

# **D4.7 Proceedings and Lessons Learnt from Summer Schools 3 & 4**

**Deliverable D4.7**

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## Abbreviations and acronyms

Acronym	Description
WP	Work Package
UPM	Universidad Politécnica de Madrid
CCC	Climate City Contract

## Executive Summary

This deliverable presents the proceedings and lessons learnt from the third and fourth NetZeroCities Seasonal Schools, held in Budapest in November 2023 and Stockholm in April 2024. It provides a concise overview of the programme design, participant engagement, and evaluation results for both editions, including session ratings and qualitative feedback from representatives of 43 Mission Cities. The report highlights the schools' role in advancing Climate City Contracts (CCCs) by facilitating targeted workshops on governance, financing, stakeholder engagement, pathways and indicators, and social innovation.

## Keywords

Seasonal Schools, Capability Building, Learning offer.

## 1. Introduction

The NetZeroCities (NZC) Seasonal Schools were initially defined in Deliverable D4.3 and constitute a foundational component of the project's Capability Building Programme, designed to accelerate the co-creation and implementation of Climate City Contracts (CCCs) across European Mission Cities. Lessons learnt from the first and second editions were reported in Deliverable D4.6, informing the structure and content of subsequent schools. Seasonal Schools bring together city representatives, experts, and learning facilitators for immersive, in-person sessions that combine technical workshops, peer-to-peer exchanges, and case studies. This deliverable (D4.7) documents the third and fourth editions of the Seasonal Schools—Budapest 2023 and Stockholm 2024—detailing the programme structure, participant feedback, and subsequent CCC validation outcomes. The primary objective is to capture actionable insights and lessons learnt to refine future schools and enhance their contribution to the Climate City Contracts process.

## 2. Overview of Seasonal Schools

### 2.1 Purpose

The aim of the Seasonal Schools is to kickstart and build sustainable relationships among Mission cities and with NZC learning facilitators, leveraging networking moments and spaces, facilitated and non-facilitated, as well as interactive sessions and workshops. This enables long-term resonance learning, reflective learning and strengthens the community feeling necessary for the Cities Mission to carry momentum. One of the main objectives of these schools is to create a space in which cities can connect with each other to establish synergies that allow them to share the knowledge they already have, and even to collaborate in achieving their particular and common objectives.

### 2.2 Content & structure

The NZC Seasonal Schools are a two and a half day intensive learning track that aims to help cities to accelerate the design of coherent portfolios of actions and sound funding strategies by introducing key tools and approaches in workshops and peer-to-peer spaces, in view of the CCC submission. This experience include:

- Working group sessions to frame the challenges of the CCC journey.
- Exchanging Peer-to-Peer sessions to share strategies, tools, methodology to overcome barriers to CCC.
- Multidisciplinary design sessions to accelerate the CCC preparation.
- Lectures and case studies to deepen knowledge on a range of topics including financing, social innovation and citizen engagement, etc.

These schools are mainly organised by Polimi and UPM, with the support of the other partners: Viable Cities (VC), Climate-KIC, TNO, Dark Matter Labs (DML), ICLEI, Democratic Society (DemSoc), Bankers Without Boundaries (BwB) and others on a more on-demand basis.

Sessions are focused on providing participants with essential knowledge on different topics related to the mission of achieving climate neutrality, all grounded in the framework of the NZC Transition Map. Interactive workshops and exercises are used to address a range of crucial topics. For example:

## Transition and local governance team

This session focuses on the critical role of multidisciplinary Transition Teams in driving climate action within cities. It explores strategies for distributed leadership, stakeholder analysis, and alignment within these teams. The session provides practical tools and guidance for building and expanding effective Transition Teams, with an emphasis on communication, learning practices, and overcoming organisational silos.

### Key Takeaways:

- Emphasises the importance of well-structured Transition Teams.
- Provides practical advice on how to develop and lead these teams effectively.

