



THE ITALIAN CLIMATE CHANGE THINK TANK

# Strategy for public participation and multi-level dialogue in the Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP)

POLICY PAPER

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	Executive summary.....	3
2	Starting point and work method .....	6
3	Conceptual framework: why we should focus on participation .....	7
4	Regulatory framework: available tools.....	9
5	Experiences and good practices for innovation in participation processes .....	12
5.1	Critical analysis of experiences.....	17
6	NRRP and NECP: lessons learned .....	18
7	Multi-level dialogue and participation for the 2023-24 NECP .....	20
7.1	General principles .....	20
7.2	Operational proposal in view of the 2023 NECP .....	22
8	Conclusions .....	27
9	Glossary .....	28

# 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Context - Why should we focus on participation and multi-level dialogue for the NECP?

Italy, like other European countries, has been called upon to structure the process of updating the Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP) through public participation and effective multi-level dialogue, as envisaged by the Energy Union Governance Regulations and reiterated by the Commission's Guidelines for revision of the Plan.

The policies that will be implemented by the NECP in this decade will be key to developing the infrastructure to enable the transition. This urgency requires greater accountability and awareness by all those involved and must again focus on the impacted territories and communities, particularly in a country characterised by a history of territories "sacrificed" to the general welfare, but which simultaneously wishes to detach itself from this legacy and to enhance its landscape and historical and environmental heritage.

There are many examples, including those related to the implementation of the current NECP, typical of infrastructure and environmental planning issues for which inaction, conflicting special interests, or administrative ineffectiveness have proven to be structural and cultural roadblocks. The simplest reaction when faced with management of complex problems. Typical examples are issues related to renewable authorisations that involve bureaucratic conflicts and confusion during the course of the authorisation process, leading to inevitable delays and highlighting dysfunctional planning, involvement and empowerment of participants upstream of the process. The identification within the Plan itself of a regulatory framework and a structured pathway that provides for organic involvement - enabling multi-level relationships among citizens, businesses, organisations and institutions in the joint definition of common goals - may be the key for its implementation.

In addition to being a legal requirement, therefore, **participation and multi-level dialogue satisfy the need to make the policies and measures of the NECP effective and open to implementation.** These must be applied with respect to the various levels of responsibility with which stakeholders participate in the Plan and its implementation, from local authorities, industry, manufacturing and civil society associations to individual citizens. The NECP could thus represent multiple visions, becoming recognised and recognisable by the players who contributed to its construction, taking ownership of its structure, content and broader purpose.

A strategy of multi-level participation and dialogue should become embedded in the very governance of the Plan, becoming an integral and substantial part of it, starting with the drafting process and during the stages of its implementation, monitoring and assessment.

Therefore, the basic requisites must be identified in order to promptly begin the process and be prepared for delivery of the final version of the updated NECP, scheduled for June 2024.

## Methodology

To give concrete form to the value of the structured participatory process, this paper is the result of leveraging multiple sources, skills and experiences of contributors involved in the various stages of conception and drafting of the text.

Two main stages can be identified:

▪ **STAGE 1**

- Literature review;
- 8 semi-structured interviews;
- NECP and NRRP gap analysis - How to make the process more effective
  - Identification of general principles.

▪ **STAGE 2**

- Round table (9 May 2023) - Discussion and debate with stakeholders;
- Finalisation and sharing of the proposal for peer review;
- Publication of the proposal.

Following STAGE 1, it was determined that in the current NECP the process of participation and implementation of multi-level dialogue was lacking, due to lack of formalisation of the process via two elements:

- a. A **reference framework** or “governance” of participation for the NECP - such as process organisation **measures** in the construction, implementation and monitoring of the same;
- b. Ensuring referencing of the **content** - how and whether the contributions received were added to the text and what their function was.

These two areas indicate room for a concrete step forward for the text to be updated by June 2024.

### **A proposal for the NECP (STAGE 2)**

A possible proposal for governance of NECP participation was achieved through sharing and discussion within a round table composed of stakeholders from different areas and levels, held according to Chatham House rules on 9 May 2023.

This round table discussed a possible **operational proposal** for the NECP update, which identifies the **basic requisites to be included within the text of the Plan**, as a basis for the practical initiation of a process dedicated to climate and energy; that can **unfold over the year before sending the final version of the document to Brussels in June 2024**.

These basic requisites elements are:

- a. **Bodies and resources** for managing multi-level dialogue, divided between central coordinating bodies and coordinating bodies of sector-based standing round tables. The presence of economic resources and technical assistance through the Structural Funds, as has been done in other cases, is an option to be examined;
- b. **Stakeholder mapping** that must be part of the multi-level dialogue and involved in the NECP revision process. Defining for each participant: the competences corresponding to the thematic areas; the planning tools available that can be put “at the service” of NECP objectives; and the funds and channels of participation that already exist.

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter 1.3 Consultations and involvement of the national bodies and the Union and results obtained

- c. Participation **stages and timing** prior to 2024, determining the time frame and how the dialogue and participatory process should be carried out in the definition phase of the Plan, before the final version is submitted. Time frame and methods will also have to be defined for the subsequent phases of implementation, monitoring and assessment of the Plan.
- d. **Channels** and **tools** for targeted participation with the control bodies and institutions, or those functional to broader and more widespread participation with the public. These also include channels and tools for disseminating information about the participatory process, increasing its visibility.

This work shows the availability of resources, time and knowledge to make the NECP a plan that reflects the needs of the country, through a participation-based path. What will be needed now is **the political willingness to make it effective and efficient, to avoid the inapplicability of complex, transversal plans and strategies that are essential for the achievement of climate neutrality goals and the social, economic and industrial revitalisation that Italy needs.**

This work is open to contributions even after publication, in STAGE 3 of the methodology, without an end date. For those intending to provide such contributions, see the contacts on the last page.

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## 2 Starting point and work method

The previous [ECCO report on the Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan \(NECP\)](#) highlighted the need to structure its update through public participation and effective multi-level dialogue, as envisaged by the EU Governance Regulations. To this end, the NECP should contain the elements of what is referred to as “a plan for participation”, which outlines how the provisions of the EU Regulations on multi-level dialogue are shaped and included within the NECP. We will refer to these elements as well as to the participation strategy and multi-level dialogue.

The prerequisite for participation should be, first and foremost, information to all of the parties that, in various capacities, are called upon to “implement” the NECP, such as municipalities, regions, the worlds of industry and business, as well as individual citizens through their behaviour. However, this prerequisite alone is not sufficient.

**An effective multi-level participation and dialogue strategy should be functional and facilitate implementation of the NECP** by enabling the aggregation of parties around common goals and substantial involvement in its implementation. **The NECP** could best represent multiple visions and **would, therefore, be recognised and recognisable by the players who contributed to its construction, responsible for its structure, content and broader purpose.** A strategy of multi-level participation and dialogue should, therefore, start from drafting of the Plan and continue constructively during the stages of its implementation.

Early and inclusive public participation and strengthened multi-level dialogue are key tools in the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and measures. The European Governance White Paper of 2001 already cited participation as one of the 5 pillars of governance, stating that *“the effectiveness and quality of policies depend on the degree of participation that will be ensured at all stages of the journey, from design to execution”*<sup>2</sup>. In fact, the Commission encourages their strengthening in the [Guidelines](#) for the revision of the Plans, not only because they are required by the Regulations, but also in compliance with the Aarhus Convention.

However, during drafting of the current NECP, a specific involvement strategy was not followed. Thus, an opportunity was missed to enhance these steps also in the context of implementing the Plan's measures, which are often the responsibility of local governments if not of individual citizens and “consumers”. **Updating of the NECP is therefore an opportunity to create a process of multi-level dialogue, participation and consultation that is more compliant with requirements and more effective.**

In this study, we propose the definition of an operational course of action for public participation and multi-level dialogue, which should be applied to the NECP update process. We also suggest that the NECP itself become an enabling tool of the participatory and conflict resolution process to be provided as support for the implementation phase. The aim is to establish a dialogue that informs and empowers the various levels of representation – both formal and informal – that are impacted by the NECP and in various ways involved in its implementation.

