RETOUCH NEXUS

REsilienT water gOvernance Under climate CHange within the WEFE NEXUS

Deliverable D2.4

Activities, Approaches, and Guidelines for Inclusive Capacity Development in WEFE Nexus Governance

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OTHER	Software, technical diagram, etc.	

Dissemination Level		
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Executive summary

Deliverable D2.4 documents and analyses the activities, approaches, and guidelines developed within RETOUCH NEXUS to support inclusive capacity development in Water–Energy–Food–Ecosystems (WEFE) Nexus governance. It consolidates the experiences of case study engagement with stakeholders, training initiatives, and Communities of Practice (CoPs), while offering practical tools and lessons that can be replicated and scaled across EU contexts.

The report begins by situating stakeholder engagement and capacity development within EU research and innovation priorities. It introduces the tools applied under WP2—namely, stakeholder template, the planning spreadsheet and post-activity questionnaire—which ensure systematic documentation and evaluation of all engagement processes. Framed as a "living resource," D2.4 is designed to add more engagement activities that emerge throughout the project. Its objectives are threefold: to showcase activities undertaken so far, to reflect on challenges and lessons learned, and to highlight approaches that can be transferred and scaled.

Across participating countries (Belgium, Germany, Malta, the Netherlands, Slovakia, and Spain), engagement has mobilised regional authorities, local governments, industry representatives, and researchers as core audiences. Knowledge transfer has also been reinforced through contributions to high-profile international and EU fora, such as the Dresden Nexus Conference, the EGU General Assembly, and Europe-INBO.

Capacity development efforts have been diverse, with awareness-raising events and workshops serving as the most common formats, complemented by targeted trainings and citizen-engagement activities. These have focused on building practical skills, encouraging inclusive participation, and strengthening the use of evidence in decision-making.

Training modules have been introduced like the WEFE governance indicator framework and the Water Governance Monitoring App. Practical sessions—including a composite-indicator exercises enabled hands-on application. Other trainings have reinforced methodological consistency for qualitative data collection and laid the groundwork for upcoming sessions on economic modelling.

CoPs are spaces for dialogue, testing, and iterative improvement of project outputs. RETOUCH partners are also active in cross-project CoPs, such as WEFE4MED, and are helping shape an overarching water governance CoP.

Lessons learned underscore the value of adaptive management, clear purpose, inclusive facilitation, and straightforward translation of scientific knowledge into policy-relevant formats. Effective engagement has been achieved through interactive methods such as World Cafés, role-play, hybrid formats, printed-map workshops, and podcasts to sustain continuity. Challenges such as stakeholder fatigue, data gaps, and institutional constraints have been addressed through pragmatic planning, transparent communication, targeted evidence sharing, and piloting with cost–benefit considerations.

Overall, D2.4 consolidates a strong foundation for inclusive and effective capacity development in WEFE Nexus governance. Looking ahead, the focus will be on formalising innovative mechanisms, strengthening CoPs with concrete outputs, embedding trainings more firmly into case study workflows, and preparing concise guides for replication and upscaling. Strong linkages to EU-level engagement and cross-project collaboration provide robust pathways for dissemination, adoption, and long-term impact.

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Abbreviations

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AI	Artificial Intelligence
App	Application (e.g., Water Governance Monitoring App)
CBA	Cost–Benefit Analysis
CoE	Community of Experts
CoI	Community of Interest
CoP	Community of Practice
CS	Case Study
EGU	European Geosciences Union
EU R&I	European Union Research & Innovation
EWA	Energy and Water Agency
GA	General Assembly
GOVAQUA	EU Water Governance Sister Project
GTI	Greening the Islands
HHNK	Hoogheemraadschap Hollands Noorderkwartier
IFAT	International Trade Fair for Water, Sewage, Waste and Raw Materials Management
INBO	International Network of Basin Organisations
IWA	International Water Association
MARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (Slovakia)
NbS	Nature-Based Solutions
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RegOb	Regierung Oberfranken (Upper Franconia Government, Germany)
RBO	River Basin Organisations
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
TUM	Technical University Munich
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VUA	Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
WEFE Nexus	Water Energy Food Ecosystem Nexus
WEFE4MED	Prima-funded WEFE Nexus Project

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1. Introduction to the deliverable

Over the past 30 months, within the RETOUCH NEXUS project, numerous activities were planned and implemented both within the case studies and, more broadly, as part of wider engagement and outreach efforts across the EU. This Deliverable 2.4 focuses on documenting and analysing the activities carried out during this period within the case studies, with a particular emphasis on the approaches and outcomes achieved situating them within the broader context of EU research and innovation (R&I) priorities. Further this deliverable provides material like guidelines, templates that can be used further within the project and beyond for the purpose of trainings, workshops and capacity building.

Capacity building activities are widely recognised as a cornerstone for achieving lasting impact in complex, multi-stakeholder projects, particularly those addressing WEFE Nexus challenges. The European Commission highlights the importance of building skills, fostering collaboration, and supporting knowledge transfer as key enablers of systemic change and innovation uptake (European Commission, 2020).

In addition, awareness raising among stakeholders and citizens was another important aspect of engagement within the case studies, as it is essential for fostering a shared understanding of the interconnectedness of WEFE Nexus, promoting informed participation, and supporting the co-creation of sustainable solutions (European Commission, 2020; Weitz et al., 2017; Smajgl et al., 2016). These activities have been systematically undertaken and are captured in this deliverable, reflecting their critical role in building social acceptance, empowering local actors, and ensuring the long-term success of WEFE Nexus interventions.

Documenting training materials, modules, and workshop guidelines is a critical component of effective capacity building in research and innovation projects. Well-structured and accessible resources not only provide a foundation for the consistent delivery of trainings but also enable adaptation and improvement based on lessons learned throughout project implementation (European Commission, 2020; Wenger et al., 2002). Within the scope of this project, under WP2, adelphi has put together a comprehensive stakeholder engagement template for WEFE Nexus that is being used by the case studies and is shared as an Annex of this deliverable (See Box 1). Within the RETOUCH NEXUS project, the iterative refinement of these materials, both via the stakeholder engagement template and the engagement mechanism factsheets under D2.2 — guided by participant feedback and real-world application—has ensured that they remain practical, relevant, and responsive to stakeholder needs. This approach ensured the application of some material from the stakeholder templates and engagement mechanisms by the case studies. This helps to transform training outputs from static reports into living resources that facilitate knowledge transfer, foster peer learning, and support future replication in different contexts (Reed et al., 2018). Furthermore, the open documentation of such materials enhances transparency and enables other practitioners and projects to build upon proven methods, thereby amplifying the project's impact and supporting broader policy and practice objectives (United Nations, 2015; European Commission, 2020).

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Box 1: WEFE Nexus stakeholder engagement template

Box 1: About Stakeholder Engagement Template for WEFE NEXUS

The "Stakeholder Engagement Template for WEFE Nexus" is a comprehensive, practical guideline for practitioners, especially those involved in the RETOUCH NEXUS project, in planning and implementing effective stakeholder engagement activities. Structured around the three Ps: Purpose, Principles, and Practice, the guide offers a clear conceptual foundation for understanding stakeholder engagement within the WEFE Nexus. It also provides hands-on tools, templates, and best practice examples. It emphasises the importance of inclusive, participatory approaches, recognising the diversity of stakeholders—from policymakers and private sector actors to civil society, researchers, and local communities—and the need to tailor engagement strategies to different contexts and challenges.

Firstly, the guide provides key definitions and explains the importance of stakeholder engagement within the WEFE Nexus. Secondly, the template supports users with the design of effective engagement processes, including e.g. identifying stakeholders, assessing influence and impact, defining engagement levels, and choosing suitable methods for collaboration and dialogue. Lastly, the guide provides detailed information on the typical steps of stakeholder engagement and step-by-step instructions. It offers practical tips, addresses common challenges, and presents a set of tools to support planning and implementation. Central to the guide is its focus on overcoming common challenges such as power dynamics, conflict management, and the inclusion of marginalised groups, while promoting clear communication, participatory learning, and systemic change. It offers actionable recommendations for engaging stakeholders in politically sensitive environments, ensuring data protection, and balancing formal and informal engagement processes across online, hybrid, and in-person settings. This is supported by a toolbox of 16 practical templates to foster sustainable, equitable partnerships within and beyond the WEFE Nexus context.

This deliverable provides not only a record of the activities around capacity building related workshops, events but critically reflects on their effectiveness and adaptability, supporting knowledge transfer within and beyond the project consortium.

Before delving into the activities undertaken, that are elaborated in subsequent chapters, it is to be noted that implementation of stakeholder engagement activities in water governance projects is often envisioned as a structured, linear process, guided by well-defined plans and methodologies, including identification of stakeholders. This has been established in the RETOUCH NEXUS too initiated by stakeholder mapping in T2.1 (D2.1) and development of roadmaps for each case study under T2.3 (D2.4). However, the trajectory of such activities frequently diverges from initial plans due to the complex, dynamic, and context-specific nature of stakeholder interactions. This phenomenon is well-documented in literature, which highlights that stakeholder processes are inherently adaptive and subject to ongoing negotiation, learning, and adjustment in response to emerging challenges and opportunities (Reed et al., 2009; Pahl-Wostl, 2009).

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Numerous studies have shown that even the most robust engagement strategies can encounter unforeseen barriers — ranging from shifting stakeholder priorities and institutional constraints to socio-political changes and resource limitations—which necessitate iterative adaptation and flexibility in implementation (Akamani & Hall, 2015; Newig & Fritsch, 2009). As a result, the actual practice of stakeholder engagement often involves a combination of planned activities and emergent, responsive actions that better reflect the evolving realities on the ground (Innes & Booher, 2004).

This deliverable document the activities undertaken with case study stakeholders in the context of water governance in RETOUCH NEXUS, illustrating how different approaches, training tools, and guidelines have shaped the implementation process. By sharing these experiences, we aim to provide practical insights into the adaptive nature of stakeholder engagement and highlight methods and lessons learnt that have proven effective in navigating the complexities of real-world implementation.

Specifically, this deliverable aims to:

- Showcase the activities implemented within the RETOUCH NEXUS project, including:
  - Stakeholder engagement activities conducted by the case studies,
  - The creation and dissemination of materials, tools, and methods.
  - The development and delivery of training modules,
  - The establishment and facilitation of Communities of Practice,
- Discuss the opportunities, challenges, and lessons learned from the implementation of these capacity development activities, drawing on the diverse experiences across the project.
- Present methods and approaches that can be replicated, highlighting the practicality of implementing these strategies for stakeholders in different contexts.

D2.4 serves as a living document that will be further updated and refined as the project progresses, ensuring that emerging insights and best practices are consistently integrated.

Chapter 2 includes an overview of capacity building and awareness raising activities implemented by the six RETOUCH NEXUS case studies in Belgium, Germany, Malta, the Netherlands, Slovakia and Spain. **Chapter 3** of this document presents the training modules and activities undertaken within the RETOUCH NEXUS project, including information on the Guidelines on Stakeholder Engagement and on trainings related to indicators. **Chapter 4** of this document provides information on the conceptualisation and implementation of Communities of Practice (CoP) within the RETOUCH NEXUS project and in synergy with other projects and initiatives. Lastly, **chapter 5** summarises lessons learned, challenges and opportunities identified from the implementation of the activities presented in this document. The **Annex** of this document includes further tools, templates, and guidelines developed by adelphi within WP 2 for the implementation and monitoring of stakeholder engagement activities by the project case studies.

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2. Capacity development and awareness raising activities within case studies

2.1. Collection of information for this chapter

This chapter provides an overview of the capacity development and awareness raising activities carried out by the six case studies. It outlines the methods used for collecting and mapping information on stakeholder engagement, as well as the key achievements from this process. This deliverable demonstrates both the scope and depth of engagement achieved throughout the project and, as stakeholder engagement remains ongoing, will continue to be updated and enriched with new insights and activities until the project's conclusion. For the planning and documentation of the activities, two tools were introduced (see Annex-chapter 2 and 3).

- The spreadsheet "Stakeholder Engagement Activities Planning", is accessible online for case study leaders to document the planning of activities, including information on the status of implementation, goals, engagement formats, participants, duration and the deployment of innovative mechanisms.
- The "Questionnaire on Stakeholder Engagement Activities", is a template for organising, supporting and tracking the preparation and evaluation of stakeholder engagement activities. case study leaders are required to answer the questions included in the template and upload the questionnaire to SharePoint after the activity is completed.

In order to obtain an overview of the activities conducted within the project and locally by each case study, adelphi conducted an exercise of mapping these activities based on the information provided by case study leaders in the spreadsheet "Stakeholder Engagement Activities Planning" and with questionnaires for each activity. Within this mapping exercise, the following information was collected from the available documentation:

- Communication channels
- Date of implementation
- Duration of stakeholder engagement activity
- Engagement of women and youth
- Form of stakeholder engagement
- Goals of stakeholder engagement activity
- Number and type of participants
- Set-up (In-person, Online or Hybrid)
- Title and purpose of stakeholder engagement activity
- Type of dissemination activity
- Use of innovative mechanisms

Overall, the activities from the case studies were successfully documented. The following sections present an overview of the results obtained from this mapping exercise as well as specific information on the implementation of the stakeholder engagement strategy by each case study.

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2.2. Overview of capacity development and awareness-raising activities

Each case study is responsible for organising and conducting their stakeholder engagement activities with support from the WP2 leader. The case studies were strategically clustered into three pairs to leverage shared interests, challenges, stakeholder profiles, and methodological approaches, thereby fostering cross-case learning and joint engagement activities. Germany and Spain were grouped together as both focus on river basin management at the regional scale, allowing for comparative insights into governance across hydrological boundaries. Slovakia and Malta were paired due to their national-level engagement and strong policy orientation, as well as their shared use of digital tools such as the GtI App. Belgium and the Netherlands formed the third cluster, initially linked by a common emphasis on cost-benefit analysis and business models in water management, particularly through cooperation with private actors. With the updated Dutch case, the focus kept the cost benefit analysis as a common topic and moving towards civil society involvement, where Belgium is actively engaged. Table 2 below informs about the number of key activities undertaken directly with stakeholders. It should be noted that there were other forms of indirect engagements with stakeholders in events and workshops organized not under the project.

Table 11: Number of direct stakeholder engagements undertaken since M1 (January 2023)

Case Study	Number
Belgium	7
Germany	10
Malta	6
Netherlands	6
Slovakia	6
Spain	3

Patterns of Stakeholder Participation

Figure 1 presents the average number of participants across stakeholder activities case study over the past 30 months. The Slovakian case study achieved the highest average participation by actively engaging a diverse range of stakeholders to raise awareness and break down entrenched policy silos—an essential step for fostering cross-sector understanding of the WEFE Nexus. In Belgium, participation estimates were notably influenced by high-attendance events such as the Flemish Open Industry Day, as well as outreach initiatives like the communication container tour and online surveys in residential areas (e.g., Agnetenpark Peer). These efforts were particularly relevant given the regional focus on the Blue Deal and the prominence of Tielt Business Park in the Flemish region.

In Germany, broader outreach was achieved by participating in major external events and conferences, such as the Dialog Forum on Water Controversies and the Tag der Hydrology, which

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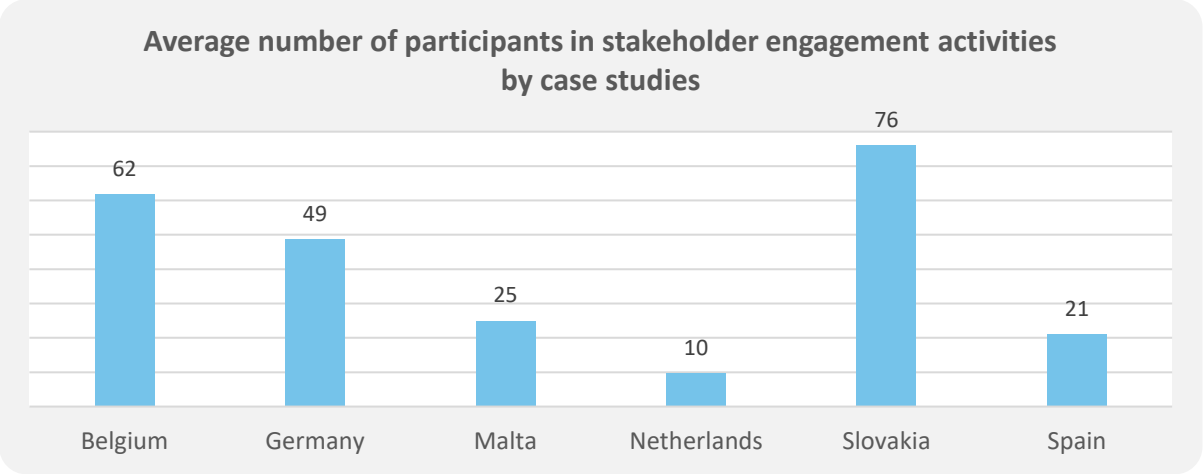
expanded engagement beyond core stakeholders. In the Netherlands, engagement centred on team members from the Hoogheemraadschap Hollands Noorderkwartier (HHNK), the regional water authority, resulting in more focused workshop participation. The Dutch case study also faced a delayed start on stakeholder activities due to a change in the case study site during the project implementation. Malta leveraged its government agency status to proactively organise and participate in numerous events, enabling effective stakeholder mobilisation. Finally, in Spain, the case study built on established relationships with Júcar River Basin stakeholders from past projects, integrating RETOUCH NEXUS into ongoing dialogues, though mindful of potential stakeholder fatigue.

Overall, variations in participation reflect both strategic choices and contextual factors in each case study, shaping the average number of stakeholders engaged throughout the project. Often, documentation of total participant numbers was challenging as external events related numbers were not always possible to access.

Figure 1: Average number of participants in stakeholder engagement activities



The selection of stakeholders for case study activities was guided by the stakeholder analysis in Deliverable 2.1, which identified and categorised relevant groups, ensuring a broad and representative engagement across the project. For each activity, case studies used a predefined list of stakeholder types, and as summarised in Figure 2, regional authorities—primarily government agencies— and researchers were the most frequently engaged due to the cross-cutting nature of the WEFE Nexus, followed closely by industry and business partners and local authorities. The figure shows the number of events in which those stakeholders participated.

RETOUCH NEXUS partners have actively reached out to this wide spectrum of stakeholders through a rich variety of events, including targeted workshops, community meetings, and site visits across all six case studies. For example, Belgian business park workshops and innovation site visits have brought together public officials and private sector representatives, while residential surveys and open days have enabled direct dialogue with citizens and end-users. In Slovakia, stakeholder workshops focused on climate-resilient water management brought together diverse actors—including farmers, policymakers, and environmental groups—to break down policy silos and build shared understanding, reflecting the project's commitment to inclusive, cross-sectoral engagement.

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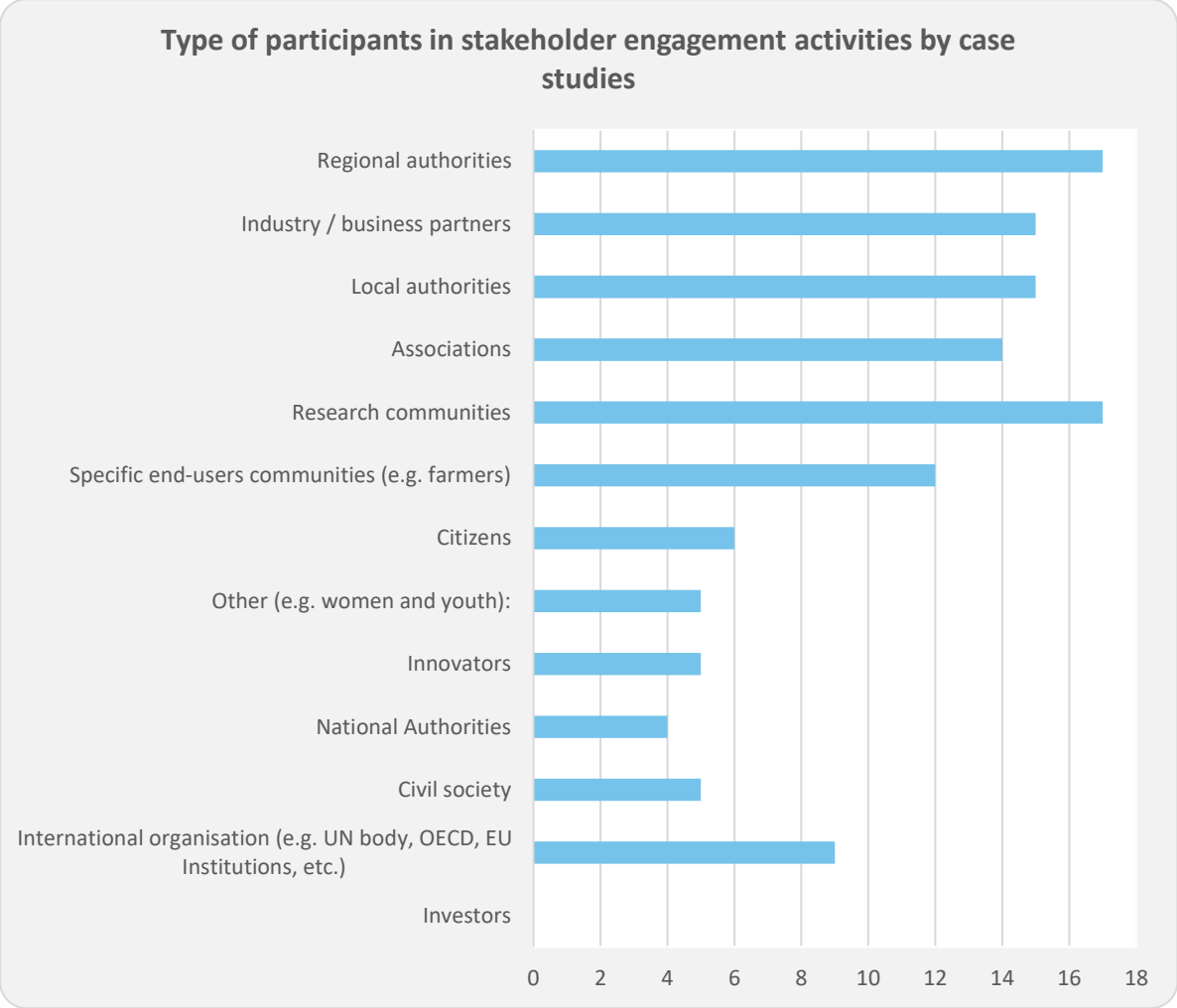
This approach extends to the European and international stage, where RETOUCH NEXUS has contributed to at least a dozen major EU and international events. By presenting at high-profile gatherings—such as the Dresden Nexus Conference, EGU General Assembly, UNESCO International Conference, and the Europe-INBO International Conference—the project has reached policymakers, researchers, and practitioners from across Europe and beyond. Engagement at international forums like the WEFE Nexus Community of Practice and the NexusNet Regional Stakeholder Forum has further strengthened connections with EU institutions and global organisations. As the project moves forward and results are disseminated more widely, outreach to local, regional and EU-level stakeholders is set to expand, deepening the project's impact and supporting broader knowledge transfer within the WEFE Nexus community.

Figure 2: Type of participants in stakeholder engagement activities



Objectives - Driven Stakeholder Engagement

For each stakeholder engagement activity, case studies defined specific objectives to guide their implementation. This objectives-driven approach is reflected in the diverse aims pursued across the project, as illustrated in Figure 3. The figure shows the number of activities carried out to address the specific objective. The most frequently selected goals were "raising awareness among stakeholders"

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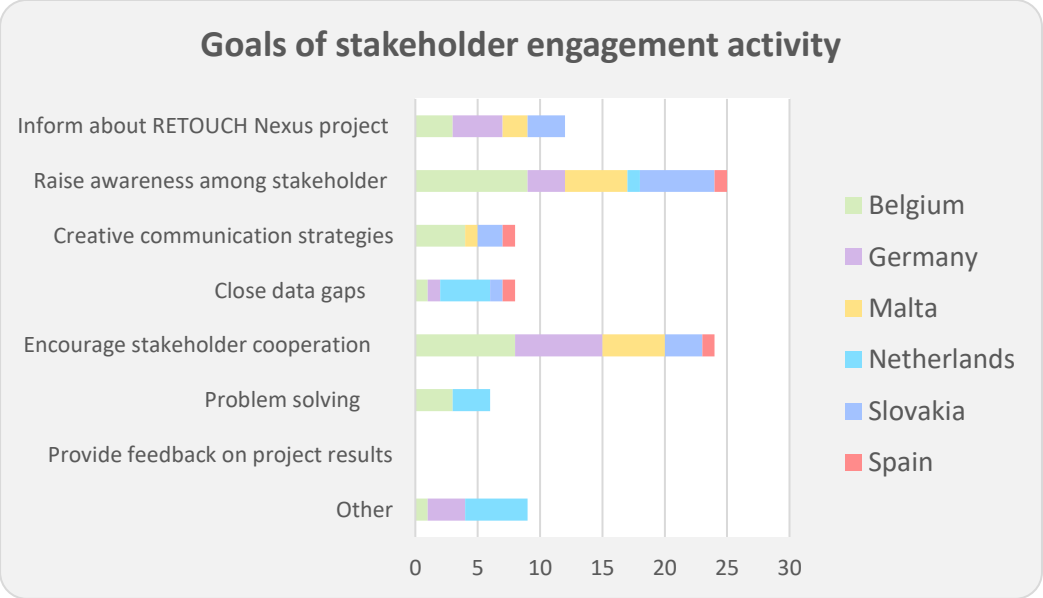
and “encouraging stakeholder cooperation,” both of which were prioritised across all case studies. “Informing about the RETOUCH NEXUS project” and “providing feedback on project results” were also common objectives, underscoring the project’s commitment to transparency and two-way communication. Other activities that were selected were about addressing the lack of or poor-quality data via “data gap” and “problem solving” to address a challenge like data gap. In the case of Germany, the data on water consumption per sector is not public. To counteract this, some stakeholder events were specifically tailored towards closing this data gap that can lead to problem solving.

Although the objectives “raising awareness among stakeholders” and “informing about the RETOUCH NEXUS project” may seem similar, they serve distinct purposes. Raising awareness focuses on the broader WEFE Nexus, aiming to increase stakeholders’ understanding of the general interlinkages and challenges. In contrast, informing about the RETOUCH NEXUS project specifically addresses the details, aims, and progress of this project, ensuring stakeholders are well-informed about its scope and activities.

The emphasis on encouraging cooperation was particularly strong in Belgium and Germany, where many activities were designed to foster collaboration between different stakeholder groups. Awareness raising stood out as a key goal in Belgium, Malta, and Slovakia, reflecting efforts to broaden understanding of the WEFE Nexus and related challenges. In the Netherlands, engagement activities were especially focused on closing data gaps and problem solving, aligning with the case study’s strategic approach of using workshops and training to address practical challenges. Meanwhile, Germany also placed a notable emphasis on informing stakeholders about the RETOUCH NEXUS project, ensuring that participants were well-informed about project aims and progress.

Overall, these patterns highlight that stakeholder engagement activities in RETOUCH NEXUS were not only diverse in format but also in their underlying objectives, tailored to the specific needs and contexts of each case study.

