



Evaluation of the Social Innovation (SI) learning programme

Deliverable D9.7

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Abbreviations and acronyms

| Acronym | Description |
|---------|------------------------|
| CTM | Climate Transition Map |
| NZC | NetZeroCities |
| PCP | Pilot Cities Programme |
| SI | Social Innovation |
| WP | Work Package |



Summary

Deliverable D9.7 presents a detailed evaluation of the Social Innovation (SI) Learning Programme, a core component of the NetZeroCities (NZC) Capability Building Programme. NZC, the initiative to manage the EU's 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission, seeks to accelerate cities' transitions toward climate neutrality and smart cities by 2030. To support this ambitious goal, its Capability Building Programme (a T6.4, T7.2, T8.1, T9.6 and T10.3 joint effort) equips cities with the knowledge, tools, and frameworks needed to overcome systemic, technical, and societal challenges in their climate neutrality journey. An essential part of the NZC Capability Building Programme, which was launched in May 2023, the SI Learning Programme (delivered through T9.6) represents a critical effort to empower city practitioners and local stakeholders through training and resources rooted in social innovation principles. Designed to foster collaboration, peer learning, and participatory approaches, the programme integrates theoretical insights with practical applications and case studies. By enabling cities to develop inclusive, bottom-up climate action strategies, the programme seeks to strengthen the capacity of urban actors to address complex challenges and drive meaningful change collaboratively.

The evaluation presented in this deliverable focuses on the programme's design, implementation, and outcomes. Key areas of analysis include its alignment with NZC objectives, its accessibility and relevance to target audiences, and its effectiveness in building the capacity of city stakeholders. The report highlights significant successes and challenges, while identifying areas for improvement:

- **Integration with NZC formats:** The SI content was well-received when incorporated into established and successful NZC initiatives like the Seasonal Schools. This demonstrates the importance of embedding SI materials into broader, well-established contexts for increased visibility and impact.
- **Engagement challenges:** The SI Learning Programme content was well-aligned with NZC's broader objectives, but user engagement with the resources and tools was lower than anticipated. This suggests that the next steps rely largely on improving overall portal usability and navigation, in addition to the specific appeal of the SI content itself.
- **Events and webinar effectiveness:** Engagement with SI-related webinars was limited. However, this can be largely attributed not to the content but to the webinar format itself and insufficient promotion.
- **Framing of Social Innovation:** There was limited demand for SI content when labelled solely as "social innovation." However, when the content was framed around practical urban challenges — such as financing climate actions or navigating policy and regulation — it attracted more interest and relevance for city stakeholders. Key topics like behaviour change, citizen engagement, and co-creation resonated strongly with city participants when linked to real-world challenges such as energy transitions or mobility improvements. This highlights the importance of contextualizing SI support to meet cities' practical needs going forward.
- **Preferred Learning Formats:** Peer-to-peer learning, challenge-driven activities, and in-person formats were more effective than expert-led or solely online approaches. These interactive and collaborative formats are better suited for building the capacity and confidence of city stakeholders.

These findings and recommendations aim to refine the SI Learning Programme's contributions, ensuring it can provide impactful support to cities striving for climate neutrality. This evaluation hence also informs future iterations of the Capability Building Programme, reinforcing NZC's mission to enable transformative urban climate actions across Europe.

Keywords

Social Innovation; Capability Building; Impact; Engagement; Portal Usability



1 Introduction

The NetZeroCities (NZC) initiative is dedicated to accelerating a transition toward climate-neutral and smart cities by 2030. By grappling with the systemic, technical, and societal challenges faced by cities, NZC equips local governments with the resources and knowledge needed to achieve climate neutrality. Central to this mission is the NZC Capability Building Programme, which supports cities in developing the skills, tools, and collaborative frameworks necessary to drive transformative climate actions effectively.

Within the NZC Capability Building Programme (resulting of the work of T6.4, T7.2, T8.1, T9.6 and T10.3), the Social Innovation (SI) Learning Programme (outcome of the work in T9.6) plays a pivotal role by focusing on empowering city practitioners and local stakeholders to harness social innovation. This programme of activities and resources launched in May 2023 facilitates collaboration, peer learning, and practical applications of social innovation principles to foster inclusive and resilient ecosystems for climate action. By integrating theoretical knowledge with real-world case studies and participatory methodologies, the programme seeks to equip cities with the capacity to engage communities and drive bottom-up climate solutions.

This deliverable, D9.7, provides a comprehensive evaluation of the SI Learning Programme as it was made available since May 2023. It examines the programme's design, implementation, and outcomes, assessing its alignment with NZC's overarching objectives. The report aims to identify key successes, challenges, and opportunities for improvement, ensuring that the programme continues to deliver impactful support to cities in their journey toward climate neutrality.

2 Programme Implementation Overview

The **Social Innovation (SI) Capability Building Programme** was designed to support cities in building the necessary skills and processes to leverage social innovation in their journey toward climate neutrality. This programme, whose design and full user journey were initially outlined in NZC **D9.6**, represented a strategic effort by the NetZeroCities (NZC) initiative to empower cities through collaborative learning, peer-to-peer engagement, and practical tools.

It was part of the broader **NZC Capability Building Programme**, a cornerstone of NZC's mission to support cities in their climate neutrality effort, aligning learning opportunities for cities with the **Climate Transition Map (CTM)**. The following sub sections describe what were the main objectives, components, delivery methods of the programme, the place of the SI component in the programme as well as the key milestones of the programme rollout.



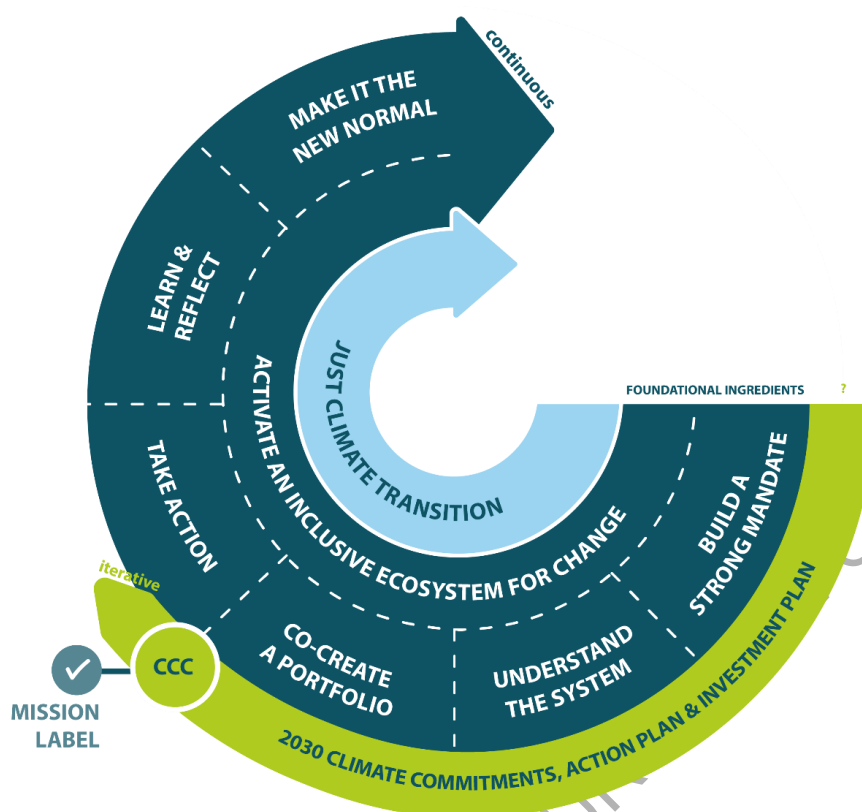


Figure 1: The Climate Transition Map

2.1 Presentation of the SI learning Programme

2.1.1 Objectives and structure of the full NZC Capability Building Programme

The NZC Capability Building Programme was created to address the unique challenges Mission cities face in achieving climate neutrality, focusing on a holistic approach that includes knowledge building, inter-city (peer to peer) exchanges, and practical tools. The programme targeted city **transition teams**: local government practitioners and local stakeholders who are directly steering local climate action initiatives and thus social innovation. These participants are viewed as change agents within their cities, equipped to diffuse knowledge and practice across ecosystems of local actors. The programme was built on principles of inclusivity, action-based learning, and systemic change. It encouraged participants to co-create solutions, emphasized practical application, and promoted an iterative learning process where feedback and adaptation play central roles. The NZC Capability Building Programme included an in-person component (deployed through NZC-SGA1) and an online component (deployed in NZC and now scaled in NZC-SGA2).