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<sup>2</sup> EUROPEAN GOVERNANCE - A WHITE PAPER (COM(2001) 428 def./2) (2001/C 287/01).

This study was conducted using a method that involved two main stages of work:

1. A literature review and the holding of eight semi-structured interviews with various experts from the sector of public participation, academia and players involved in the process. Following this work, it was possible to draw up guidelines for an effective participation process and multi-level dialogue for climate and energy policy in Italy.
2. Based on the evidence gathered and a possible operational proposal for the NECP that could incorporate the principles identified, even in the contingency of the timing of the Plan update (30 June 2023), a round table conducted according to Chatham House<sup>3</sup> rules was convened on 9 May 2023. The table, composed of stakeholders from different backgrounds and different levels (from local to national), brought their own considerations and expertise, which have been reflected as much as possible in the concluding paragraphs of this report. The objective was to partially reproduce a “small-scale” participation model that could provide a co-constructed proposal representing a variety of visions.

### 3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: WHY WE SHOULD FOCUS ON PARTICIPATION

The update of the current text of the NECP is scheduled for June 2023 and will be the country's strategic guide in defining the plan for decarbonisation and, more broadly, strategic planning of the economic transformation needed to achieve the medium- and long-term climate goals. It will also identify the strategic guidelines to reposition Italy on the global stage, which is involves [competitive challenges that are being played out precisely on the issue of clean tech and climate change](#). Moreover, the Plan's policies and measures will also impact the lives of everyone, with concrete interventions throughout the country, such as policies on public transportation, urban mobility, and domestic heating. The legitimacy required to accompany the implementation of measures will therefore need to reflect the broad and composite spectrum of the needs of all the stakeholders.

The theme of participation is predominant today because, at least in some of its forms (deliberative participation), it offers a systemic alternative to the democratic and governance model that is not responding to the climate and environmental crisis or the social and economic<sup>4</sup> crisis, which has exacerbated inequalities and deteriorated essential services such as health and education. Despite “participation” being a rather ambiguous terms<sup>5</sup> – both because it refers

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<sup>3</sup> [Chatham House Rule | Chatham House – International Affairs Think Tank](#)

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/339306da-en/1/3/1/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/339306da-en&csp\\_07698b7c924c319dbb92a6500bf563da&itemIGO=oecd&itemContentType=book#section-d1e1437](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/339306da-en/1/3/1/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/339306da-en&csp_07698b7c924c319dbb92a6500bf563da&itemIGO=oecd&itemContentType=book#section-d1e1437)

<sup>5</sup> Assistance on this issue is provided by an earlier OECD Manual (as the last one focuses more on the deliberation), from the 2002 Citizens as Partners, on information, consulting and participation in policy making ([https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/cittadini-partner\\_9789264299269-it](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/cittadini-partner_9789264299269-it)). Very briefly: Information - Administration disseminates information on the formulation of public policies; Consultation - Administration solicits and receives feedback from citizens on the formulation of public policies; Participation - Citizens actively participate in decision-making and in the formulation of public policies.

to a broad spectrum of actions, and because it is often used to justify decisions where civil society (in the broad sense) involvement is only formal – it is the subject of extensive research and experimentation (Papadopoulou and Warin 2007 in Bobbio and Pomatto, 2007)<sup>6</sup>.

This research starts from an evident crisis in the institutions of representative democracy, which some studies trace back principally to the fall of party democracy (Manin, 1993; Mair 2013). In Italy this could be identified with the disappearance of mass parties and the weakening of trade unions in the late 1980s and the vast organised system of corruption uncovered with Tangentopoli. On the other hand, there has also been a decline in the reliability of centralised coordination between Government and interest groups (Bobbio e Pomatto, 2007). The progressive disconnect between the population and conventional politics, i.e. between citizens retreating into their individual spheres and party leaders locking themselves within the logics of power, has left a vacuum that has given way to the advance of populism and to the growing legitimisation of depoliticised decision-making processes, with decision-making centres in institutions such as the European Union, international agencies, and, in general, a predominantly regulatory rather than political and redistributive state (Mair, 2013)<sup>7</sup>.

However, in this vacuum, other models have begun to emerge and attract demand, supported by theories of democratic renewal and proposals for new forms of institutional politics. The experiences of involving citizens and other stakeholders, as well as the renewed focus on the role of public administration as a conduit for bottom-up demands, are an attempt to respond. **The climate, social and economic crisis that we are undergoing has proven to be a catalyst for this process, but unless there is a political willingness to make it effective and efficient, we will see the consequences in the inapplicability of complex and transversal plans and strategies such as the NECP. In practical terms, therefore, we will not achieve the goals of climate neutrality and social, economic and industrial revitalisation that Italy needs.**

In this sense, participation should be thought of as a political process, where all actors are involved in a dialectical and even conflict-driven exercise of discussion, information, deliberation, planning, and distribution of responsibilities (Giambartolomei 2021; Evans, 2004; Otsuki 2015)<sup>8</sup>. The sociology of contemporary consumption that questions ecological transition and changing development patterns provides a starting point for this reflection, establishing that the basis of a participatory

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Active participation means that citizens play a role in the formulation of public policy, such as making alternative proposals, with the understanding that the Government is responsible for the final decision. Involving citizens in policy making constitutes an elaborate two-way relationship between administration and citizens, based on the principle of partnership. The influence of citizens on decision-making increases from information to consultation and then to active participation.

<sup>6</sup> Bobbio L., Pomatto G. (2007). Models for involvement of citizens in public decisions. Report drawn up on behalf of the Autonomous Province of Trento.

Papadopoulos, Y. e Warin, Ph. (2007), Are innovative, participatory and deliberative procedures in policy making democratic and effective? In *European Journal of Political Research*, 46, pages 445-472

<sup>7</sup> Mair P. (2013). *Governing the gap. The end of party democracy*. Rubbettino

<sup>8</sup> Giambartolomei G. (2021). *Caring-with People and Nature: Exploring social-ecologically just transformations through a lens of feminist and democratic caring*. Coventry University.

Evans, P. (2004). Development as institutional change: The pitfalls of monocropping and the potentials of deliberation. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 38(4), 30–52.

Otsuki, K. (2015). *Transformative Sustainable Development: Participation, Reflection and Change* (Routledge). Taylor & Francis Group.



process must comprise three elements: information, awareness and accessibility to change.

Let us therefore move on to analyse whether the tools already available in Italy meet these minimum requirements and which national success stories can provide useful insights.

## 4 THE REGULATORY FRAMEWORK: AVAILABLE TOOLS

Widespread mistrust of institutions shows how the process of appropriation and identification in policy development has been and still is disregarded, and how said institutions fail to provide effective responses to the needs of stakeholders and citizens, in an institutional path of short-circuiting and assignment of responsibilities that are dysfunctional with respect to objectives. In particular, especially with regard to national planning processes, policymakers have lacked the capacity to understand the potential of those initiatives and innovation niches that in recent decades have tried to fill the representation and participation gap mentioned in the previous section. In fact, to date, participation has materialised mainly in terms of consumption and the citizen as consumer and market player, without a reference framework. This is at the expense of factual and organic political involvement, which has been achieved, instead, by enabling local-level relationships among citizens, businesses, organisations, and institutions and by co-constructing common goals. The most obvious consequence is that the environmental issue has encountered a classic collective action problem, where inaction has in fact proven to be the easiest reaction to complex problems.

Yet environmental information and participation have been recognised as rights in Italy since 2001, since the endorsement of the Aarhus Convention through Law no. 108 of 16 March 2001. The European Union ratified the Convention by issuing Directive 2003/4/EC, which was implemented in Italy by Legislative Decree 195/2005. Specifically, the Convention calls for public participation in the preparation of plans and programmes related to the environment, including the NECP. It also stipulates that this participation must take place at the beginning of the procedure, without exceptions<sup>9</sup>, establishing a mandate to “listen” to communities. Moreover, the Italian Constitution sanctions the principle of subsidiarity with Article 118, which commits society to achieving the collective good, on the same level as institutions: the task of institutions is to build opportunities for participation, with a view to inclusiveness.