Figure 3: Goals of stakeholder engagement activity



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Forms of engagement activity by case studies

A diverse array of stakeholder engagement activities was implemented across the case studies, reflecting the varied needs and contexts of each setting. As shown in Figure 4, awareness raising activities (34%) and workshops (32%) were the most used forms of engagement, highlighting the project's strong focus on building understanding and fostering dialogue among stakeholders. Trainings and citizen engagement activities each accounted for 11% and 10% respectively of the total, demonstrating the commitment to both capacity building and direct involvement of end-users. Other forms of engagement, such as CoP and podcasts, though less frequent, illustrate the project's objective to experiment with innovative and tailored approaches.

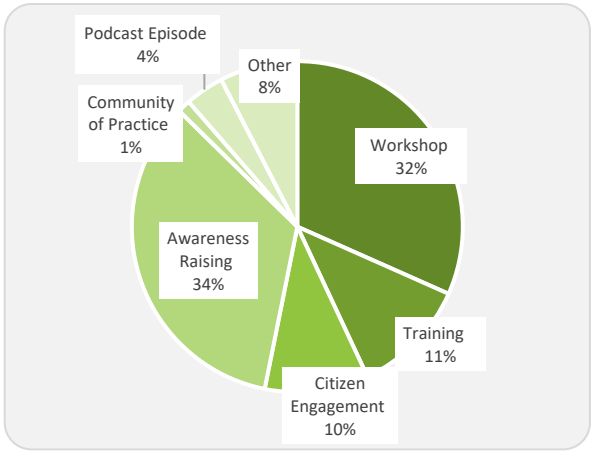

Figure 4: Forms of stakeholder engagement activities

The importance of using multiple means and mediums of engagement lies in their ability to address the unique challenges and opportunities present in each case study. Details on how these forms were applied are provided in the subsequent case study sections and further explored in the following chapters. Notably, several of these approaches—particularly the more innovative formats—will be captured and discussed in greater detail in the next deliverable focused on innovations in case studies (D2.5).

2.3. Stakeholder engagement activities implemented by case studies

Capacity development and awareness raising are at the heart of the RETOUCH NEXUS case studies, supporting the advancement of resilient water governance and sustainable resource management. Across each case study, tailored activities have been implemented to strengthen local knowledge, enhance stakeholder skills, and deepen understanding of the WEFE Nexus. These efforts empower stakeholders to engage meaningfully in decision-making, address knowledge gaps, and foster inclusive, community-led solutions that respond to the specific challenges of each context. Table 2 provides an overview of the main objectives of each case study that guides stakeholder activities, which are elaborated further below. For each case study, the roadmap from Deliverable D2.3—developed to guide stakeholder engagement activities throughout the project—has been summarised here, with remarks included on the status of implementation and any deviations from the original plan.

Table 2: Case studies' focus

Case Study	Focus

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WaterProof, Belgium	Developing water pricing mechanisms for rainwater reuse in business parks and residential areas; climate resilience.
Upper Main, Germany	Transitioning to digitally driven, participatory water governance and improving coordination among stakeholders.
Jucar River Basin, Spain	Ensuring sustainable water supply for Valencia; addressing drought, over-exploitation, and affordability issues.
Maltese River Basin District, Malta	Managing water scarcity through non-conventional sources (desalination, reclamation) in a densely populated area.
Dutch HHNK, Netherlands	Developing an innovative freshwater availability programme through early stakeholder inclusion and exploring new participatory engagement approaches, guided by the regional water authority HHNK.
South-Western Slovakia	Tackling flooding, drought, water insecurity, and biodiversity loss; improving water retention and land management.

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Belgium

The Belgian case study within RETOUCH NEXUS centres on the Tielt Business Park, a pioneering demonstration site for innovative and sustainable water management in industrial zones. This site is part of the broader "WaterProof" initiative, which aims to develop and implement climate-resilient water solutions across business parks and residential areas. The RETOUCH NEXUS project leverages the advanced progress already made in Tielt to further enhance stakeholder engagement, focusing on maintaining active participation and scaling up best practices. The engagement strategy in Belgium is tailored to the diverse motivations of key stakeholder groups—especially farmers, companies, and government representatives—whose involvement is crucial for addressing water scarcity and quality challenges. By integrating the WaterProof approach with RETOUCH NEXUS objectives, the case study exemplifies how targeted, participatory activities can drive both local innovation and broader knowledge exchange on sustainable water governance. By September 2025, the Belgian case study concentrated on raising stakeholder awareness, fostering cooperation, and gathering feedback on project results. Awareness-raising and workshops were the most frequent engagement formats, with industry and business partners comprising the largest share of participants, followed by local authorities.

Figure 5: Snapshot of case study: Belgium

In terms of achievements, Belgium's case advanced WEFE outcomes by engaging industry, local authorities, innovators and farmers, moving reuse concepts from awareness to practical uptake. Experiential tools (e.g., water experience container) deepened buy-in, while a household water website and cost–benefit framing clarified monitoring, smart control and investment decisions, strengthening the water–energy link. Regular farmer involvement anchored irrigation reuse, connecting water–food–ecosystems and addressing scarcity and quality concerns. Cross-actor cooperation in Tielt created a pathway to upscale WaterProof practices to other sites, despite strict Flemish regulations.

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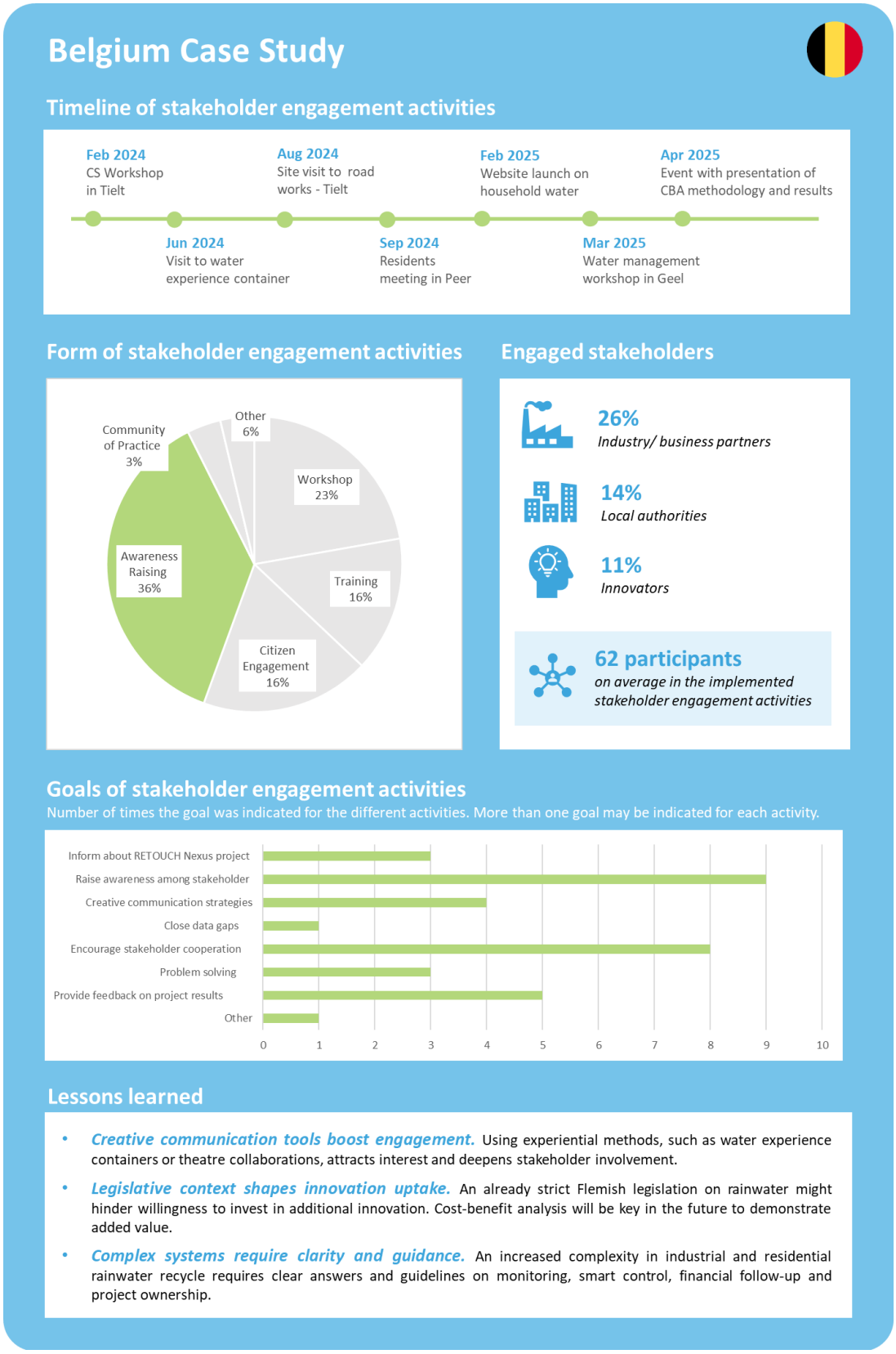
Figure 6: Belgium case study



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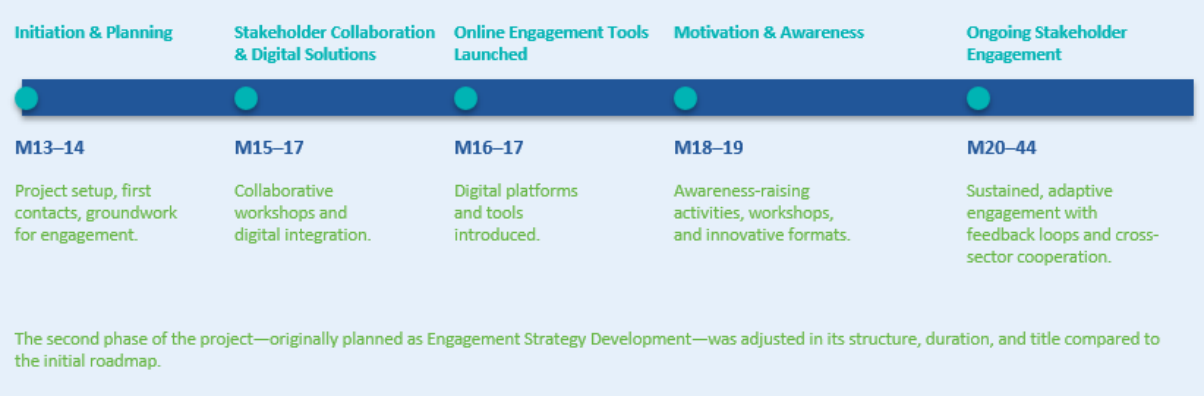
Germany

The Upper Main case study in Bavaria aims to modernise water governance by shifting from a traditional top-down approach to a digitally driven, participatory model that strengthens communication, coordination, and cooperation among institutions and water users. Stakeholder structures are predominantly hybrid (public–research), with limited private and civil society representation; most actors operate at local/regional scale, with stronger emphasis on water and ecosystems than energy. Engagement also leverages established platforms like River Paradise Upper Franconia, the Ecological Education Centre, and the Round Table Upper Franconia to support education, dialogue, and planning.

Key engagements included a feedback meeting with the Regional Government of Upper Franconia, a first stakeholder workshop in Upper Main, Dialogue Forum on Water Controversies IV, the WEFE Nexus game (using the World Café method), a governance questionnaire on innovation schemes, and a nature-based solutions workshop. Awareness-raising and workshops were the most common formats, with regional authorities and research communities comprising the largest participant shares; average participation was circa 30 per event, with the Dialogue Forum (100 participants) raising the overall mean.

Figure 7: Snapshot of case study: Germany



In terms of achievements, there was active participation in a range of conferences and workshops, with a strong emphasis on informing stakeholders about the project. This objective was consistently prioritised across engagement activities, ensuring widespread awareness and understanding of the project's aims. A particularly innovative achievement was the implementation of the WEFE Nexus game, which engaged international students aged 20–28. Delivered using the World Café Method—a structured dialogue approach designed to foster a welcoming and collaborative environment—the game enabled participants to explore nexus challenges, share knowledge, and discuss practical solutions in a creative, interactive setting. These efforts not only facilitated cross-sector dialogue and cooperation but also helped make complex scientific concepts more accessible and actionable for diverse stakeholder groups.

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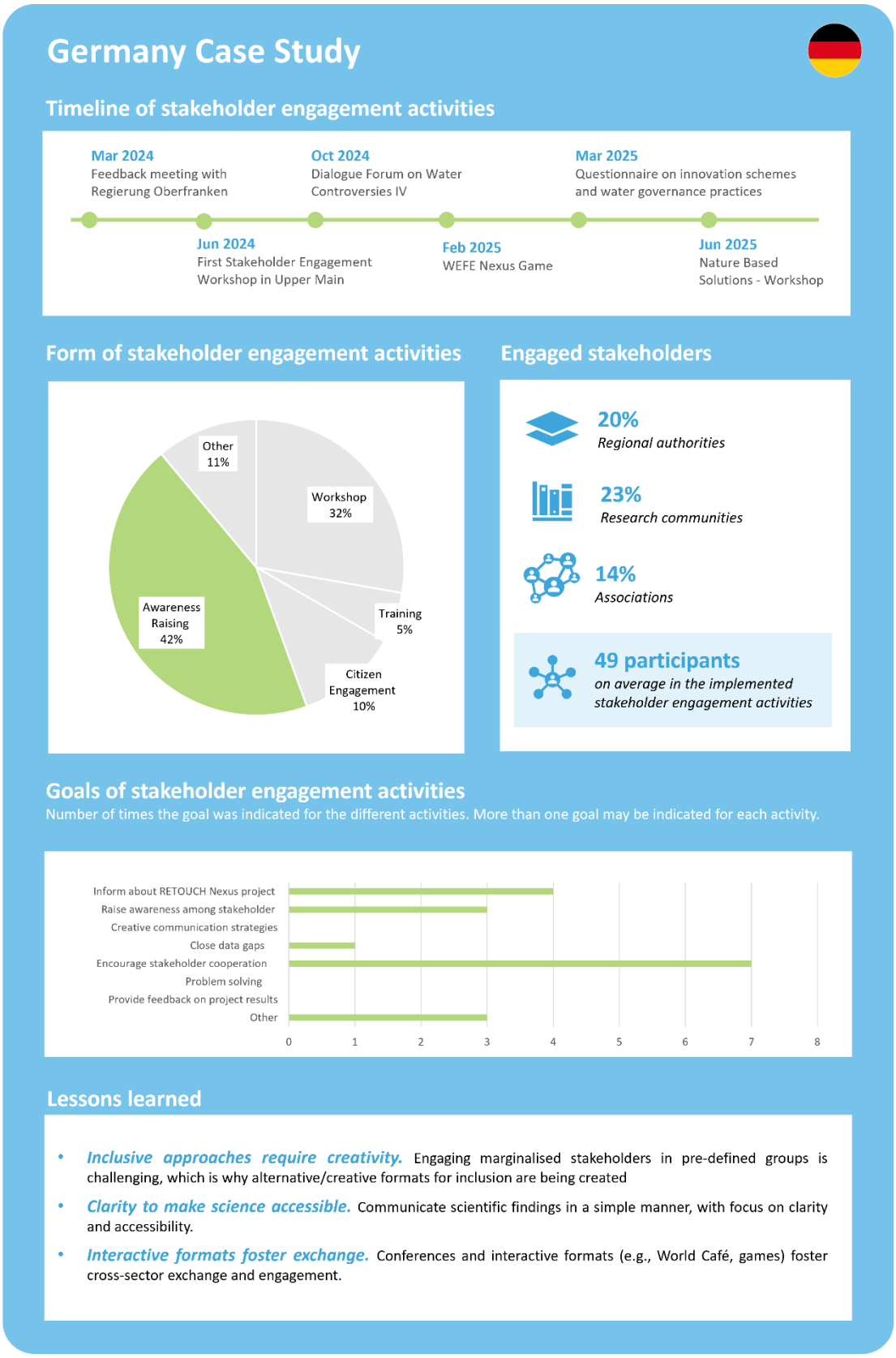
Figure 8: Germany case study



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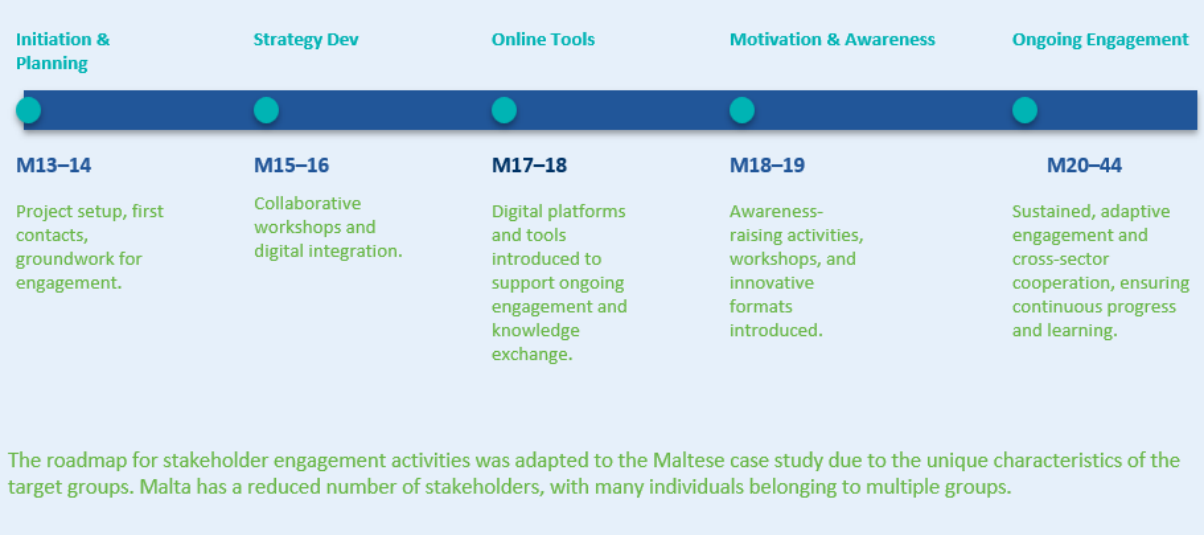
Malta

The Malta case study, part of the RETOUCH NEXUS project and led nationally by the Energy and Water Agency, aims to strengthen governance mechanisms to better withstand the challenges posed by water scarcity and climate-related pressures—issues particularly acute in Malta's island context. To achieve these aims, Malta has implemented a deliberately varied and sustained set of engagement mechanisms. Business breakfasts and living-lab workshops, designed with interactive, round-table formats, facilitated open dialogue and co-creation among stakeholders. Regular newsletters and meetings ensured engagement and momentum between events, while the introduction of an online tool extended participation and knowledge exchange into the digital realm, enabling ongoing feedback and visibility of WEFE-related trade-offs.

Figure 9: Snapshot of case study: Malta



In terms of achievements, this steady, multi-channel engagement—reaching local authorities, associations, and specific end-users such as farmers—has moved stakeholders from one-off awareness-raising to ongoing, cross-sector cooperation. Notably, these efforts have led to the emergence of a CoP addressing WEFE issues in Malta. The use of concise, interactive formats and targeted communication has improved message uptake, addressed previously limited public understanding of the nexus, and fostered a shared vocabulary for collaborative problem-solving. As a result, Malta's case has initiated multi-actor coordination, surfaced critical data and knowledge gaps for collective action, and begun embedding WEFE considerations into planning and dialogue.

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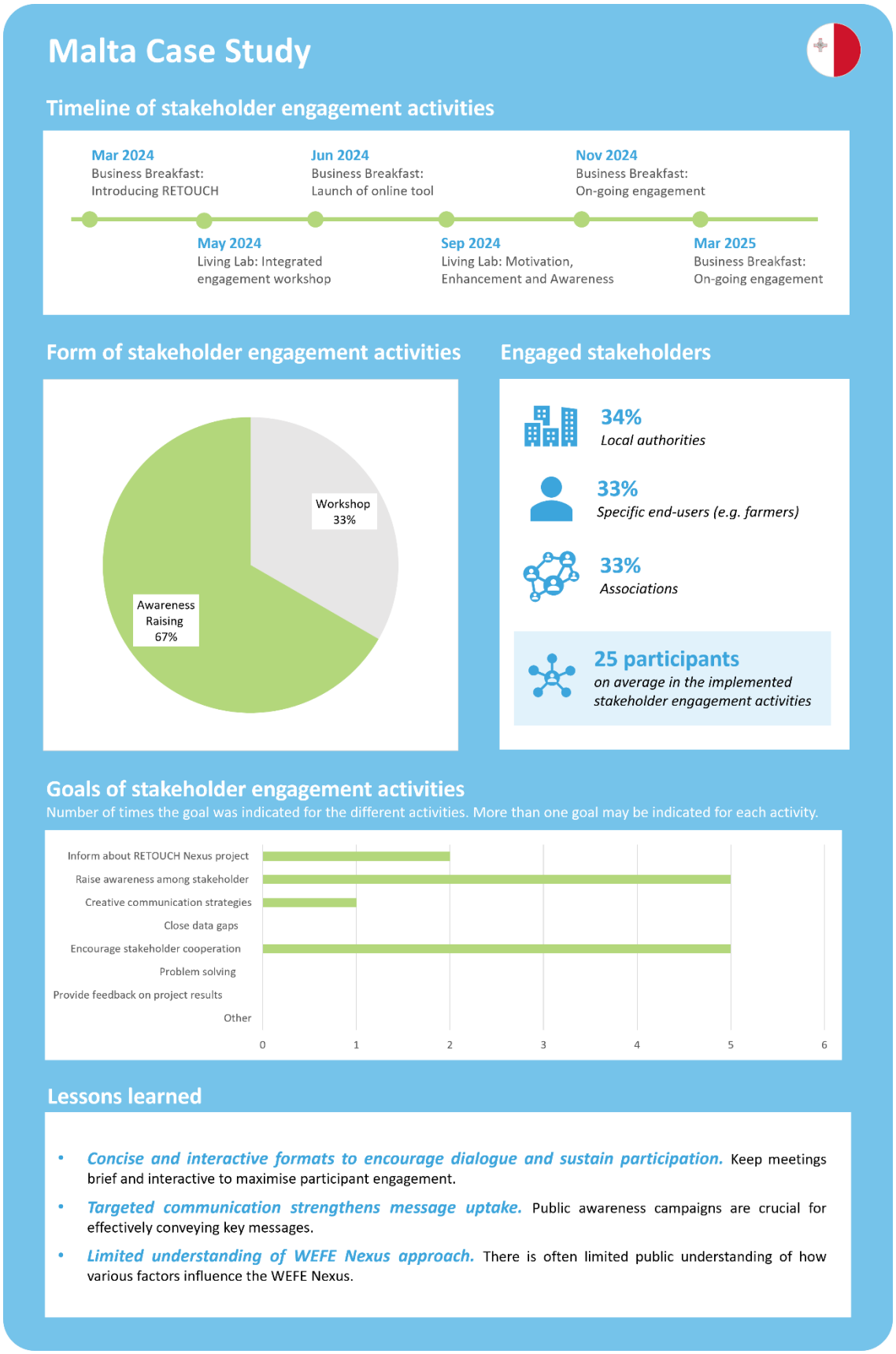
Figure 10: Malta case study



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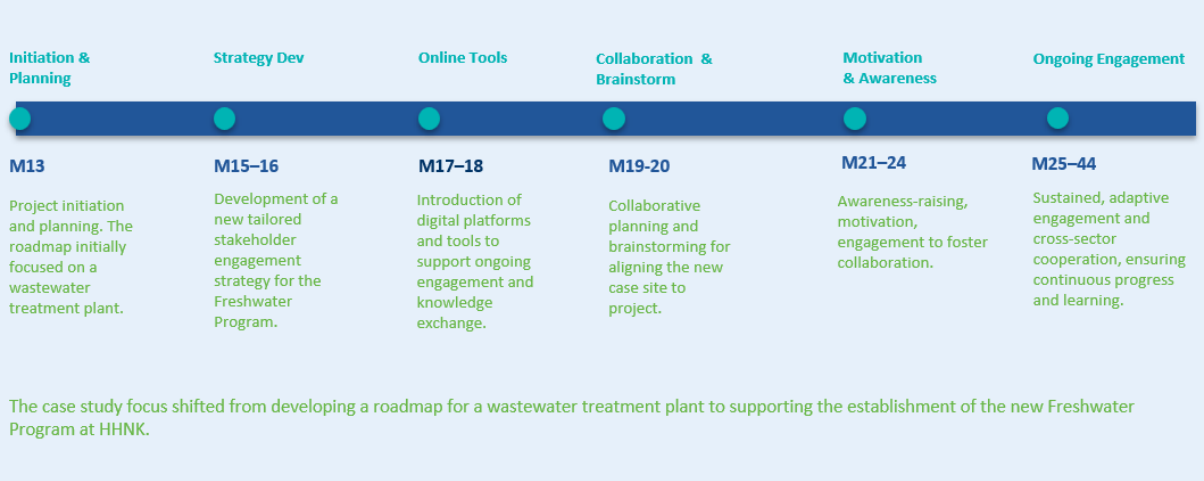
Netherlands

The Netherlands case study supports the Water Authority HHNK in shaping a Freshwater Availability Programme for North Holland, embedding a participatory track to address escalating water-scarcity risks driven by climate change, sea-level rise and growing regional demands. The case study's emphasis is on building a robust participatory pathway within HHNK's governance processes, so stakeholder interests inform programme design and implementation. The original case study for the Netherlands was changed during the course of the implementation due to the inability of the initial case study site to continue to be part of the project. Hence, the initial roadmap and activities related to stakeholders in the case study had to be adapted, completely replanned.

The Dutch case study activities aim to develop a participatory plan aligned with the water authority's Freshwater Availability Program timeline. They focus on closing data gaps, problem solving, and raising stakeholder awareness. Workshops and trainings are the main engagement tools, with a limited number of participants from the regional authorities. The focus is on capacity building and equipping the water authority with knowledge and tools for a participatory process within the programme.

Figure 11: Snapshot of case study: Netherlands



The Dutch case has established a coherent, staged participatory pathway for HHNK's Freshwater Availability Programme, translating "participation" from concept into practice through methods, roles and boundaries tailored to HHNK. Iterative workshops have helped clarify governance touchpoints, surface priority information gaps, and create feedback loops that link technical analysis with stakeholder insight. Internally, HHNK has strengthened skills for interviews, facilitation and stakeholder analysis, enabling a more intentional and context-sensitive approach to collaboration. Lessons captured in the process highlight the need for political sensitivity and multi-level coordination, and show that well-paced, creative workshops and reflective moments deepen engagement and trust—outcomes that directly support nexus-aligned decision-making in a complex, multi-actor setting.