## Co-development of portfolios for climate action planning

This session provides participants with strategies and techniques to co-design city-wide portfolios of coordinated actions for climate neutrality. The focus is on moving from fragmented sustainability projects to a more integrated portfolio approach, which is crucial for systemic climate action. Participants are guided on how to refine their existing plans and improve the coherence and impact of their portfolios.

### Key Takeaways:

- Facilitates the shift from isolated projects to a cohesive portfolio approach.
- Enhances the potential and impact of a city's climate action plans.

## Impact pathways, indicators for measurement, evaluation and learning

This session supports cities in co-creating their impact pathways using existing climate-neutrality scenarios and emission reduction trajectories. Through interactive exercises, the session clarifies key concepts such as direct versus indirect impacts, early versus later outcomes, and the selection of appropriate indicators. The session also includes examples of how other cities are implementing these strategies.

### Key Takeaways:

- Supports the design of effective monitoring, evaluation, and learning processes.
- Aligns these processes with long-term climate goals.

Table 1. Detailed structure of the Seasonal School available at D4.3

Day 1		Day 2		Day 3	
Free for travel		Welcome		Welcome	
Welcome reception		Session 2A (2h) <b>Portfolio co-design</b>	Session 2B (2h) <b>Transition team</b>	Session 5A (2h) <b>Social innovation</b>	Session 5B (2h) <b>Stakeholder engagement</b>
Inspirational speech		Break & networking		Break & networking	
Inauguration keynotes		Session 3A (2h) <b>Investment planning</b>	Session 3B (2h) <b>Impact pathways &amp; indicators</b>	Session 6A (2h) <b>Stakeholder engagement</b>	Session 6B (2h) <b>Social innovation</b>
Lunch		Lunch		Lunch	
Session 1A (2h) <b>Transition Team</b>	Session 1B (2h) <b>Portfolio Co-design</b>	Session 4A (2h) <b>Investment Planning</b>	Session 4B (2h) <b>Pathways and Indicators</b>	<b>Individual coaching sessions (2h)</b>	
<b>Collective learning session 1 (1 h)</b>		<b>Collective learning session 2 (1 h)</b>		Free for travel	

## 2.3 Attendance

Table 2. Seasonal School Attendance. Schools 3 &amp; 4

Date	Place	Lead	N° of cities participating	No. Of City Representatives
22- 24 November 2023	Budapest, Hungary	Polimi	17 cities: Bordeaux, Bratislava, Bristol, Brussels, Budapest, Gothenburg, Grenoble,	30

			Ioannina, Kraków, Ljubljana, Miskolc, Pécs, Podgorica, Reykjavik, Tartu, Trikala, Velenje	
24-26 April 2024	Stockholm, Sweden	UPM	26 cities: Aarhus, Cork, Copenhagen, Differdange, Dunkirk, Elbasan, Gabrovo, Groningen, Helsingborg, Ioannina, Istanbul, İzmir, Košice, Łódź, Lund, Munich, Oslo, Prato, Reykjavík, Rome, Sofia, Stavanger, Stockholm, Trondheim, Umeå, Warsaw, and Wrocław.	46

In total, forty-three attended these schools. The cities of Ioannina and Reykjavik attended both editions of the Summer Schools.

## 1 Budapest Winter School

### 1.1 General information

The NetZeroCities Winter School was held in Budapest **from 22 to 24 November 2023** at the BME Faculty of Architecture. Over the course of two and a half days, city representatives came together for an immersive learning experience focused on key steps in the Climate City Contract (CCC) journey from design to monitoring and iteration. The programme combined interactive workshops, peer exchange, and collaborative group sessions covering topics such as transition teams, portfolio co-design, financing strategies, social innovation, and indicators. Alongside structured sessions, there were moments for informal networking, shared meals, and open discussions, helping cities connect both professionally and personally.


The event was co-organised with support from NZC partners including Viable Cities, Dark Matter Labs, Demsoc, BwB, ICLEI and others. Participants were hosted at the Ibis Budapest Centrum, with evening dinners taking place in local venues that added a warm and social atmosphere to the learning experience.