Online component: 6 Modules

A collection of **six structured modules** that align with the different phases of a city's climate transition journey in the Climate Transition Map formed the online component of the programme. These modules were designed to address both foundational and advanced topics, supporting cities from understanding the mission to creating a financing strategy. Each module was meant to include guided learning materials, digital or interactive formats, and community-based exchanges.



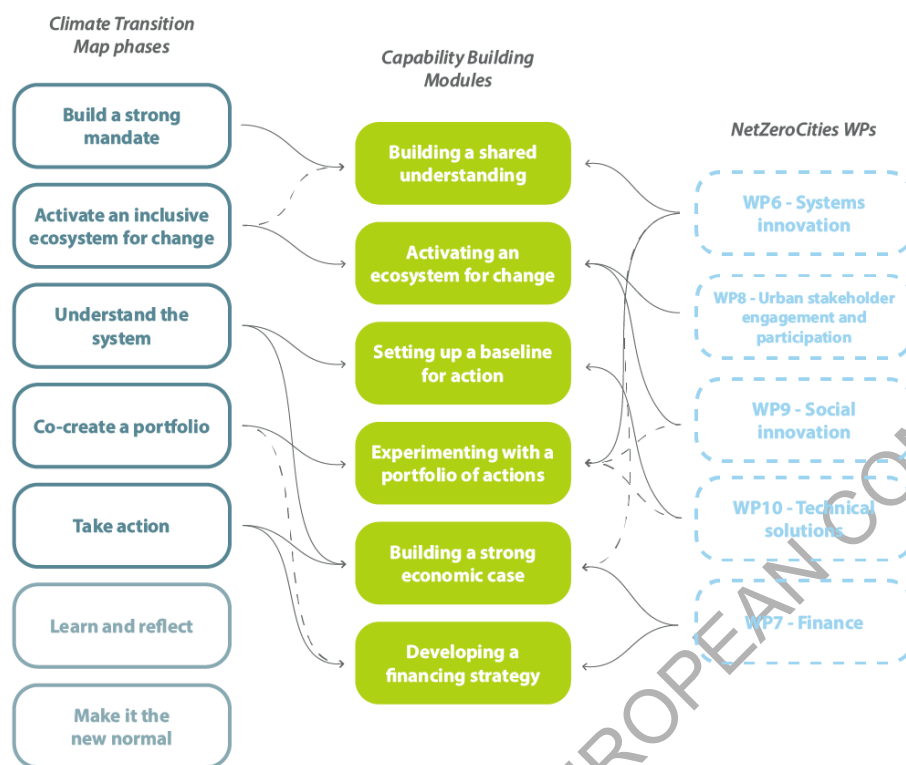


Figure 2: Climate Transition Map, Capability Building Modules and WP links

The 6 modules of the Capability Building programme were:

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| Module 1 Building a Shared Understanding | Purpose This module introduced cities to the overarching Mission of achieving climate neutrality. It focused on how to establish a common understanding among local stakeholders and setting up effective governance structures for acceleration a transition. | Key Topics Building a transition team, engaging with national, regional, and local stakeholders, and creating buy-in for climate action initiatives. |
| Module 2 Activating Ecosystems for Change | Purpose This core module equipped cities with the tools to mobilize local ecosystems, emphasizing the importance of citizen engagement, stakeholder collaboration and social innovation to drive climate action. | Key Topics Vision creation, citizen engagement, leveraging social innovation, and mapping civic interdependencies. Participants will develop actionable plans to activate their ecosystems. |
| Module 3 Setting Up a Baseline for Action | Purpose This module guided cities in establishing a robust baseline by creating comprehensive emissions inventories and selecting indicators for monitoring climate impact. | Key Topics Quantitative and qualitative indicators, emissions inventory setup, impact assessment frameworks, and data visualization to communicate progress and align with climate-neutrality goals. |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| Module 4 Experimenting with a Portfolio of Actions | Purpose This module supported cities to shift from isolated actions to a strategic, interconnected portfolio of climate actions, allowing for more effective, systemic change. | Key Topics Co-designing a climate action portfolio, identifying gaps and barriers, scenario experimentation, and aligning actions across departments and stakeholders to create synergies. |
| Module 5 Building a Strong Economic Case | Purpose This module helped cities develop an economic rationale for their climate action plans, ensuring projects are backed by robust financial and carbon-impact analysis | Key Topics Calculating economic and carbon impact, prioritizing investments, and demonstrating value to stakeholders. This module supports planning and investment allocation for maximum impact. |
| Module 6 Developing a Financing Strategy | Purpose This final module assisted cities in creating a financing strategy to support their climate actions, incorporating both traditional and innovative funding methods. | Key Topics Investment planning, identifying and engaging financial stakeholders, exploring financing instruments, and structuring an investment plan aligned with the city's climate action goals. |

Table 1: Capability Building Modules purpose and content

In-person component: Seasonal School

Seasonal schools formed the in-person component of the programme. They are in-depth, immersive events that form a key part of the NZC Capability Building Programme. These events were held twice a year, with one in summer and another in winter, and were designed to complement the programme's online component by providing hands-on, experiential learning opportunities. Their key characteristics are:

- **Format and Content:** Seasonal Schools are intensive, 2.5-days sessions where participants engage in workshops, simulations, and collaborative exercises. Each session focuses on a core theme, such as stakeholder engagement, economic case building, or social innovation.
- **Experiential Learning:** Participants engage in practical exercises that allow them to apply concepts from the learning modules in a live environment. This includes activities like role-playing exercises for stakeholder engagement and prototyping sessions for testing social innovation approaches.
- **Peer Exchange and Networking:** The Seasonal Schools facilitate direct interactions between cities, fostering relationships and shared learning. Cities present their projects, share feedback, and gain insights from each other's experiences.
- **Feedback Loops:** Seasonal Schools also serve as a platform for feedback on the programme content. Facilitators gather input from participants on the effectiveness of modules, tools, and resources, which informs future content updates and adjustments.

The first two seasonal schools in Como and Milan in June 2023, and Santander in July 2023 were developed and implemented as part of NZC. This approach was scaled in SGA1 WP4 through the Learning Hub in three more schools - in Budapest in November 2023, Stockholm in April 2024, and Madrid in November 2024 – building off the learnings from the previous two pilots.



Together, seasonal schools and the six online modules make the NZC Capability Building Programme, which aimed to provide a **multi-disciplinary support system** designed to empower cities to accelerate systemic climate action.

2.1.2 The Social Innovation Component of the NZC Capability Building Programme

Within the NZC capability Building programme, the **Activate the Ecosystem** module was central to NZC's focus on creating a social innovation's component in its integrated and systemic capability building programme. This module enabled cities to create an inclusive and resilient ecosystem of stakeholders working toward shared climate goals. It emphasized collaboration across sectors and bottom-up innovation and was supported by various tools and resources that guided cities in mobilizing their communities through social innovation programmes. Several tools and formats were part of the offer:

Social

Innovation

Pathways

The Social Innovation Pathways provided a **step-by-step roadmap** that helps cities and community stakeholders adopt social innovation practices tailored to their specific contexts. These pathways guided cities in aligning grassroots innovation with city goals and assisting local innovators in building effective social innovations.

Social

Innovation

Actionable

Pathways

The Actionable Pathways Tool **assesses cities' readiness** to implement social innovation practices and recommends customized resources from the Social Innovation Toolkit, Case Study Collection as well as providing metrics for evaluation and measurement. This ensured that cities have the support they need to move forward, regardless of their starting point.