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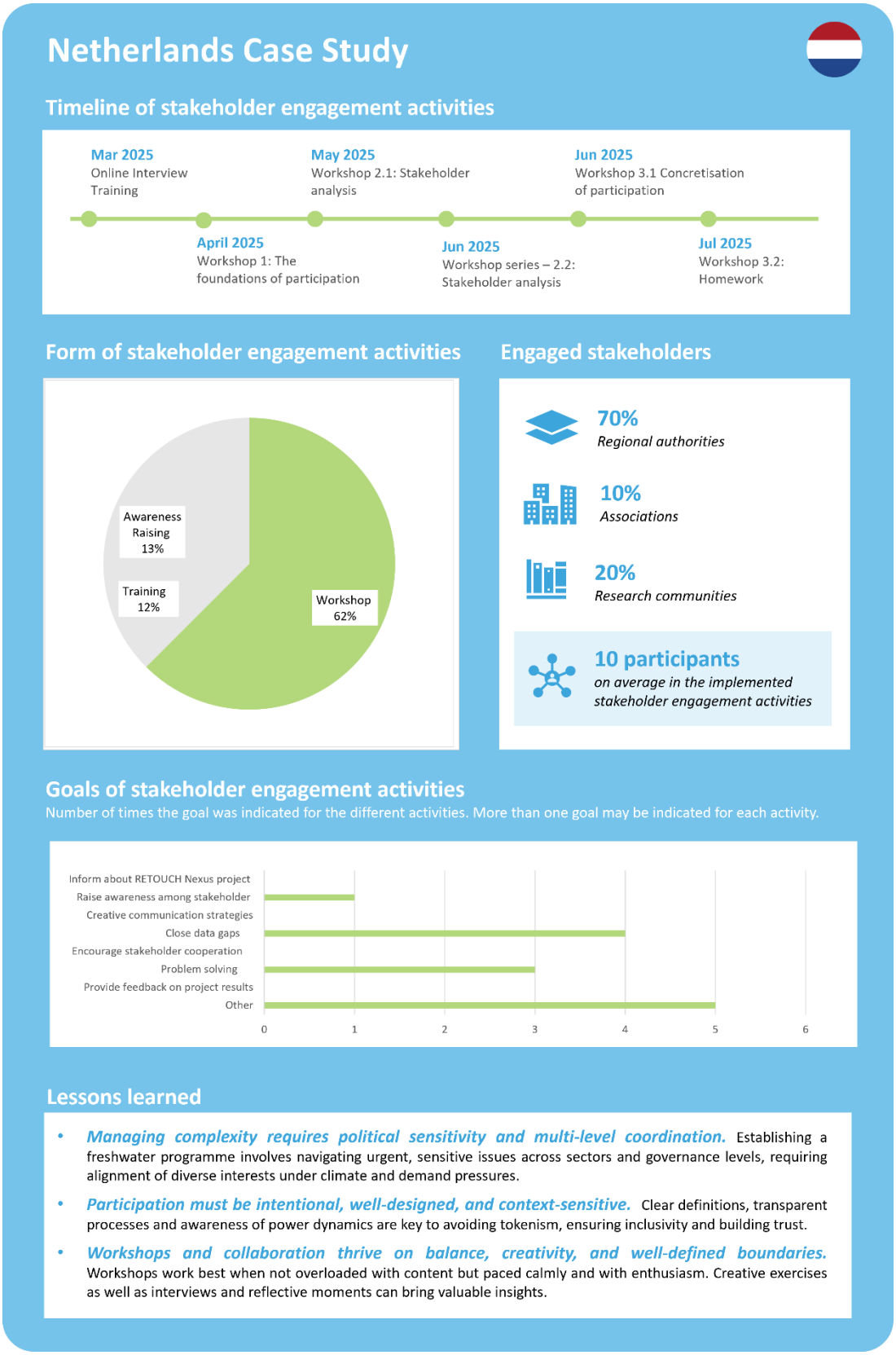
Figure 12: Netherlands case study



Slovakia

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The Slovakia case study highlights a comprehensive approach to addressing floods, droughts, water insecurity, desertification, biodiversity loss, and land fragmentation, with a focus on strengthening water governance for climate-resilient agriculture and sustainable water use. By applying the WEFE Nexus, it convenes relevant actors to overcome structural barriers such as fragmented land ownership and underutilised irrigation systems, while tackling climate risks to farmers. The roadmap for stakeholder engagement reduces the number of workshops to ensure effective participation, with activities centred on water retention infrastructure and broader environmental challenges and emphasises the need for policy alignment and investment to build resilience.

The Slovakia case study's engagement approach combines workshops, trainings, awareness-raising activities, podcasts, and tailored touchpoints to reach diverse audiences, with local authorities making up the majority of participants. By engaging national authorities, business partners, civil society, and farming communities, it bridges silos and surfaces trade-offs while making complex WEFE Nexus topics accessible and actionable. Activities up to September 2025 focused on awareness-raising and cooperation, averaging 86 participants—with some workshops attracting 100–150—supported by feedback loops to sustain momentum.

Figure 13: Snapshot of case study: Slovakia

Stakeholder engagement in Slovakia has successfully broadened and energised the core WEFE Nexus community through a series of targeted events, including workshops on climate-resilient water management, training sessions for farmers on water and NBS, seminars focused on innovations for a healthy landscape, and in-person sessions with fruit and vegetable growers. These activities brought together national authorities, farmers, businesses, and civil society, fostering structured dialogue and practical cooperation rather than one-off consultation. The process raised awareness of nexus interdependencies, encouraged collaboration across sectors, and began closing essential data and knowledge gaps for informed decision-making. Importantly, the engagement surfaced systemic obstacles—such as land fragmentation and underutilised irrigation infrastructure—and channelled these challenges into governance discussions around policy alignment and targeted investment, including standards and monitoring for rainwater reuse. Through clear, creative communication and continuous feedback loops, Slovakia's case study has improved multi-actor coordination and embedded WEFE considerations into ongoing planning.

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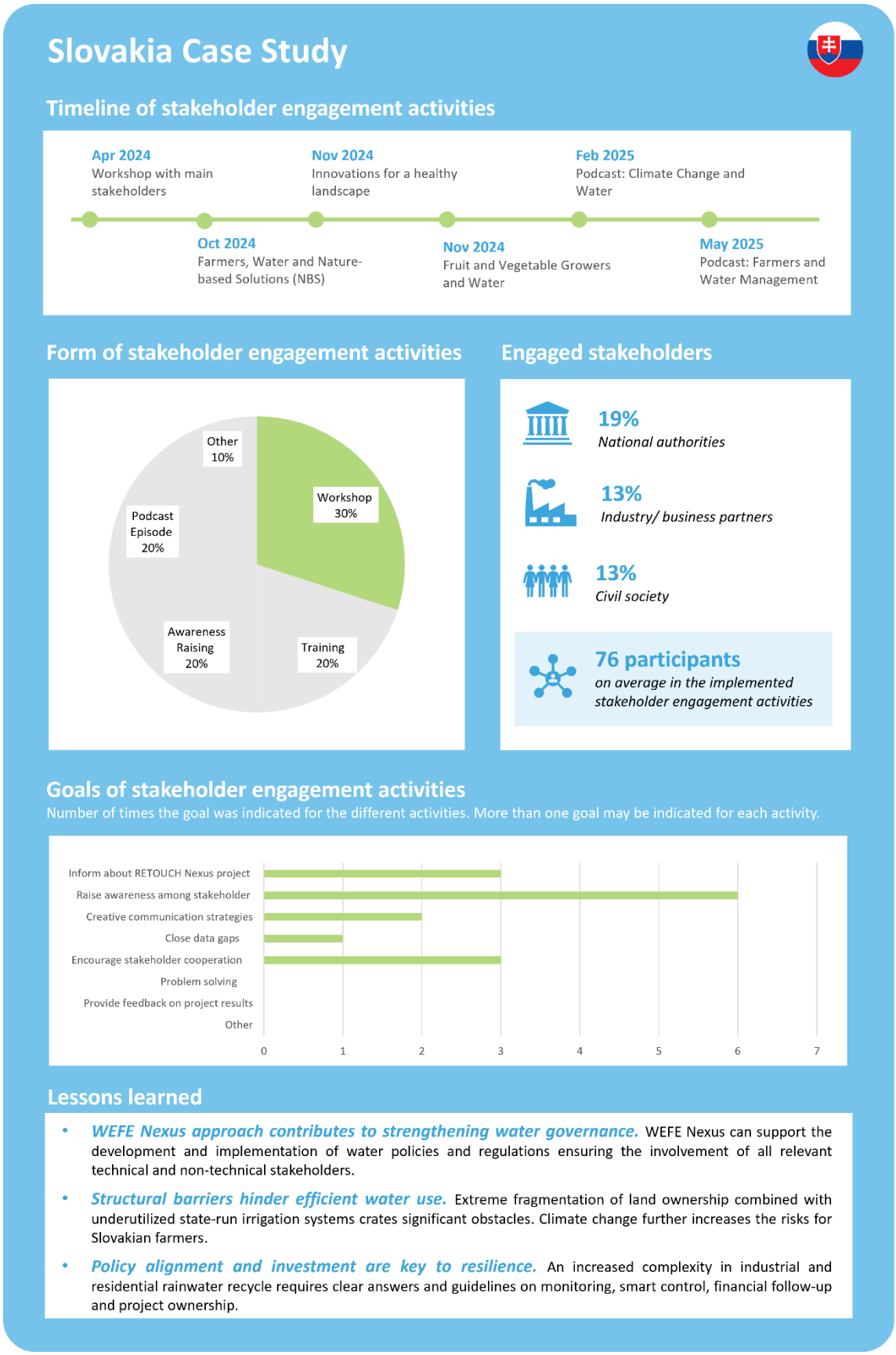
Figure 14: Slovakia case study



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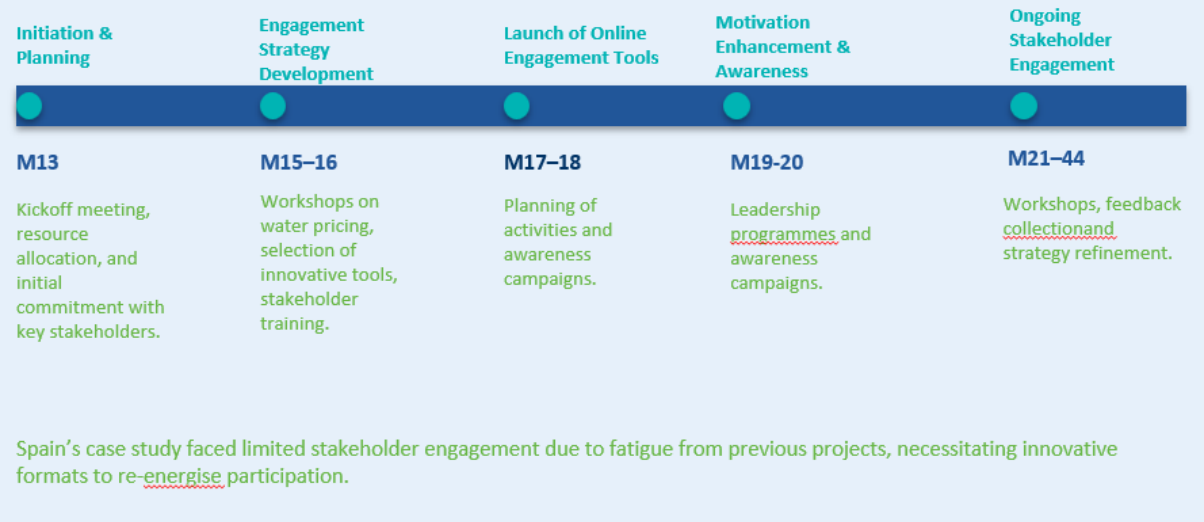
Spain

The Spain case study aims to improve water governance schemes and embed effective economic instruments within a WEFE Nexus framing, with water pricing set as the strategic entry point. It builds on the Júcar River Basin's existing science–policy interface and the stakeholder engagement foundations laid by GONEXUS, ensuring a participatory, evidence-based approach that brings together authorities, economists, civil society, industry and academia.

Engagement activities were diverse and interactive, aiming to raise awareness, foster multi-sector cooperation, and co-develop adaptation and mitigation strategies. The case study implemented workshops that explored water pricing and governance challenges, alongside scenario-based dialogues representing all WEFE Nexus sectors in the Júcar Basin. Tools such as newspaper-style narratives about plausible 2050 future scenarios were used to stimulate dialogue and participation. A podcast episode released in July 2025 extended outreach beyond traditional formats, broadening engagement and public understanding. Stakeholders actively contributed feedback to refine the modelling suite, enhancing analysis quality and relevance.

Figure 15: Snapshot of case study: Spain



The Spain case succeeded in building shared understanding of pressing challenges like water scarcity, sectoral competition, and climate risks (droughts and floods). Economic tools—including water pricing, agricultural insurance, incentives for efficient water use, and risk-sharing mechanisms—are being introduced to stakeholders as essential instruments for adaptation and long-term mitigation. The ongoing science-policy interface fostered knowledge exchange, strengthened decision-making, and enabled stakeholders to bridge analytic insights with practical governance. Innovative communication approaches, such as the podcast, complemented workshops to sustain engagement.

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Figure 16: Spain case study

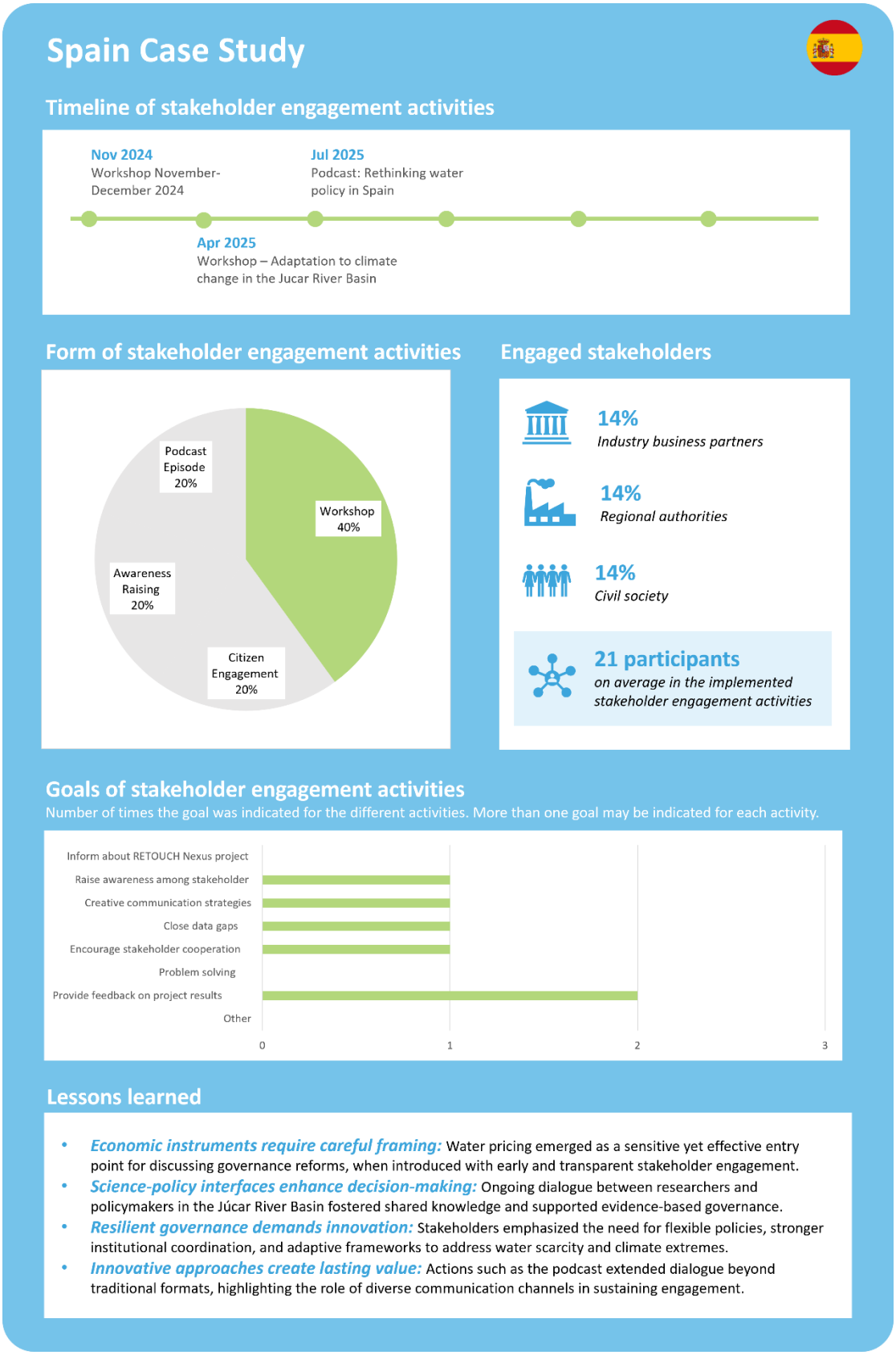

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Table 3 below provides insights across all case studies, outlining shared lessons, notable achievements, and ongoing challenges, as well as approaches with strong potential for replication. This synthesis offers a clear snapshot of what has worked, where obstacles remain, and which strategies are most promising.

Table 3: Overview of key lessons, achievements, and challenges in case studies

Case Study	Key Lessons / Insights	Achievements	Ongoing Challenges	Unique Aspects / Replication Potential
Belgium	Creative communication (e.g. experience container, theatre) increased engagement; data gaps in water abstraction/quality; collective rainwater management opportunities.	Strong stakeholder interest: site visits clarified technical solutions; basis for future blue-green collaborations.	Strict rainwater legislation hinders innovation; need for clear monitoring, ownership, and financial guidance.	Creative tools inspire other case study leaders; site visits and demos support replication.
Germany (Upper Main)	Simple, accessible communication is essential; creative formats needed for inclusion; conferences and games foster cross-sector exchange.	Expanded networks via conferences; validated research via local input; new formats for marginalised groups.	Pre-defined groups complicate inclusion; lack of prioritisation frameworks; legislative executive disconnects.	World Café, role-play, and interactive workshops are transferable.
Malta	Short, interactive meetings are most effective; educational campaigns are vital; WEFE awareness is limited.	Higher engagement through concise formats; essential public messaging.	General lack of WEFE awareness among public; sustaining engagement.	Short, focused meetings and public campaigns can be replicated.
Netherlands	Participation design must be context-sensitive and iterative; power dynamics and capacity constraints are significant; stakeholder diversity makes engagement complex.	Transparent, paced workshops work best; reflective moments yield valuable insights; strengthened cross-sector cooperation.	Risk of tokenistic participation if not well-resourced; complex participatory plans due to diverse stakeholders.	Practical, hands-on exercises and mapping approaches can be replicated.
Slovakia	Need to embed WEFE Nexus in policy/regulation; land fragmentation	High farmer interest: gender balance achieved; hybrid	Difficulty convening policymakers with other groups;	Success stories, hybrid workshops, and practical

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	and under-invested irrigation hinder efficiency; climate change increases urgency.	engagement formats effective.	practical barriers to engagement.	examples support replication.
Spain (Júcar Basin)	Repeated engagement risks fatigue: facilitation must balance contributions; unforeseen events require adaptive formats.	Collaborative dialogue in workshops; broad agreement on indicators and governance frameworks.	Stakeholder fatigue; need for more inclusive representation and facilitation of differing priorities.	Podcast/alternative formats and balanced facilitation are replicable.

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3. Capacity Development: RETOUCH NEXUS trainings

Apart from the various stakeholder engagement activities, a series of targeted technical trainings on WEFE topics have been designed and delivered to enhance the capacity and expertise of project partners and stakeholders, within the case studies and beyond. Training sessions on the use of WEFE governance indicators have equipped participants on assessing and monitoring WEFE Nexus impacts. Trainings on Economic Modelling is planned under WP3 is planned within M36-44. The trainings contribute to the project's overarching goal of building capacity for innovative and inclusive water governance.

3.1. Training on WEFE Governance indicators

1st Training at Dresden Nexus Conference

On April 8th 2025, the RETOUCH NEXUS team – represented by project partners from the Technical University Munich (TUM) and adelphi conducted the 1st training technical training "Monitoring Framework for the Quantification of Nexus-Smart Water Governance" at the Dresden Nexus Conference (DNC). The conference is a biennial international forum that focuses on the Resource Nexus and brings together researchers, policymakers, international organizations, practitioners, civil society, and the private sector to exchange knowledge and bridge science, policy, and practice.

The objective of the training was to build the understanding of participants on the WEFE indictors monitoring framework that has been developed under WP1. The indicator framework proposes a collection of existing and new WEFE-nexus smart socio-economic and environmental indicators, built on the OECD water governance indicator framework, to monitor water governance in a cross-sectoral, multi-level way across time and space.

The training session introduced the Water Governance Monitoring Framework, outlining its objectives and how the framework can be applied within and beyond the project and explained about the set of indicators, and the app consisting of quantitative and qualitative indicators. A live demo of the app showcased four panels: benchmarking progress across space and time, exploring trade-offs through indicator correlations, assessing water stress via the WEFE withdrawals-to-availability ratio, and building custom indicators with flexible priorities, normalization, aggregation, and weighting. Participants engaged in a hands-on exercise to apply the app and its concepts in practice, followed by a closing discussion with Q&A and feedback on both the workshop and the application. Figure 14 below captures the essential features of the app.

For the group work, each group worked on different case studies based on examples from the case study countries. The exercise included a description of the country's background in terms of water resources availability and challenges and a set of questions to guide the work on the application. The following box presents an example of the exercise for the Spanish case study (Box 2).

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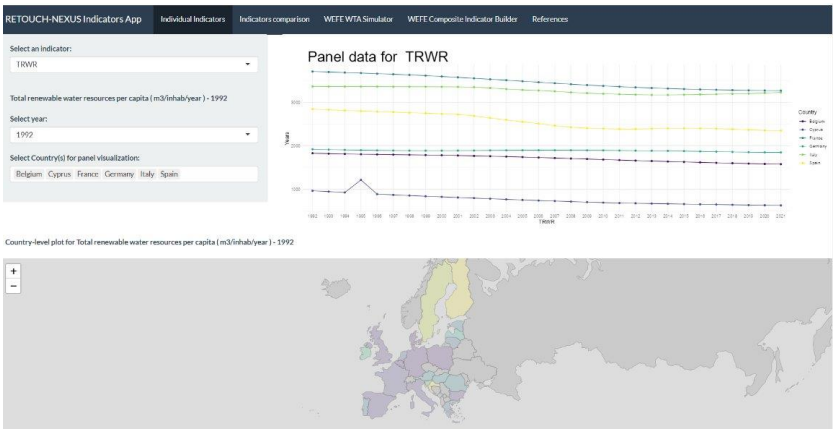
Figure 17: Showcasing the RETOUCH NEXUS Water Governance Monitoring App

RETOUCH NEXUS Water Governance Monitoring App

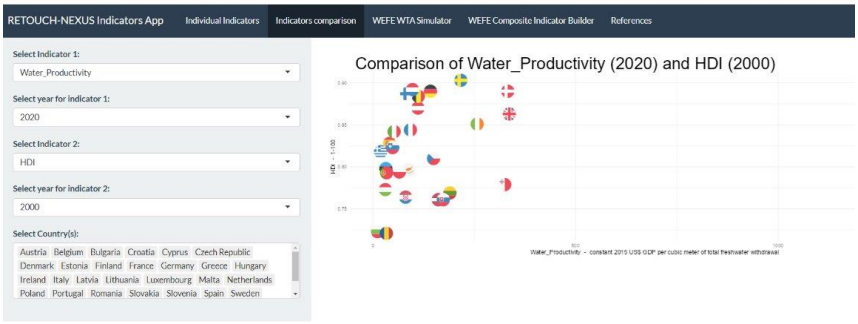
Panel 1: Benchmarking – Measuring progress in space and time



User can select an indicator, a reference year and countries for the panel visualisation.

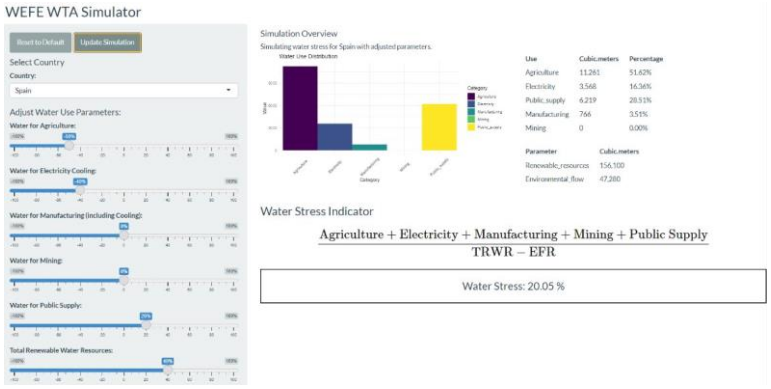
Individual indicators can be assessed in terms of their **progress in time across different locations**.

Panel 2: Identifying trade-offs – Analysing correlations between indicators



User can select two indicators as well as reference years for each of them and countries for a **comparative visualisation in the graphic**.

Panel 3: How is water stress affected by sectoral water use changes?



For each country, user can simulate the **impacts on water stress caused by changes in different parameters of water use**.

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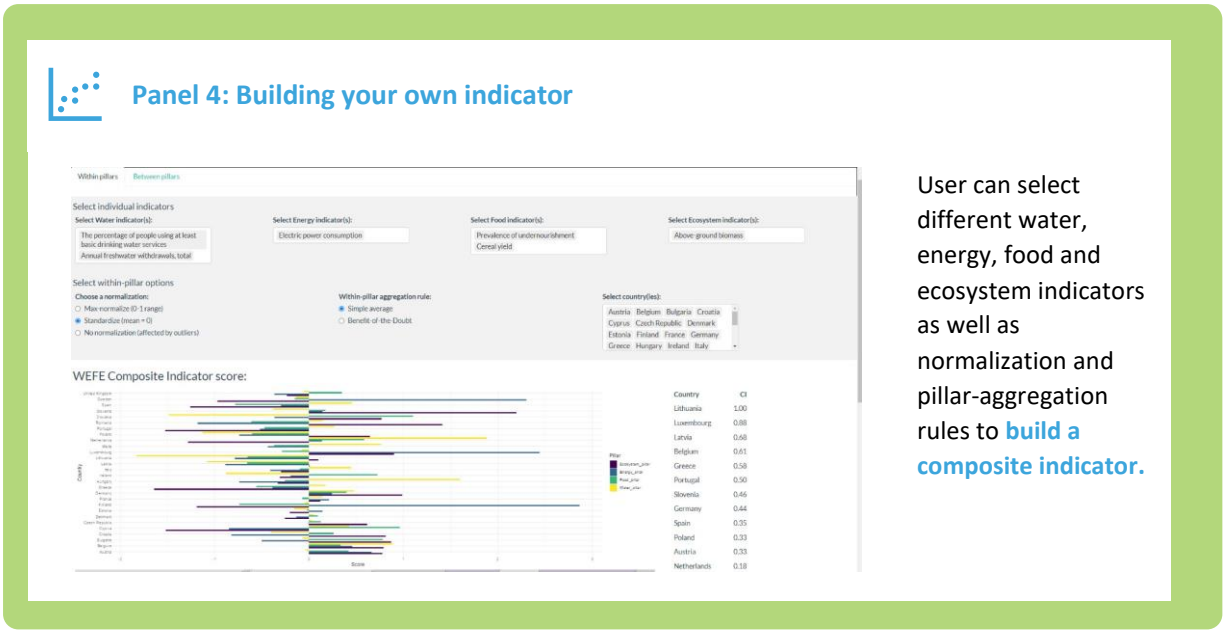
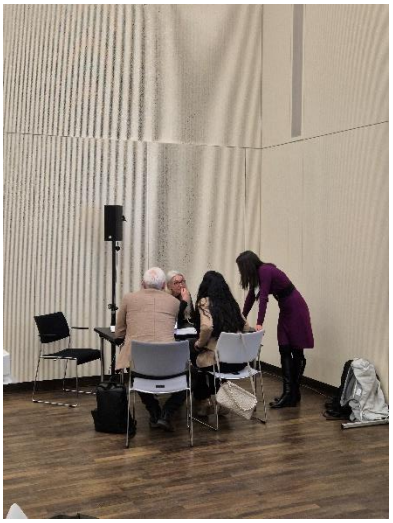


Figure 18: Group work during the training session



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Box 2: Monitoring framework for the quantification of the nexus-smart water governance

Monitoring Framework for the Quantification of Nexus-Smart Water Governance
Group Exercise

Case Study: Spain

With a delicate sensitive equilibrium between water supply and demand, and a distinct part of its water availability not reaching a *good status* according to the Water Framework Directive, Spain is in a difficult position to manage its water resources. Historically, Spain has addressed water scarcity by increasing available resources. However, this approach has become unfeasible as the use of non-conventional sources is often expensive, especially in the context of rising energy prices. This challenge is further complicated when considering climate change and its associated risks. Improved water governance schemes and economic instruments have been suggested as promising alternatives to achieve sustainable water use.