The Winter School in Budapest gathered representatives from a wide range of European cities (**17 cities in total attended**), reflecting the diversity and commitment of the NetZeroCities community. Cities that took part included **Bordeaux Metropole, Bratislava, Bristol, Brussels Capital, Budapest,**

**Gothenburg, Grenoble Alpes Metropole, Ioannina Municipality, Kraków, Ljubljana, Miskolc, Pécs, Podgorica, Reykjavik, Rzeszów, Tartu, Trikala and Velenje.** This diverse participation enriched the discussions and allowed for valuable exchange across different local contexts and stages of progress in the climate neutrality journey.

## 1.2 Agenda

The Winter School programme was structured across two and a half intensive days, blending interactive sessions, technical deep dives, and informal exchanges. Participants explored key elements of the Climate City Contract, including portfolio design, investment planning, stakeholder engagement, and indicators.

Schedule	Wednesday November 22	Schedule	Thursday November 23	Schedule	Friday November 24		
			Group 1 Group 2		Group 1 Group 2		
		9.00-11.00	Portfolio Codesign (DML)	Transition Team (Viable Cities)	9.00-11.00	Pathways and Indicators (CKIC)	Social Innovation (Polimi)
		11.00-11.15	Break		11.00-11.15	Break	
		11.15-13.15	Investment Plan (BwB)	Portfolio Codesign (DML)	11.15-13.15	Social Innovation (Polimi)	Pathways and Indicators (CKIC)
14.00-15.00	Welcome and Opening Francesca Rizzo (NetZeroCities) Patrick Child (Mission Manager for the Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission, European Commission) Viola Kelemen (CapaCities) Julio Lumbreras (NetZeroCities)	13.15-15.00	Lunch & Learning session: CCC reflections (TNO)		13.15-15.00	Lunch and networking	
	Group 1 Group 2		Group 1 Group 2			Exchange sessions between cities	
15.15-17.15	Transition Team (Viable Cities) Stakeholder Engagement (Demsoc)	15.00-17.00	Stakeholder Engagement (Demsoc)	Investment Plan (BwB)	15.00-18.00		
17.15-17.30	Break		17.00-17.15	Break			
17.30-18.30	Learning session: Cities' best practices (TNO)		17.15-18.15	Resource Pack (ICLEI)			
18.30-19.10	CCC learnings (City Advisors)						
20.00-22.00	Dinner 1 :		20.00 -22.00	Dinner 2			

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Figure 1. Agenda of the 2023 Winter School in Budapest

## 1.3 Evaluation from cities

Table 3. Budapest Winter School feedback answers

Name of the session	Rating: 0 to 5 – 5 being excellent	Participants liked the most	Participants would have liked more
Transition Team Session	4.1	Participants appreciated the engaging introduction, the chance to reflect on team composition, and the open space for sharing experiences across cities. The facilitation and	Some participants felt the session could have been more tailored to their specific contexts. They suggested including more relevant case studies and having time to apply

		practical insights were also highly valued.	ideas to their own city situations.
<b>Stakeholder Engagement Session</b>	4	Participants appreciated the interactive format and the use of metaphors, which helped convey key messages clearly. The game was considered helpful and engaging, and many valued the CCC explanation and practical examples. Overall, the session felt well prepared and enjoyable.	Some participants felt the time for the exercise was too short. Several suggested including more locally tailored engagement, breaking down long explanations, and distinguishing between civic and stakeholder engagement content.
<b>Portfolio Co-Design Session</b>	4	The session offered a practical and engaging approach to a complex topic. Participants appreciated the clear facilitation, helpful tools, and the interactive, well-designed game.	Some found the content a bit abstract and would have welcomed more concrete examples, clearer guidance, and more time for discussion.
<b>Investment Plan Session</b>	4.3	Participants appreciated the clarity of the explanations, especially on parts of the City Climate Contract (CCC) they found confusing before. They highlighted the relevance of the content, the inclusion of real case studies, and the practical orientation of the session. Many found it helpful for understanding next steps and financial planning.	Some participants suggested including more concrete examples from actual city contracts and more details on funding mechanisms. A few wished for additional time for discussion, questions, and deeper dives into the financial tools presented. One specific intervention was also mentioned for potential improvement.
<b>Cities Best Practices</b>	3.7	Participants appreciated getting a quick and practical overview of what other cities are working on. They valued the chance to learn from each other's experience and see concrete examples. The format of the session (short, focused presentations) was	Several participants felt that the session was too rushed, making it hard to fully grasp the content. There were also comments suggesting the session should be scheduled earlier in the day, as fatigue made it harder to focus. Some felt the presentations could be stronger, and