With respect to citizen participation in public administration decision-making, a number of regulations have come into force, mainly since the 1990s, which have regulated the relationship between administration and citizens. For example, Law 241/1990 on access to administrative documents or 142/1990 on the system of local self-government have highlighted more clearly the collective and individual rights of participation in administrative proceedings. On the other hand, regarding public consultations, Italy has set out clear rules starting with Directive 2/2017, signed by then Minister of Public Administration Marianna Madia. In particular, it was recommended that public administration should organise consultations according to the guidelines outlined by the Department of Civil Service in collaboration with civil society organisations that are members of the Open Government Partnership, international initiative that supports the collaboration

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<sup>9</sup> [https://www.iidma.org/attachments/Publicaciones/PNIEC\\_EN.pdf](https://www.iidma.org/attachments/Publicaciones/PNIEC_EN.pdf)

between Governments and organisations of civil society. The Consultation Guidelines bring together the general principles and give Governments the tools to implement open and inclusive participatory processes. Indeed, public administration should consider consultations as an essential step in the decision-making process, and therefore publicise them adequately to ensure ample adherence and devote resources necessary for the effectiveness of the process, since, to date, there is no funding line dedicated exclusively to participation.

Clearly, the higher the level at which the Planning tool is set and untethered from the territories, the more complex the operation and management of participatory processes becomes. Indeed, the challenge lies in creating a system that meets the legal requirements and is, at the same time, effective in managing when and how decision-making is concluded and implemented. All of this is without forgetting that the public administration systems are not “built” or even adequately equipped in terms of resources and skills to implement such tools.

The regulatory structure at the national level is highly fragmented or left to the initiative of individual regions, some of which, over time, have developed expertise with respect to community involvement in decision-making, while others have not. There are successful examples at the level of individual regions. Tuscany, for example, has specific legislation in the field of urban planning, as well as a law that finances participatory processes (Regional Law 46 of 2013). Emilia-Romagna has a law that funds many participation projects, allocating small amounts of funding to each (Regional Law no. 15/2018), and Puglia has legislation on participation with Regional Law 28/2017.

Another element already in our system is that of public debate, which became law at the end of 2018, with the National Commission established in December 2020. This regulation falls under the scope of the Procurement Code, and the Commission reports to an office within the Ministry of Infrastructure. There are examples, such as in the case of France, where this function is assigned to an independent authority, with a stronger degree of autonomy and not necessarily attached to a single ministry that effectively limits its scope of action to infrastructure alone and not to policies in the broader sense. This rule has weakened over the years, most recently with the NRRP projects and the reform of the Procurement Code. In the first case, public debate times have been halved, to conclude the process within 45 days<sup>10</sup>, on issues that still remain very complex. Although this simplification was implemented to shorten the time for project approval, it actually turned out to be a very short-sighted policy because conflicts were not resolved before the projects, inevitably lengthening the timing after the process. In the second case, the new version of article 40 provides for cancellation of the National Commission, a further halving of the time provided for public debate and its very limited legitimacy, being left to the discretion of the contracting body, with

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<sup>10</sup> “Article 46 of Decree Law no. 77 of 31 May 2021: ‘Governance of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan and initial measures to strengthen administrative structures and accelerate and streamline procedures’, converted, with amendments, into Law no. 108 of 29 July 2021, provides for the reduction of the timeframe for the Public Debate process, envisaged in DPCM (Prime Ministerial Decree) no. 76 of 2018 solely for those works indicated in attachment no. 4 of the aforementioned decree law for which Public Debate is mandatory. Generally speaking, the aforementioned provision establishes that Public Debate must have a maximum duration of forty-five days and that all of the other times envisaged in DPCM no. 76 of 2018 be reduced by half”.  
<https://www.lavoripubblici.it/news/dibattito-pubblico-linee-guida-commissione-codice-contratti-pnrr-26549>

no occasions for discussion with the individual parties<sup>11</sup>. All this should prompt a thorough reflection in view of the drafting of a plan as important as the NECP, where the amount of infrastructure and works to be carried out to achieve climate goals is most likely unprecedented.

The procedures of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)<sup>12</sup> and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)<sup>13</sup> are a way of involving stakeholders in the decision-making process for the approval of plans, projects and works with potential environmental impacts. Although the informational effort is evident, such procedures do not always effectively succeed, especially when it comes to Strategic Environmental Assessments on Plans and Programmes.

Finally, Italy has a legal obligation toward public participation, specifically in the NECP update process that comes, as mentioned above, from Regulation (EU) 2018/1999 on the governance of the Energy and Climate Action Union. Specifically, Article 10 of the Regulation obliges member states, among other things, to introduce measures to ensure **transparent** and fair **public participation**, consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, widespread and effective disclosure, and reasonable timelines for implementing the entire process. Article 11, on the other hand, calls on Member States to **establish a multi-level dialogue** to provide opportunities for various stakeholders to actively participate and discuss the achievement of the Union's goal of neutrality, the projected scenarios for energy and climate policies, review progress, and, as part of this dialogue, also discuss the Plans. **The Guidelines for drafting of the Plans indicate that Member States should provide a platform where this multi-level dialogue can take place**<sup>14</sup>.

The consultations that took place in 2019 on the current NECP text did not follow a predefined format and relied on the operational tools already in place, such as open public consultations or structured consultations within the SEA process or the State-Regions Conference. Given the magnitude of the Plan's goal to 2030 and, especially in view of 2050, it is no longer possible to disregard setting up and exploiting the participatory process, with a view to increasing the accountability of the stakeholders who, at multiple levels, are called upon to implement the Plan.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.apertacontrada.it/2023/01/31/il-nuovo-codice-dei-contratti-pubblici-dibatto-pubblico-indietro-tutta/>;  
<https://greenreport.it/news/urbanistica-e-territorio/riforma-del-codice-degli-appalti-cosi-non-va-le-proposte-di-modifica-al-decreto-legislativo-del-governo/>

<sup>12</sup> Legislative Decree 152/2006

<sup>13</sup> Legislative Decree no. 152 of 2006 "Environmental regulations".

<sup>14</sup> In Italia, this platform exists and is called ParteciPa, the platform of the Italian Government dedicated to public consultation and participation processes (<https://partecipa.gov.it/?locale=it>), which was used by the Government for various projects for consultation of national Plans and Strategies. Also from the MASE (Ministry of the Environment and Energy Security) with the Forum for Sustainable Development (<https://partecipa.gov.it/assemblies/forum-nazionale-sviluppo-sostenibile>)

## 5 Experiences and good practices for innovation in participation processes

Ideas of multi-level governance and open, deliberative and participatory democracy have more often than not arisen “from below” and have proven very functional in aggregating multiple voices around a decision-making process. This section gives some of the examples of the many experiences acquired over the years in Italy, beginning with processes most comparable to what is desired for the NECP; specifically, those on a national and multi-player scale (Forum for the Sustainable Development Strategy and the “green polder model”), ending with processes more specific to particular stakeholders (Town meetings).

At the national scale, it is relevant to mention the experimental experience with the [National Forum for Sustainable Development](#)<sup>15</sup> conducted for the development of the National Sustainable Development Strategy, the latter promoted by the Ministry of the Environment and Energy Security (MASE) - Directorate General Circular Economy, in collaboration with the Forum itself and the Department of Civil Service<sup>16</sup>. It is worth mentioning how the implementation resources derive from the [2014-2020 PON Governance and Institutional Capacity](#). **However, it would be desirable to take advantage of the support of the new PON for 2021-2027, i.e. the CAPCOE (Capacity for Cohesion) fund, also as part of the equally desirable participatory process and multi-level dialogue for the development and implementation of the NECP**<sup>17</sup>.

The process was initiated with a guided co-design of the ‘Forum Space’, i.e. a virtual space organised on ParteciPA and dedicated to the aforementioned National Forum (September 2021-April 2022) which, based on a process of co-construction, is now divided into two distinct but transversal areas: the ‘Meeting Space’, accessible to anyone, and the ‘Participatory Space’, accessible only to Forum members (200 organisations) divided into Work Groups, the same as those into which the Forum is divided.