Social Innovation Learning Club

The Social Innovation Learning Club was a **digital platform for peer-to-peer learning**, allowing city practitioners to share insights, challenges, and solutions related to social innovation. The Learning Club's initial aim was to host monthly discussion hours, where cities could engage with each other on focused topics, exchange case studies, and learn about emerging practices. After a webinar in 2024, the activities were paused and will resume in February 2025, with a series of webinars aimed to demystify social innovation and share resources and case studies developed in WP9.

Social Innovation Toolkit

The SI Toolkit provides **practical tools and resources for cities to engage their communities and drive social innovation projects**. It includes templates for stakeholder mapping, methods for conducting participatory workshops, and tools for creating inclusive governance structures. The toolkit is modular, allowing cities to select and use the resources most relevant to their needs.

Events

The module included **live events and Q&A sessions** where cities could connect with **experts**, discuss specific challenges, and get feedback on their approaches. Regularly scheduled sessions were to be held to reinforce concepts from the module and support continuous engagement.

By combining structured modules, digital resources, peer learning, and in-person events, the programme aimed to offer a balanced blend of theoretical knowledge and practical application designed to empower cities to lead climate action through social innovation.

2.2 Programme Implementation



| Month | Activity | Output |
|---------------------|--|---|
| Nov 2021 – May 2023 | Development of content and resources to be leveraged in the capability building programme through connected tasks (T6.2, T6.4, T7.2, T8.1, T8.2, T8.4, T9.1, T9.2, T10.2) | 59 case studies, 75 methods, 203 factsheets, 13 videos, 8 articles available through the NZC knowledge repository, including 82 resources across formats directly targeted at social innovation |
| May 2023 | Launch of the online modules with welcome messages, introductions, community moderation set-up and communication campaign in newsletter | 6 online modules available to join for cities on the NZC portal |
| June 2023 | Release of first batches of videos, tools and resource collections for the <i>Activate the Ecosystem</i> module | Content created for the modules directly accessible to cities through the online capability building modules for discussion and exchange. Includes all social innovation resources. |
| June 2023 | Launch of the Social Innovation Learning Club | Monthly discussion group open for Mission City user registration on the NZC portal within the online module space |
| June 2023 | Delivery of seasonal school n°1 - Milan / Como | 2.5 days event mobilising 49 participants, from 16 Mission Cities, offering 6 replicable workshops, including 1 dedicated to social innovation |
| July 2023 | Announcement of first online event in the <i>Activate the Ecosystem</i> module: <i>“Understanding Energy Poverty with Arthur Hinsch”</i> | Online event available for pre-registration to Mission City users |
| July 2023 | Delivery of seasonal school n°2 - Santander | 2.5 days event mobilising 19 participants from 19 Mission Cities, offering new replicable workshops, including 1 dedicated to social innovation |
| July 2023 | Postponement of the first online event <i>“Understanding Energy Poverty with Arthur Hinsch”</i> for absence of participant | / |
| September 2023 | Release of first batches of videos, tools and resources for the <i>Build a Strong Economic Case</i> module | Content created for the modules now directly accessible to cities through the online capability building modules for discussion and exchange. Includes all NetZeroPlanner resources |
| November 2023 | Delivery of seasonal school n°3 - Budapest (under SGA1 WP4) | 2.5 days event mobilising 29 participants from 17 Mission Cities, offering new replicable workshops, including 1 dedicated to social innovation |
| March 2024 | <i>“Understanding Energy Poverty with Arthur Hinsch”</i> webinar | Webinar on energy poverty and POWERPOOR (Horizon 2020 project) with guest speaker Arthur Hinsch, senior expert at ICLEI. |



| | | |
|------------|---|--|
| April 2024 | Delivery of seasonal school n°4 - Stockholm (under SGA1 WP4) | 2.5 days event mobilising 50 participants from 26 Mission Cities, offering new replicable workshops, including 1 dedicated to social innovation |
| May 2024 | 1 year monitoring and reflection workshop (Milano – all WP partners) | Suspension of the online modules |
| Nov 2024 | Delivery of seasonal school n°5 - Madrid (under SGA1 WP4) | 2.5 days event mobilising 30 participants from 17 Mission Cities, offering new replicable workshops, including 1 dedicated to social innovation (combined with citizen engagement) |

Table 2: Implementation activities and timeline of the NZC Capability Building Programme

3 Monitoring results

3.1 Feedback on the Capability Building programme

Method

Feedback was gathered on the Capability Building Programme and in particular the Social Innovation and Citizen Engagement components through various sources:

- Respective **feedback survey of the initial two seasonal schools** in Milan/Como and Santander (organized under NZC WP9),
- Respective **feedback survey of the three following seasonal schools** in Budapest, Stockholm, and Madrid (conducted under NZC-SGA1 WP4 using content developed within NZC WP9), which asked city participants for their feedback immediately after attending
- **Interviews with seven City Advisors** supporting 64 cities across 28 countries. The interviews included conversations focusing on Social Innovation (conducted by DML) and Citizen Engagement (conducted by DemSoc).

Key insights from these answers and conversations are presented below, supported by a selection of illustrative quotes. It is important to note that these observations apply broadly to the overall NZC Capability Building Programme and are not exclusively limited to the Social Innovation Learning Programme.

Insights

Almost all interviewees mentioned that **city practitioners find value in peer-to-peer learning because they can exchange with other cities with shared challenges and context about what works for them, what doesn't and how to implement in their own city** and in feedback from seasonal school attendees frequently valued whenever the sessions made good use of interaction with others.

- *"Seasonal schools are positive to connect with other city teams"*
- *"The twinning programme and on-site visits have been useful because of the two-way learning between cities, and a lot of mutual learning, especially from the visits."*
- From feedback in the seasonal schools:



- From the Winter School in Madrid - Nov 2024, at the session 'Building legitimacy through Democratic Infrastructures and Community driven Initiatives': *"This was probably my favourite session because of how interactive it was. I like the idea of all of us gathering together and sharing what worked or did not work for us."*
- From the Summer School in Milan/Como - June 2023, in the Social Innovation Session: *I liked... "to see it's as complicated for other cities as mine", "many good examples were shared in our group..."*

Recurringly from seasonal school feedback, attendees gave **positive comments when real life examples from cities were included and wished for them when they were missing and too high level**. Furthermore, almost all interviewees mentioned that **many of the resources are too generic and high level, instead of practical, concrete and with real examples from cities**.

- From feedback in the seasonal schools:
 - From the Winter School in Madrid - Nov 2024, at the session 'Building legitimacy through Democratic Infrastructures and Community driven Initiatives':
 - *"The presentation, that intended to provide valuable academic overview on the topics of Stakeholders Engagement, was rushed through with no practical examples whatsoever. Vaguely addressing this important topic, that the cities struggle with the most, was a missed opportunity, especially since the session intended to reinforce bottom-up approaches in city administrations mission efforts."*
 - *"I wish there were examples with clear impact."*
 - From the Winter School in Budapest - Nov 2023, in the Social Innovation Session:
 - *"It was informative to learn about specific projects in another cities"*
 - *"I liked there were lots of real case studies"*
 - *"It was very motivational and very good examples chosen"*
 - From the Summer School in Milan/Como - June 2023, in the Social Innovation Session:
 - *I liked: "The discussion and best practice examples", "Examples from cities", "Many good examples were shared in our group"*
 - *"I wish more examples could be presented"*
- *"Not often does a webinar solve a problem for a city...often it feels we're too high-level and doesn't touch the reality for cities."*
- *"Seasonal schools are positive to connect with other city teams, but often too abstract, and need more real cases."*
- *"Actions need to be more focused and targeted to accommodate cities' limited resources and numerous ongoing projects."*

Almost all interviewees mentioned that there are an **overwhelming amount of learning activities and formats, but they don't feel connected**. While this transcends the whole learning programme, it also negatively affects cities' ability to engage with the social innovation topic.