		also highlighted as effective and engaging. It helped participants feel more connected and reassured about ongoing processes despite recent template changes.	that more time for discussion in smaller groups would improve learning and exchange.
<b>CCC Learnings</b>	4.0	This session was widely valued for offering concrete explanations and clarifying a topic that many considered complex. Participants appreciated the clarity of the presentation, the relevance of the topic, and the opportunity to receive direct feedback from the first round of CCCs. It was considered one of the most useful sessions, with practical insights and key messages that helped clarify next steps.	Some participants found the session too dense and suggested it would have worked better earlier in the programme when participants were more alert. They also called for more clarity on the balance of actions in relation to emissions, and more time to engage with the content. A few noted the late scheduling and fatigue affected their focus.
<b>CCC Reflections</b>	3.9	The opportunity to connect with another city sharing similar goals, engage in in-depth discussions, and receive practical advice on CCC writing.	A clearer structure: some felt there was no real programme and that the session lacked clear guidance.
<b>Resource Pack</b>	3.38	Participants appreciated receiving relevant updates and clear explanations about the upcoming changes, including the new templates. The session was considered informative and helpful for planning future work.	Some participants found the session rushed and dense, especially at the end of the day. They suggested allocating more time for questions and discussion and avoiding a detailed list of changes if comprehensive guidance will be shared later.
<b>Pathways and Indicators Session</b>	4.5	Participants found the session well-prepared and facilitative, with clear and informative conversations. They appreciated the interactivity, the relevance of the materials, and the clarity in explaining	Several participants pointed out that the session felt rushed and would have benefited from more time, especially for the introductory presentation and reflection on the exercises. Some found

		complex ideas. Many highlighted how the session deepened their understanding of the importance of pathways beyond individual actions and introduced valuable new concepts, including indicators for co-benefits.	parts of the theoretical framework still abstract and wished for a slower presentation pace. Overall, the consensus was that the session was excellent but deserved more time to unfold fully.
<b>Social Innovation Session</b>	4.17	Participants appreciated the engaging group discussions, the overall quality of the presentation, and the diversity of real case studies. The session was seen as motivational, with well-chosen examples particularly the one from Valencia. It was also informative, helping participants better understand social innovation across different city contexts.	Some felt the session included too many case presentations and would have preferred more concise lectures with space for discussion. A few noted the content was either repetitive or less applicable to their local context. Suggestions included a final group exchange to consolidate insights, and practical advice on how to scale social innovation in cities.

In addition to feedback on individual sessions, participants provided input on the overall event experience. The **location** of the Winter School (Budapest) stood out as a highlight, with many rating it as excellent. Accommodation and the opportunities for **networking** were also highly appreciated. Communication before the event and travel logistics received slightly lower (but still positive) ratings. In fact, networking clearly emerged as one of the strongest points of the Winter School – participants valued the chance to connect and exchange ideas with peers from other cities in person.

Participants praised the dynamic mix of workshops, lectures, and case-based learning activities, especially insofar as these directly supported their CCC development. However, some suggested allowing more time for certain technical topics (such as the Investment Plan and Pathways & Indicators sessions) as well as for peer exchange sessions, a few of which felt rushed or had to be shortened. Looking ahead, city teams expressed strong interest in exploring specific topics in greater depth – notably stakeholder engagement strategies, innovative financial tools, and how to integrate co-benefits – in future capacity-building events. Overall, the Budapest Winter School was seen as a motivating and **valuable learning experience** for cities at different stages of their climate neutrality journey.