For this exercise, the focus was on the fourth panel (see Figure 14) as a tool to measure the performance of different countries in relationship to specific goals, objectives and priorities. The application is to solve the following questions and discuss within the group.

1. Browse the application for indicators that you consider the most relevant priorities for your case study. Select at least two indicators for Water, Energy, Food and Ecosystems. How are these indicators related to water governance challenges?
2. With the indicators you selected, what is the score of the country associated with your Case Study? How does your country rank with respect to other European countries?
3. Navigate to the "Between Pillars" tab of the Application. Imagine you want to assign a specific level of importance (or *weight*) to each of the WEFE Nexus pillars. Given the context provided, your expert knowledge and other data from the application, discuss among your group what weights will you assign to each of the WEFE Nexus pillars (keep in mind that weights should add up to 100%). How does the score of your country change when considering these new weights? Does the ranking of your country change when considering the new weights?

At the end of the training, the results and experiences of the group work were discussed with the participants. They were also invited to provide further input and feedback online via a questionnaire on Mentimeter (see examples in figures 19 – 20). The feedback included:

- Most participants consider the indicators app to be useful.
- It would be helpful to add further explanations on the indicators and features of the app, so that users can better understand the choices and the methodology behind.
- Most participants are interested in joining a CoP on the indicator's topic.
- The training met the participants' interests and needs, and they learned something new.

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Figure 19: Feedback collected from Mentimeter – Possible applications of the app

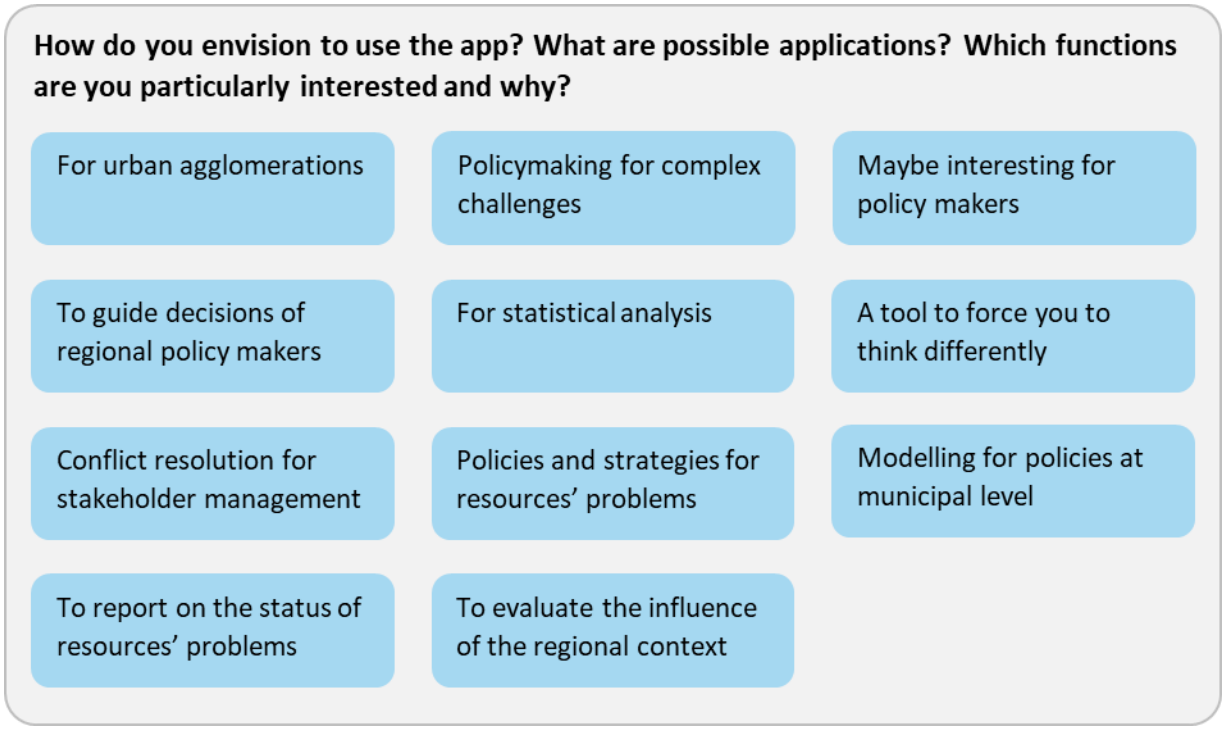
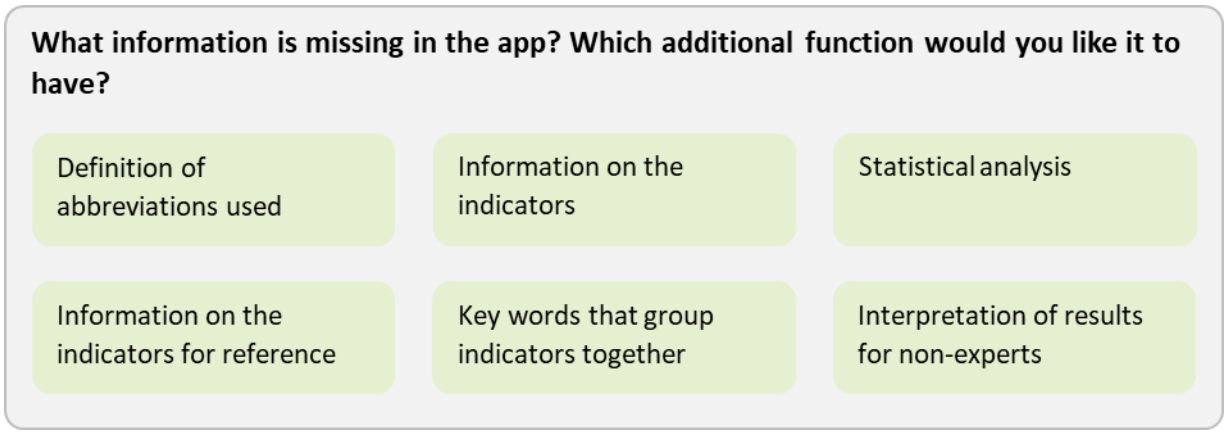


Figure 20: Feedback collected from Mentimeter – Information and functions missing in the app



Workshop at HHNK during RETOUCH GA 2025 in Amsterdam

Building on the earlier training in Dresden, the HHNK session further developed participants' familiarity with the Water Governance Monitoring Framework and its practical application beyond the project. At HHNK, the plan was to introduce the framework, demonstrate the App's four core functions, hold a short Q&A, and then run a hands-on small-group exercise using pre-uploaded datasets, with facilitators providing step-by-step guidance and discussing personalisation options. Owing to time constraints, the session prioritised core tasks: participants downloaded the prepared dataset provided by TUM, uploaded it to the App, constructed a composite indicator reflecting agreed priorities, and reviewed the resulting graphs comparing country scores. This practical exposure now

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feeds directly into the emerging CoP on indicators. Participants start with a shared workflow, a reusable template, and common interpretation practices, which can be iterated collectively to refine indicator definitions, test assumptions, and compare benchmarking approaches across contexts. The HHNK exercise thus serves as a foundational CoP module—establishing consistent data handling, composite-building protocols, and peer review of results—upon which future sessions can add deeper trade-off analysis and withdrawals-to-availability assessments.

3.2. Training on conducting interviews with stakeholders

On March 3rd, 2025, a training was conducted by WP4 leader VUA with RETOUCH NEXUS consortium members and case study leaders on how to independently conduct interviews with stakeholders in relation to capturing data and information on innovation. The primary objective of this training was to prepare for and ensure a smooth execution of task 4.3 – Innovative Schemes and Practices of Water. The training held online explained about the theoretical and practical aspects of the interview processes as well as best practices followed by a role-play. The key results and lessons learned from the online training are highlighted below:

- The training equipped participants with knowledge and practical skills for conducting semi-structured interviews, strengthened through best practice sharing and role-playing exercises.
- It ensured methodological consistency across RETOUCH NEXUS case studies for Task 4.3.
- Participants exchanged approaches for qualitative research, including ways to address potential challenges.
- A closing Q&A and discussion fostered connections and collaboration.

3.3. Upcoming: Training on economic modelling

Economic modelling is a core component of RETOUCH NEXUS, supporting the project's ambition to design and implement integrated, innovative, and inclusive water governance schemes within the WEFE Nexus. Deliverable D3.1 provides an in-depth analysis and strategy for developing and applying economic instruments and models that address the trade-offs and synergies between water, energy, food, and ecosystems. These models are designed to help reconcile water price, value, and cost, and support robust decision-making under cross-sectoral competition and climate change.

The project's modelling approach is evidence-based and adaptable, aiming to provide practical recommendations for policymakers, water managers, and practitioners. It also includes a focus on translating complex economic concepts into accessible resources—such as factsheets and training materials—to enhance capacity and understanding among stakeholders. Looking ahead, RETOUCH NEXUS will offer targeted trainings on economic modelling, ensuring that partners and stakeholders can effectively use these tools in practice. As this is a living deliverable, D2.4 will be updated with new insights and training materials as the economic modelling work progresses, ensuring ongoing relevance and knowledge transfer across the project and to the wider community.

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4. Capacity Development: Communities of Practice

4.1. The concept of Communities of Practice

CoPs are groups of people who share a common interest, challenge, or profession and come together regularly to exchange experiences, generate knowledge, and co-develop solutions. They have emerged as a pivotal concept for fostering collaboration, knowledge exchange, and capacity building across academic, professional, and organizational contexts, providing a structured yet flexible space for peer-to-peer learning, mutual support, and bridging gaps between research, policy, and practice. In the RETOUCH NEXUS project, CoPs provide a structured flexible framework for stakeholder engagement and collective learning.

In general, a CoP can be defined as container for social learning based on regular interaction. As shown in figure 21, it consists of three core elements, namely domain, community, and practice. Wenger (2010) describes CoPs as groups "who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour". CoPs differ from teams and networks as they constitute unique organisational structures rooted in peer-to-peer learning (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Key characteristics of CoPs include sustained mutual relationships, shared ways of engaging, rapid information flow, and a jointly conducted discourse reflecting a particular perspective (Cox, 2005). Altogether, this makes CoPs a very open format, which can range from chat groups on social media such as on LinkedIn to organised webinars and in-person meetings such as trainings. Effective CoPs are practitioner-centred and require thoughtful engagement strategies to motivate participation and knowledge sharing. Six experience-based principles for successful CoPs include:

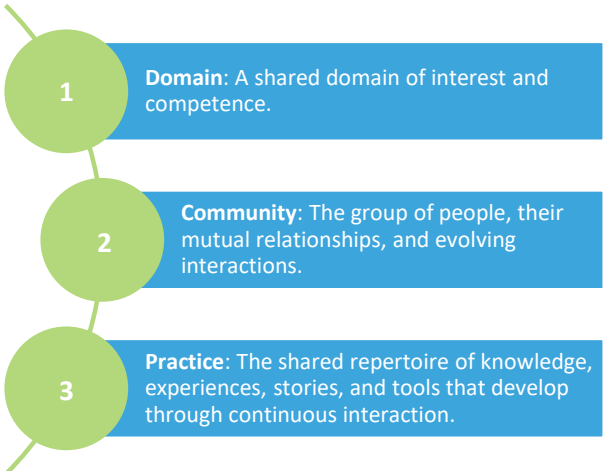

Figure 19: Three core elements of CoPs © adelphi (2025), based on based on Wenger et al. (2002)

1. Highlighting the CoP's added value as the members' resources and capacities are limited.
2. Be aware of challenges and specific needs of the different members as the motives to participate in a CoP can be manifold.
3. Flexibility in stakeholder identification as new stakeholders may appear over time.
4. An adaptable roadmap as CoPs should be responsive to emerging trends and needs.
5. Organic conversations as meetings should allow time for discussions and feedback.
6. Clarity of purpose as objectives and next steps must be transparent to all members.

In recent years, CoPs have become increasingly vital in EU research projects for facilitating collaboration and knowledge exchange among diverse stakeholders. Especially in cross-sectoral contexts they can enhance the potential for innovation and local application, supporting the long-term

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success and upscaling of developed solutions. Besides the RETOUCH NEXUS project, CoPs are applied in other Horizon projects like RECREATE, RESIST, and WEFE4MED.

4.2. Conceptualisation in the RETOUCH NEXUS context

In the RETOUCH NEXUS project, CoPs are predominantly used as tool to (a) create space for discussion on recurring issues and topics, to (b) test and improve products developed within the project and to (c) ensure that they continue to be applied beyond the project duration. The CoPs are made up of diverse groups, mainly including practitioners and experts from the WEFE Nexus sectors, but also policy makers, and other relevant networks and projects. By bringing together these diverse actors, the CoPs create a vibrant platform for the exchange of experiences and peer-to-peer learning and allows members to discuss challenges and opportunities.

As mentioned, the understanding of a CoP is rather broad, so several innovative formats are being employed to maximise engagement and impact within the project. The “CoP Hop” concept, for instance, links CoPs to major conferences, allowing the community to ‘hop’ from one event to another. The WEFE Nexus International Conference in Morocco in February 2025 and SEAM 2025 – Advancing Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystem Governance in Slovakia in September 2025 are such CoP Hops where the project participated. These events can involve promoting upcoming CoPs or hosting on-site CoP activities such as workshops, or trainings. CoP webinars are another online format for connecting that typically last between two and three hours, with a third of the time dedicated to expert input and the remainder to discussion and exchange. Webinars feature contributions from both, “horizontal partners” (topic experts) and “vertical partners” (community members presenting best practices), followed by guided discussions and a summary of common challenges, solutions, and next steps. Another important format is the Community of Experts (CoE), which serves as a consultative mechanism for technical topics. CoEs provide feedback on draft reports, deliverables, and review processes, drawing on the expertise of technical experts. These consultations can take place online or in-person and may include bilateral interviews to capture specialist knowledge, which can then be documented as case studies or best practice examples. To further expand the reach and inclusivity of CoPs, a variety of additional formats are being explored. These include leveraging online platforms, developing content libraries with videos, and organising regular roundtables and field trips.

Through these diverse and flexible formats, the RETOUCH NEXUS CoPs foster a dynamic, inclusive, and effective environment for knowledge exchange, capacity building, and collaborative problem-solving across the water sector and beyond.

4.3. Implementation and CoP sustainability

During the RETOUCH NEXUS GA in Malta from 22-24 January 2025, a survey was conducted among the participating project partners (Figures 22, and 23). The aim of the survey was to gain an impression of suitable topics for setting up CoPs based on relevance and interest of the RETOUCH NEXUS partners. To this end, possible topics were collected in a first step and voting points were distributed in a second

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Figure 20: CoP topic voting at the GA in Malta

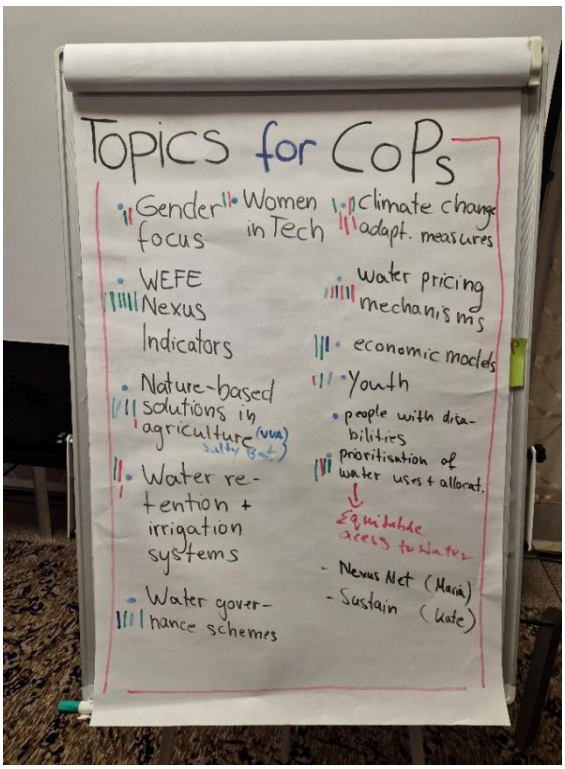

Figure 21: Results of the CoP topic voting © adelphi (2025)

step. As the evaluation of the survey shows, four thematic groups were identified. The topics that received the most votes are WEFE Nexus indicators, water pricing mechanisms, and climate change adaptation measures. Nature-based solutions (NbS) in agriculture, and water governance schemes were also considered important CoP topics Prioritisation of water uses and equitable access, and gender focus and women in tech were other topics. Based on these results, and taking into consideration the project objectives, since 2025 CoPs have been initiated on the topics of gender focus and women in tech, WEFE Nexus governance indicators, climate change adaptation measures and water governance schemes.

Gender is an important but often overlooked topic and within RETOUCH NEXUS, an important objective is to engage with more women stakeholders. To draw more attention to this perspective and share experiences, Lilly Aufdembrinke from adelphi participated in a CoP webinar "Empowering Women in the Water Sector" on March 25th 2025, initiated by the EU-funded project WE-ACT. The CoP opened the floor for discussing diverse perspectives and strategies, including presentations on Uzbekistan's 2030 Gender Concept, Kyrgyzstan's gender equality initiatives, and the role of water management in empowering women from India to Europe.

A first round of a CoP Hop was held at DNC 2025 where the training session on WEFE Nexus Governance Indicators was used to establish a CoP on the indicators related work (see chapter 3.1 for more information). Measuring the impact of WEFE Nexus projects – for example, with the help of indicators – is a key issue within the nexus community. The training and subsequent interaction via the CoP helps to test the app with researchers and practitioners and to incorporate their feedback into its further development. A further test run, already updated with several changes, was implemented in September 2025 with key stakeholders from the Dutch case study—employees of the water authority for the province of North Holland (HHNK). By focusing on the application aspects-engaging implementing stakeholders, the circle of the first CoP HoP members was expanded from researchers to practitioners. The plan is to reconvene these members in a future CoP, with notable

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upcoming opportunities including Water Innovation Europe 2026 in Copenhagen, Denmark, the environmental trade fair IFAT in Munich, Germany, the IWA World Water Congress and Exhibition in Glasgow, Scotland and the Euro Mediterranean Water Forum in Rome, Italy. These events cover a wide range of topics relevant to the CoPs, such as technological solutions for water efficiency, NbS, governance frameworks, gender dimensions in resource management, and integrated approaches to WEFE.

In May 2025, representatives from adelphi and the Maltese Energy and Water Agency (EWA) participated as panellists in a CoP webinar "Unlocking the Potential of WEFE Nexus Demonstrators", organized by the Prima-funded project WEFE4MED. It brought together researchers and practitioners from the nexus community to share and discuss insights, innovations, and best practices for implementing climate change adaptation measures to tackle WEFE Nexus-related challenges. To maintain communication with the CoP members, RETOUCH has registered on the WEFE4MED Knowledge Hub, a platform where WEFE Nexus-related information is shared. RETOUCH NEXUS uses this platform to inform the community about the launch of latest products from the project, such as the RETOUCH NEXUS Narratives podcast series.

CoPs are characterised by recurring interaction, and for this reason, the project plans to establish an overarching cross-project CoP on water governance. A potential target group, besides RETOUCH NEXUS, could include the sister projects of from the Water Governance 2027 Synergy Group, INNWATER and GOVAQUA, the RECREATE project, and the WEFE4MED project. An overarching CoP can serve as a platform for sharing experiences and lessons learned. It would help ensure research is communicated effectively to policymakers, and practitioners. By creating this umbrella of CoPs, projects can exchange knowledge, build capacity, and showcase tools extending their impact and sustainability beyond the project's lifetime.

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5. Overall Achievements and Lessons Learnt

This chapter distils the achievements and lessons learnt to date in the RETOUCH NEXUS project, focusing on stakeholder engagement, capacity development, within the case studies and on activities outside of the case studies. By synthesising what worked, what did not, and why, the chapter provides practical guidance on stakeholder engagement where case studies consistently show that WEFE action sits in a multi-faceted, multi-stakeholder landscape, requiring iteration and clear framing to stay actionable. The compilation is designed to be used by partners and peers to inform replication and cross-project collaboration going forward.

The project set out to transform water governance by piloting innovative engagement mechanisms, building knowledge and capacity, and fostering CoPs. Over 30 months, the project has delivered a substantial volume of stakeholder engagement activities, not only within these case studies but also at regional, national, and international levels. Partners have actively participated in and contributed to major European and global fora—including the Dresden Nexus Conference, the EGU General Assembly, and Europe-INBO—ensuring that the project's insights, methods, and tools are visible and influential beyond the immediate project sites.

5.1. Overall Achievements: Case Studies

The most common aims across case studies were to raise awareness on WEFE Nexus, encourage cooperation, and ensure transparency and two-way communication between stakeholders and the case studies. These goals are being realised through a diverse mix of formats, including workshops, awareness-raising events, trainings, and citizen-focused activities, each tailored to the local context. The project consistently engaged a broad spectrum of actors—regional authorities, industry, local government, researchers, and citizens—reflecting the cross-sectoral ambition of the project. Importantly, the project's influence has extended beyond the immediate cases, with partners contributing to European and international fora, thus connecting local insights to broader policy and research communities and enhancing the project's potential for upscaling and replication.

Within this overall framework, several case studies have pioneered innovative approaches with strong potential for replication and scalability. In Belgium, the WaterProof case at Tielt Business Park stands out for its use of a "water experience container." This demonstration allowed stakeholders to interact directly with water reuse technologies, demystifying technical solutions and fostering greater buy-in from businesses, local authorities, and farmers. The approach was complemented by a dedicated household water website and clear cost–benefit communication, enabling stakeholders to make informed decisions about water management. The integration of experiential learning and strategic communication makes this model highly replicable, particularly for regions seeking to promote practical adoption of water innovations.

Germany's Upper Main case introduced a WEFE Nexus game, delivered through the World Café method, which engaged young, international participants in exploring complex resource trade-offs. By embedding serious gaming within workshops, the team translated abstract nexus concepts into accessible, actionable insights, fostering creative problem-solving and cross-sector dialogue. This method is particularly well-suited for adaptation in other contexts and can catalyse learning and innovation in water governance settings where stakeholder diversity and complexity are high.

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Malta's approach combined business breakfasts, living-lab workshops, regular newsletters, and an online stakeholder feedback tool to move engagement from isolated events to sustained, cross-sector cooperation. This multi-channel strategy led to the emergence of potential CoP, demonstrating how digital and face-to-face formats can be integrated to build collaboration.

The Netherlands' HHNK case, faced with the challenge of reorienting its activities due to a change in the case study site, established a staged participatory pathway within the regional water authority's Freshwater Availability Programme. Through iterative workshops, facilitation skills development, and feedback loops, the Dutch case study embedded participation into institutional processes. This process-oriented model is particularly valuable for other water authorities seeking to mainstream participatory governance.

In Slovakia, the project achieved high and diverse participation by actively involving traditional farmers, vegetable and fruit growers, policymakers, and environmental groups in workshops focused on climate-resilient water management. By breaking down entrenched policy silos and fostering a shared understanding of the WEFE Nexus, the Slovakian team laid the groundwork for integrated action. This inclusive engagement model is essential for addressing complex resource challenges.

Spain's Júcar river basin case integrated RETOUCH NEXUS activities into longstanding basin dialogues, making use of established relationships while carefully pacing engagements to avoid stakeholder fatigue. This approach highlights the importance of leveraging existing networks and adapting engagement intensity to maintain stakeholder commitment over time.

The project partners have actively engaged at the EU and international level by participating in a range of high-profile conferences, networks, and policy platforms, significantly extending the project's impact beyond its immediate case studies. Notable examples include contributions to the Dresden Nexus Conference, the European Geosciences Union (EGU) General Assembly, the UNESCO International Conference, and the Europe-INBO International Conference. At these events, RETOUCH partners have presented project methodologies, shared emerging results, and facilitated discussions on the WEFE Nexus among policymakers, researchers, and practitioners from across Europe.

A key achievement has been the dissemination and testing of RETOUCH's practical tools and participatory methods—such as the Water Governance Monitoring App, cost-benefit analysis frameworks, and stakeholder mapping templates. This not only validates the project's approaches in different contexts but generated valuable feedback for further refinement. The project's open-access resources and training modules have been highlighted as replicable models for other EU-funded water governance initiatives, supporting capacity building and stakeholder engagement.

5.2. Capacity Building and Communities of Practice

Capacity development consists of reaching well beyond the six case studies to build skills and foster collaboration across the broader WEFE Nexus community. Over the first 30 months, more than 400 stakeholders—including local authorities, policymakers, researchers, business representatives, farmers, and civil society actors—have participated in at least 48 documented workshops, training sessions, and awareness-raising events. Within the case studies, trainings have focused on practical tools such as the Water Governance Monitoring App, which was introduced and tested both locally (e.g., in HHNK, Netherlands) and at major international events like the DNC. Key training topics have included the use of WEFE governance indicators (enabling participants to benchmark water

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governance across sectors and regions), stakeholder engagement methods, and qualitative research skills such as conducting semi-structured interviews. These sessions have been delivered in a variety of formats—including hands-on group work, hybrid online/in-person modules—to maximise accessibility and peer learning. Feedback from participants has been consistently positive, with many interested in joining CoP to continue collaborative learning. The iterative refinement of training materials, guided by real-world application and participant feedback, has ensured that capacity-building resources remain practical and relevant, supporting both immediate project needs and broader replication across the European water governance landscape.

The CoPs developed within the project have similarly extended their reach beyond the case studies. In addition to internal CoPs focused on scenario-building and knowledge exchange, partners have played active roles in external CoPs such as the WEFE Nexus Community of Practice at the European level and the NexusNet Regional Stakeholder Forum. These platforms have enabled the sharing of RETOUCH NEXUS methodologies with a broader audience, fostering mutual learning and supporting the upscaling of innovative approaches.

5.3. Lessons Learnt and Implications for the Future

A key lesson from the project is the central importance of adaptive management. Even with well-structured plans and detailed stakeholder maps, real-world engagement has required a flexible, iterative approach—constantly adjusting to shifting priorities, institutional constraints, and socio-political dynamics. The most successful activities were those that built in moments for reflection and adjustment, using participant feedback to refine objectives, formats, and the mix of participants. Clarity of purpose, combined with a willingness to experiment—such as piloting serious gaming, experiential demonstrations, and hybrid digital-physical engagement—helped ensure that engagements remained relevant, accessible, and impactful.