- *"It's confusing to call it THE programme because it's so many things."*
- *"I don't see a programme, I see different activities, I don't see them connected. It's extensive but scattered."*
- *"In one month for Guimarães they're involved in: Cohort 1 sensemaking, ECT sensemaking, bootcamp, the twinning programme, Non-Mission Cities peer sharing programme, also peer sharing with Marseille & Bergamo, info sessions for capital hub, and interactions with capital hub where they need to present projects. This can create a lot of fatigue, if it's not structured. It they know in advance what is happening this semester they can organise themselves. Sometimes there are different topics, and how we can connect the different topics?"*

Almost all interviewees mentioned that it's **hard to navigate and find relevant insights among overwhelming amounts of information** (especially in the Knowledge Repository). Again, while this is an issue across all topics, it also negatively affects cities' ability to find relevant and actionable social innovation resources.



- *"There is no need for more resources but to know what the useful resources are among the ones available."*
- *"Just for citizen engagement there are 289 resources, there is no way I can go through this. Is there some kind of rating, or better filtering, searches?"*
- *"It was 67 slides [reference to social innovation seasonal school presentation] - it wasn't from hell, but it was too much content for cities. It was a tour de force with no time for interaction and conversation."*
- *"I've been involved in the development of the portal, unfortunately most of the resources, although valuable, are lying in the basement."*
- *"I'm not sure how much time cities spend on general resources. I wouldn't share unless I knew it was relevant. I need to do multiple translation points - I gather a need, I translate that need, I find it difficult to then go into static resources and do another translation on how it meets cities' need. There's risk that I'm making things up."*
- *"It's a massive amount of information [in the knowledge repository] that it's hard to know what exactly serves you and what's not. Sometimes they provide basic information, and if you want more they link you to an academic paper."*
- *"Are we putting in info on what we think cities' need, rather than what cities actually need? It should target what the cities' needs."*

City practitioners often **prefer in-person events because it's easier to be present and engaged compared to online**. Therefore, like in other topics, online social innovation events may struggle to achieve the same level of engagement as in-person events, and still may not be comparable. While we should aim for higher standards, this context should be considered when evaluating the impact and effectiveness of online events.

- *"We adapt to the circumstances, but for some things it is always going to be better to train in person."*
- *"Most often if you have an actual physical meeting, you will remember it better and you will focus better"*

In relation to social innovation and citizen engagement specifically:

From some interviewees **the term "Social innovation" in NZC is very broad** and relates anything involving citizens and with a public action from municipalities. This **makes it difficult for cities to engage with**.

- *I haven't engaged with much, what is meant by social innovation - for myself and cities.*
- *They [cities] might be getting more granular - it's quite conceptual, it's more something you apply as a lens/lever for example in the energy sector, or mobility.*
- *When we make connections with other cities, when we pair them, they want to learn a specific thing that a city has done.*

It can be **easier for city advisors & cities to name more specific challenges under the topic of citizen engagement rather than social innovation**. For example, city advisors named challenges and goals such as, how might we...

- Support Cities with the sustainability of their citizen engagement approach? How do we keep citizens engaged?
- Tackle fake news and misinformation from spreading around climate change / climatic events?
- Explain difficult / complex / unfamiliar topics to civil society?
- Engage citizen that struggle to trust governments e.g. Central European countries that have a culture, history and legacy from Soviet times?
- Create climate assemblies or making an improved version and learn from other cities' approaches?
- Translate the mission and CCCs to citizens and show how they can engage and participant?
- Monitor and amplify effective actions from citizens?



3.2 Analytics of the Capability Building programme

Method

The analytics presented in this section were gathered using a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches to evaluate user engagement with the Capability Building Programme. Portal usage metrics, including resource views, active user counts, and engagement data, were extracted from the NZC portal's analytics system. Supplementary insights were obtained using tools like Hotjar to track session interactions, average time spent on pages, and heatmaps for select resources. Attendance data for webinars and events were recorded through registration and participation logs, while satisfaction ratings for Seasonal School sessions were collected via post-event feedback surveys.

These methods provided both broad engagement metrics and detailed insights into user behaviour. However, limitations in the current analytics tools, such as the inability to track search terms or detailed user segmentation, were identified. The following section presents results of the analysis of these data points as well as of the limitations encountered.

3.2.1 Overview of key data

3.2.1.1 Seasonal School satisfaction ratings

Alongside the qualitative feedback outlined in the previous section, for each of the 5 seasonal schools T9.6 collected satisfaction ratings from attendees for the overall experience as well as for each individual session. Social innovation sessions can be compared with other sessions to place the data in context. **Across all seasonal schools, Social innovation sessions were rated on average almost as highly as the average across all sessions: 3.8 compared to 3.9 in total (out of 5).**

Rate from 1 to 5 the Social Innovation Session

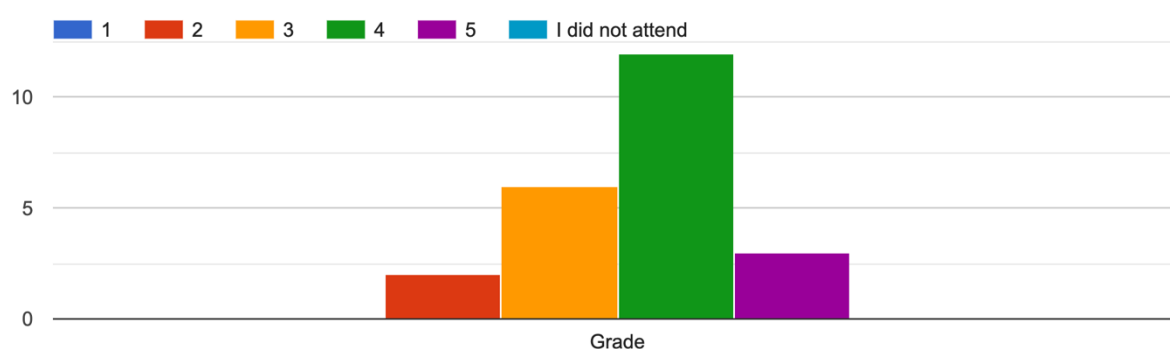


Figure 3: Attendee rating of the social innovation session at the Summer School in Milan & Como, in June 2023. The ratings represent 23 responses in total.



Rate from 1 to 5 the Social Innovation Session

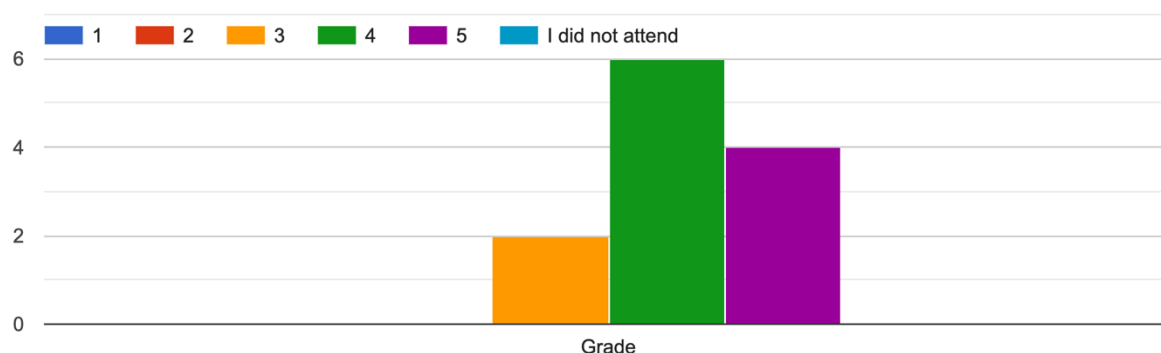


Figure 4: Attendee rating of the Social Innovation session at the Winter School in Budapest, in November 2023. The ratings represent 12 responses in total.