The trial was aimed at co-writing a shared technical document (May-July 2022). An initial offline phase led to the development of a draft of the Positioning Statement with the Forum’s requests with respect to implementation of the strategy as carried out by central administration and the Government. A second online phase launched and completed a consultation of the Forum Space among participants. Following said consultation, it was possible to collect the contributions, proceeding with finalisation of the Positioning Statement. This experience, therefore, provided a positioning statement with respect to the strategy, not the co-construction of the strategy itself, and aimed to test the platform and evaluate its effective use.

An experience on a regional scale that saw a broad and structured participatory process, correlated to the example just given on a national scale and significant with respect to the objective of this paper, was the [co-design process of the Sustainable Development Strategy for the Region of Sardinia \(SRSvS\)](#). The operational hub for coordinating participation activities was the Strategy Coordination Group, supported by technical assistance. In coordination with these

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<sup>16</sup> MASE, DFP, Formez PA – Line A3 Project OPENGOV, Technical Support Unit L2WP1 Creiamo PA, Sapienza University - Dept. of Social and Economic Sciences.

<sup>17</sup> [https://www.agenziacoessione.gov.it/news\\_istituzionali/approvato-dalla-commissione-europea-il-pn-capacita-per-la-coesione-2021-2027/](https://www.agenziacoessione.gov.it/news_istituzionali/approvato-dalla-commissione-europea-il-pn-capacita-per-la-coesione-2021-2027/)

bodies, the main operational core was the Inter-Departmental Work Group, consisting of more than 100 officials from the administrations, who worked together in 2020 in about 40 online workshops to develop an initial Preliminary Strategy Document.

Following the Council's approval of the Preliminary Document, the process of involving territorial institutional players and all civil society was initiated in early 2021, for the shared development of the SRSvS.

In this phase, the role of bringing together institutions, the business world, the third sector and civil society in general has been the Sardegna2030 Regional Forum for Sustainable Development. Between March and October 2021, 14 online events were held, including two Regional, Institutional and Civil Society round tables; seven thematic workshops on 2021-2027 EU Policy Goals: Sardinia + Intelligent, Sardinia + Green, Sardinia + Connected, Sardinia + Social, Sardinia + Near; four local round tables for South Sardinia, Oristanese-Medio Campidano, Nuoro-Ogliastra and North Sardinia; one event presenting the Sardinia 2030 Strategy. The agendas and objectives of the meetings were always defined on a co-construction basis by the Strategy Coordination Group, technical support and the inter-departmental group.

With the help of tools and methodologies of group facilitation and digital interaction<sup>18</sup>, it was possible to receive over 20,000 formal and informal contributions, achieving a multi-player and multi-level governance that brought concrete results in terms of streamlining some objectives and increasing the lines of intervention and actions (which also increased in number from 82 to 104, and from 400 to 571).

This model has been similarly applied in all regions, in addition to the extensive co-design process, but what positively characterised the Sardinian experience was the activation of a group of 100 civil servants, across all departments, stimulating a rare collaboration and participation within the departments<sup>19</sup>.

Good practices at the regional scale can also be seen, for example, in **Emilia-Romagna**, where a labour and climate pact involving labour unions was signed by the Region and environmental associations. The pact has been updated and defines transition policies at the regional level, along with the labour issue. Reggio Emilia even adopted a regulation on democracy and urban and climate justice, which provides for *“the establishment of nine Councils, i.e. participatory bodies on a territorial basis”*<sup>20</sup>. In **Puglia**, the experience of **Community Cooperatives** is an example of how an initiative established through the strong grassroots involvement of citizens and existing structures can have strong repercussions at the regional level. In fact, Puglia has passed legislation on this very topic.

The Dutch “Green Polder model” is another virtuous example of how, outside of Italy, the institutionalisation of public participation and multi-level dialogue has been used to design, implement and monitor climate policies, in this case including the Dutch NECP (BOX 1).

Other examples of successful participatory practices in Italy are the local food networks, formed by people active in a certain territory and who, in this case, pursued ideas of multi-level

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<sup>18</sup> The following have activated on the Region website: a dedicated section, the Decidum platform, mail marketing with Sendinblue, and RAS social media. The meetings were held remotely using the Zoom platform

<sup>19</sup> The example on the SNSvS and on the Sardinian model can both be found as good practices in the participation hub ([https://partecipa.gov.it/assemblies/hub-partecipazione/f/209/proposals/1341?order=most\\_endorsed&per\\_page=100](https://partecipa.gov.it/assemblies/hub-partecipazione/f/209/proposals/1341?order=most_endorsed&per_page=100)) (<https://partecipa.gov.it/assemblies/hub-partecipazione/f/209/proposals/1334>)

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.comune.re.it/novita/notizie/approvato-il-nuovo-regolamento-sulla-democrazia-e-la-giustizia-urbana-e-climatica-a-reggio-emilia>

governance. **This was done by mapping, in that area, the various initiatives that support sustainable production and consumption practices, subsequently creating extended consultation tables and, lastly, involving the local government.**

With regard to the process of building and implementing the SNAI (National Strategy for Inland Areas, 2014-2020), the **Technical Committee for Inland Areas** has also implemented a place-based strategy, visiting the areas and consulting with the community in order to define area strategies. The interviews conducted for this study showed how this involvement and aggregation led to area strategies that very often turned out to be different from the initial draft, which was defined by few experts and when tested against the real facts from the community was not appropriate. The involvement process thus served to understand that citizens' interests, demands and needs required greater representation in the strategy.

Also noteworthy is the experience of the **Steering Committee**, which, on the initiative of CNEL and ISTAT, reached a shared definition of the progress and well-being of Italian society<sup>21</sup>. The Committee was composed of representatives of social partners and civil society and identified the 12 Fair and Sustainable Well-being (BES) indicators, which were then adopted by the MEF with decree dated 16 October 2017<sup>22</sup>.

In contrast, the Bologna citizen's climate assembly (which met for the first time in 2023) is a demonstration of how the city and the region have made efforts over time to actively involve citizens. The Assembly was formed through a participatory process in which Bologna's organised and non-organised civil society took part. It has a policy-directing role in the city and was constituted with a stratified and randomly drawn audience. After declaring a climate emergency in 2019, the City of Bologna included the instrument of the citizen's assembly in its Municipal Statute in 2021. The Urban Innovation Foundation has played an important role from the perspective of implementing urban policies and institutionalising the Assembly, preparing the project for the participatory process ("A Climate of Participation"), the facilitation service for the round tables, reporting and design.

The Permanent Citizens' Assembly on Climate in Milan, launched in December 2022 and designed to last through 2030, is a model that operates through the periodic drawing of a sample of residents in the city in an attempt to gradually bring a broad representation to the table, thanks to the mechanism of rotating participants. It was established for the implementation and roll-out phase of the Air and Climate Plan (PAC) adopted in 2022 by the City of Milan, as one of the plan measures. The mechanism designed by Milan's Administration is the creation of annual proposal documents by the Assembly, after deliberation among its members, on which the municipality formally comments by communicating what is incorporated into the PAC and arguing what, if anything, is not. This allows the parties to interact with the territorial bodies and the official decision maker, in order to provide a justified response to the demands of citizens.

The experience of Deliberative Assemblies is now a worldwide phenomenon that is also taking shape in Europe with the support of the Knowledge Network on Climate Assemblies (KNOCA).

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/44267>

<sup>22</sup> [https://www.camera.it/temiap/documentazione/temi/pdf/1105123.pdf?\\_1555202491890](https://www.camera.it/temiap/documentazione/temi/pdf/1105123.pdf?_1555202491890)

A case in point is the French National Citizens' Climate Convention, a successful experience and initiative of President Macron. He gave the Convention the task of drafting bills and, on his part, pledged to take the demands of the Convention to Parliament. The Irish Constitutional Convention, another experiment dating back to 2012, is composed of citizens drawn randomly for two-thirds and MPs from the various Irish constituencies for one-third. It was charged with considering possible changes to the Constitution and producing recommendations. The law on marriage between same-sex couples, for instance, was introduced in the country through the Convention's deliberation.