## 2.4 Participating cities after The School

At the time of this report, **all cities that participated in the Budapest Winter School have successfully validated their Climate City Contract and obtained the Mission Label.**

**Two** of the participating cities, Ioannina Municipality and Pécs, completed their contracts in **window two**. A **second group** including Brussels Capital, Gothenburg, Ljubljana, Miskolc and Trikala validated their contracts in **window three**. Most of the cities completed their CCCs in **window four**. This group comprises Bordeaux Metropole, Bratislava, Bristol from the United Kingdom, Budapest, Grenoble Alpes Metropole, Kraków, Podgorica, Reykjavik, Rzeszów and Velenje. Finally, Tartu finalized its Climate City Contract shortly afterwards in a later stage referred to as **window four plus**.

## 2.5 Pictures



Figure 2. Opening of the Winter School in Budapest (2024)



Figure 3. Opening of the Winter School in Budapest (2024)





Figure 4. Participants at the Winter School in Budapest (2024)

## 2 Stockholm Spring School

### 2.1 General information

The Fourth NetZeroCities Spring School, held in Stockholm, took place between April 24 and 26, 2024. 46 city representatives from 26 cities participated in this edition of the Seasonal School: Aarhus; Cork; Copenhagen, Differdange; Dunkirk; Elbasan; Gabrovo; Groningen; Helsingborg; Ioannina; Istanbul; İzmir; Kosice; Łódź; Lund; Munich; Oslo; Prato; Reykjavík; Rome; Sofia; Stavanger; Stockholm; Trondheim; Umeå; Warsaw; and Wrocław. The organization of the Spring School was carried out by Universidad Politécnica of Madrid (UPM), with the support of POLIMI and Viable Cities, and tak's partners from Climate-Kic, TNO, Dark Matter Labs, Democratic Society (DemSoc), Bankers without Boundaries (BwB) and ICLEI. For the first time, the figures of the City Advisors were included in the development of The School. Their involvement was a stepping stone with the overall relationship with the cities and the assurance the content is complying with cities' needs.

### 2.2 Agenda

Schedule	Day 1 Wednesday / April 24	Schedule	Day 2 Thursday / April 25	Schedule	Day 3 Friday / April 26																
			<table border="1"> <tr> <th>Group 1</th> <th>Group 2</th> </tr> <tr> <td>8.30-10.30 Portfolio Codesign</td> <td>Transition Team</td> </tr> <tr> <td>10.30-10.45</td> <td>Break</td> </tr> <tr> <td>10.45-12.45 Investment Plan</td> <td>Portfolio Codesign</td> </tr> </table>	Group 1	Group 2	8.30-10.30 Portfolio Codesign	Transition Team	10.30-10.45	Break	10.45-12.45 Investment Plan	Portfolio Codesign		<table border="1"> <tr> <th>Group 1</th> <th>Group 2</th> </tr> <tr> <td>8.30-10.30 Pathways and Indicators</td> <td>Social Innovation</td> </tr> <tr> <td>10.30-10.45</td> <td>Break</td> </tr> <tr> <td>10.45-12.45 Social Innovation</td> <td>Pathways and Indicators</td> </tr> </table>	Group 1	Group 2	8.30-10.30 Pathways and Indicators	Social Innovation	10.30-10.45	Break	10.45-12.45 Social Innovation	Pathways and Indicators
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16.15-16.30	Break	16.30-16.45	Break																		
16.30-18.00	Learning session: Cities' best practices – 1st session 15 minutes break Learning session: Cities' best practices – 2nd session	16.45-17.45	CCC learnings (City Advisors)																		
19.00-21.00	Dinner 1	19.00-21.00	Dinner 2																		