Rate from 1 to 5 the Social Innovation Session

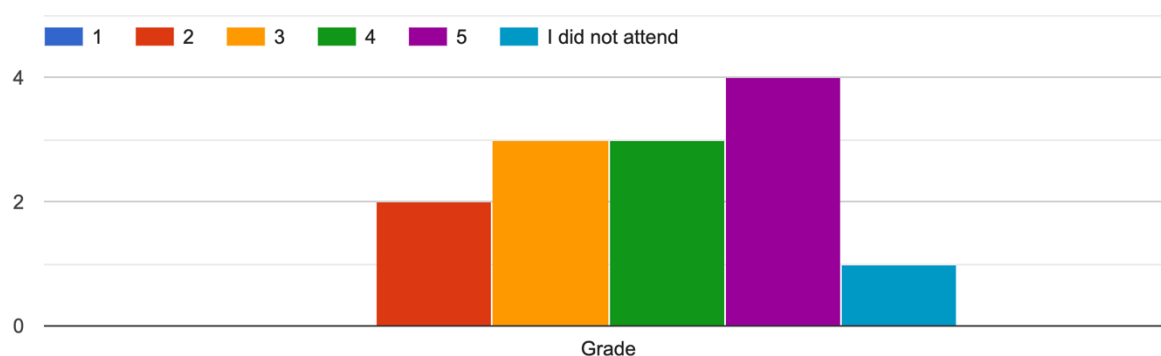


Figure 5: Attendee rating of the Social Innovation session at the Spring School in Stockholm, in April 2024. The ratings represent 13 responses in total.

Rate from 1 to 5 the session

8 responses

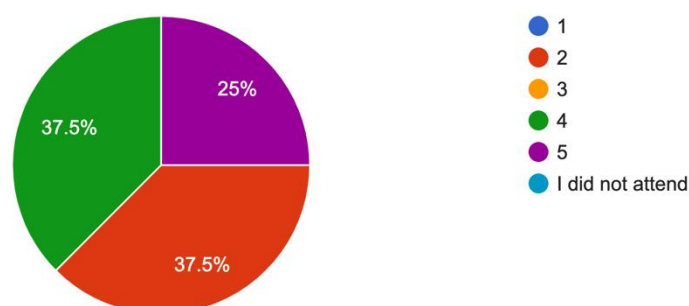


Figure 6: Attendee rating of the Social Innovation and Citizen Engagement session: “Building legitimacy through Democratic Infrastructures and Community driven Initiatives” at the Winter School in Madrid, in November 2024. The ratings represent 8 responses in total.

| School | Session | Total N° of responses | Avg. rating |
|--|---|-----------------------|-------------|
| Summer School in Milan & Como (Jun 2023) | All sessions | 23 | 4.0 |
| | Social innovation | | 3.8 |
| In Santander (Jul 2023) | All sessions | 11 | 3.8 |
| | (No ratings collected for individual sessions) | | / |
| Winter School in Budapest, (Nov 2023) | All sessions | 12 | 4.1 |
| | Social innovation | | 4.1 |
| Spring School in Stockholm (Apr 2024) | All sessions | 12 | 3.75 |
| | Social innovation | | 3.75 |
| Winter School in Madrid (Nov 2024) | All sessions | 8 | 3.9 |
| | Social Innovation and Citizen Engagement: “Building legitimacy through Democratic Infrastructures and Community driven Initiatives” | | 3.5 |
| All schools | All sessions | 66 | 3.9 |
| | Social innovation sessions only | 55 | 3.8 |

Table 3: Attendee average ratings for seasonal school sessions from all sessions and social innovation sessions

3.2.1.2 Webinar/events attendance

Analysis of events attendance showed the **first Social Innovation Learning Club event**, the *Understanding Energy Poverty with Arthur Hinsch* webinar, held on March 1, 2024, attracted **16 participants** (8 city practitioners, 4 City Advisors, and 4 NZC/EU project stakeholders). This webinar



had already been postponed for absence of any participants on its first scheduling. With the second scheduling leading to such low attendance, it put a halt to SI learning Club events.

For comparison, in 2024 there were 7 webinar events in the NetZeroCities Community of Practice (CoP). While the CoP is not exclusively focused on social innovation, and the number of events is not sufficient to draw reliable conclusions about the topics that get traction yet, attendance rates can serve as a benchmark, evidencing that higher attendance rates are not only possible but also a regular event. Anecdotally, organisers suggested that when signing up for webinars, many registrants forget and there often aren't reliable email reminders or calendar invites to remind them.

| Event name | Presenter | Date | Attendees |
|--|---|------------|-----------|
| Welcome Coffee Webinar | CoP Leads Anna Krzyżanowska | 29/02/2024 | 7 |
| Welcome Coffee Webinar | CoP Leads Emmanuel Dommergues (UITP) | 26/03/2024 | 15 |
| Engagement Strategy Tools | CoP Leads Max Stearns (Demsoc) | 11/04/2024 | 13 |
| Innovative Energy Solutions: energy communities and solar energy solutions | Heinz Bartelmuss (HBT Energy) Szabó László | 02/07/2024 | 50 |
| CoP Official Launch Webinar | CoP Leads Thomas Haddock UPM | 26/09/2024 | 85 |
| Smart Cities | Tamlyn Shimizu - Bable Smart Cities | 29/10/2024 | 60 |
| City Data Solutions! GHG emissions | Susanne Schödel – Environment Data | 19/11/2024 | 60 |

Table 4: Attendance rates of CoP event, for comparison

Note: The event Engagement Strategy Tools (related to citizen engagement) in April 2024 had 13 attendees, this is lower than many of the others, however this was still during the pilot phase of the CoP. The next event: Innovative Energy Solutions and solar energy solutions" (related to social innovation) in July 2024 had 50 attendees. The highest number of attendees was 85, for the "CoP Official Launch Webinar" event in September.

3.2.1.3 Social innovation online learning resource views

A variety of online resources and tools were created as part of the Social Innovation Learning Programme within the NZC Capability Building Programme. We measured key metrics for these resources (as of January 10, 2025), deriving from the Knowledge Repository's analytics. It should be noted that these figures include consortium members, who constitute approximately 11% of active users. Adjusted metrics excluding consortium members would likely be lower.

| Metric | | Value | Percentage/Details |
|---|---|-------|--------------------|
| Active users on the portal | Overall | 5730 | 100.0% |
| Community of Practice (CoP) or Local Partners | Community of Practice (CoP) or Local Partners | 2888 | 50.4% |
| City users | City users | 1639 | 28.6% |
| Public Authority users | Public Authority users | 587 | 10.2% |



| | | | |
|---|---|----------|--------|
| Consortium users | Consortium users | 616 | 10.8% |
| Number of Published resources | Overall | 921 | 100.0% |
| Resources tagged with social innovation | Resources tagged with social innovation | 268 | 29% |
| Unique views of resources | Overall | ~360,000 | 100.0% |
| For social innovation resources | For social innovation resources | ~85,000 | 23.6% |
| Average unique views per month | Overall | 24 | |
| For Social Innovation resources | For Social Innovation resources | 22 | |

Table 5: Key portal resources metrics

Average unique views per month was calculated to adjust for the fact that some resources were published 28 months ago, compared to some published in the last month. Overall **social innovation resources are not significantly less viewed relative to all resources**; however, engagement is lower than expected, especially in comparison with the total number of “active users” on the portal.