For effective stakeholder engagement, the project's experience highlights the value of practical, human-centred facilitation. Short, interactive formats sustained attention, while accessible language and creative, experiential tools broadened inclusion and improved uptake of scientific insights. Methods like World Café and role-play proved particularly effective for engaging younger and more diverse audiences, and creative communication approaches, including theatre and podcasts, sparked interest and sustained involvement. At the same time, teams needed to plan for participation equity, manage stakeholder fatigue, and prepare contingency strategies for disruptions—such as reframing content into alternative formats like podcasts during extreme events. Bringing in under-represented groups, such as farmers and NGOs, was essential for balancing perspectives and refreshing the stakeholder mix.

The need to calibrate participant composition was another recurring lesson: balancing broad outreach with focused, decision-oriented sessions allowed for both inclusivity and effective progress. Persistent challenges—such as stakeholder fatigue, documentation and data gaps, and political or regulatory sensitivities—were best addressed through pragmatic planning, transparent communication, and evidence-based sessions. For example, local mapping and hands-on workshops helped narrow data gaps, while hybrid and success-story-driven sessions lowered barriers for policymakers and under-represented groups.

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From a governance perspective, the project found that simple, accessible translation of science to policy should be the default, supported by iterative, context-sensitive participation plans and clear timelines. Practical formats—like printed-map workshops, hybrid sessions, and cross-project linkages—accelerated learning and widened inclusion. Where challenges persisted, targeted workarounds proved effective: rotating engagement formats reduced fatigue, structured dialogue and co-creation workshops clarified trade-offs and priorities, and piloting with clear monitoring and cost–benefit analysis helped build the case for innovation in highly regulated settings.

In terms of economic instruments, careful framing was essential. Water pricing, for instance, emerged as a sensitive yet effective entry point for governance reform when introduced transparently and with early stakeholder consultation. The science-policy interface was another area of strength, with ongoing dialogue between researchers and policymakers—such as in the Júcar River Basin—fostering shared knowledge and supporting evidence-based decision-making. Stakeholders also emphasised the need for flexible policies, stronger institutional coordination, and adaptive frameworks to address water scarcity and climate extremes.

Looking ahead, the focus for the next 18 months will be on consolidating the most effective engagement mechanisms, formalising Communities of Practice with clear scopes and actionable knowledge products and embedding training outputs into case workflows. Priority actions include completing and documenting innovative mechanisms piloted in each case, preparing concise guides for replication and upscaling, and ensuring that case insights continue to inform the design of multi-level governance schemes and economic instruments. Each case will also prepare briefs outlining success factors, barriers, and enabling conditions for upscaling. Taken together, these lessons and approaches provide a practical playbook for the next phase of RETOUCH NEXUS and offer valuable guidance for peers working on WEFE Nexus, water governance, and stakeholder engagement across diverse contexts.

In terms of each case study, the following recommendations are provided to strengthen future stakeholder engagement and address some of the challenges encountered.

Belgium (WaterProof, Tielt and other Business Parks)

- *Broaden civil society and end-user participation by making use of citizen engagement tools. In close cooperation with WP3, highlight the costs and benefits of holistic WEFE Nexus innovations to policy makers*.
- *Address regulatory barriers by advocating for clearer monitoring frameworks and financial guidance, with stakeholder input, to overcome strict rainwater legislation that limits innovation uptake.*
- *Formalise long-term collaboration by moving beyond awareness and episodic cooperation to establish sustained partnerships and co-management structures.*
- *Enhance data collection and communications by strengthening monitoring systems and ensuring transparent communication, making water-energy linkages more tangible to diverse stakeholders.*

Germany (Upper Main, Bavaria)

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- *Expand stakeholder diversity by implementing deliberate outreach and incentives to include private sector, civil society actors, marginalised groups addressing the current limitations to inclusive governance.*
- *Balance participation equity by overcoming the challenge of predefined stakeholder groups through the introduction of flexible and adaptive participation models and formats.*
- *Strengthen policy impact by improving mechanisms that link stakeholder dialogue outcomes with policy and regulatory decision-making, focusing on policymakers through targeted formats such as training on WEFE Nexus indicators.*
- *Scale up successful innovative formats by formalising and replicating engaging methods such as serious games and role-play in other cases and contexts.*

Malta (Maltese River Basin District)

- *Increase WEFE awareness among broader public:* Despite efforts, public understanding remains limited; enhanced educational campaigns and simpler messaging are needed.
- *Sustain the momentum of CoPs by establishing formal governance, clear objectives, and resource support, while leveraging the recurring nature of the target group—for example, through a 'train-the-trainer' concept that multiplies knowledge via this fixed group.*
- *Broaden the stakeholder base by expanding involvement to include underrepresented groups such as youth, women, and marginalised communities.*
- *Leverage data gaps by using identified knowledge gaps as entry points for collective action, supported by targeted capacity building and transparent data sharing.*

Netherlands (Hoogheemraadschap Hollands Noorderkwartier – HHNK)

- *Improve multi-level coordination by strengthening collaboration beyond regional authorities to include national and local stakeholders, involving civil society—for example, through a roadmap and the provision of useful tools for participation.*
- *Address power dynamics and capacity constraints by facilitating inclusive dialogue that accounts for different stakeholder influence and skill levels.*
- *Enhance documentation and monitoring by systematically tracking engagement outcomes to inform adaptive management.*
- *Make engagement more inclusive by expanding beyond technical experts to civil society and end-users for a richer understanding of local needs.*

Slovakia (South-Western Slovakia)

- *Strengthen practical policy integration by engaging decision-makers more strategically, as policy and regulatory changes incorporating WEFE Nexus thinking remain limited.*
- *Overcome structural barriers by addressing land fragmentation and under-invested irrigation infrastructure through stakeholder-driven investment and policy coordination.*

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- *Strengthen cross-sectoral understanding and cooperation among stakeholders, especially farmers' associations based on already conducted events, for example, by forming a CoP.*
- *Manage participation quality by reducing workshop overload and enhancing the depth of engagement.*
- *Build more inclusive coalitions by bringing in youth, women, and NGO voices to strengthen social equity in governance.*

Spain (Júcar River Basin)

- *Prevent stakeholder fatigue by rotating engagement formats and pacing to maintain enthusiasm and avoid overburdening participants, using economic scenarios (WP3) as a starting point to appeal to new target groups.*
- *Increase representation diversity by ensuring the inclusion of marginalised sectors and interests for a more balanced negotiation of priorities.*
- *Enhance facilitation quality by employing capable facilitators who can manage conflicting priorities and maintain constructive dialogue.*
- *Strengthen the link between economic instruments and stakeholder acceptance through transparent discussions on water pricing and incentives to build trust.*

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RETOUCH NEXUS

REsilienT water gOvernance Under climate CHange within the WEFE NEXUS

Deliverable D2.4

Annex on Tools, Templates, and Guidelines

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Date (30/09/2025)

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RETOUCH NEXUS

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Abbreviations

AI	Artificial Intelligence
CoP	Community of Practice
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EU	European Union
EWA	Energy and Water Agency
GA	General Assembly
HHNK	Hoogheemraadschap Hollands Noorderkwartier
KPIs	Key Performance Indicators
MSPs	Multi Stakeholder Partnerships
MYP	Meaningful Youth Participation
NCV	Non-violent communication
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RBO	River Basin Organisation
VR	Virtual Reality
WEFE	Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystems
WG2027	WaterGovernance2027
WP	Work Package

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1. Introduction to the annex

The annex is a vital part of Deliverable D2.4, providing essential tools, templates, and guidelines to assist case studies and other interested stakeholders in planning and implementing effective stakeholder engagement activities. Designed to offer practical support, the annex ensures that users have access to resources that streamline coordination, enhance reflection, and promote best practices in engagement.

Firstly, the annex includes in **chapter 2** an Excel file for activity planning. This versatile tool enables project managers, coordinators, and case study teams to systematically organise, structure, and track both planned and completed activities. Its purpose is to help users maintain a clear overview of ongoing processes, ensuring nothing is overlooked and facilitating smooth project management.

In addition, the annex features in **chapter 3** an evaluation questionnaire for stakeholder engagement activities. This questionnaire is a valuable resource for project coordinators and case study leads, allowing them to reflect on the effectiveness and outcomes of their engagement efforts. The insights gathered can be used for internal reports and to generate content for social media channels, enhancing transparency and communication.

The annex contains in **chapter 4** a comprehensive document called “Stakeholder Engagement Approaches and Guidelines for WEFE Nexus and Beyond.” This document provides in-depth guidance on stakeholder engagement and is complemented by a curated list of 16 tools in **chapter 5.** Each tool is accompanied by explanations on their application. These resources are designed to support the development of inclusive and impactful engagement strategies, both within the Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystems (WEFE) nexus context and beyond.

Finally, **chapter 6** provides a guide for a follow along exercise designed to guide users through the process of quantifying nexus-smart water governance. Drawing on the indicator workshop conducted within the Dutch case study, this chapter outlines step-by-step instructions for using the RETOUCH NEXUS Indicator Application.

Together, the materials in the annex equip users with the means to plan, execute, and evaluate stakeholder engagement activities effectively, contributing to the overall success and sustainability of their initiatives.

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2. Activity planning

Table 4: Case study's activity planning

Case Study Name										
Verification				Engagement Activities		Engagement Activities				
						Engagement Formats				
Activity conducted (yes)	Within the original timeline (yes)	If the activity was not conducted within the original timeline, please explain why.	Title of activity	Goals	Work packages and tasks addressed	Workshop	Training	Training on Indicators	Citizen Engagement	Awareness Raising

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Case Study Name											
Engagement Activities									Communities of Practice		Are you using innovative engagement mechanisms? If yes, what?
Set Up			Number of Participants				Time		Do you need a CoP	Role of CoPs	
Online	In-person	Hybrid	Stakeholders	Women	Experts	Number	Month	Duration			

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3. Evaluation questionnaire on stakeholder engagement activities

Note on the questionnaire

The online Questionnaire on Stakeholder Engagement Activities is designed by the work package leaders of WP2 (adelphi) and WP5 (EQY) for the six RETOUCH NEXUS case study leaders. The questionnaire aims to organize, support, and track the preparation and evaluation of stakeholder engagement activities. It will be used by EQY, TUM and adelphi for documentation purpose.

Case studies are asked to answer all questions in the questionnaire and upload it on their respective SharePoint folder within one week after the implementation of the stakeholder engagement activity.

1. General information

Case study name:	
Name of stakeholder engagement activity:	
Venue:	
Date and Duration:	
Contact person:	

2. Stakeholder engagement activity

Please describe the stakeholder engagement activity**.** In what context did the activity take place? What is the concept? What actions were taken during the activity? What are specific objectives or goals? (150 – 200 words)

Set up: ☐ Online ☐ In-person ☐ Hybrid

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What are the overall goals of the activity?	
☐ Inform about RETOUCH NEXUS project ☐ Raise awareness among stakeholders ☐ Creative communication strategies ☐ Close data gaps	☐ Encourage stakeholder cooperation ☐ Problem solving ☐ Provide feedback on project results ☐ Other: _____

Please select the format of the activity.	
☐ Workshop ☐ Training ☐ Indicator Training ☐ Citizen Engagement ☐ Awareness Raising	☐ Community of Practice ☐ Podcast Episode ☐ News Article ☐ Other: _____

Please select which stakeholder groups participated in the activity and add the number of participants.	
☐ Industry / business partners: _____ ☐ Innovators: _____ ☐ EU Institutions: _____ ☐ National Authorities: _____ ☐ Regional authorities: _____ ☐ Local authorities: _____ ☐ Civil society: _____ ☐ Citizens: _____ ☐ Research communities: _____	☐ Specific end-users' communities (e.g. farmers): _____ ☐ Associations: _____ ☐ International organisation (e.g. UN body, OECD, etc.): _____ ☐ Investors: _____ ☐ Other (e.g. women and youth): _____

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Were women, youth, and other vulnerable groups part of the activity? If yes, please provide more information on how they were included. If not, please explain why. (150 – 200 words)

Were innovative engagement mechanisms part of your activity? If yes, please provide further information on the innovation.	
☐ Digital Platforms and tools: ☐ Interactive workshops (e.g. school summer camps):	☐ Creative communication strategies (e.g. podcast episode ☐ Other (e.g. water experience container):

3. Communication and dissemination

What kind of communication channels were used to promote the activity?		
☐ Event	☐ Print materials	☐ Exhibition
☐ conference	☐ brochure	☐ Press release
☐ meeting	☐ leaflet	☐ Interview
☐ workshop	☐ posters	☐ social media
☐ internet debate	☐ stickers	☐ Media article
☐ round table	☐ banners	☐ TV/radio campaign
☐ group discussion	☐ Other:	☐ Newsletter
☐ Other:		☐ Other:

Please describe why you used the above selected communication channels. (100 – 150 words)

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What kind of dissemination activities are planned to be used to make knowledge and results of the activity available?	
☐ Clustering activities *(refers to the process of bringing together related projects or consortia to share knowledge, best practices, and resources to address common challenges, and enhance the overall impact of results)* ☐ Collaboration with EU-funded projects	☐ Conferences ☐ Education and training events ☐ Meetings ☐ Other scientific collaboration: _____ ☐ Other: _____

Please describe why you used the above selected dissemination activities with reference to a specific project output. (100 – 150 words)

4. Lessons learned, review and outlook

Which key results, and/or lessons learned resulted from the activity? Please add minimum three points. (150 – 200 words)

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What kind of materials are available to document the activity? Please upload them on Sharepoint under WP2 in your respective case study folder.	
☐ Agenda ☐ List of Participants ☐ Pictures	☐ Recordings ☐ Report ☐ Other: _____

Which next steps are planned? Please add minimum three points. (150 – 200 words)

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4. Stakeholder engagement approaches and guidelines for WEFE Nexus and beyond

Preface

This "Stakeholder Engagement Template for WEFE Nexus" serves as a hands-on practical manual to support the six European case studies in their ongoing process of planning and implementing stakeholder engagement activities, such as workshops, awareness raising activities, podcasts, and school summer camps. It serves as a guiding document for practitioners interested in effective and sustainable stakeholder engagement in the RETOUCH NEXUS project and beyond. It includes guiding sections on how to engage with stakeholders in the WEFE Nexus, as well as practical tools, checklists and templates for collaborating with stakeholders.

Who is this document for?

This guide is for everyone who is (in)directly involved in stakeholder engagement activities – as stakeholder, facilitator, leader or partner. It provides you with both the conceptual foundations as well as practical tools to foster successful partnerships.

Primary Target Group: Case Study owners and partners within WEFE Nexus

Secondary Target Group: Water governance professionals and practitioners (interested in) implementing stakeholder engagement activities especially in the WEFE Nexus but also beyond.

How to use this guide

- *This guide is structured around three key sections—the 3 Ps: Purpose, Principles, and Practice. The first section, "Stakeholder Engagement: What It Means and Why It Matters," introduces key definitions and explains the importance of stakeholder engagement within the WEFE Nexus. The second section, "Designing the Process," provides guidance on how to structure an effective engagement process—whether you're planning a one-day workshop or a longer-term initiative. It outlines core principles for success and shares best practice examples from the WEFE context. The third section, "From Design to Practice," walks you through the typical steps of stakeholder engagement. It offers practical tips, addresses common challenges, and presents a set of tools to support planning and implementation.*

- *Note that there is a toolbox with 16 practical templates and step-by-step instructions in the appendix of this guideline document. You can use and complete these templates and get started right away, because this guide is, above all, a practical, hands-on tool rather than a theoretical treatise The document repeatedly refers to the (numbered) tools from #1-#16, often with the symbol of a light bulb.*

- *Feel free to use the guide as needed. If you want to start from scratch and remind yourself (and others) why stakeholder engagement is important, read the first chapter. Are you already in the middle of the process and looking for inspiration for your next workshop? Then feel free to jump straight to the tools. Keep in mind, however, that it is still recommended to work*

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through the guide step by step, as the recommendations at the end are based on the previously developed strategy.

Questions this guide will answer

- *How to address existing challenges within the case studies with regards to stakeholder engagement*
- *How to design and facilitate improved stakeholder engagement activities in the WEFE Nexus processes and beyond*
- *How to find suitable and innovative stakeholder engagement tools for your specific case example*
- *How to initiate and manage long-term stakeholder partnerships beyond the scope of the RETOUCH NEX project*

4.1. Purpose – Stakeholder engagement: What it means and why it matters

Defining stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder engagement means informing, listening to, or collaborating with stakeholders of an organization or project. It can also be a combination of all three. Depending on the level and intensity of the process, stakeholder engagement can be an overarching framework or individual components of that framework. As preparation for the actual engagement activity, the process includes identifying, mapping and prioritizing stakeholders (and their needs). This is the basis to develop the best strategy on how to engage them and to make the best use of available resources. It goes without saying that it is not just about efficiency; stakeholder engagement helps to proactively (and preventively, before a potential conflict arises) consider the needs and desires of anyone who has a stake in an organization or project to ensure long-term success.[1] In the case of the RETOUCH NEXUS project, each case study engages with their own circle of stakeholders that were mapped and described at the beginning. The description included an overview of the sectoral affiliation of stakeholders involved (water, energy, food, ecosystem) as well as the type of their relation to each other (joint interest, cooperation, conflict).

In a nutshell, stakeholder engagement means:

- the process by which an organization involves people who may be affected by the decisions it makes or can influence the implementation of its decisions
- proactive interaction and collaboration with individuals or groups affected by a project or business activity
- understanding, involving and responding to expectations and concerns to ensure the success of the project or operation

[1] https://www.smestrategy.net/blog/stakeholder-engagement-management-for-strategic-planning

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Who can be a stakeholder?

Stakeholders are not just the general public, they are specific groups of people or individuals, each with different needs. A stakeholder is anyone who has a stake in your organization, project or activity, either through interest, influence or both. In the WEFE Nexus, depending on the scope of the project, stakeholder groups can range from government and policy makers (like ministries or departments of water, energy, agriculture, and environment), to private sector (such as agribusinesses, water utilities or technology providers), to civil society and local communities (such as farmers, civil society organisation (CSOs), non-governmental organisation (NGOs), or residents), to universities and research institutions, international organizations, as well as consumers and the general public. In the RETOUCH NEXUS project, stakeholders from all these categories are engaged which not only broadens the circle of people involved but also enriches the quality of discussions, implementations, and upscaling around WEFE Nexus solutions. This diversity of potential stakeholders already shows why integrated governance and participatory planning are key in the WEFE Nexus approach. To identify the "right" stakeholders and develop a strategy for effective communication, a thorough analysis is necessary.

Why is it important to engage stakeholders?

When done well and at the right time, stakeholder engagement can improve connection, trust, and buy-in for your key initiatives. It goes beyond merely informing stakeholders, because they themselves can be actively involved as experts by providing information that was previously not known. Moreover, well selected stakeholders can also give feedback on the feasibility of a project or activity to ensure that planning does not fail reality and that needs are met. For example, in the context of modelling, which is done a lot in the case studies Germany and Spain, stakeholders can assess different scenarios in which water is used more sustainable through the implementation of economic incentives and policies. Bringing consent and reservations to light and ensuring that diverse perspectives from politics, water providers, and users are considered in decision-making can have tremendous effects. Furthermore, stakeholder engagement can foster transparency and mutual understanding by identifying and mitigating potential risks and conflicts at an early stage, including uncertainty, dissatisfaction, disengagement, and reservation to change.

Effective engagement also enhances communication, minimizes resistance, and helps align stakeholder expectations with project goals. By actively involving those who are affected by or can influence a project, projects or organizations can gain valuable insights, and create more sustainable, widely supported outcomes even in complex contexts. In summary, stakeholder engagement can have many positive effects:

- a better understanding of the stakeholders and project risks
- improved acceptance of decisions among all parties
- more effective management of stakeholder expectations

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- more success through increased trust and goodwill

Stakeholder engagement in the WEFE Nexus

Since 2010, the WEFE Nexus approach has been adapted in various regions and in different programs and projects. The community is actively working towards integrating water, energy, food, and ecosystem considerations into policy and practice. Much has already been achieved, for example, common financing and funding schemes, tools, frameworks and dialogue platforms. Besides the RETOUCH NEXUS project and its sister projects GOVAQA and INNWATER, recent examples include the RECREATE project, the WEFE Nexus international conference in Rabat in February 2025, the annual Dresden Nexus Conference as well as online platforms such as The Water, Energy & Food Security Resource Platform or the WEFE4MED Knowledge Hub. These examples are part of the outreach and engagement strategy of the RETOUCH NEXUS project.

Stakeholder engagement in the WEFE Nexus is especially critical due to the complex, interconnected nature of resources and services. As mentioned in Deliverable 2.1 (p. 5), we need water in all areas of life and sectors, otherwise our ecosystem would collapse. At the same time, various actors from different sectors have their own vested interests in this increasingly scarce resource while climate change is exacerbating this scarcity. To ensure that European countries are well prepared and promote robust, integrated, sustainable, inclusive and up-scalable water governance practice, it becomes more and more important to involve stakeholders systematically and as early as possible. This is why stakeholder engagement is a key component of RETOUCH NEXUS building on the WEFE Nexus.

As mentioned in Deliverable 2.1 (p. 56) "…stakeholder engagement in the RETOUCH NEXUS case studies aligns with different spheres of influence and interests, with a range of stakeholders representing societal, government, private, and research sectors. Collaboration, coordination, and proactive outreach are essential to address common interests, potential conflicts, and foster effective engagement for sustainable water management."

Stakeholder engagement provides the basis for participatory decision-making and integrated planning. However, there are still major reservations within the WEFE sectors, as stakeholders fear to lose decision-making power and that it causes additional effort to involve other sectors in decision-making process. Stakeholder engagement can help to resolve this misunderstanding. First, by making processes of collaboration more effective and efficient in the long term. Second, it helps to raise awareness for the opportunities of a WEFE Nexus approach, not only because different sectoral perspectives are heard, but also to emphasize that the WEFE Nexus itself offers a solution to the dilemma of increasingly scarce resources. Third, stakeholder engagement can help to clarify roles and responsibilities, especially at political level and opens opportunities for exchanging perspectives and interests: What are the priorities of each stakeholder? What matters most? What aspects are negotiable? And what shared goals can we work toward? Forth, stakeholder engagement also helps build bridges between diverse stakeholder groups—for example, exploring how research can inform policy and practice, and how this knowledge can be effectively communicated to practitioners such as farmers. Due to growing application and recognition of the WEFE Nexus approach, it also leverages new funds and funding sources which did not exist before. And again, stakeholder engagement plays

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a central role, as it represents the common ground on which all collaborations – including financial ones – are built. Finally, ongoing interaction fosters a two-way exchange of knowledge: not only from the RETOUCH project to stakeholders, but also from policy and practice back into research. This dynamic was evident for example in the Netherlands case study, where a workshop on stakeholder participation was organized from project side to facilitate such engagement.

In a nutshell, stakeholder engagement in the WEFE Nexus helps to

- bring people and different WEFE Nexus voices together
- develop a common understanding on how to best manage our resources
- inform and raise awareness for the added value of the WEFE Nexus approach

4.2. Principles – Designing the process

Key principles for successful stakeholder engagement[2]

The content of this subchapter 2.1 is largely adapted from [Brouwer, H., Woodhill, J., Hemmati, M., Verhoosel, K., & van Vugt, S.] (2019), who provide a comprehensive overview of seven principles that make multi stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) effective (p. 40 ff). Some of the seven principles have been applied, summarized and rephrased to suit the context of this document and of RETOUCH NEXUS.

Navigate power dynamics

Politics and underlying power structures play a major role in managing the WEFE Nexus. Power can bring about change. However, what matters is how it is used and towards what end – especially when looking at it from a less powerful position. Power dynamics will inevitably play a role in any stakeholder engagement process. How you deal with them will influence the levels of trust, openness, and overall legitimacy of the process. If you want to bring about transformative change means that you need to be aware and in a best-case scenario also tackle the underlying issues that have created power differences. An example could be to give small-scale farmers access to information about market prices. Another possibility is to address often neglected target groups through a conscious choice of media. For example, young people through a podcast series such as RETOUCH NEXUS Narratives. Finally, the opening of spaces for certain target groups, such as women is another option. Be aware that powerful stakeholders could capture the process and further disadvantage already disempowered stakeholders (Brouwer et al., 2019, p. 80). If women or farmers cannot speak freely in mixed groups due to power imbalances, organizing separate discussion rounds for them can help.

[2] Adapted from: Brouwer, H., Woodhill, J., Hemmati, M., Verhoosel, K., & van Vugt, S. (2019). *The MSP guide: how to design and facilitate multi-stakeholder partnerships*. (3rd ed.) Practical Action Publishing. https://edepot.wur.nl/543151

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While this doesn't solve the underlying issues, it allows voices and perspectives that might otherwise be missed to be heard.

If you include prior work with less influential stakeholders, you can ensure that they participate more meaningfully and take part in a dialogue with those with more power. At the same time, you may need to work with more privileged groups to raise awareness and increase their willingness to share and delegate power. Moreover, language and phrasing play a central role in shaping, maintaining, or challenging power structures. Try using different words (instead of 'power' talk about politics or contributions so that power structures are not reinforced by the choice of words). And keep in mind, that in some cases, terms can have a different meaning when translated. Apart from that, when scientific or technical language is used (as it is often the case in the WEFE Nexus context) make sure that it is accessible to the target audience – no matter whether you are talking to a politician, a farmer or a tenant. (Interim) results should always be communicated in plain language. Avoid acronyms (or explain them if they cannot be avoided), use short sentences, visual aids, like infographics or videos and engage local intermediaries whenever possible.

In the context of the WEFE Nexus, differing expectations, interests, and power dynamics inevitably converge. These tensions exist both vertically—from individuals, such as residents and farmers to regional organizations and national political institutions—and horizontally, across the WEFE Nexus sectors. Increasing resource scarcity and the impacts of climate change demand a departure from siloed approaches, urging us to adopt more integrated and holistic strategies. The WEFE Nexus offers a valuable framework for facilitating the transition towards a future in which we learn to live well with limited resources.

See conflict as an opportunity for growth

Conflict is inevitable and normal in any multi-stakeholder process. We talk about conflict when parties or individuals have genuinely different interests and struggle over them. When facilitating a process with different stakeholders try to understand and work with the underlying causes. You cannot ask other people to change their beliefs. But you can achieve that benefits and synergies are becoming obvious and more likely to choose than following the old path, characterised by sector singularity. Therefore, support people in becoming aware of their beliefs and the beliefs of others. Through dialogue, we can provide a safe place for people to shift their perspectives. Also don't be afraid of conflict, we naturally surround ourselves with people from *our bubble*, but if we want to work towards systemic change, we will also need to deal with other perspectives, so dare to disagree!

External facilitation: In some cases, it might be advisable to get an external moderator or mediator to support you as a third party with no stake in the conflict or process. Advantages range from impartiality and fairness to improved communication and focus. The Maltese case study, for example, engaged an external facilitator for all their workshops to support the process with the necessary distance and neutrality as the invited stakeholder group was very diverse – ranging from public and private institutions over all WEFE sectors – and as such their interests as well.

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Useful Tools: #3 Six Thinking Hats, #4 The Wheel of Multiple Perspectives

Facilitate clear communication

People being able to communicate with each other in an open, respectful, constructive and empathetic way is one of the key factors of a successful stakeholder engagement process.