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Figure 5. Agenda of the 2024 Spring School in Stockholm

### 2.3 Evaluation from cities

Table 3. Stockholm Spring School feedback answers

Name of the session	Rating: 0 to 5 5 being excellent	Participants liked the most	Participants would have liked more
<b>Transition Team Session</b>	3.4	Participants enjoyed meeting and discussing with other participants. They also mentioned how this session is a good way to start The School.	Participants wished to have more time and more spaces to talk to the other participants. Some also wished to have received tools/experiences on how to allocate resources to establish the Transition Team
<b>Stakeholder engagement Session</b>	4.3	Participants liked the practical approach of the session. They also liked the cards of the boardgame, which showed activities of stakeholder engagement. They remark the great experience of the speakers in leading the session	Participants wished they had more time and to have smaller groups. They recall time management issues
<b>Cities' Best Practices Session</b>	3.7	Participants enjoyed knowing more about what other cities are working on and the examples they brought.	Participants wished the session was at another timeframe. They also mentioned how the format has been more uniform and stick to the examples.
<b>Portfolio co-design Session</b>	3.8	Participants enjoyed the Depth of knowledge and real-world applicability. They also highlighted as positive the examples used from the CCCs	Participants wished to have more examples from Mission Cities. Besides, they wished for more practical time in the exercises
<b>Investment plan Session</b>	3.8	Participants liked to hear about how the Economic model and the flow of the session. They complemented on the depth of knowledge of the session and the speaker	Participants argue that because of their backgrounds, it was not that relevant and too detailed. Others suggested to include the reasoning of doing an investment plan
<b>CCC Reflections</b>	3.4	Participants liked they shared good practices.	Participants wished the timeframe was different, since it happened during lunch time. They also wished it was more inspiring

<b>CCC Learnings</b>	3.6	Participants enjoyed how insightful it was, as they saw how The Commission reads the CCC's and gave some good pointers and what points to elaborate further.	They wished it was placed in another timeframe, since it was at the end of the day. Some participants found it demotivating
<b>Pathways and indicators Session</b>	4	Participants enjoyed how interactive and practical the session was. They liked how it encouraged them to think holistically and how they would share outputs from the session with the rest of their teams	They wished they had more time to delve into the exercises.
<b>Social Innovation Session</b>	3.75	Participants liked the redefinition of benefits and co-benefits from the perspective of the citizens and the examples.	Participants wished it had a little more depth since it was a bit basic to some of them.

After taking each sessions feedback, the feedback form includes an epigraph to rate the overall experience, ranking six categories: “Communication before the event; travelling; location (the city where The School took place); food; accommodation; and networking opportunities.

In these categories, “Networking opportunities” was the highest raked with an average of 4.2 out of the answers. These were followed by “Location” (3.9), “Accommodation” (3.8), “Travelling” (3.8), “Communication before the event” (3.7) and “Food” as the lowest ranked (2.8).

Participants then had a space to share their suggestions for future schools, which they include:

- Add smaller breaks into the sessions to improve concentration
- Healthier and more food options
- Better time management
- Extend the duration of The School.

Finally, the survey included the following prompt “If you would recommend the spring school experience to other cities, what would you say to them?”. Here are some of the answers:

- *“Really nice occasion for exchange of good practises, networking and also some specific input useful for completing the climate city contract.”*
- *“Spring school is condensed knowledge that will help you to save a lot of time of figuring things out.”*
- *“Meet colleagues who're in the same boat, learn from best practices, and talk to brilliant experts with ready-to-use tools.”*
- *“would say that this is the best way to promote not only the preparation of CCC, but also an understanding of the topic and all the context of climate in general. It is also an opportunity to adapt a different approach to the preparation of action plans in other topics as well. It is a great experience.”*

## 2.4 Participating cities after The School

At the time of this report, **all cities listed have successfully validated their Climate City Contract and received the Mission Label**. Two cities, Ioannina and İzmir, completed their contracts during **window two**, while Prato and Umeå did so in **window three**. Stockholm stands out as one of the earliest to complete the process, having submitted its CCC in **window one**. The majority of the cities, including Aarhus, Cork, Copenhagen, Differdange, Dunkirk, Gabrovo, Groningen, Helsingborg, Istanbul, Kosiće, Łódź, Lund, Oslo, Reykjavík, Sofia, Stavanger, Trondheim, Warsaw and Wrocław, submitted their CCCs in **window four**. A few cities finalised their contracts slightly later, during what is referred to as **window four plus**. These include Elbasan, Munich and Rome.