To help users find resources on social innovation, key landing pages were developed to consolidate everything in one place. Below are the unique views total and per month of the primary landing pages for social innovation. The landing page "[Social Innovation for Climate Neutrality: full collection of resources, cases and methods](#)" has the **17th most unique views per month of all pages on the portal**, and **25th most unique views total, out of 921 resources**.

| Landing page name | Unique views | Unique views per month |
|--|--------------|------------------------|
| 1. Social Innovation for Climate Neutrality: full collection of resources, cases and methods | 1259 | 105 |
| 2. Social Innovation Actionable Pathways - map with links to case studies | 400 | 36 |
| 3. Social innovation toolkit | 671 | 28 |

Table 6: Key landing page metrics

For comparison, here are unique views total and per month for all the other landing pages:

| Landing page name | Unique views | Unique views per month |
|---|--------------|------------------------|
| Focus on: Social Innovation - Social Innovation for Climate Neutrality: full collection of resources, cases and methods | 1259 | 105 |
| Focus on: Impact pathways & Monitoring - Impact pathways, Monitoring Evaluation and Learning framework and indicators | 771 | 129 |
| Focus on: Citizen Engagement - Citizens and urban stakeholders | 367 | 61 |
| Focus on: Technical Solutions - State-of-the art on technical solutions to achieve climate neutrality (WP10) | 381 | 54 |

| | | |
|--|-----|----|
| Focus on: Financing - Financing the ambition of NetZeroCities: Compilation of all resources | 369 | 53 |
| Focus on: Systemic Approaches - Systemic Innovation for Cities: full collection of resources | 309 | 44 |
| Focus on: Partnership & Policy - Policy and Partnerships | 243 | 41 |

Table 7: Comparison with other landing pages metrics

The Social Innovation landing pages, gathering all SI learning programme resources has the **most unique views total**, and **2nd unique views per month** compared to the other 6 “focus on” pages, only the “impact pathways & monitoring” focus on page has more unique views per month. We note it is the first “focus on” page listed in the primary navigation under “Learn”, so this may amplify its view count somewhat.

One other key resource, often shared with cities to give an overview of social innovation and NetZeroCities approach to it, is the presentation given at the 2023 seasonal schools, for which unique views are comparable to the less popular landing pages, a success as this page is an actual resource rather than a navigation page.

| Resource name | Unique views | Unique views per month |
|---|--------------|------------------------|
| Seasonal School Presentation on Social Innovation | 264 | 24 |

Table 8: Seasonal School Presentation on Social Innovation metrics

We analysed the **top 10 most uniquely viewed resources per month tagged for social innovation**. This tag is used very generously in the portal, so a large number of resources are including a social innovation dimension, even though it isn't the primary topic of the resource.

| Resource name | Type | Unique views | Unique views per month |
|--|----------|--------------|------------------------|
| 1. Learn from Mission Cities and propel your city's climate neutrality journey! | Document | 799 | 799 |
| 2. CCC - 2030 Climate Neutrality Action Plan (Guidance and Explanations) | Document | 3020 | 112 |
| 3. NetZeroCities Learning | Article | 434 | 109 |
| 4. Social Innovation for Climate Neutrality: full collection of resources, cases and methods | Article | 1259 | 105 |
| 5. Solar PV implementation in Spain (past and future) | Article | 1430 | 60 |
| 6. Citizen and Stakeholder Engagement Services | Article | 513 | 57 |
| 7. CCC Highlights - A Diverse Ecosystem of Supporters | Document | 297 | 50 |
| 8. Florianopolis, Brazil | Method | 777 | 49 |
| 9. Scale up/scale out/scale deep | Method | 733 | 46 |
| 10. JRC Collection | Article | 861 | 45 |



Table 9: Top 10 most used resources tagged with “Social Innovation”

There are 30 case studies listed in [“Social Innovation for Climate Neutrality: full collection of resources, cases and methods”](#). An analysis of the top 10 of SI case studies by most unique views per month shows that **some of these case studies are viewed more than the average portal resource, but not significantly.**

| Resource name | Type | Unique views | Unique views per month |
|--|-------------------|--------------|------------------------|
| 1. Florianopolis, Brazil | Method | 777 | 49 |
| 2. Viable Cities | Visual case study | 504 | 34 |
| 3. Torino Social Innovation | Visual case study | 185 | 31 |
| 4. Better Reykjavik | Visual case study | 464 | 29 |
| 5. Nappi Naapuri (Nifty Neighbor) | Case study | 373 | 25 |
| 6. Tartu - Climate Assembly | Visual case study | 115 | 23 |
| 7. Antwerp's Participatory Budget | Case study | 558 | 21 |
| 8. Bologna's Citizen Collaboration Pacts | Case study | 546 | 20 |
| 9. VeniSIA | Visual case study | 121 | 20 |
| 10. Paris 15-min City | Visual case study | 322 | 20 |

Table 10: Top 10 of SI case studies and methods per unique views per month

3.2.2 Limitations of data

Accurate and detailed analytics are essential for understanding user engagement with resources available through the NZC portal and thus refining the Social Innovation Learning Programme. However, the current analytics tools have limitations that constrain the ability to extract actionable insights and tailor resources to user needs. The key gaps faced with the existing system are:

1. **"Search terms" are not tracked currently** in the NZC portal. This would help us to create and frame resources based on more specific user demands.
2. **Social innovation is often embedded within other topics** but not as the main topic - for a full analysis, we would need to **investigate engagement on specific elements where social innovation is mentioned** but not the central theme. This kind of depth is **not possible in our current analytics tools**.
3. There is **no breakdown of the user types viewing and engaging with specific resources**, it's only at a general level, so it's hard to contextualise interactions i.e. it might be only a certain type of user (like consortium users) looking at a specific social innovation resource, rather than all users.

WP9 currently explores opportunities to enhance data tracking and analysis, particularly for social innovation content, through additional analytics tools such as Hotjar. For each resource they make possible to track metrics that indicate engagement beyond views with data for average time on page, average scroll depth, total clicks and top clicks (or “taps” on mobile), heatmaps, session recordings.

However, key limitations prevent use from drawing meaningful conclusions from this engagement data at this stage:



1. There is a **large discrepancy between portal analytics (page views) and Hotjar (sessions)**. This is likely due to the payment plan we are on with Hotjar that has a limit on the number of session recordings, so it will only record sessions for a percentage of total views. Therefore, current engagement data can be seen as a **limited representation of all users, but not the whole picture**.
 - For example, as of 10.01.2025, the landing page “Social Innovation for Climate Neutrality: full collection of resources, cases and methods” had 1,827 total views and 1,184 unique views on NZC analytics but only 286 sessions on Hotjar.
2. We lack the functionalities necessary to draw contextual conclusions based on **user segments and comparative use/engagement on other pages**.
 - For example, for the method page “Scale up/scale out/scale deep” in the 54 sessions Hotjar recorded in the last 12 months, users spent an average of 4:11m on the page, and there was a total of 115 clicks. The heatmap below illustrates general activity on this page:

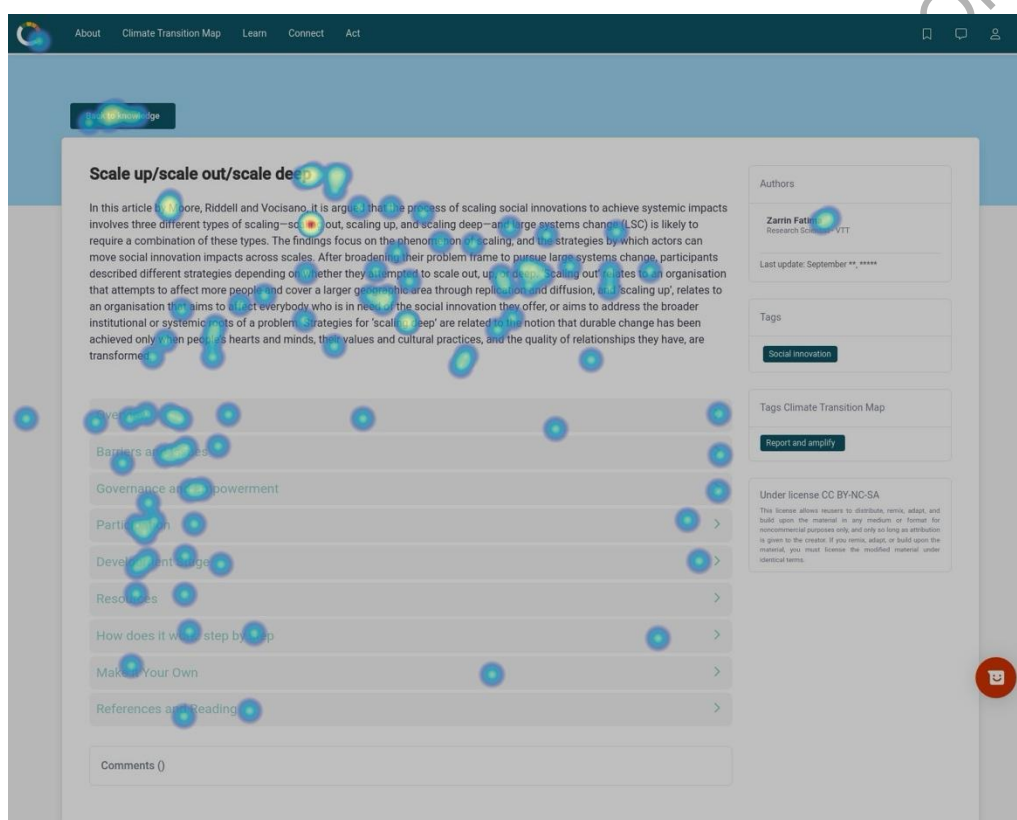


Figure 7: Example of a heatmap from Hotjar analytics, this shows a heatmap for the “Scale up/scale out/scale deep” page