There are, therefore, experiences implemented and good practices of innovation in the participatory process on the territory, from which it is possible and necessary to draw inspiration<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> In addition to those mentioned, one could in fact continue with the Italian Association for Public Participation (Aip2) as examples of good practices, or the Government's platform for participation ParteciPA, the above-mentioned Open Government and the National Action Plan for Government, the NRRP Civic Observatory or the UN Agenda 21, which is currently an important player in the dialogue with municipalities and with ANCI in particular.

### BOX 1: The Dutch “Green Polder Model”

The Dutch model is an attempt to institutionalise multi-stakeholder participatory processes in environmental policy-making. Here, civil society organisations have the opportunity to make their views heard from the very beginning of the process. This was reflected in the National Energy and Climate Plan, where broad involvement and consensus was sought right from the drafting stage. The strategy of participation and multi-level dialogue saw the involvement of all players in various stages through a set of meetings, thematic tables, consultations within the region and through online platforms. Subsequent to the Plan, consultations began based on the National Climate Agreement, which provided the framework for drafting the Plan.

#### *Civil society involvement in policy formulation*

The discussion on the Agreement was divided into five sectorial platforms and three task forces in the transversal areas of finance, innovation, employment and education, including organisations and companies that could make specific contributions to the transition of individual sectors.



The five sectorial platforms were chaired by independent members who met periodically in the Climate Council, which monitored coordination and consistency with cross-sector issues and organised dialogue meetings in each province of the country. In general, citizens were able to submit suggestions, ideas and plans online through dedicated platforms, while the organisations “Dutch Citizen Participation” and “Government Policy Platform” (NPBO) organised meetings which involved a more widespread audience. In late summer 2019, an online public consultation was launched to provide an opportunity to respond to the draft Energy and Climate Plan.

#### *Citizen participation and involvement in policy implementation*

A key role was also given to public participation in policy implementation, with a focus on Regional Energy Strategies, municipal transition and renewable energy generation.

#### *Understanding the point of view of citizens*

The Institute of Social Research then developed a programme to map the different viewpoints of citizens, in order to ensure a socio-cultural vision to the transition, which must first and foremost be socially sustainable.

#### *Communication*

In September 2019, the Government launched a communication campaign to raise awareness among citizens about their role in the transition.

Source: Glasbergen P. (2002). The Green Polder Model: institutionalising multi-stakeholder processes in strategic environmental decision-making. *European Environment* 12, 303-315.  
NECP Netherlands, 2019 [https://energy.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-03/nl\\_final\\_necp\\_main\\_en\\_0.pdf](https://energy.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-03/nl_final_necp_main_en_0.pdf)



## 5.1 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF EXPERIENCES

The panorama of actual and positive experiences of participation is clearly broad and multi-layered. The examples cited in this study constitute a rich, though evidently fragmented picture. What has also been noted is that the bottom-up experiences are highly focused on practice and, most of the time, are conditioned by the availability of time and resources of the players involved. The experience of the Bologna and Milan assemblies, although positive, should have a well-defined organisation at a national level, in order to be replicated throughout the country. The local areas have a very different level of maturity with respect to citizen involvement, which should sometimes be stimulated with different methods of dialogue, since the level of trust in institutions is varied, as is, in fact, the capacity in terms of the resources of public administration to plan on issues such as energy and the environment. Thus, these participatory models cannot merely be replicated, but an accompanying operation is needed to build the model most suitable for the different situations. Assemblies also represent the place of non-organised civil society and cannot replace a space for dialogue, which must be present for organised civil society and representations in general (e.g. trade unions, associations, industries and so on). For these stakeholders, it is important to consolidate the experiences from establishment of the National Partnership Agreement and the Regional Programmes for the European Structural and Investment Funds (ERDF and ESF, part of the ESI funds), whose partnership processes are regulated by the European Code of Conduct for Partnerships<sup>24</sup>. The latter contains the key principles on transparent procedures for the identification of relevant partners, essential principles and good practices regarding the involvement of relevant partners in the preparation of programmes.

The next step to be defined and organised, where universities have often played the important role of mediator, is the collection of experiences and good practices, which are niches of bottom-up social innovation, in meetings with the public administration. The aim is to trigger the realisation that citizens have a political role in participating in the management of resources, starting from proximity. A network of municipalities must then be created, which, on their part, have a very important role to play because of their tradition of dialogue with their catchment area and, therefore, also because of the tools and political expertise that inevitably leave their mark on the local areas. The ecological transition, in fact, also passes through a widespread and distributed planning and implementation model, but often the resources available to the municipalities - which are the subjects that bring together businesses, the environmental needs of the local area, and social inclusion - in terms of financial resources and skills for their use, are very different and correlated, for example, to the size of the administration and number of inhabitants. This evidently leads to a high degree of inequality in the possibility of seizing the opportunities of the transition, if not adequately accompanied. Municipalities should be assisted and supported with the necessary skills and data to know and meet the needs of their communities, so that the transition is not partial and they are not also exposed to speculative risks.

An equally fundamental role in the process of “scaling up” bottom-up demands is that of the Regions and Autonomous Provinces. In fact, it has been observed that exclusively bottom-up

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<sup>24</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/ALL/?uri=celex:32014R0240>

policies have limited results precisely because of the lack of expertise in terms of human resources to develop visions beyond localism.

A multi-level perspective must be brought into play in the process in order to exploit the unexpressed synergies between the competencies, experiences and strategic vision of the whole and, on the other hand, the experiences and competencies of the local areas, in order to give recognition to the content of complex and multidisciplinary plans such as the PNIEC.

## 6 THE NRRP AND NECP: LESSONS LEARNED

The lack of a coherent framework for public participation and multi-level dialogue has brought to light the critical nature of the drafting process of the NRRP and of the NECP itself (both the one that led to its original version and the process implemented so far for its update). Despite the standards already in place in Italy and the considerable pool of bottom-up initiatives, the absence of an at least partial formalisation of aggregative processes has meant that the participation and multi-level dialogue envisaged for these two plans, essential for the country's development, have not led to satisfactory results. This is because the importance of the Plans, which have a considerable impact on people and local areas, has not been matched by adequate participatory and discussion practices. Indeed, they should have incorporated instruments for conflict resolution, an issue which in these cases has instead fallen into the mere sphere of political opportunism. Excluding procedural and administrative practices such as SEA and EIA, both Plans were limited to the opening of “procedures”, without any real information and involvement of the players in question, many of whom may be unaware of the existence and scope of strategic plans such as the NECP. There has been much talk of the NIMBY (Not in My Back Yard) syndrome, particularly with regard to the installation of renewable energy works (wind and photovoltaic). In fact, it could be seen as a request for greater involvement and democracy within the decision-making processes and trust in the common sense of citizens and local communities which, if excluded from the decision-making process, assume a prejudicial and oppositional position, generating immobility and, in fact, jeopardising the Plan's objectives. An adequate participatory process makes it possible to acquire the needs of the territories and permit the enhancement of their specific features at an early stage, with a view to mutual accountability that may also prevent conflict.

As far as the NRRP is concerned, the greatest problem encountered was the “trade-off” between the need to act and to spend quickly, which led to a centralisation of interventions (“top-down”): the time to organise a participatory process, therefore, was not there, but from what was observed in various European countries, it was not even sought. The idea of convergence of development towards the European average was applied, with a focus on the large cities and without any conceptualisation of the “left behind” local areas<sup>25</sup>.

In the case of Italy, the participation of all local communities, but also of the lower levels of government, has been lacking. For example the regions were only convened for a consultative meeting and the lower levels of government were not consulted at all. Therefore, neither the municipalities nor the associations of municipalities, such as ANCI, were involved in construction of the plan and, therefore, in the vision building phase. This is even more serious when one considers that the municipalities are the ones that manage the enormous resources from the Plan and implement its measures.

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<sup>25</sup> Carrosio G., Cicerone G., Faggian A., Urso G. (2022). How place-sensitive are the national recovery and resilience plans? FEPS, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, IEV, Inequality and Diversity Forum, GSSI.