## 2.5 Pictures



Figure 6. Group photo of the 2024 Spring School in Stockholm



Figure 7. Site Visit to the Royal Seaport in Stockholm



Figure 8. Opening of the 2024 Spring School by Olga Kordas (Viable Cities)

### 3 Lessons learnt

- The third and fourth editions of the NetZeroCities Seasonal Schools offered a wealth of insights for improving future capacity-building efforts. Key lessons include:
- **Seasonal Schools as accelerators for CCC development:** The Seasonal Schools have proven to be an effective instrument for accelerating the design and implementation of Climate City Contracts (CCCs). Their immersive format—combining targeted workshops, hands-on exercises, and structured peer exchange—provided cities with the tools, knowledge, and confidence needed to finalise their CCCs. The fact that all participating cities went on to validate their contracts and receive the Mission Label is a testament to the strategic impact of the schools.
- **Face-to-face learning is highly valued by city teams:** City representatives consistently highlighted the value of meeting peers in person. These in-person exchanges foster trust, mutual understanding, and deeper engagement—outcomes that are harder to achieve through online formats. Within the broader framework of NetZeroCities, face-to-face learning emerges as a critical component of effective capacity building.
- **Peer-to-peer learning enhances motivation and relevance:** The increasing incorporation of peer-to-peer methodologies into the Seasonal Schools has been well received. City representatives appreciate hearing directly from peers about how they are approaching CCC development, including the obstacles they face and the strategies they employ. Sessions grounded in real city experiences resonate strongly and help participants contextualise new tools and concepts. This reinforces the importance of allocating structured time and space for facilitated peer exchange.
- **Diversity of city progress levels enriches learning:** Having cities at different stages of CCC preparation in the same event created valuable contrasts. Cities that were further along could offer practical insights to those earlier in the process, while less advanced cities brought fresh perspectives and questions that challenged assumptions. This mix enriched discussions and ensured that all participants benefited from a more comprehensive and dynamic learning environment.
- **Agenda design must balance ambition and feasibility:** One recurring point of feedback concerns the intensity of the agenda, particularly on the second and third days of the programme. While participants appreciated the breadth and quality of the content, several noted that overly packed schedules limited time for reflection, networking, or deeper discussion. In particular, activities scheduled late on Day 3 suffered from lower attendance due to participant departures. The NZC team has learned the importance of calibrating agenda ambitions with the time and energy realistically available, and of prioritising key sessions earlier in the programme.
- **Access to appropriate facilities supports engagement:** The physical environment of the schools influences the overall experience. Participants expressed appreciation for facilities that offered easy access to outdoor areas, especially during long days of indoor sessions. Being able to enjoy breaks in open-air spaces contributed positively to wellbeing and concentration. Going forward, venues should be selected not only for logistical suitability, but also for their capacity to support the rhythm of intensive learning programmes.
- **Practical, tailored content remains essential:** As in previous editions, cities responded most positively to sessions that were concrete, context-relevant, and action-oriented. Content that included case studies, examples from other Mission Cities, or hands-on exercises helped participants connect new knowledge to their local realities. Conversely, sessions that were too theoretical, rushed, or general in nature were seen as less impactful. This underscores the value of co-designing content with facilitators, city advisors, and cities themselves to ensure relevance and applicability.
- **City Advisors add strategic value:** The introduction of City Advisors as active contributors to the Spring School was a notable improvement. Their involvement ensured that content was

aligned with the cities' current challenges and increased the overall cohesion between schools and other support instruments within NZC. Their continued participation should be reinforced and expanded in future editions.