One can also use Hotjar to watch session recordings to view an individual user’s activity and interactions on this page:

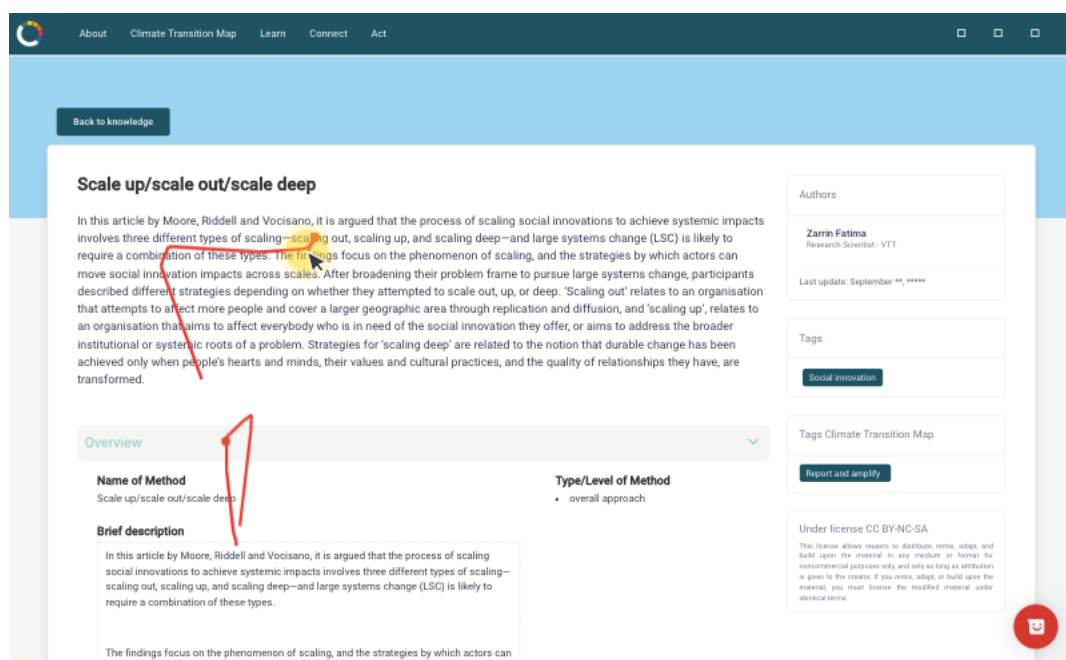


Figure 8: Example of a session video recording from Hotjar analytics, screenshot of a recording of a user viewing the “Scale up/scale out/scale deep” page

However, to understand what this means and spot issues we need more context such as:

- What type of page this is, and how it compares others similar pages, instead of all pages. This page has a lot more interactive elements and information on it than many others, so you might expect users to spend more time, and to click more – this doesn't necessarily mean that they are getting what they need.
 - What type of users are arriving on the page and if they are the ones who are likely to find value from this page.
3. Many resources (like visual case studies) on the portal contain the **key content embedded within an iframe where interactions can't be tracked in Hotjar** - in recordings, in heatmaps, in clicks etc. Therefore, with the current setup it is not possible to draw meaningful conclusions about the performance of these pages, except if the time spent on the page is especially low, we can assume that the initial slides are not relevant or addressing key needs.

4 Lessons learned, adjustments and strategic shifts

Based on the results outlined in the previous chapter, it appears that **seasonal schools** and other in-person, peer-to-peer formats combine interactive collaboration and practical real-life example cases in a way that demonstrate clear value and satisfaction among city practitioners. On the other hand, the current level of engagement from cities with the **online capability programme** - through webinars, resources and tools - would benefit from significant improvement to deliver the impact in helping cities transition given the weak results they yield for the effort invested. While online formats can be more cost-effective and increase the breadth of access to learning in comparison to in-person formats, a higher standard is often needed to gain and maintain the attention of participants. While these challenges are present across the full NetZeroCities portal offer and NZC Capability Building programme, and actions should be taken to address them at this level, there are also challenges that are specific to social innovation.

The following sections detail some key lessons, and the adjustments and strategic shifts we have made and plan to make in response to them.

4.1 Relate social innovation to more concrete and relevant challenges and examples

Interviews show that many city practitioners find the term social innovation too broad and vague, which may result in lower engagement with learning materials related to the topic. Therefore, it would be beneficial to **identify more specific, concrete challenges from cities related to social innovation and frame learning resources and formats around them**. The wider NetZeroCities programme has ample experience with such successful formats, for example consortium expert-facilitated (in person or online) peer to peer workshops that may be suitable.

Efforts to Provide Concrete Examples

There has been an active effort into providing and including more concrete, real-life examples from cities in the learning programme in general and for social innovation:

- **Case studies:** More and higher-quality visual case studies are being integrated into the programme, showcasing actionable and relatable examples from cities.
- **Events:** The Social Innovation Learning Club series is set to resume in February 2025 and aims to foster a comprehensive understanding of social innovation and highlight the differences and overlaps with other topics such as citizen engagement and stakeholder engagement under the banner of “people-based solutions”. Three to five webinars will be organised through the end of the Grant Agreement period, and it will be highly relevant to connect these to the Agile City Support offer so that an integrated support modality is achieved.
 - The webinars will be designed to provide value independently and not make any assumptions of prior attendance or knowledge on SI. The sessions will explore how social innovation connects to various sectors that cities are currently working on (e.g. mobility, finance...) through concrete challenges and case studies.
 - Some webinars will be restricted to cities, provided a focused environment for peer-to-peer exchange and learning. Other webinars will be organized with the Community of Practice, to bring a broader range of perspectives into the conversation.
 - Inviting inspiring city practitioners as presenters in the Community of Practice webinars
- **Seasonal Schools:** Workshops at seasonal schools are incorporating more real-life examples, enabling participants to engage with practical cases and actionable insights.

This will continue going forward, especially as Mission cities implement pilots activities, initiatives and start to demonstrate impact as this will create a rich source of inspiration and case studies. Concrete examples based on both prior case study development within NZC-WP9 and learning loops from direct city support in NZC and NZC-SGA1 should be embedded in all learning materials where possible and relevant. They should also be proactively shared among City Support Groups (CSGs) in NZC-SGA1 so that CSGs can refer to them in their direct advisory with cities.

Connecting Social Innovation to Practical Challenges

The consortium should continue to **adopt a more integrated approach to recognise specific issues that cities face that social innovation can address**. For example, the Pilot Cities Programme (PCP)



under NZC and NZC-SGA1 have already revealed key questions on “mobility behaviour shifts” or “retrofit adoption”. Cities have responded positively to initiatives, delivered in the context of PCP support, that rethinks assumptions on what enables shifts in behaviour. This demonstrates how unlocking social innovation learning opportunities could happen through better alignment with cities’ practical challenges as identified by the Agile City Support function (in NZC-SGA1, including PCP support) and national platforms (in NZC-SGA2).