> Non-violent communication (NVC) is a communication approach developed by Marshall Rosenberg that focuses on fostering understanding, empathy, and connection. It encourages individuals to express their feelings and needs without blame or judgment, while also actively listening to others' emotions and needs. NVC emphasizes using "I" statements, avoiding defensive or accusatory language, and seeking collaborative solutions to resolve conflicts peacefully.[3]

Ensure that you invest time in understanding the different views of the problem and their underlying assumptions. People often assume that all stakeholders understand the problem or issue in the same way, but it can be seen rather differently. So rather than moving too quickly to the solution and possible strategies, dare to spend time analysing the problem. There are various approaches, for example you can play through the scenario by asking “what is the worst thing that can happen?”. As a facilitator, help participants to identify, understand, and create awareness about communication patterns. Help your stakeholders to become active listeners and break bad habits (Brouwer et al., 2019, p. 100). Help your participants to recognize and acknowledge their emotions and those of others. It can be difficult to listen properly when you are triggered emotionally. Try to build trust and resolve conflicts through open communication and increasing understanding of the different points of view.

Useful Tools: #2 SWOT Analysis, #3 Six Thinking Hats, #4 The Wheel of Multiple Perspectives, #5 Power Ranking, Role Plays

Promote participatory learning

Participatory learning happens when stakeholders learn from each other’s experiences to solve problems and innovate. You could think of the process as a play (or a battleground) for dealing with strategic challenges (Brouwer et al., 2019, p. 109). Create learning environments that are safe but challenging enough to inspire people to think outside the box. If divergent groups come together, choose a neutral location. Include group work and peer-to-peer learning such as in a community of practice (CoP), to emphasize learning with and from stakeholders, not just delivering information to

[3] https://www.scienceofintelligence.de/the-power-of-non-violent-communication/

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them. Jumping too early to decisions and action will hinder the learning process. Remember that learning is not only about building capacity it is also about innovation: understanding the challenge, identifying new options, and testing until something works. Use creative methods like social media or visual harvesting. When collecting feedback, play with different variations, like oral/written, anonymous/public, online/offline, and more.

Support systemic change

When it comes to systemic change, we know that human systems are complex and will not change overnight. This is both good and bad news. You don't need to expect to bring about change in the shortest possible time, because it's simply not feasible. So, stay realistic here, systemic change is complex, takes time, and only works if all relevant stakeholders are involved. In the context of RETOUCH NEXUS, systemic change is achieved through a holistic perspective – not only on different sectoral stakeholders but also by (a) taking into account the lived realities of the six case studies, by (b) analysing governmental processes, and finally by (c) working on economic models to identify new strategies on how to achieve sustainable water use across Europe with spillover effects beyond.

As mentioned in the beginning, on a broader level, the WEFE Nexus community is actively working towards integrating water, energy, food and ecosystems to foster systemic thinking. Achievements include common funding schemes, tools, frameworks and dialogue platforms. Also in RETOUCH NEXUS, through collaborative efforts, knowledge sharing, and practical demonstrations, different stakeholders are making remarkable progress in addressing complex challenges. Two compelling examples from the RETOUCH NEXUS illustrate how stakeholders are addressing the challenge of enhancing water resource management, in Malta the project partner Energy and Water Agency (EWA) is spearheading innovative efforts by integrating energy and water. Meanwhile, in the Netherlands the key stakeholder Hoogheemraadschap Hollands Noorderkwartier (HHNK) – the regional water authority – has established an entirely new department, the Freshwater Availability Program to meet the increasing demand for freshwater amid declining freshwater supplies. A participation process is a core component of their implementation strategy. part of their strategy to implement.

Another global example is South Africa that restructured its cabinet, merging several ministries to promote integrated governance. Notably, the Department of Water and Sanitation was combined with the Department of Human Settlements, and the Department of Agriculture was merged with the Department of Land Reform and Rural Development. These actions aimed to streamline responsibilities and enhance coordination across sectors. [4] These examples show how the WEFE Nexus community has catalysed systemic thinking and structural reforms to improve the resilience and sustainability of resource systems.

Acting systemically also means aligning change processes with the way in which systems evolve. So don’t expect things to go as planned, include multiple cycles of reflection, planning, and action so you can always adapt your plans to unexpected change. Recognize that change happens because of the

[4] https://www.gov.za/news/media-statements/president-cyril-ramaphosa-announces-reconfigured-departments-14-jun-2019

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actions of many different actors and try out a range of options and tools. Expect failure and learn from it.

Useful Tool: #15 Constellations

Best Practice and innovative approaches

Innovative approaches to stakeholder engagement in the WEFE Nexus are helping to make participation more inclusive, impactful, and forward-looking. Mobile engagement platforms such as the RETOUCH Indicators App or the GTI App bring data and information directly to communities, increasing accessibility in rural and under-served areas. Digital storytelling and podcasts like RETOUCH NEXUS Narratives humanize technical content by sharing real-world experiences from diverse voices across sectors reaching broader audiences. Tools like virtual reality (VR) offer immersive simulations of nexus trade-offs, helping policymakers, communities, and others visualize complex future scenarios as it was done by case study Netherlands with their VR nexus game. Youth engagement at kindergarten, schools, and universities through dedicated WEFE Nexus session is building long-term awareness and empowering the next generation of decision-makers. Meanwhile, CoPs on stakeholder engagement itself, or on WEFE Nexus monitoring approaches foster continuous learning across sectors through webinars and online forums. Finally physical spaces such as the WaterProof Experience container from case study Belgium are being used to simulate resource trade-offs, encouraging empathy, systems thinking, and collaborative problem-solving.

For more detailed insights, take a look at Deliverable 2.2 "Factsheets on Good Practices and Innovative Tools for Stakeholder Engagement and Public Participation" as well as on the innovation handbook in Deliverable 2.5 that will further describe innovative solutions and will be released in April 2026.

4.3. Practice – From design to practice

Typical steps

Identify and list stakeholders

In the first step you identify and list all actors who have a direct or indirect interest / stake in your project or activity (see subchapter on "Who can be a stakeholder"). It is important that you do not limit yourself in this first brainstorming phase, think outside the box and be creative, prioritization will only take place in the next step. In the RETOUCH NEXUS project, different pathways for stakeholder engagement were chosen. Some case studies engage different stakeholders on various occasions, which is advantageous to introduce new voices, respond to changing contexts, or transition to a new project phase or scale. Other case studies maintain engagement with the same stakeholder groups over a defined period to build trust and strong relationships. Long-term involvement also enables stakeholders to deepen their understanding of nexus issues, becoming more effective co-creators of solutions. Additionally, continuity helps preserve valuable institutional memory, allowing stakeholders to recall previous discussions, conflicts, and agreements.

Also take another look at previous deliverables for key considerations for stakeholder mapping and analysis based on case studies (D 2.1, p. 55) such as defining system boundaries, considering the scale

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and population of the case study area when identifying stakeholders and tailoring the stakeholder involvement based on the nature and focus of the project.

Assess influence / importance and level of impact

There are many ways to analyse and prioritize stakeholders, e.g. the Importance-Influence Matrix (see Tool #1 "Stakeholder Analysis") or the Stakeholder Onion that has been used in RETOUCH Deliverable 2.1. Tailored precisely to the project context, stakeholders have been classified according to their importance and interest to RETOUCH. While the first category 'key stakeholders' includes all those stakeholders that can use their skills or power to influence the RETOUCH case studies and without whose participation the targeted results cannot be achieved, the second category are 'primary stakeholders' who are directly affected by or have direct impact on the RETOUCH NEXUS challenges in respective the case study. The third category (basically the outer layer of the onion) are 'secondary stakeholders' who are only indirectly affected by nexus challenges. For further details, look at D2.1 Annex, p. 2.

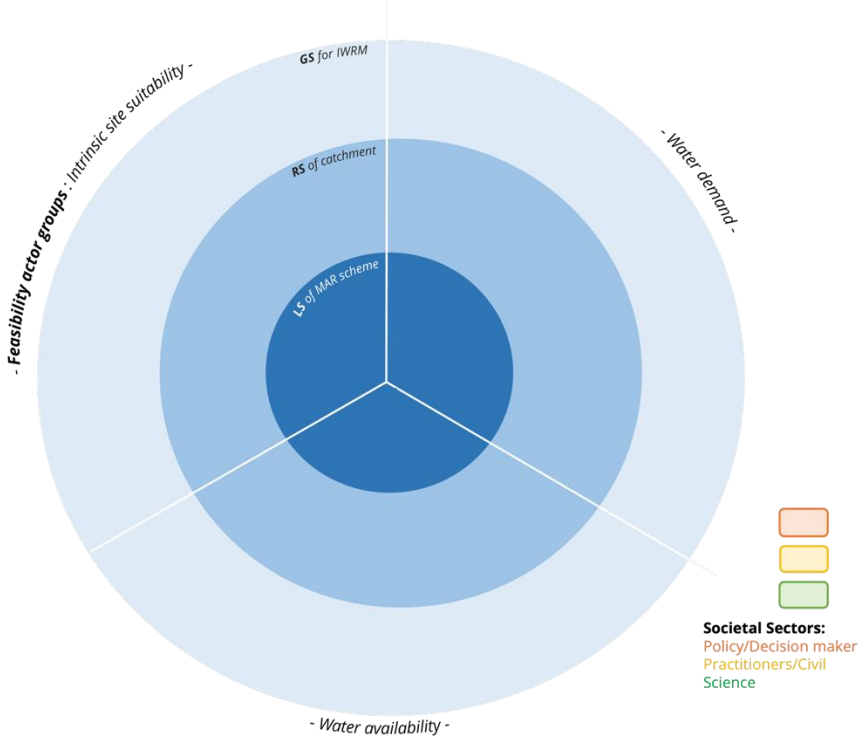

Figure 24: Template for Stakeholder Onion

Deliverable 2.1 (Chapter 3) shows the result of the Stakeholder Mapping Exercise for the different case studies. Traditional representatives from WEFE sectors include farmers, water utilities, river basin organisations (RBOs), environmental NGOs, and government authorities. These actors are directly responsible for managing or regulating resources, making their participation crucial for designing integrated and context-sensitive solutions. However, the stakeholder landscape is increasingly expanding to include groups beyond the conventional WEFE sectors. Greater attention is now being

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given to women and youth, who often face barriers to participation but bring vital perspectives and long-term sustainability insights. Business parks and private sector actors are emerging as important contributors, particularly in innovation and resource efficiency. Academic institutions also play a key role by generating knowledge, facilitating dialogue, and training the next generation of decision-makers.

Define level of engagement and the respective goal of the activity

After prioritizing the most important stakeholders, the next step is to define their appropriate level of engagement based on the project's goals and the stakeholders' roles. Engagement levels typically range from Inform (providing stakeholders with relevant information), to Consult (seeking their feedback), Involve (actively including them in decision-making processes), and Collaborate (partnering with stakeholders in shared decision-making and implementation). Clearly defining the level of engagement helps tailor activities to each group's needs and capacities, ensuring effective communication, meaningful participation, and stronger partnerships throughout the project. It is advisable to consider at the start of the project at which point in time which engagement level can best be strategically utilized to best support the project and its objectives.

→ Note that the level of engagement often decreases as the number of people increases, so be aware of what is more important to you: reaching as many people as possible or working together effectively?

Define engagement approaches and methods

There is a variety of stakeholder engagement approaches that can be used to reach different audiences and meet diverse needs. There are both classic and innovative, out-of-the-box formats, and both are important. Sometimes you don't have to reinvent the wheel, but it can be refreshing to try something new. The important thing is that you get started.

A website serves as a central hub for information and updates, while a newsletter provides regular, targeted communication to keep stakeholders informed. Podcasts offer an accessible and engaging format to share stories, insights, and expert perspectives. Questionnaires and Online Surveys are useful tools for gathering feedback and understanding stakeholder priorities.

Some practical examples from RETOUCH NEXUS include the RETOUCH NEXUS project website, the RETOUCH NEXUS newsletter, the podcast series called RETOUCH NEXUS Narratives, a tailored questionnaire on Stakeholder Engagement Activities (to document what kind of activities have been carried out by the different case studies and for what goal and with whom), a survey (case study Germany conducted a survey with representatives from different departments of the Government in Upper Franconia – responsible for water, agriculture, and ecosystems – and non-governmental stakeholders such as environmental organisations to receive feedback on vertical and horizontal coordination mechanisms which are currently in place).

While online tools are often used in the initial phase and for "information purposes", it is more effective to work together in person for a more intensive engagement. Workshops with 20-40 participants create interactive spaces for dialogue and co-creation. One innovative example is the so-

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called “WaterProof Experience container” from case study Belgium that has been developed to translate the lessons learned on water management from the WaterProof project on the business park Tielt Noord towards other business parks; it is a physical container which can be moved to different locations and people can enter it and explore sustainable/circular water use options in the context of business parks. When it comes to youth engagement, the case study Germany applied the WEFE Nexus Game on water abstraction fees with students, the case study Netherlands developed a farming game with VR glasses and case study Slovakia piloted the GTI app with students. Another, more long-term engagement mechanism is a CoP that fosters continuous learning and exchange among professionals. Examples from RETOUCH are the CoP with RECREATE project on stakeholder engagement itself; as well as the CoP following the Dresden Nexus Conference 2025 around WEFE Nexus monitoring approach, e.g. via the RETOUCH NEXUS indicators app,

You want to engage stakeholders, but you do not know where to start? Check out our template to contact stakeholders in the annex.

Tips and tricks: Facilitation of multi-stakeholder processes

Facilitating multi-stakeholder processes is no easy task, as it involves managing diverse, sometimes even opposing perspectives, interests, and goals. – not only among the target group but also within the relation between project partners and their key, primary, and secondary stakeholders. However, with the right mindset and tools, you can ensure that all voices are heard, and the group moves forward productively. Here are some tips and tricks to help you plan, manage and facilitate multi-stakeholder processes:

Set clear objectives and expectations

- Define the Purpose: At the outset of any activity (regardless of whether it is a one-day workshop or a process lasting several months) set a clear goal and ensure all stakeholders are on board. Clearly articulate what you want to achieve and why it matters to everyone involved. Here are some examples for objectives:
    - Align stakeholder priorities with national or regional WEFE Nexus strategies.
    - Explore the use of digital tools or modelling approaches for cross-sector scenario planning.
    - Map key stakeholders and identify synergies and conflicts in current resource use and planning strategies.
    - Share recent findings from pilot projects or research initiatives to get feedback for further development and discuss their relevance to local planning.

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A clear and realistic objective, which the participants have agreed upon, is essential, as it not only helps you choose the right methods and tools but also ensures that you do not lose focus during the process. As soon as the discussion goes in a different direction, keep reminding the participants of the (jointly) set goal. Make sure the goal is visualized (and visible) throughout the process. *Tipp: You can work with a so-called "idea basket" on a board or flipchart where you store topics and questions that come up during the process but are not necessarily related to the workshop goal. In this way you acknowledge it but are still able to stick to your plan.*

- Establish Ground Rules: Set clear expectations for behaviour and communication. These can include respecting different opinions, ensure active listening, and stay solution oriented.
- Ensure clear time management: Especially in short meetings and when there are stakeholders who like to talk a lot. Ensure a proper briefing (tell participants that you will need to cut them off after a defined amount of time to ensure a fair process for everyone) and remind speakers when they run out of time. You could also introduce a cards-based time keeping approach as part of the ground rules in the beginning. Whenever a participant exceeds the time, you hold up a (yellow, orange, or red) card.
- Clarify Roles: Make sure each stakeholder understands their role in the process, whether it is providing expertise, making decisions, or ensuring follow-up.

Build trust and inclusivity

- Foster Open Communication: Encourage transparency and honest dialogue. Let stakeholders voice their concerns, ideas, and perspectives without fear of judgment.
- Be Neutral: As a facilitator, it's crucial to remain impartial. Your role is to guide the process and support people in achieving common goals. In terms of conflicts of interest (e.g. because you possess another role within the discussion besides being a facilitator), assign another person with moderation such as an external facilitator.
- Engage All Voices: Ensure that every stakeholder can contribute. This can be challenging when there are power imbalances, so actively encourage quieter voices to participate (e.g. through different tools, group sizes, and constellations).
- Remain patient and flexible: Stakeholder processes can take time, especially when dealing with complex or sensitive issues. Avoid rushing the process by including time buffers in your planning. But never skip pauses as they are key for informal discussions and clarifications. Be prepared for the process to evolve as new stakeholders, issues, or perspectives arise. Flexibility is key to success.

Choose the right tools to structure the discussion

- Develop an agenda: After setting a goal, a well-structured agenda is critical for guiding the discussion and ensuring that all key topics are covered. Share it in advance so stakeholders can prepare and make sure it is obvious from the agenda where their explicit contribution is expected (e.g. by assigning responsibilities in each section).
- Use interactive tools: Include interactive and innovative tools for brainstorming and decision-making, to structure discussions and gather input. When the group is larger, break participants into smaller working groups to foster everyone's participation. This allows more focused and intimate conversations before reconvening with the large group.

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- Create Visuals: Visual tools like diagrams, charts, and mind maps can help to simplify complex discussions and ensure everyone is on the same page.
- Online Collaboration Tools: In case stakeholders are not in the same location, use online tools like Miro, Zoom, Slack, or Google Docs to facilitate communication and collaboration.
- Survey Tools: Use surveys (e.g., SurveyMonkey, Mentimeter, Google Forms) to gather input, measure satisfaction, or gauge opinions on specific issues.

Provide opportunities for reflection and feedback

- Check-in Regularly: Regularly seek feedback on how to improve, use tools like surveys or (anonymous) feedback to gather insights.
- Adjust When Needed: Be flexible and willing to adapt the process based on feedback to improve engagement or address emerging concerns.

Manage conflicts effectively

- Acknowledge Tensions: Tensions (or conflicts) are not uncommon in multi-stakeholder processes when competing perspectives come together. Typically, underlying conflicts arise when the space is there. This is challenging, but also a great opportunity for collaborative learning. Choose tools (like the #14 Circle of Coherence or #4 The Wheel of Multiple Perspectives) to recognize the conflicts early on and address them constructively. Encourage respectful debates that can lead to better solutions.

Keep the momentum going

- Assign Action Items and ensure accountability: After each session, make sure that specific actions are assigned to relevant stakeholders to keep the momentum going. Ensure that there's accountability. Follow up on actions and outcomes after the meeting (e.g. via a summarizing mail) to maintain engagement and ensure that commitments are being met.
- Document Outcomes: Summarize what has been decided and keep detailed records of decisions, discussions, action items and who is responsible for what. Share these with all stakeholders to ensure transparency and prevent misunderstandings.
- Communicate Next Steps Clearly: Make sure stakeholders are clear about the next steps and timelines.
- Create a Roadmap: If the process spans over a long time, create a roadmap or timeline to keep everyone aligned and informed. Break the process into manageable milestones and celebrate progress along the way.

Challenges within RETOUCH NEXUS and how to tackle them

In the face of climate change, breaking away from business-as-usual habits is essential to make space for new and more adaptive approaches. However, institutional settings—particularly within government—tend to evolve slowly and can be highly rigid, making it difficult to implement integrative frameworks like the nexus perspective overnight. Timing becomes crucial when sharing project

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results, as findings may touch on politically sensitive issues or highlight tensions between scientific insights and policy priorities, potentially sparking heated discussions (see also chapter on “How to engage stakeholders in a politically sensitive environment?” on p. 23). This can complicate stakeholder engagement, which is not always easy to position, especially when key political decisions have already been made or are pending.

As mentioned in D 2.1, the WEFE Nexus community had to deal with typical challenges related to the inclusion of marginalized groups. In some cases, stakeholder communication tends to be project-based and lacks a long-term communication strategy and platform, or the scope and purpose of engagement sometimes lack an integrated nexus approach. In other cases, the administrative framework is too complex leading to high costs.

> Deliverable 2.1 shows a comprehensive overview of typical challenges in stakeholder engagement within RETOUCH NEXUS (see chapter 1.1, p. 13).

Gender equity and social inclusion in the WEFE Nexus

The lack of representation of marginalized groups such as women is a critical weakness in many WEFE Nexus initiatives and is due to different reasons like power imbalances, communication barriers, accessibility issues, economic constraints, or resource dependency. Water issues are linked to gender, as women are mainly involved in water procurement at household level. In addition, women or youth often have fewer financial resources, making it harder to participate in unpaid engagement processes. Another obstacle are communication barriers, for example, youth may struggle to express their concerns in settings dominated by older, more experienced participants. Furthermore, power dynamics play a significant role. Often marginalized groups are sidelined, not invited or do not get the opportunity to speak. It is therefore important to create safe space where they can share their inputs and opinions.

It goes without saying that all groups should be included but especially in the development sector it is still the case that marginalized groups are seen as “beneficiaries” or “recipients” instead of experts in their own realities with vital insights into what works and what needs to change. The WEFE Nexus community suggests frameworks and tools for moving from resource-centric to more people-centric WEFE Nexus approaches in which stakeholder engagement plays a central role.[5]

While RETOUCH Deliverable 2.2 already presents some inclusive engagement mechanisms (p. 24-31), here are some recommendations on how to make your stakeholder engagement process more inclusive and sustainable.

Co-creation instead ticking boxes

Include representatives already in the conceptualization phase, not just during consultation or implementation. Identify and work with (intermediaries from) community-based, grassroots

[5] https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fuploads.water-energy-food.org%2Fresources%2F2.4_GESI_WEFE_Nexus_learning_module_FINAL_ENG.pptx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK

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organizations, youth networks, women's groups to co-design how engagement will take place. There are many tools for co-creation to build trust and relevance (see Tools and Templates).

In RETOUCH NEXUS, it is essential to recognize the diverse contexts in which the case studies operate, particularly the varying structural conditions. To address these differences and ensure more inclusive outreach, case studies can benefit from exploring alternative engagement formats—such as podcast series, virtual reality experiences, or educational collaborations with schools and universities—that cater to different audiences and access levels. Additionally, enhancing the visibility and participation of women remains a key priority. Examples such as a dedicated LinkedIn posts for International Women's Day or the WE-ACT webinar series highlight effective ways to spotlight female voices and leadership within the WEFE Nexus discourse.

Avoid Box-Ticking

Sometimes, due to donor requirements or time pressure and reporting purposes, the inclusion of youth, women and other vulnerable groups in development projects often ends up being tokenistic or "box-ticking". If you follow the following principles, you can avoid pseudo participation.

- Be aware and address the root causes of exclusion, like unequal power dynamics and discrimination.
- Go beyond simply asking marginalized groups for their opinions – provide them with knowledge and tools and the space to raise their concerns and influence decisions.
- Ensure that the voices of marginalized groups actively shape project design and outcomes.
- Establish robust systems of accountability to ensure that these groups' participation is not just symbolic but leads to real change in project design, policies, or outcomes.

Build capacity for participation

Partnering up with trusted organizations or individuals, NGOs, community leaders, grassroots movements or collectives often helps to ensure real participation and meaningful involvement. If you provide these (often voluntary) groups with capacity support like technical or financial support everyone could benefit even more. Practical services like childcare or transportation support could further enable participation. Pre-engagement trainings and mentorship programs are further possibilities to ensure that women, youth and other vulnerable groups can participate confidently and stay engaged.

Meet people where they are

This includes using easy (or local) language, engaging and visual tools. Consider also digital accessibility and flexible locations and times like meetings outside working or school hours and in community-friendly, safe, and accessible spaces. Combine offline and online options, consider social media or radio to reach wider audiences, especially in rural or low-connectivity areas.

Within the RETOUCH NEXUS project, there are numerous examples of engaging stakeholders in accessible and context-sensitive ways. For instance, a workshop with the government of Upper Franconia, Germany was conducted directly at their premises, fostering a sense of ownership and

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convenience. In the Netherlands, HHNK is consistently engaged through on-site visits, ensuring direct interaction with the local context. In Malta, the case study team rented a seminar room in a hotel to create a more personal and welcoming setting for stakeholder discussions. Meanwhile, the Belgian case study utilises a mobile container unit, allowing them to meet stakeholders at various locations across the country—bringing the project directly to the communities involved.

Create Safe and inclusive spaces

In some cases, it might make sense to collaborate with trained experts who ensure inclusive dialogue and actively mitigate power imbalances (since there may be tensions among diverse ethnic groups as well). Sometimes, hosting dedicated events for marginalized groups can allow more open and honest participation.

Two successful examples of external facilitation within RETOUCH NEXUS include the Malta case study, which brought in an external facilitator to guide discussions, and the Upper Main case study in Germany, where consultations with government agencies were effectively supported by a RETOUCH NEXUS project partner, but not by the German case study itself.

Monitor, Learn, and Adapt

Stakeholder engagement is a learning process for everyone involved. Try to learn from each engagement by obtaining and analysing feedback and adjust methods to be more inclusive over time. Tracking representation over time on who is participating (including factors like age, gender, ethnicity, disability, socioeconomic status) can provide interesting insights, but here too the focus should not lie on reporting objectives, but on doing the work better. Note that discussions around water management can be a real door opener for the empowerment of women if it is implemented in a context-specific manner, with a broader time perspective and in close cooperation with the target group and its environment.

The Meaningful Youth Participation (MYP) Toolkit[6] is a useful source as it outlines various levels of youth participation ranging from “Inform” to “Collaborate” and offers inspiring examples of youth participation at various levels.

How to engage stakeholders in a politically sensitive environment

In the WEFE Nexus, stakeholders often interact in a highly political context. It can be very crucial and sensitive to decide about how and whom to engage. Engaging stakeholders in a politically sensitive environment requires a careful, context-specific approach that prioritizes trust-building, neutrality, and risk mitigation. Begin by conducting a stakeholder and institutional analysis to understand power dynamics, interests, and potential risks. Who holds power – formally and informally? Work together with trusted intermediaries, respected local figures or community leaders to facilitate dialogue, and

[6] Meaningful Youth Participation Toolkit: https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/ed3002/NL%252BMFA%252BMeaningful%252BYouth%252BParticipation%252BToolkit%252BEnglish%252BEN%2520%25281%2529.pdf

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frame engagement around shared, non-controversial goals such as development, service delivery, or community well-being. Ensure confidentiality and provide safe spaces—virtual or in-person—for participation, especially for vulnerable or dissenting voices. Gradually build legitimacy and buy-in through transparent communication, inclusive processes, and small, confidence-building actions that demonstrate mutual benefit without triggering political backlash. Depending on the context, collaborate with local facilitators with local knowledge, or facilitators that are conflict sensitive, trauma-informed or trained in mediation.

A notable example of the challenges in stakeholder engagement can be seen in one of the case studies, which involved selecting a location for a wastewater treatment plant. This decision was highly political and sensitive due to its direct impact on residents, making it difficult to integrate broad stakeholder participation as many discussions took place behind closed doors. Such situations highlight the complexity of balancing political considerations with inclusive engagement processes. Similarly, trade-offs often arise between political decisions on water usage and distribution and the real needs of key stakeholders, such as agricultural actors. These examples underscore the importance of carefully designing stakeholder engagement strategies that navigate political sensitivities.

Data Protection in Stakeholder Engagement

Data protection and privacy are a fundamental part of stakeholder engagement as it aims at securing private and sensitive information. On a broader scale, interference with privacy can undermine public engagement in development and democratic processes and reshape how information flows through society. These concerns are equally relevant on a smaller scale—particularly in stakeholder engagement processes, whether conducted online or in person.

To foster a safe and trustworthy environment that encourages open, meaningful exchange, it is essential to consider appropriate data protection mechanisms early in the planning phase. The following three aspects are key to ensuring privacy and safeguarding participants:

1. Identify sensitive topics or data – such as personal details or confidential information.
2. Limit access and exposure – by controlling who can view or use the shared information (while at the same time considering transparency and reporting obligations in publicly projects)
3. Choose appropriate engagement methods – that align with the sensitivity of the information and the preferences of participants.