- **Iterative improvement through feedback is key:** The Seasonal School model continues to evolve thanks to robust post-event feedback from participants. Lessons from the first two editions informed the design of the third and fourth; similarly, the insights captured in this report will support further refinement. This iterative process strengthens the long-term quality and effectiveness of the NZC capacity-building offer.

## 4 Conclusions

With the completion of Seasonal Schools 3 (Budapest, November 2023) and 4 (Stockholm, April 2024), NetZeroCities has successfully delivered the four Seasonal Schools originally envisioned in Specific Grant Agreement 1 (SGA1). These learning events have played a central role in supporting cities throughout their Climate City Contract (CCC) journey—offering practical guidance, peer exchange, and targeted capacity-building aligned with the Mission's goals. The strong level of participation, the relevance of the content delivered, and the overwhelmingly positive feedback from attendees confirm the strategic value of this format within the broader NZC learning architecture.

Importantly, the experience and success of these initial editions led the consortium to further strengthen this model. As detailed in Deliverable D4.5 (*Capacity and Capability Building – Year 3*), the positive outcomes of the first four schools prompted a strategic realignment of Task 4.2 to focus explicitly on **Seasonal Schools as a primary vehicle for implementation-oriented capacity building**. This evolution materialised through two further in-person editions: the **Madrid Autumn School (November 2024)** and the **Milan Summer School (June 2025)**. While these are not covered in the present deliverable, they are worth acknowledging as a direct continuation of the approach described herein—tailored to the needs of cities transitioning from CCC submission to implementation.

Across the four Seasonal Schools covered in Deliverables D4.6 and D4.7 (Milano-Como, Santander, Budapest, and Stockholm), **a total of 70 unique cities participated**, of which **53 have already obtained the Mission Label**, representing **76% of all attendees**. Specifically for Schools 3 and 4, **41 cities took part**, with **Ioannina** and **Reykjavik** attending both events. Of these, **30 cities have been officially awarded the Mission Label**, while others are actively advancing in their CCC processes. This translates to a **73% success rate**, demonstrating the Seasonal Schools' impact in supporting cities to meet the technical and strategic requirements of the Mission.

These outcomes are reinforced by the post-event surveys, which consistently highlighted the importance of in-person interaction, peer learning, and immersive engagement. City representatives emphasised how the Seasonal Schools enabled the exchange of practical knowledge, the co-development of solutions, and the formation of lasting connections that extended beyond the events themselves. These interactions did not only support the CCC process, but also laid the groundwork for future collaboration among cities—both within and beyond the NZC framework.

The Seasonal School format has also contributed to fostering a deeper cultural and institutional shift within city administrations. By exposing teams to systems thinking, co-benefits, stakeholder engagement, and innovative financing, the schools have helped cities reframe how they approach complex challenges and institutional coordination. This has been especially relevant as many cities move into the implementation phase of their Climate City Contracts.

Looking forward, the clear demand for these types of formats, combined with their proven effectiveness, suggests that **Seasonal Schools—or similar in-person learning forums—should remain a central component of the NZC capacity-building strategy**. While digital resources and advisory services are essential complements, the intensity, relational depth, and collective energy of the Seasonal Schools

offer unique value. Their role in **bridging planning and implementation**, and in **strengthening mission-driven communities of practice**, is critical for sustaining momentum and driving meaningful, systemic change.

In conclusion, the Seasonal Schools delivered under SGA1 have made a significant and measurable contribution to building the capabilities of Mission Cities. They have supported cities not only in finalising their Climate City Contracts but also in building the leadership, networks, and shared understanding necessary to move from ambition to action. Their legacy will continue to shape the way cities collaborate, learn, and innovate as they move forward on the path to climate neutrality.

## References

D4.6 Proceedings and Lessons Learnt from Summer Schools 1 & 2