At the same time, with respect to the management of funding, there has been no strengthening of public administration specifically for those places, especially inland areas, which do not possess the skills to manage them (some municipalities do not have a technical office, and may share one among several municipalities).

Moreover, the NRRP has in no way taken into consideration the identification of marginal places carried out, for example, by the National Strategy for Inland Areas, which already clearly defined which territories need support for the implementation of essential services. This suggests that the definition of interventions has taken place by trying to hold together a series of different interests, without a common objective or a cohesive, unified and coherent vision.

On the issue of labour and confrontation with the unions, it is also worth recalling what has been reported as a positive experience of direct and preventive confrontation, in the context of development of the NRRP. Preventive talks held during the Draghi Government resulted in the drafting of a protocol. The latter envisaged a dialogue between unions and ministries, both at national and territorial level, with discussion tables. At the local level, however, tables were only convened in a few regions, underlining the fragmented nature of action already mentioned.

A further step backwards on participation was also taken in the implementation phase of the NRRP, where an institutional and socio-economic partnership table had been planned but was recently cancelled in favour of a control room to which the social partnership had no access.

With regard to the NECP, a [previous study by ECCO think tank](#) had already highlighted some critical issues with regard to the participatory process and multi-level dialogue implemented for the drafting of the current text, which was prepared between 2018 and 2019. The involvement of local authorities and stakeholders in general appeared to be inadequate for the purpose. Since then, no reforms have been formally initiated to strengthen the elements of information and accessibility mentioned above, leading to fears that the updating process planned for June 2023 may follow the same path. In that case, the municipalities were only involved in the final stages of unifying the Plan, forcing a superficial contribution because it was unplanned and hasty. The procedural and cultural elements at the basis of participation and structured multi-level dialogue must also have continuity in terms of local policy, and the NECP, together with the Long-Term Strategy (LTS), are the place in which to build it. In fact, not having a long-term vision or the involvement of citizens for such a vast and complex subject is a missed opportunity, because it makes it impossible for those who will have to implement policies (e.g. municipalities and local administrators) to reconstruct the framework and thus make informed decisions.

In summary, in the current NECP the process of participation and implementation of multi-level dialogue is lacking, due to the lack of formalisation of two key elements:

1. A **reference framework** or “governance” of participation for the NECP - such as process organisation **measures** in the construction, implementation, monitoring and assessment of the same;
2. Ensuring referencing of the **content** - how and whether the contributions received were added to the text and what their function was.

These two areas indicate room and the possibility for a concrete step forward for the text to be definitively updated by June 2024.

## 7 MULTI-LEVEL DIALOGUE AND PARTICIPATION FOR THE 2023-24 NECP

### 7.1 GENERAL PRINCIPLES

As mentioned in the Charter of Participation<sup>26</sup>, promoted by the INU (National Institute of Urban Planning), AIP2 (Italian Association for Public Participation) and IAF Italy (National Association of Facilitators), the process of participation must be supported by a philosophy that emphasises shared principles such as equity, trust, information, inclusion and cooperation.

The review of the literature and interviews conducted for this study firstly identified a set of general principles that would need to be implemented in order to start a concrete process of integrating participation and multi-level dialogue within climate and decarbonisation policies.

These principles, the implementation of which will require the expression of a clear policy objective and an adequate timeframe for action, can be summarised as follows:

#### 1. **Creating the conditions so that listening actually takes place at all levels.**

With regard to the participatory process, the timeframe must be ample enough to allow for an in-depth analysis of the issues, and the objectives must be communicated in a clear and timely manner. Only in this way can the different participants contribute to the conversation in a constructive manner, channelling their needs and sharing their different starting points. It is also necessary to source the available funds (e.g. PON-ERDF) and the relevant competences (e.g. the technical support to be put in place for implementation of the action lines of the Funds) in order to identify the broad funding possibilities of such a process, to scout for competencies in terms of both “method” (process design and third/neutral facilitation) and “content” (including NECP technicians to accompany the process in substance), and to activate synergies within the PA that – in several areas and at several levels – is engaged in the open government process.

#### 2. **Promoting the public player in the role of guide in the participatory decision-making process.**

Also within the participatory process, the aggregation of interests and needs cannot be left to spontaneous dynamics, because there is a risk that they will always go in the direction of the players with the most resources. Moreover, the public decision-maker has the task of providing the broadest vision, based on technical knowledge and acting as a guarantor of the interests of the community, blocking any attempts at intrusion by massive vested interests. In general, the participatory process must be planned and structured if it is to be effective and of quality. The roles of the players that guide and promote it must therefore be defined, starting with a political guarantor, a technical director within public administration, and a competent third party to manage facilitation. The stakeholders to be involved must also be carefully mapped and analysed, using specific methodologies. Objectives, expected results, work phases and content (e.g. context

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<sup>26</sup> Charter of Participation, 2014. Available at: [https://inu.it/wp-content/uploads/Carta\\_della\\_Partecipazione\\_illustrata.pdf](https://inu.it/wp-content/uploads/Carta_della_Partecipazione_illustrata.pdf).  
<https://www.aip2italia.org/carta-della-partecipazione/>

analysis, strategic swot analysis, needs analysis, vision building, definition of objectives and actions), methodologies and timeframes, information and communication tools, etc. must be defined.

### **3. Stimulating the role of experts in the participatory process.**

The involvement of experts, and thus also of universities within an area, is crucial. These topics call for multidisciplinary knowledge and specialised expertise. Therefore, it is the ability of the mediators that will provide the innovation niches with the necessary knowledge.

### **4. Associations, organisations and trade unions must have discussion and negotiation tables at both local and national levels.**

These entities have a fundamental role as mediators: through a democratic process, they can speak locally about projects related to the NECP that directly impact the health, economy and work of that area. At national level, they must have the space to bring these demands back into the Plan. In this sense, public administration has a fundamental role in activating the participatory process at its various levels and involving all players.

### **5. Accompanying the growth of local authorities, municipalities and regions in their role as receivers of territorial demands**

If local authorities are not accompanied in the process of constructing and implementing decarbonisation policies by strengthening their structure and skills, the listening process will also be ineffective, because it will resort to a standardisation of needs. Assisting administrations so that they can develop concrete ideas and provide support in the use of appropriate tools, such as public funds or providing access to data that enable an adequate knowledge of the area for informed decisions affecting it. Funds are, in fact, often misaligned in time and with respect to their objectives, and they refer to different mechanisms that do not necessarily meet the needs of an area or a community. Access to data and analysis tools would allow municipalities to have a snapshot of the appropriate scenario and thus make more informed choices (at present, municipalities do not have data on citizens' energy consumption, for example). This would allow them to better fulfil their function as mediators between central administration and the population, as well as their role as recipients of information for public decision-makers and their policy-making work.

Added to this framework are the transversal elements of participation and multi-level dialogue, i.e. the methodology with which the process is carried out. A process is, in fact, participatory if involvement and dialogue are a formalised and codified part of policies and plans, from the construction of the vision and objectives, to monitoring, the construction of result indicators and evaluation of these indicators.

Indeed, the participatory process should be part of a **dynamic governance** system that allows participation and multi-level dialogue to be functional for the ex-post evaluation of policies and their possible reformulation.

## 7.2 An operational proposal in view of NECP 2023

The implementation of these principles will be difficult within the deadline envisaged for submitting the proposed revision of the NECP (June 2023).

However, the timeframe in which some of the examples mentioned in paragraph 5 took place, which, even in cases of broader participation, were concluded within a few months, means one could work around these basic requisites in order to promptly begin the process and be prepared for delivery of the final version of the updated NECP, scheduled for June 2024.