Transparency around documentation is also crucial. Participants should be clearly informed about any video recordings or photo documentation beforehand, with the option to consent or opt out. For example, this is important when recording podcast episodes, but also in relation to webinars. Decisions on whether and how to document an engagement process must be handled with care.

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Stakeholder engagement in formal and informal processes

While formal stakeholder engagement such as public consultations, official surveys or panels is often more mandated with clear procedures and documentations, informal processes such as community meetups or social media conversations tend to be more flexible, spontaneous and relationship driven. Formal engagement is structured, often mandated by policy or regulation, it provides transparency, accountability, and documented input at key project stages. In contrast, while informal engagement may lack formal documentation, it fosters trust, real-time feedback, and ongoing dialogue. Combining both approaches ensures not only compliance and legitimacy but also responsiveness and deeper stakeholder relationships.

Online, hybrid, and in-person settings

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, we've become accustomed to switching to online or hybrid formats. The advantages and disadvantages of the various formats are outlined below. Fortunately, we now have a choice again, so it makes sense to take a moment to choose the right format. We now have more options and can adapt the format even better to the context.

Table 5: Format of stakeholder engagement

	In-Person	Hybrid	Online
Outreach / Group size	+ More inclusive for those without digital access - Limited reach, especially across regions	+ Greater accessibility for diverse groups + Combines the reach of online with the depth of offline + Flexibility to adapt to participant needs	+ Increases reach, especially across geographies
Costs	- More expensive and time-consuming - Logistical complexity (venues, travel, visas, etc.)	-Technically complex to coordinate - Higher resource demands (both tech and facilitation) - Needs strong planning to ensure equity and engagement across both modes	+ Cost-effective (no travel/logistics) + Easier documentation and data collection

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	In-Person	Hybrid	Online
Level of engagement / Relationships	+ Builds stronger trust, rapport, and connection + Easier to manage sensitive or political discussions + Body language and informal interactions enhance communication	- Risk of unequal experience (online participants may feel sidelined)	-Digital divide: excludes those without access or skills -Attention fatigue and distractions - Lower personal connection/trust - Difficult for complex negotiations or emotional topics
Flexibility		*+ offers choice between physical and remote*	+ Easy to schedule and time-efficient + Allows asynchronous participation (e.g., surveys, forums) -Moderation is less flexible, because meticulous planning is important in online settings

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Strategies and further recommendations in the context of RETOUCH NEXUS

Within the framework of the RETOUCH project, the six case studies identified various challenges related to stakeholder engagement and developed strategies to address them. The following section provides a brief overview of current challenges—ranging from legal and financial barriers to issues related to target groups and engagement methods—alongside practical recommendations.

Table 6: Changes and strategies of stakeholder engagement

Type of challenge	Challenges Faced	Strategies adopted	Further ideas and recommendations
Legislative and governance Issues	Lack of willingness, because of already existing strong Flemish legislation	Show that the implementation of smart solutions and a more robust, sustainable and inclusive water governance might create co-benefits	• Map the legal landscape (start early by conducting a legal and regulatory review to identify specific laws or policies that restrict engagement) • Build alliances (work with stakeholders to advocate for legal or policy changes that enable more inclusive engagement) • Document and demonstrate impact (show how stakeholder engagement leads to better outcomes like policy effectiveness and greater public trust) • Use informal or parallel processes where formal engagement is restricted, consider alternative mechanisms like community forums or digital platforms
	Frequent political changes disrupt continuity, concepts and plans change with every election	Inviting all relevant policy makers (difficult)	
	Shift in the political agenda and (partly related) delays in the previous case study focus	Shift in focus towards the Freshwater Availability Program, leveraging existing stakeholder engagement activities and collaborating with proactive, input-driven contacts (plus more scope for nexus)	
Cost-related challenges	Fear of increasing costs	Smart and innovative solutions save costs in the long run	• Demonstrate cost-savings from other contexts, such as reduced conflict and litigation and implementation that tends to move faster and more smoothly.

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Type of challenge	Challenges Faced	Strategies adopted	Further ideas and recommendations
Target Group	Difficult to approach broader audience, because the very technical events attracted audiences with prior knowledge in the field Content is too scientific for non-scientific stakeholders	Organize additional events focusing on blue-green measures that are interesting for other groups of society (youth, women, elderly, minorities) Keep it simple	• Use target group specific channels, such as social media, work with influencers, collaborate with youth organizations, visit places where the target group is (for example, elderly are usually less mobile) • Use simple language that is accessible for a broader audience, avoid acronyms and test with intermediaries if content is understandable
	Engaging non-governmental stakeholders	Attend other stakeholder events within the study area	
	Lack of inclusion of minorities and vulnerable groups	Preparation of a specific workshop with women	
	Insufficient vertical and horizontal coordination and communication (Proposals and feedback from local authorities and stakeholder (e.g. farmers) are often ignored	Media involvement, innovative communication, stakeholder engagement events	
	Meetings are not interactive and engaging enough	Include professional moderator to ensure participatory and engaging meetings	• Try out unconventional formats and tools to engage these groups, highlight and communicate incentives for farmers to collaborate (illustrate where they can meet their primary (economic) objectives while also meeting project goals)
Methods	Little interest in RETOUCH NEXUS due to current state of the model development	Action year 2025 > Finalization of model(s)	• Try out innovative tools (some of them are also possible without external facilitation) to make meetings more interesting and fun
Other	Lack of specific focus of the case study	10 issue areas based on the interviews to be further explored and selectively implemented	• Show why and how RETOUCH NEXUS is / will be relevant to respective stakeholders in the future

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As can be seen in the table, stakeholder engagement within RETOUCH NEXUS faces a range of legislative, political, financial, and communication-related challenges. A major barrier is the lack of willingness to change existing governance structures, particularly where strong national or regional legislation is already in place. Frequent political shifts further disrupt continuity, often causing delays and changes in focus.

To overcome these issues, stakeholders are encouraged to map the legal landscape early on to identify engagement barriers, build alliances to advocate for policy reform and inclusive governance and leverage informal or alternative engagement channels where formal processes are limited.

Cost concerns also hinder participation, particularly due to fears that stakeholder engagement will drive up expenses. However, showcasing long-term cost benefits—like smoother implementation and reduced conflict—can counter this perception.

A key communication challenge lies in reaching broader audiences, as technical language and scientific framing tend to exclude non-experts. Solutions include simplifying language, avoiding jargon, and tailoring content to specific groups, using inclusive channels, such as social media or community-based events, to connect with youth, minorities, and the elderly as well as organizing targeted workshops to engage underrepresented groups, particularly women and farmers.

Finally, weak horizontal and vertical coordination remains a barrier, with local feedback often ignored. This calls for more interactive formats, better facilitation, and innovative tools to make engagement more dynamic and inclusive.

Many of these challenges are common and can be observed across different contexts. Regardless of how advanced your process is, obstacles are inevitable. Human systems are inherently complex, and meaningful change takes time. It is also important to recognize that not all challenges are within your direct control. Tools like the SWOT analysis (see **Tool #2 SWOT Analysis**) can help identify effective strategies and clarify your sphere of influence. This strategic clarity not only supports progress but can also make stakeholder engagement more rewarding and even enjoyable.

Don’t be afraid to make mistakes, if you stick to the recommended tools and strategies, your stakeholder engagement activities will gradually become more resilient, inclusive and impactful.

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4.4. Contact form for stakeholders

You can use and adapt this form if you want to reach out stakeholders via email:

Subject Line: You are invited: *(Event Name and Date)*

Dear *(Stakeholder Name / Organization Name),*

we are pleased to invite you to an upcoming event hosted by *(your Organization/Project Team),* as part of the RETOUCH NEXUS project, which is dedicated to tackling the growing challenge of water scarcity by promoting an integrated WEFE Nexus approach that supports the EU water economy and relies on ecological and social considerations.

Your involvement as a stakeholder is incredibly valuable to the success of this project, and we'd be honoured by your presence at our upcoming event.

- Event Name
- Date
- Time
- Location
- Purpose (Short sentence about what the event aims to achieve)

At this event, you'll have the opportunity to *(List benefits depending on your activity)*

- Hear project updates or impact stories
- Network with other stakeholders and collaborators
- Provide feedback or participate in planning

Please confirm your attendance by (deadline date) using the form below *(it can be advisable to use a Google Form if you plan with more than 20 participants*) or by replying directly to this message.

We truly appreciate your continued support and interest in [Project Name]. We look forward to your participation and valuable insights at the event.

Warm regards,
(Your Name, position, organisation, contact details)

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5. Tools and templates

Selected Tools for small groups (up to 25 people) and big groups (25-100 people)

1. Stakeholder Analysis
2. SWOT Analysis
3. Six Thinking Hats
4. The Wheel of Multiple Perspectives
5. Power Ranking
6. Role Plays
7. Fishbowl
8. Prototyping
9. Prioritizing and Ranking
10. Speed Dating
11. World Café
12. Open Space
13. Visioning
14. Circle of Coherence
15. Constellations
16. Polls / Voting

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#1

Name: Stakeholder Analysis: Importance vs. Influence Matrix

Goal: *To identify, map and prioritize stakeholders and to capture the degree of influence and level of interest of each of them over the issue at stake.*

Short Description

An « Importance vs. Influence Matrix » helps to map out stakeholders and their relation to the issue at stake. The analysis generates insights on the importance and influence of each stakeholder and helps to develop a specific strategy for the identified stakeholders. It should be used at the beginning of a project and can be repeated several times.

Template to fill out

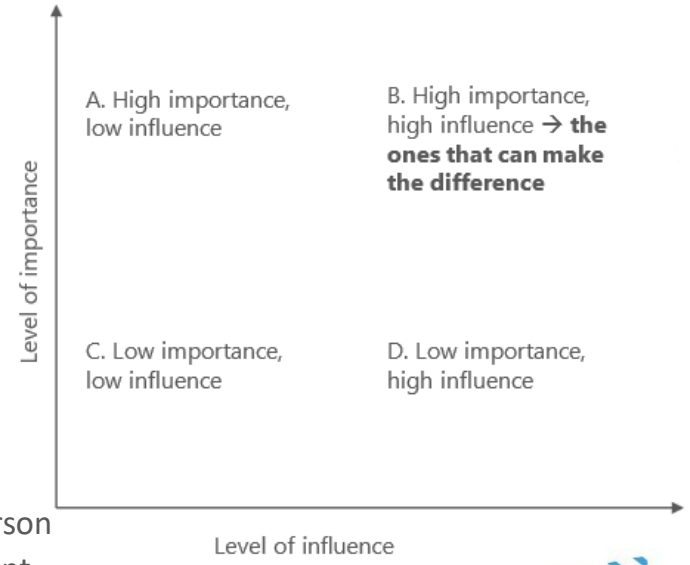

Figure 25: Stakeholder analysis

Step-by-Step Guidance

1. Identify and list the most important stakeholders in your project / program.
2. Draw 4 quadrants and the two named axes (see template)
    a. Importance: The priority given to satisfying the needs / interests of each person
    b. Influence: The power a stakeholder has to facilitate or impede the achievement of an activity's objective. The extent to which the stakeholder can influence others.
3. After filling out the matrix, several conclusions can be made Group A requires special initiatives to protect their interest, Group B are the « ideal stakeholders » which is why we should create a good relationship with them, Group C can be given less priority and Group D should be carefully

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#2

Name: SWOT Analysis

Goal: Identify the key internal and external factors that impact the functioning of a group or organization.

Short Description

A SWOT Analysis is a well-known strategic planning tool to discover weaknesses and strengths of an individual, group or organization.

Step-by-Step Guidance

The group defines and discusses as many factors as possible for each heading. Make sure that strengths and weaknesses should refer to internal aspects of the group or organization while opportunities and threats can be looked at as internal or external factors affecting them.

-> Alternatively, different subgroups in a workshop can conduct a SWOT analysis on their own to later compare similarities and possibilities with the others.

Based on the SWOT analysis, discuss what actions are needed:
« How can we use our strengths to avert threats or make use of the available opportunities? » « How can we deal with our weaknesses? »

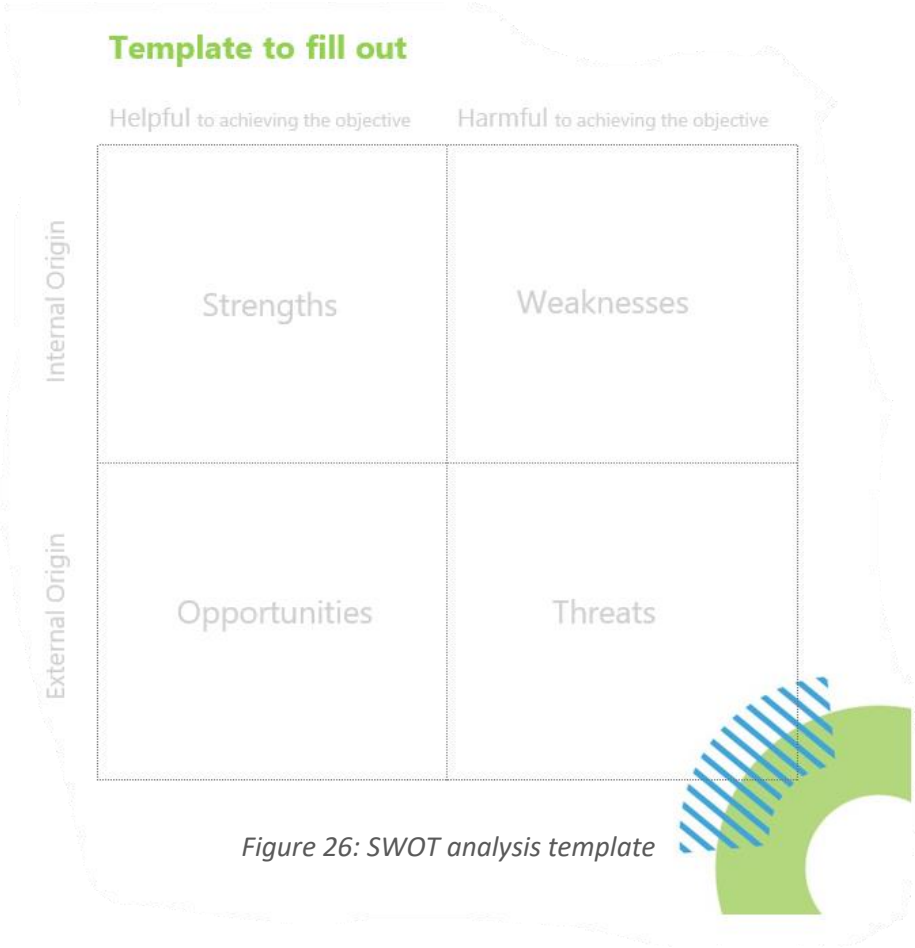

Figure 26: SWOT analysis template

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#3

Name: Six Thinking Hats

Goal: *By systematically "wearing" a different hat, participants are encouraged to explore issues from multiple angles, fostering more comprehensive and balanced decision-making.*

Short Description

The Six Thinking Hats method, developed by Edward de Bono, is a structured approach to problem-solving and decision- making that encourages individuals or groups to think from different perspectives. Each "hat" represents a different mode of thinking:

- *White Hat: Focuses on facts, data, and information.*
- *Red Hat: Represents emotions, feelings, and intuition.*
- *Black Hat: Involves critical thinking, judgment, and identifying risks or negative aspects.*
- *Yellow Hat: Emphasizes optimism, benefits, and positive outcomes.*
- *Green Hat: Encourages creativity, new ideas, and alternatives.*
- *Blue Hat: Focuses on the process, organization, and managing the thinking.*

Step-by-Step Guidance

1. Introduce the method and distribute the different hats in the group (the method can be illustrated with real hats / accessories)
2. State the issue or topic you are addressing and write down guiding questions for each hat (i.e. ask the Black Hat about potential downsides or risks, ask the Red Hat how the person feels about the situation, ask the yellow hat what the benefits and opportunities of this idea or solution are, etc.)

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#4

Name: The Wheel of Multiple Perspectives

Goal: *The goal of the Wheel of Multiple Perspectives is to encourage a comprehensive understanding of a situation or issue by examining it from various viewpoints. Ultimately the goal is to foster open-mindedness, collaboration, and a deeper, more inclusive analysis of issues.*

Short Description

The Wheel of Multiple Perspectives is a method used to explore an issue or situation from various viewpoints, helping to gain a more comprehensive understanding. It involves looking at the topic through different "lenses," such as cultural, social, emotional, logical, or ethical perspectives. By considering multiple angles, the Wheel encourages broader thinking, enhances creativity, and fosters empathy, allowing individuals or groups to see a more complete picture before making decisions or taking action. This approach helps prevent narrow thinking and promotes well-rounded problem-solving.

Step-by-Step Guidance

1. Prepare: Write the name of the issue, project or task on a large card and put it on the centre of the table. Then write up cards with the names or titles of 6-8 stakeholders involved. The stakeholders can be listed through a quick brainstorm or taken from earlier stakeholder analysis exercises.
2. Generate Perspectives: Distribute the stakeholder cards randomly among the participants. Ask participants to put themselves in the position of this stakeholder and comment on the issue one by one.
   Collect the main points on a flipchart.
3. Repeat Step 2 at least 3 times to allow people to explore different perspectives.
4. Working with the perspectives: Finally, reflect on the exercise by asking questions like:
   « What are similarities and what are differences? » « What new thoughts could enhance your capacity for dealing with this issue?

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#5

Name: Power Ranking

Goal: *Power Ranking helps participants experience how every person has different kinds of rank and privileges, and to see how this influences group power dynamics. The methods helps to evaluate and prioritize items, ideas, or individuals based on their perceived importance, influence, or impact in a given context.*

Short Description

Participants rank the items on a scale, often from most to least powerful, based on specific criteria. Power ranking is commonly used in decision-making processes, strategic planning, or group discussions to align on what matters most. Rank describes how influential someone is in the hierarchy of a group, it is the level of an individual's social or personal power.

Template to fill out

1. Situational Rank (Position in an organization)	**2. Social Rank** (Gender, educational, rank, age, race)	**3. Personal rank** (charismatic, insecure, avoiding conflict, communicative ...)
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.

Figure 27: Power ranking

Step-by-Step Guidance

1. Depending on the example and context, you can do the exercise with the « real » people who are present in the room (and their actual rank) or use prepared roles that are handed out to the participants on slips of paper
2. Introduce the method using a very specific situation / case example (»Who has most decision-making power when it comes to identifying and managing sources of water in this community? »)
3. Ask participants to form a line and rank themselves from the person with most decision-making power to the person with least decision- making power. When the line is formed, ask « How does it feel to stand where you are now? »
4. Repeat this with each rank and ensure to include people who have not spoken yet.

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#6

Name: Role Plays

Goal: Encourage active participation, increase engagement, and enhance understanding for other perspectives on a specific topic. Develop communicative skills and create in depth understanding of a situation.

Short Description

Role plays in a workshop setting are interactive activities where participants take on specific roles and act out scenarios to practice skills, explore perspectives, or solve problems. These exercises simulate real-life situations, allowing individuals to experiment with different behaviours, communication styles, and decision-making strategies in a safe and controlled environment. Role plays are commonly used for team building, conflict resolution, customer service training, leadership development, and other skill-building purposes.

Step-by-Step Guidance

1. Provide a sketch of the situation and distribute different perspectives on the situation to all participants. Each role includes an objective to be fulfilled during the play which might be in conflict with the objectives of fellow role players.
2. After the role play, participants are asked to reflect upon what they have experienced during the play.
3. Assign 1-2 participants as observers to provide feedback after the role play.

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#7

Name: Fishbowl

Goal: *Facilitate focused, inclusive, and dynamic dialogue on controversial issues, encourage active listening, share diverse perspectives, and promote engagement from both the inner and outer circle.*

Short Description

A Fishbowl is a group discussion method used to facilitate open dialogue and encourage participation from a larger group while maintaining focus on a specific topic. It involves two groups: an inner circle (the "fishbowl") and an outer circle. The inner circle consists of a small group of participants who engage in a conversation, while the outer circle observes. After a set time, participants from the outer circle can switch places with those in the inner circle, allowing for a dynamic exchange of ideas. This method is often used to promote active listening, diverse viewpoints, and an inclusive conversation.

Step-by-Step Guidance

1. After a general introduction on the technique, process and objective, a selection of experts on the selected theme is invited to the inner circle, the facilitator explains that only the inner circle is allowed to speak
2. The facilitator should make sure the outer circle observes silently, takes notes and prepares questions so they are ready to move into the inner circle.
3. Participants are allowed to switch between the inner and outer circle to either contribute or observe.
4. Once the topics or the time allocated have been covered, the facilitator should summarize the discussion and open the floor for a debriefing to review key points, and the groups feelings regarding particular issues.

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#8

Name: Prototyping

Goal: Prototyping fosters creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving by encouraging participants to translate abstract ideas into something tangible and actionable.

Short Description

Prototyping is the process of creating quick, tangible models or representations of ideas to explore, test, and refine concepts. Participants use low-fidelity materials (such as paper, cardboard, or digital tools) to build prototypes that illustrate solutions or concepts. This hands-on approach allows for experimentation, feedback, and iteration, helping participants visualize and refine their ideas in a practical way.

Step-by-Step Guidance

1. Sketch your prototype
2. Turn the sketch into a quick and testable prototype, this can be a paper prototype, a storyboard, a mock-up or even a role-play
3. Test and get feedback (present your prototype to other workshop participants or even to potential users)
4. Reflect and iterate
5. Refine the prototype and document key learnings

#9

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Name: Prioritizing and Ranking

Goal: *This tool can help you select the most promising ideas or options when many have been generated during prototyping (see previous tool).*

Short Description

After a creative brainstorming session in which as many ideas as possible were generated, this method helps to decide which ideas to keep and which ones to discard. This template shows 3 different methods to do this.

Step-by-Step Guidance

1. Select promising ideas (a. Cluster the ideas, b. Vote for favourite ideas using sticky dots or simply drawing a dot, c. Discuss the results)
2. Narrowing a list by following criteria for selection (importance, time needed, cost, urgency, feasibility, desirability etc.)
3. Ranking and Scoring
    a. Write all ideas on a Flipchart paper
    b. Ask participants to rank the ideas by assigning a number to each item - from most important (10) to least important (1)
    c. Calculate average scores and rewrite the items in the new order
    d. Select the prioritised / most important 3-5 ideas

#10

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Name: Speed Dating

Goal: *The purpose is to encourage quick introductions, idea sharing, or networking in a fun and dynamic way.*

Short Description

Speed dating in a workshop setting is a structured networking activity where participants engage in brief, timed one-on-one conversations with multiple people. Each interaction typically lasts 3-5 minutes before participants rotate to the next person. This activity is often used to foster connections, encourage interaction among participants, and generate diverse perspectives in a short amount of time. It's particularly useful for breaking the ice, building rapport, and stimulating creativity in group settings.

Step-by-Step Guidance

1. Set up the space (arrange two rows of chairs facing each other or a large circle with inner/outer rings)
2. Prepare guiding questions (depending on goal and purpose of the exercise) and read out the next question before each round
3. Time each round (3-5 minutes per round) and use a timer or bell to keep it moving
4. Wrap-up (optional) asking what was surprising or inspiring

#11

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Name: **World Café**

Goal: *To foster collective intelligence by creating an open, informal environment where ideas are shared, connections are made, and collective insights emerge.*

Short Description

The World Café is a collaborative dialogue methodology designed to facilitate meaningful conversations in large groups. It involves participants engaging in small, rotating groups to discuss a series of questions related to a central theme. The format encourages active listening, diverse perspectives, and the co-creation of solutions, making it particularly effective for addressing complex issues and fostering community-building. By mixing up participants at each table more diverse perspectives can be ensured.

Step-by-Step Guidance

1. Prepare the environment (i.e. several round tables covered with a flipchart paper tablecloth and coloured pens)
2. Welcome Participants and Set the Context (purpose and questions)
3. Facilitate the conversations (one moderator per table)
4. Switch tables: After a certain time, participants are asked to change groups.
5. Harvest insights: Invite everyone to reflect on the key insights gathered. Each table can prepare a summary or key points.

#12

Name: **Open Space**

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Goal: *The method encourages collaboration, creativity, and flexibility, with a focus on peer-led discussions and spontaneous ideas.*

Short Description

The Open Space Method is a participatory and self-organizing approach to meetings or workshops where participants create and manage their own agenda around a central theme or issue. At the start, the facilitator introduces the broad topic, and then participants suggest discussion topics they are passionate about. These topics are posted, and participants freely choose which discussions to join based on their interests. It works well for fostering innovation, addressing complex issues, and engaging all participants in meaningful conversations.

Step-by-Step Guidance

1. Define a clear theme (formulate an inviting, open-ended guiding question)
2. Prepare the space (a large room and materials)
3. Explain the process and the 4 principles: 1. Whoever comes is the right people, 2. Whatever happens is the only thing that could, 3. Whenever it starts is the right time, 4. When it is over, it is over
4. Participants propose sessions themselves by writing title and name on a sticky note and announcing it (topic, time and location) briefly to the group
5. Participants attend whichever session they are drawn to
6. End with a closing circle to share takeaways or insights (optional)

#13

Name: Visioning

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Goal: *The goal is to inspire and align participants around a common vision, providing clarity and direction for decision- making, planning, or problem-solving.*

Short Description

The Visioning Method in a workshop setting is a process where participants collectively imagine and create a shared vision of the future. This method involves guided exercises to help individuals or groups visualize their desired outcomes or goals, often using creative techniques such as storytelling, imagery, or future scenarios. It encourages creativity, collaboration, and a sense of purpose, helping to generate enthusiasm and commitment toward achieving the envisioned future.

Step-by-Step Guidance

1. Set the stage (give a clear introduction, explain why visioning matters and start with a guided breathing or grounding moment to foster creative thinking)
2. Frame the visioning prompt (choose a future point in time, example: « We write the year 2050, we have achieved our sustainability goals. What does it look and feel like? »
3. Let participants visualize the future individually (quiet writing or drawing)
4. Have participants share their vision with the rest of the group
5. Create a collective vision (optional)

#14

Name: Circle of Coherence

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Goal: *The aim is to create a sense of coherence, where diverse perspectives are integrated, fostering mutual understanding and collective clarity.*

Short Description

The Circle of Coherence is a method used to align participants around shared values, goals, or understanding by encouraging open dialogue and collective reflection. Participants sit in a circle and engage in discussions where everyone has an equal opportunity to speak and listen. This method promotes deeper connection, empathy, and collaboration, helping participants find common ground and strengthen group cohesion in tackling challenges or making decisions.

Step-by-Step Guidance

1. Prepare the space (create a large circle on the floor, e.g. with masking tape, divided into 6 segments)
2. Set the intention and introduce the method (« We will walk through six key areas that help us create coherence for ourselves and our shared future »)
3. Walk through each field (Purpose & Vision, Values & Attitudes, Relationships & Stakeholders, Resources, Actions, Reflection & Learning)
4. Group sharing or harvesting
5. Integration & Closing

#15

Name: Constellations

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Goal: *Gain insight into how different components interact and influence each other.*

Short Description

The method of Constellations is a visual and experiential approach used to explore complex systems, relationships, or problems. It involves positioning people, objects, or symbols in a space to represent various elements of a situation. This method is often used in group settings to uncover hidden dynamics, patterns, and perspectives, helping to identify solutions or new ways of thinking about challenges. It is commonly used in organizational development, coaching, and conflict resolution.