In practice, to relate social innovation to concrete challenges, seasonal school workshops, webinars, and portal resources **should be clearly targeting the specific issues city practitioners face**. Clear titles, descriptions, and focused content will better attract and maintain practitioners’ attention and deliver actionable, immediate value.

Other options to identify specific challenges could include, where appropriate, qualitative research methods such as **interviews with city practitioners**. It is also possible to identify demand through quantitative **keyword tracking and analysis** in the portal.

These efforts, integrated in the overall support journey for Mission cities, could unlock the extensive content that has already been created. Subsequently, the consortium can measure improvements by running controlled experiments to then create new content or improving existing resources, webinars, and events, tracking increases in unique views, average page view times and funnel conversion (via Hotjar), event attendance and satisfaction.

4.2 More intuitive navigation and findability of content

Multiple data points show that cities and city advisors **struggle to navigate and find relevant insights among the large amounts of information and formats** available in the SI learning programme, and especially the portal and knowledge repository.

Existing Efforts to Enhance Navigation and Findability

There have been efforts to improve portal navigation, structure and the findability of relevant content in other work packages including the implementation of:

- **Focus on pages:** curated resources on a topic in one place
- **Quick Reads:** short overviews of key NetZeroCities concepts and essential information in a practical and visual way.
- **Support Pathways:** guided learning journeys focused on key concepts such as “[Creating an inclusive local ecosystem for change and social innovation](#)”. These were launched in December 2024

An improved search service – Algolia - is in implementation phase. This intends to improve the knowledge repository search experience and tagging, as well as the capability for AI-augmented search for deep searching within content and conversational interfaces.

Co-Creating a User-Centered Navigation Structure

Other NetZeroCities portal improvement options include co-creating and iterating on portal navigation and learning content structure *with* city practitioners and city advisors to better **match their mental models and language**. This might involve approaches like card sorting where NetZeroCities facilitates a process to gather a list of topics and challenges, and asks city practitioners, as ‘service users’, to phrase them in their own words and organise them in a way that makes sense to them. The consolidation of this work should inform the information architecture of the online portal and resources in future iterations, as well as potentially the calendar of webinar series, seasonal school agendas, and other learning formats.

Promotion and Engagement



Lastly, given that information has been difficult to find, we will also need to actively promote relevant content and improvements to city advisors and city practitioners through **other marketing channels** (e.g. email), to reengage them and kickstart more active, self-service use of the learning programme and especially the portal.

4.3 Improving webinar attendance and engagement

Based on our analysis, improvements could be made to event information and registration but also overall communication with cities before, during and after engagement with cities.

Streamlining Event Communication and Promotion

Across the NetZeroCities consortia work, there are not always been reliable quarterly event overviews, email reminders and calendar invites to online events, which has a negative effect on attendance. Therefore, it will be important for WP12 to set up **automated email reminders and calendar invites** to events, and in the meantime, reminders should be sent out manually by the organisers and communication team. Alongside the work of developing more relevant and challenge-based framings, events should also be manually and **proactively promoted to relevant audiences through multiple marketing channels**, including City Advisors, to increase attendance further.

Leveraging Feedback for Continuous Improvement

To learn and improve on webinars, as part of NZC standard practice, a practice of **sending out feedback surveys to attendees after each event** needs to be built. A practice of **regular review of attendance figures and feedback** needs to be installed, as well as the **use of polls** to identify the most important challenges and topics learning content should focus on, so that future webinars are improved and addressing the key needs of city practitioners and other stakeholders.

Increasing Real-Time Engagement During Webinars

Slido, an online polling tool, is an option to use during webinars to **drive engagement** by facilitating live questions and conducting real-time polls. This approach allows participants to provide feedback and engage actively, even if they are unable to speak due to time constraints, ensuring everyone has a way to contribute to the discussion.

4.4 Continuous monitoring and improvement

To measure if the changes are leading to real improvements and impact, new learning tasks (across NZC-SGA1 and NZC-SGA2) will continuously track and review key metrics and indicators. This should be part of an NZC consortium-wide practice and applied to specific topics like social innovation.

Key Performance Indicators

Additional Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) should be introduced, including:

- **Event engagement:** Seasonal school and webinar sign-ups, attendance, satisfaction ratings and feedback
- **Portal resources performance:** Unique view counts, engagement metrics, search conversions and feedback on specific portal resources
- **User segmentation:** More user segmentation to identify and learn from which specific users are more and less engaged and getting value, and to follow up with them to understand why.

This will also enable us to report metrics that filters out consortium members and tell a more accurate story.

- **Engagement and retention:** New relevant engagement and retention metrics such as percentage of weekly/monthly returning active use, completion rates, sharing rates and satisfaction surveys for more general performance.

Note: many of these would require changes and redesigns to learning formats and updated analytics setup

Expanding Qualitative Feedback

Quantitative data alone cannot fully capture the impact of learning formats. To complement these metrics, qualitative feedback centred on tracking what city practitioners specifically learned and applied is essential so NZC can understand the impact of effort spent in the real world.

The visibility and engagement with feedback surveys for the portal and other learning formats needs to be increased for that purpose. The gathering, documentation and synthesis of qualitative feedback should also be more regular. This will help WP9 and new learning tasks (in NZC-SGA1 and NZC-SGA2) to better evaluate *why* certain learning formats and content are working or not working, and discover new opportunities, as this is difficult to understand from quantitative data alone.

Lastly, as activity can't be tracked on content embedded in iframes, WP5 should investigate hosting presentations and visual case studies on tools where we can track engagement, completion rates etc.

5 Conclusion

The Social Innovation (SI) Learning Programme has been a pivotal component of the NetZeroCities (NZC) Capability Building Programme, designed to equip cities with the tools and strategies needed to integrate social innovation into their journey toward climate neutrality. The programme has succeeded in creating a comprehensive framework that combines theoretical knowledge with practical application, delivered through online modules, in-person seasonal schools, and a wealth of resources. However, the evaluation has highlighted areas for improvement that are critical to achieving the programme's intended impact. Key lessons from the evaluation underscore the need to address the programme's challenges by refining its focus, improving accessibility, and tailoring its content to meet the specific needs of city practitioners:

- **The term “social innovation” often feels abstract and broad**, which diminishes its resonance with participants. **By framing content around concrete challenges** such as sustaining citizen engagement, tackling misinformation, or building climate assemblies, **the programme can better align with the pressing issues cities face**. When framed more specifically there is clear demand from cities for support and learning on this.
- **Improving navigation, findability, and content curation is essential to enhance the learning platform's accessibility and usability**. Co-design with city practitioners will help to make sure we implement intuitive search features, guided learning pathways, and practical resources, making information easier to find, engage with, and get value from. **Active promotion of online materials** to relevant audiences through multiple marketing channels, including City Advisors, **is important to make sure city practitioners can make better use of learning material that already exists to address their challenges**.
- **The in-person seasonal schools have demonstrated strong value**, particularly in fostering **peer-to-peer, interactive learning** and **showcasing relevant real-world examples**. **Expanding the use of these successful formats** and embedding real-life case studies throughout the programme will further strengthen its appeal and practical relevance.



- **Webinar engagement can be bolstered through better planning and promotion.** Automated reminders, clear scheduling, and targeted marketing will ensure higher attendance. By focusing on topics that directly address participants' needs, these events can become more impactful and engaging.

Investing in better continuous monitoring and feedback mechanisms will be essential to refine the programme further. This iterative approach, supported by improved analytics and user segmentation, will enable the programme to adapt to the evolving needs of its audience.

In conclusion, the **SI Learning Programme has laid a strong foundation for empowering cities to leverage social innovation in their climate neutrality efforts.** By implementing the adjustments outlined in this report, the programme can significantly enhance its effectiveness, ensuring that it delivers actionable insights, fosters deeper engagement, and supports systemic change at the city level. **With these suggested refinements, the programme will be better positioned to drive meaningful progress in the mission for climate-neutral cities.**

6 Appendix

[Online learning resource metrics - 8.1.2025](#)

[City Advisor Interview Guide](#)

[Social Innovation Learning Programme Evaluation – insight harvesting Miro Board](#)