With the aim of gathering proposals and visions for a multi-level dialogue and public participation in the NECP revision process, on 9 May 2023, ECCO think tank organised a work and discussion table that was held according to Chatham House rules<sup>27</sup>. The round table took place a few days after the opening of the online consultation, launched by the Ministry of the Environment and Energy Security (MASE), which, as mentioned in the consultation document itself, “*opened a phase of information and sharing at various levels that will end in June 2024, date for delivery of the final text of the NECP*”.<sup>28</sup>

The objective of the round table was to discuss an operational proposal that, on the one hand, could stimulate a real participatory pathway to be applied to the process of updating the NECP and, on the other, indicate the elements that can make participation a consolidated part of decision-making processes in climate policies and the NECP, so that it becomes an enabling tool for the implementation of decarbonisation policies. In particular, and in light of the launch of online consultation, the discussion focused on what governance of participation should be included in the NECP. This will require **structured, anticipated and ongoing forms of discussion** that **prioritise listening** to the players responsible for carrying out the policies. At the same time, it should be able to accompany the definition of the final version of the plan and the implementation, monitoring and participatory evaluation of the policies. Furthermore, there emerged a need for **confrontation, transparency and empowerment** of all players, through a dialogue that starts with sharing the scenarios on which the Plan will be built and with which the short- and medium-term climate objectives will be updated.

The prerequisite for embarking on an adequate multi-level participatory dialogue is information. In this sense, the first measure necessary to start the process should be an **adequate sharing by decision-makers of the scenarios and objectives to be achieved, also highlighting a clear subdivision of the NECP by sectorial thematic areas (electricity, buildings, transport, industry, agriculture, LULUCF) and transversal ones (financial, social, adaptation, etc.)**.

For the NECP to succeed in implementing a process of participation and multi-level dialogue, as required by the Governance Regulation, **its basic requisites would need to be defined within the text, constituting the outline of a policy objective and, in fact, the basis for the concrete launch of a process dedicated to climate and energy<sup>29</sup> that could unfold in the year leading up to the sending of the final version of the document to Brussels in June 2024.**

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<sup>27</sup> <https://www.chathamhouse.org/about-us/chatham-house-rule>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.mase.gov.it/comunicati/aggiornamento-piano-nazionale-integrato-energia-e-clima>; <https://www.gse.it/PNIEC>

<sup>29</sup> Chapter 1.3 Consultations and involvement of the national bodies and the Union and results obtained

These elements, preparatory and functional to the implementation of the multi-level dialogue, as discussed among the table participants, are:

Identifying **bodies and resources for managing multi-level dialogue**, divided between central coordinating bodies and coordinating bodies of sector-based standing tables.

*A Plan Coordination Centre connected to the MASE (ISPRA, experts from the academic world, GSE, ENEA, etc.) would be needed, which would act, among other things, as promoter of an appropriate multi-level dialogue among stakeholders. As in the example of the Region of Sardinia<sup>30</sup>, this Centre must be assisted by the appropriate technical support and process consultancy for the design and facilitation of participatory processes (with the latter requiring very different experiences from those put in place by the technical assistance to the ESI Funds), where available, by the Civil Service Department and other entities identified for the purpose of implementing the multi-level dialogue.*

*The Centre should act in close coordination with at least two other bodies representing the levels of central government impacted by the Plan's measures (Ministries and Reference Agencies) and the levels of regional and local government (Regions and Autonomous Provinces, Metropolitan Cities, and ANCI). With this framework and these players, the Centre should coordinate the multi-level participation and dialogue strategy. The structure is streamlined with a view to the economy of the process; however, it assumes that the players involved can effectively catalyse and channel the needs and experiences of the territory.*

*This structure should also be the framework for defining the contents of the Plan, for its drafting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. These functions, within the scope of this work, will be referred to solely with respect to the participatory aspect. However, it is conceivable that, with a view to sharing responsibilities, the governance of the NECP could be structured in the same way.*

*These governance bodies should eventually meet in different sessions, depending on the competencies required by the NECP matter under consideration.*

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<sup>30</sup> Here, in fact, there was a virtuous process of multi-level governance between the ministry, regions and territories, which could be used for the NECP.

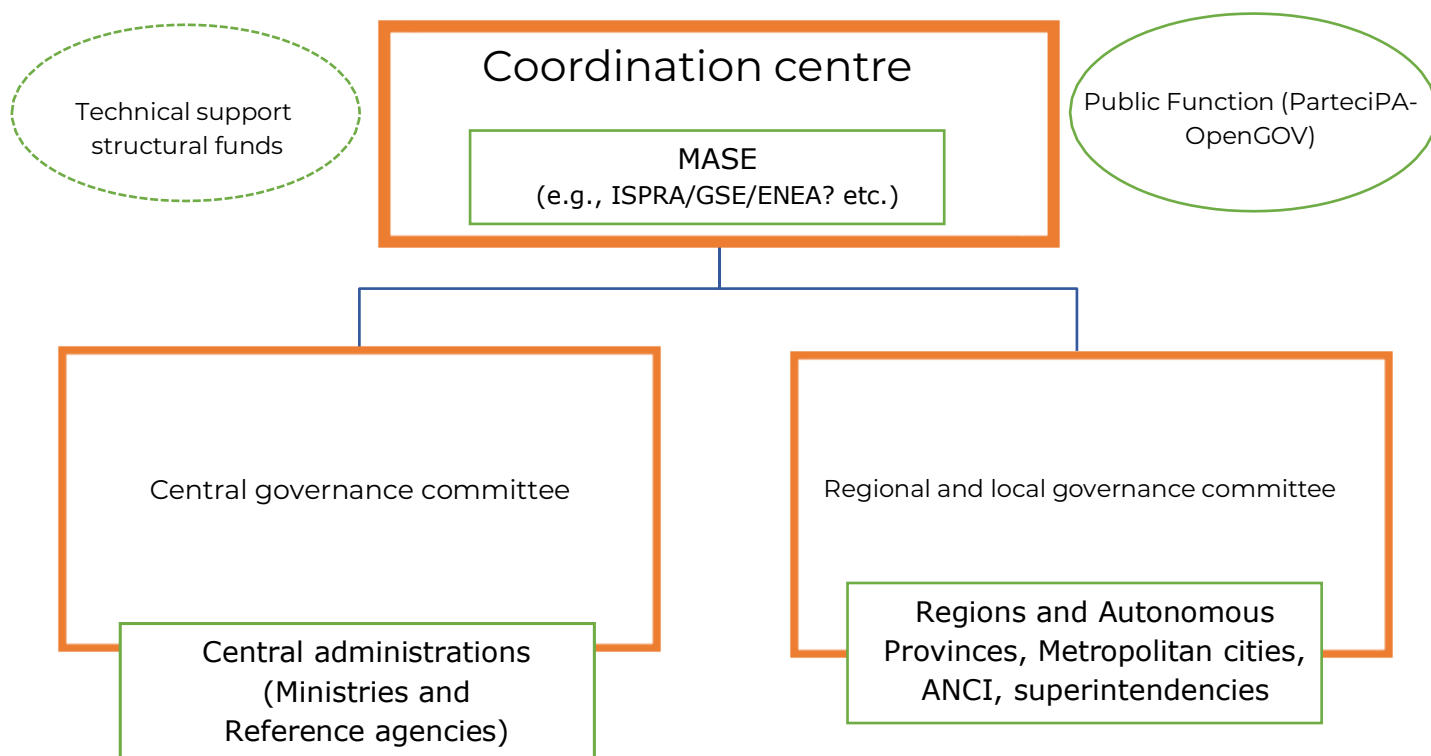


Figure 1 - Framework for functioning of the centre for coordination of the participation and multi-level dialogue activities for the NECP

1. Building a **stakeholder map that must be part of the multi-level dialogue** and involved in the NECP revision process. The competences corresponding to the thematic areas of the NECP must be defined for each player, as well as the planning tools that can be put “at the service” of NECP objectives and the funds and channels of participation that already exist.

*The list of respondents to the online consultation can be an initial framework for a thematic mapping of players to be part of the future path and to be included in the governance of participation of the NECP. Similarly, it would be possible to draw, for example, from the list of Subjects with environmental competence consulted in the formal consultations of the SEA procedures or to trace the players using European Commission Regulation 240/2014 on the Code of Conduct for partnerships in European structural and investment funds, in order to build an initial outline map. Again, the process of building the map could itself be participatory, by filling in online forms made available by the MASE or through the ParteciPA platform. Mapping should also be able to direct the relevance of the participants with respect to their skills and the level to which they represent the sector to which they belong, so as to establish the relevance and priorities of listening based on objective criteria and as far as possible shared with the players. Criteria of this type, to which we could assign a semi-quantitative indicator (e.g. +, 😊 😐 😞) could be:*

- Criterion 1: entities with regulatory power in matters relevant to the NECP
- Criterion 2: entities with formal representation of # entities/people (identifying a minimum



*threshold if required*

- Criterion 3: Entity identified on the basis of the criteria normally used to measure representation, also assessing it in relation to the overall impacts that the NECP will produce in the national social and economic context and which are independent of a specific production sector.

Said criteria will make it possible to identify the most relevant players and consequently to determine the most appropriate method of participation.

		Subject	Relevance criterion score	Sectors	Civil	Transport	Industry	Electricity	Agriculture and land use
Sectorial consultation - round tables	Phases of dialogue	Subject xxx	+++	Transversal issues	Finance - Social - Innovation				
				Definition of policies					
				Implementation of policies					
				Monitoring of policies					
				Evaluation of policies					
Online public consultation	Phases of dialogue	Subject yyy	---						
				Definition of policies					
				Implementation of policies					
				Monitoring of policies					
				Evaluation of policies					

Table 1 - Example of thematic mapping construction of players involved in the multi-level participation and dialogue process distinguishing by relevance of players and communication channel (white - tables; yellow - online)

The round table also revealed the need for a restricted, yet transparent consultation with the most representative stakeholders. These could be consulted by the MASE through multi-stakeholder discussion tables so that the conversation takes place at several levels and stakeholders are able to find points of contact with each other. This step could further enrich the mapping. Construction of the mapping should take place **by end September 2023**, so there is sufficient space to engage in an effective multi-level dialogue and participation process.

2. Identifying the **participation stages and timing prior to 2024**, starting from the mapping of players and determining the time frame and how the dialogue and consultation should be carried out for each phase of definition, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the sector policies.

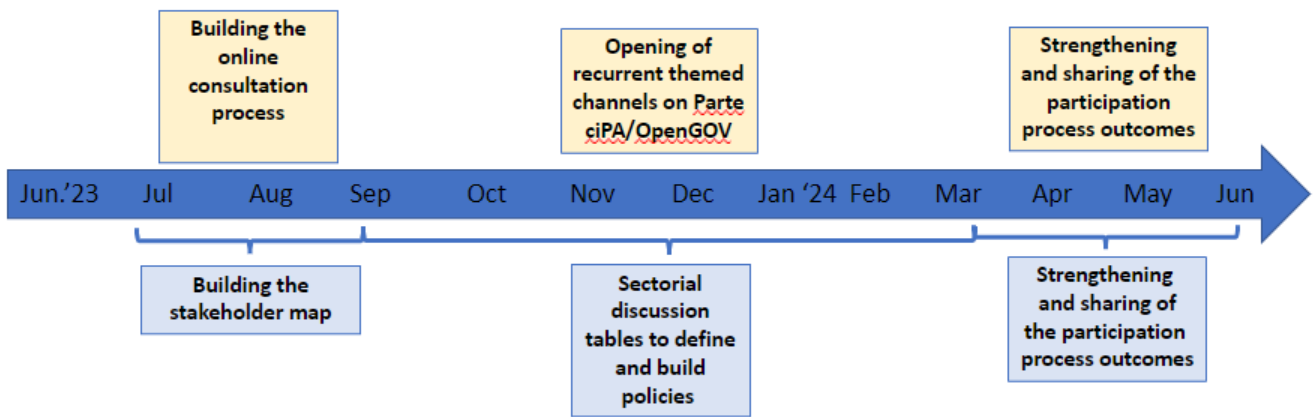


Figure 2 - Possible example for construction of the phases and timing of the multi-level participation and dialogue process in the Plan definition phase, between June 2023 and June 2024

3. Starting from the participation **channels** and **tools** also identified through stakeholder mapping, identify those for targeted participation with the control bodies and institutions, or those to be used for broader and more widespread participation with the public. The former is most commonly implemented via **thematic round tables** or **permanent forums**, and the latter with **meetings in the areas** and **online platforms** such as OpenGovernment or ParteciPa.

*Over a period of at least six months (September 2023-March 2024, also see Figure 2), in coordination with the central and local ministerial structures (i.e. Central Government Committee and Regional and Local Governance Committee), the Centre should convene an adequate number of discussion tables, focusing on the themes and as much as possible on the policy proposals in order to collect the formal and informal contributions of the representatives that, in various ways, have been invited. These meetings should be established according to a previously agreed timetable.*

*With the help of dedicated platforms, it would be possible to create parallel processes dedicated to non-organised representations. These processes should be accompanied by appropriate information campaigns for all players involved, including at the tables, as well as for the MASE. The process could therefore be completed by March 2024, and it would be possible to construct and define policies and, at the same time, the way in which organised and non-organised representatives could participate in the subsequent stages of implementing, monitoring and evaluating the Plan.*

Based on the four elements mentioned above, it would be possible to conclude the substantial testing phase of the participatory process and multi-level dialogue on the NECP by June 2024. On this basis, it would then be possible to define the consolidated methods for implementing the participatory process and multi-level dialogue, including them in the more general framework of the evaluation interactions with the EU Commission, and to include the participatory process within the broader governance of the NECP.

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<sup>31</sup> In this regard, it should be noted that employers' associations are widespread in local areas and therefore, at this level, the participation of the local branches of such associations could/should be envisaged

## 8 CONCLUSIONS

To create substantial involvement for the drafting and implementation of the final version of the NECP (deadline June 2024), it is essential to identify strategies around which to design a Plan that can articulate policies and measures appropriate to the various levels of responsibility with which stakeholders participate in the Plan and its implementation, from local authorities to industrial, manufacturing and civil society associations, and individual citizens.

The operational proposal presented in this study stimulates, on the one hand, a participatory pathway to be applied to the process of updating the NECP and, on the other, indicates the basic requirements that make participation a consolidated part of decision-making processes in climate policies and the NECP an enabling tool in the decarbonisation and conflict resolution process.

These elements are:

- a. **Bodies and resources** for managing multi-level dialogue.
- b. A **stakeholder map** that must be part of the multi-level dialogue and involved in the NECP revision process.
- c. Participation **phases and times** prior to 2024.
- d. **Channels** and **tools** for targeted participation with the control bodies and institutions, or those functional to a broader and more widespread participation with the public.

Such a participatory and multi-level dialogue process, inspired by principles of accountability and transparency, would ensure the broad support and effectiveness that the NECP, as the main instrument for implementing Italy's climate commitments, must provide.

## 9 GLOSSARY

AIP2: Italian Association for Public Participation  
ANCI: Italian National Association of Municipalities  
BES: Fair and Sustainable Well-being  
CAPCOE: Capacity for Cohesion  
CITE: Interministerial Committee for Ecological Transition  
CNA: National Confederation of Craftspeople and SMEs  
CNEL: National Economic and Labour Council  
EIA: Environmental Impact Assessment  
ENEA: National Agency for New Technologies, Energy and Sustainable Economic Development  
ERDF: European Regional Development Fund  
ESI Funds: European Structural and Investment Funds  
ESF: European Social Fund  
GSE: Energy Services Manager  
IAF Italia: National Association of Facilitators  
INU: National Institute of Urban Planning  
ISPRA: Higher Superior Institute for Environmental Protection and Research  
ISTAT: National Statistics Institute  
MEF: Ministry of Economy and Finance  
NECP: National Energy and Climate Plan  
NIMBY: Not in My Back Yard  
PAC: Air and Climate Plan  
NRRP: National Recovery and Resilience Plan  
PON: National Operational Plan  
SNAI: National Strategy for Inland Areas  
SEA: Strategic Environmental Assessment  
SNSvS: National Sustainable Development Strategy  
MASE: Ministry of the Environment and Energy Security



THE ITALIAN CLIMATE CHANGE THINK TANK

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