Step-by-Step Guidance

1. Define the focus and formulate a guiding question.
2. Ask participants to place themselves (or objects that represent different stakeholders) in the space in relation to each other, based on their sense of the relationship and dynamics.
3. Reflect on the constellation and ask the group to share their observation (« Are there any imbalances? », « Do any elements seem disconnected or isolated? », «What emotions emerge when participants observe the setup? »)
4. Experiment with adjustments and explore possible solutions (« What happens if two elements are moved closer together? »)
5. Look for insights and conclusions (« How have the dynamics shifted? », « What does the new configuration tell us about possible actions or solutions? »

#16

Name: Polls / Voting

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Goal: *Polls foster interactivity and enable effective feedback. Possibilities range from mood pictures, queries to voting.*

Short Description

(Digital) polls during conferences are interactive tools used to gather real-time feedback from participants. They engage the audience, provide immediate insights into opinions or understanding, and allow organizers to adjust the content or discussions accordingly. The advantages include increased participation, anonymous input, data-driven insights, and the ability to quickly gauge consensus or make decisions, leading to a more dynamic and responsive event. Polls can also be conducted before a workshop or event, i.e. to collect expectations in a structured manner and to set priorities. Polls can also be used for voting when a decision needs to be taken.

Step-by-Step Guidance (Voting)

1. Stickers
    a. Write down every option on a flipchart
    b. Give every participant three sticker to allocate to their preferred options
    c. *Variation*: use different colours of stickers
2. Raising hands
    a. Ask participants to raise their hands for the option they prefer
    b. Use online tools so participants can vote anonymously
3. Online Tools (Survey Monkey or Mentimeter)

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6. Indicator workshop quantification of nexus-smart water governance

6.1. Workshop – follow along exercise

In this exercise we will walk through the process of using the RETOUCH NEXUS Indicator Application for the quantification of WEFE Nexus Smart water governance.

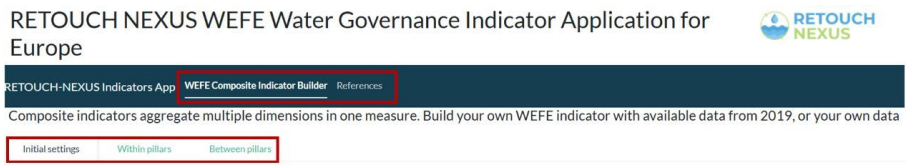
1. Please access the application at: https://qrto.org/aFt9Wm
2. Now try to familiarise with the app:
    a) Navigate through the panels.
    b) Open, read, and understand the "Help" boxes.
3. The instructions below describe in detail the use of the application. In this workshop we will use these instructions, and we will guide you through the application in a follow along exercise to:
    a) Understand the application
    b) Upload customized and own data
    c) Run the application with different settings
    d) Analyse and interpret the results.

Familiarising with the app

First steps – the layout

First, let's explore the layout of the app.

- At the top of the app, a menu allows the user to navigate through 2 panels
    - "WEFE Composite Indicator Builder" is the main panel of the app, which includes a second menu (in green) of sub-panels. These contain the three successive decisional steps that are necessary to run the app and generate WEFE composite indicator scores.
    - "References" is instead a panel where the main references that have been used to build the app are collected



- Below the sub-menu, depending on which panel is selected, the user can make several decisions to build his/her desired WEFE composite indicators
    - In the "Initial settings" panel, the user chooses which data to work with (sample data or upload his/her own), and what results to look at (spatial plot or just quantitative plots?)
    - In the "Within pillars" panel, it is possible to decide which indicators to consider for each of the four pillars (WEFE), which observations, which time periods, and how to aggregate several indicators within each pillar
    - In the "Between pillars" panel, the final decisions on the weight of each pillar and how to aggregate W, E, F, and E scores are taken
- To move from one sub-panel to the other, the user can either click on the sub-panel title in the green menu, or click on the "Back" and "Next" buttons at the bottom right of the screen

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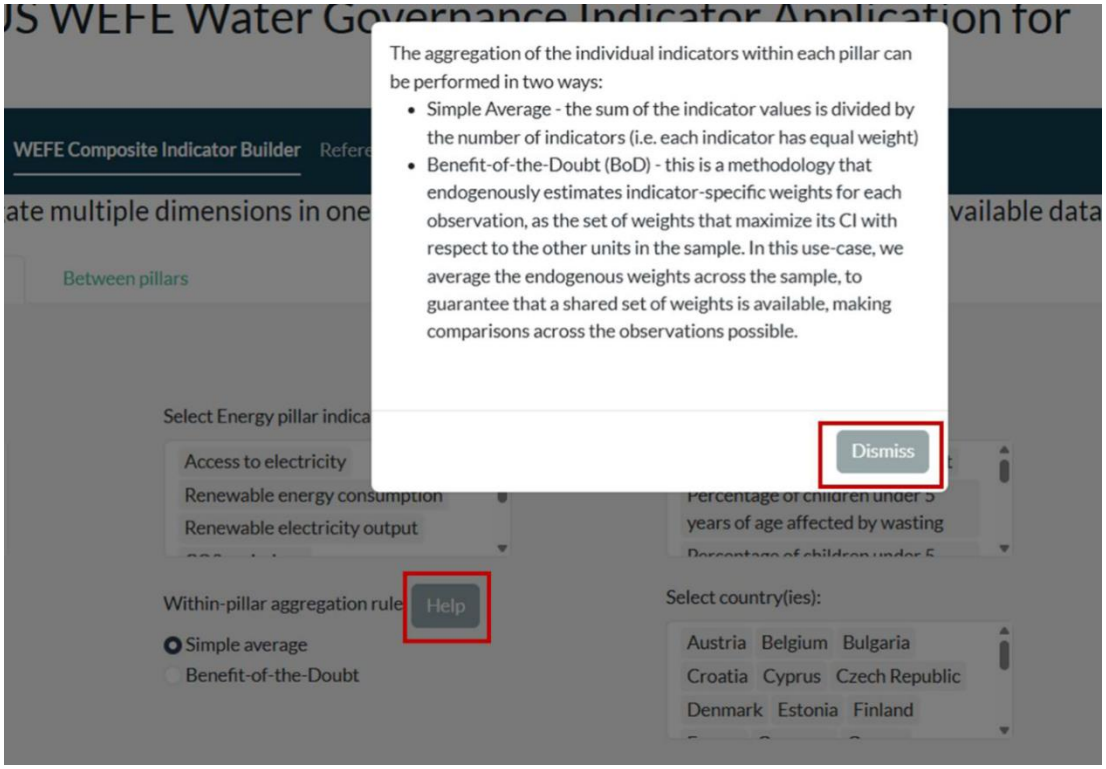
them.

- Several "Help" boxes assist the user in the interaction with the app. These can be opened by clicking on them. To close a "Help" box, click on the "Dismiss" button in its lower right corner, or on the screen outside of the box.



- Once all decisions have been made, the user clicks on "Run Nexus Composite Index" in the "Between pillars" sub-panel, to run the program and generate the final WEFE composite indicator scores. The results will be automatically updated and displayed at the bottom of the screen

  - At the bottom of the screen, an additional sub-menu (in green) organizes the visualisation of results among "WEFE pillars" - a plot of the observed performance across each pillar, and "WEFE Composite Indicator scores" - the overall composite scores in quantitative form and in a spatial plot (i.e., a mat, if the user expressed the will visualize it in the first sub-panel "Initial settings")

- After generating the results, the user can also download a summary, by clicking on the button "Download results"

The app works with three main input data:

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- A dataset of indicator values, with structure as follows

Observation	Spatial_ID	Time_ID	Ind_1	Ind_2	Ind_3	Ind_4	...
A	Italy	2021	1	23	12	0.4	...
B	Italy	2022	0.14	4	10	5	...
C	France	2021	9	98	4	0.12	...
D	Germany	2022	12	44	7	2	...
...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...

Example 1. Data table

- A *dictionary* providing more details on the individual indicators, with structure as follows

Indicators	Dimension	UnitOfMeasurement	...
Ind_1	Water	l	...
Ind_2	Water	kg	...
Ind_3	Energy	m3	...
Ind_4	Ecosystem	m3/inhab/year	...
...	...	...	...

Example 2. "Dictionary" table for each indicator.

- A *shape file* with multipolygons for plotting the results at relevant geographical scale

The user can choose to upload his/her own data for all three inputs, or to use the sample data provided with the app (EU countries, at the national level).

Adding your own indicator data and dictionary files

The app comes with a dataset of sample indicators (and its dictionary file), across the four WEFE nexus dimensions, at the national scale. However, the user can supply his/her own data and dictionary, to make the analysis specific to a context.

To do so:

1. navigate to the *"Initial settings"* sub-panel (the first to the left of the sub-menu in green),
2. scroll down and select "Yes" for *"Do you want to use your own data (alternatively, national level data are provided)?"*

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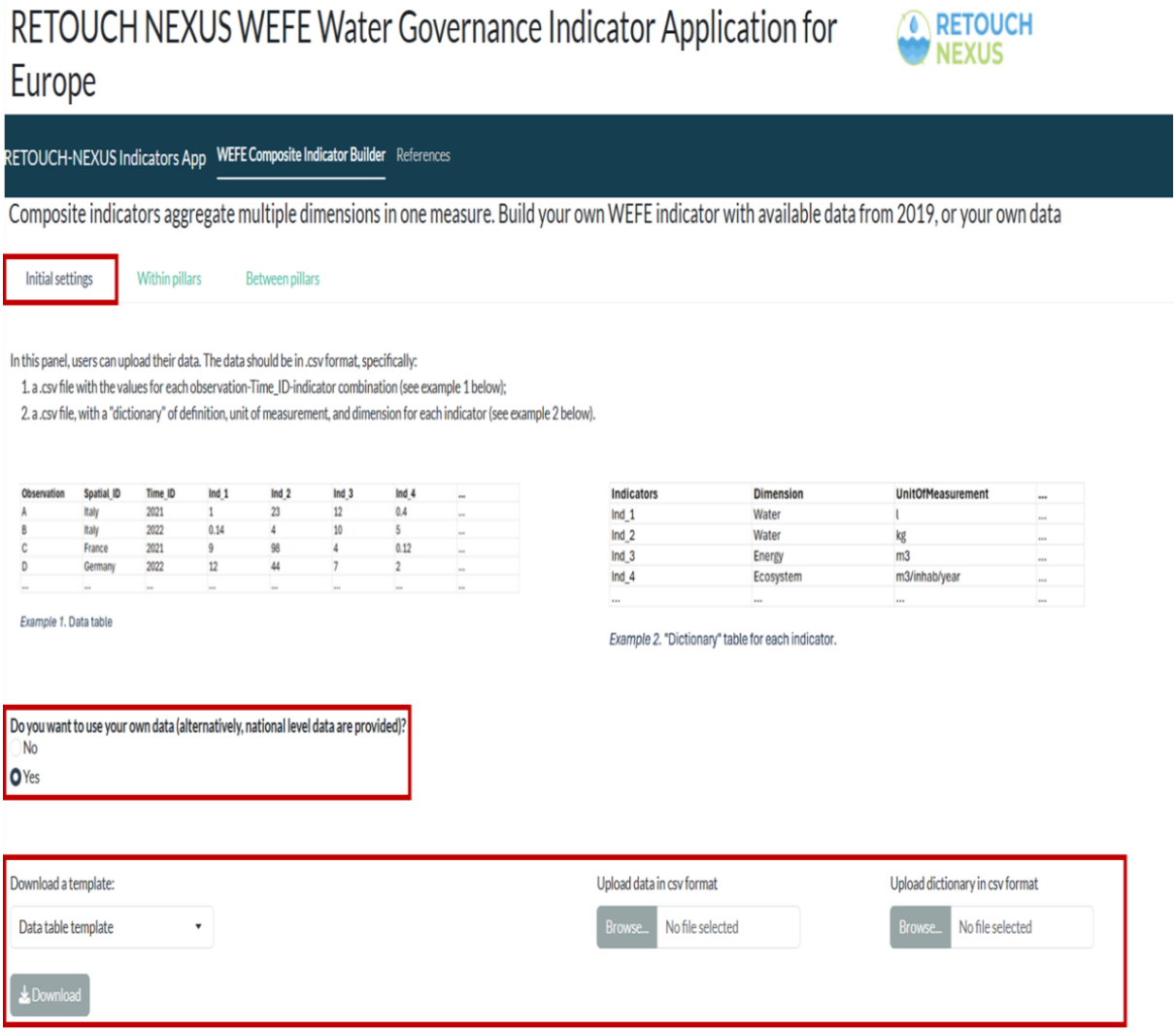
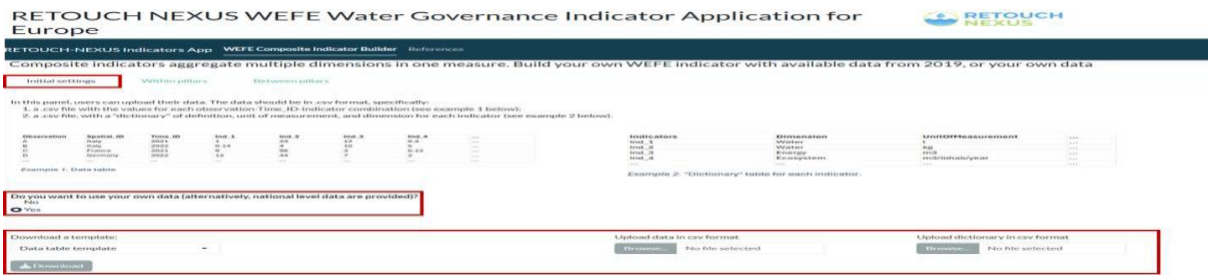


3. Three new elements will appear
   a) A dropdown menu below *"Download template"* allows the user to download two individual .csv files for the indicator data and the *dictionary* inputs. These can be filled with the user's own data, to avoid formatting issues at later stages,
   b) Under *"Upload data in .csv format",* the user can upload his/her own *indicator data,*
   c) Under *"Upload dictionary in .csv format",* the user can upload his/her own *dictionary*



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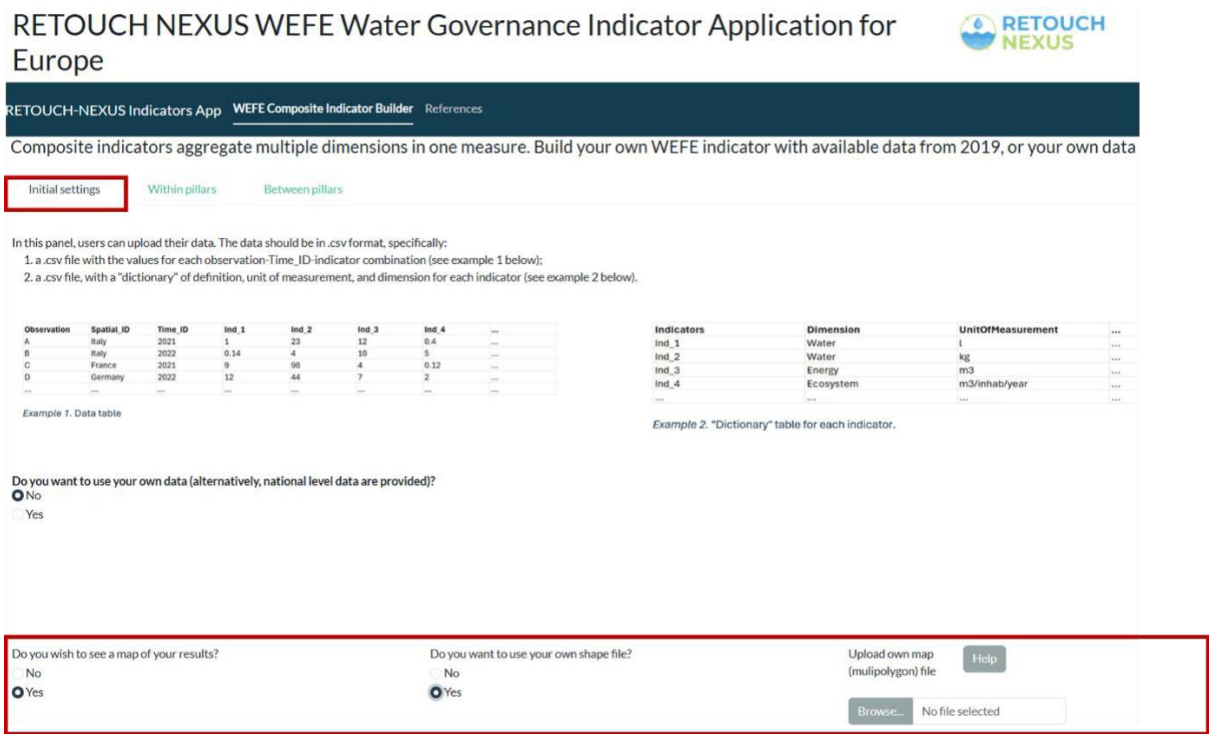
Using your own shape file

The application comes with a pre-loaded shapefile of EU countries, to plot results at the national level. Alternatively, to provide a visualization that is specific to the scale and the context under analysis, the user can also provide his/her own shape file.

To do so:

1. navigate to the *"Initial settings"* sub-panel (the first to the left of the sub-menu in green),
2. scroll down and select "Yes" for *"Do you wish to see a map of your results?"*



3. A new element will appear asking "Do you want to use your own shape file?", select "Yes"
4. A new element will appear, where the user can select and upload a .rds file of two columns, as specified in the help box (can be opened by clicking on it) *"Own map files can be uploaded in .rds format. These should serve as the basis for plotting the results in a map. The file should consist of:*
    a) *A column, called "name", with the identifiers of each unit (e.g. these would be country names, if the map is at the country scale)*

A column, called "geometry", with the MULTIPOLYGON data of each spatial unit"

Using the application for WEFE Nexus composite indicator analysis

Once you have selected the desired initial settings, you may use the tool for the creation and analysis of WEFE Nexus composite indicators. For this, first you need to choose the desired settings in the "Within Pillars" and "Between Pillars" sub-menus.

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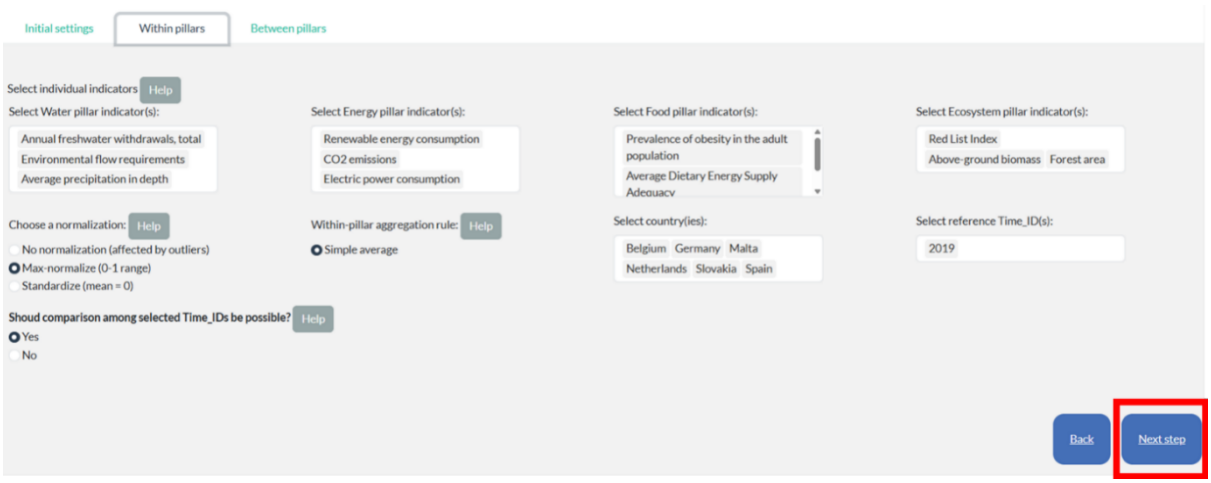
Within pillars – Selection of indicators and normalisation rules

The functionality of this sub-menu is to select the indicators of your interest for each of the WEFE nexus pillars.

1. Selection of indicators: The default selection of indicators is the complete set (pre-loaded or uploaded) of indicators. For each of the pillars you can select the entire set of indicators or manually remove or add indicators from the boxes "*Select … pillar indicator(s)*".
2. Selection of normalisation rule: For every composite indicator it is recommended to determine a normalisation rule. The tool allows to choose no normalisation, max-normalisation and standardisation.
3. If your data has a time component, you can optionally select if you want to additionally compare among time components.
4. Once you have decided your indicator parameters, go to the "*next step*" by clicking in the button.



To have a better understanding of the data, the user can open the "Help" box at the top of the "Within pillar" sub-panel.

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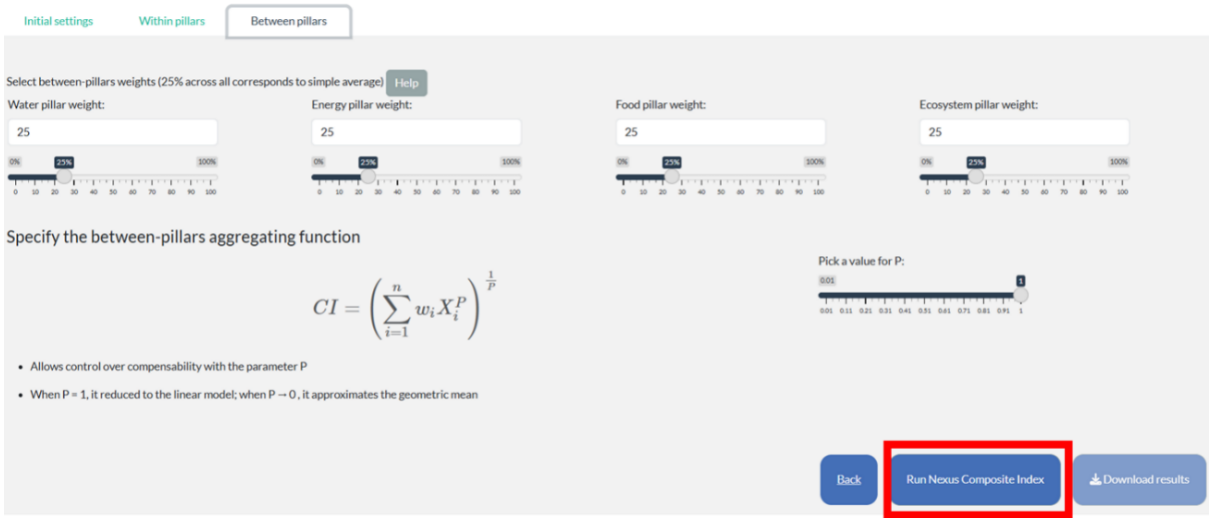
Between pillars – Selection of aggregation rules

This sub-menus allows selecting the aggregation rules for your composite indicator.

1. Select weights. For every composite indicator you need aggregation rules. This first rule is the weight of each pillar. The application defaults the weights to 25% so that each pillar has the same importance. If you want to assign specific weights (e.g., stakeholder priorities) you can do so by dragging the slider bars.
2. Select aggregation function. There are different functions for aggregating indicators. The application allows selecting different function using the slider and parameter "*p*". For linear aggregation use p=1. For different aggregation select smaller values of "*p*". When "*p*" is small the aggregation rule is similar to the geometric mean.
3. Once you have decided weights and aggregation function, press "*Run Nexus Composite Index*".



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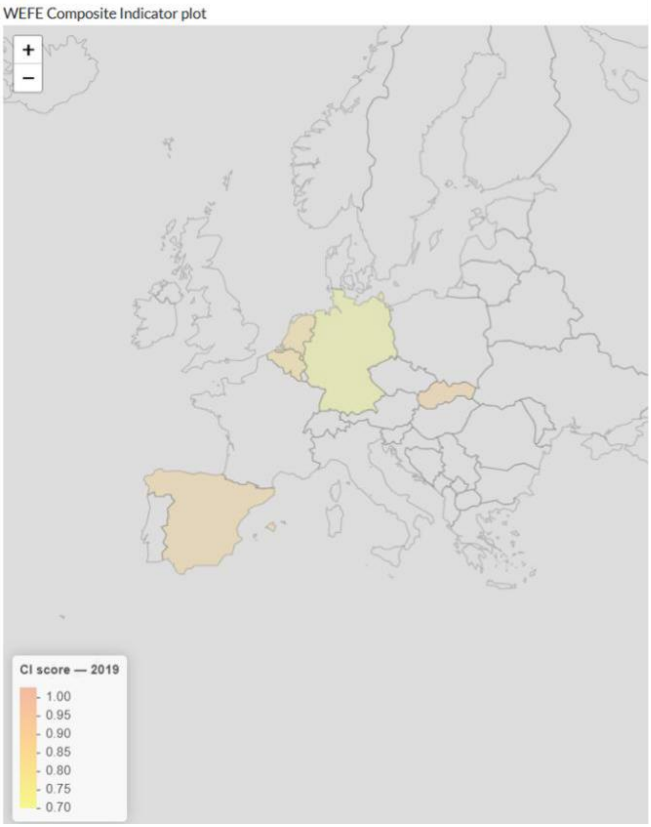
Analysis of results – WEFE pillars

The first part of the composite indicator results is given in the "*WEFE pillars*". Here you can see the *score* of each of your spatial units for each of the WEFE Nexus pillars. Higher scores represent better *performance* in each category. The graph allows comparison among spatial units and WEFE Nexus Pillars to identify *top-performing* units and pillars.

Analysis of results – WEFE composite indicator scores

In the "*WEFE Composite Indicator Scores*", the tool displays a table of the aggregated final scores as both a table and a map (if the user previously selected the desire to visualise the map from the "Initial settings" sub-panel).



WEFE pillars | WEFE Composite Indicator scores

Observation	Spatial_ID	Time_ID	CI
Germany	Germany	2019	1.00
Belgium	Belgium	2019	0.90
Netherlands	Netherlands	2019	0.88
Spain	Spain	2019	0.85
Slovakia	Slovakia	2019	0.83
Malta	Malta	2019	0.67

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7. Tailored terminologies for RETOUCH NEXUS: A reference guide

7.1. About the glossary

There are numerous terminologies that are applied within the RETOUCH NEXUS project, within the project proposal, and within the engagement process with stakeholders (especially in the six cases studies). New activities and terms are also included as the project progresses. Most of the referred terms have a standard universal definition; however, in the context of RETOUCH NEXUS, the terminologies need to be tailored to the purpose of the project and the stakeholder groups involved and for connecting to the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

To guide the Consortium partners and the case studies, this Glossary has been developed by adelphi (WP 2 Lead) that serves as a reference guide for case studies in the development and implementation of activities and engagement with stakeholders.

7.2. Definition of terms in the context of RETOUCH NEXUS

Table 7: Glossary

1	**Artificial Intelligence**	Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to the use of software-based AI for translation tasks (e.g. translation of RETOUCH NEXUS website, translation of materials for stakeholder engagement activities), transcription (e.g. online meetings, webinars), and text assistance (writing and improvements of texts and voice assistants).
2	**Case Study**	In the RETOUCH NEXUS project, a case study is understood as context-specific setting in which stakeholders aim at improving water economy at micro-level by enhancing the interaction of the WEFE Nexus pillars. Therefore, integrated and climate-resilient water governance schemes and innovative engagement mechanisms can be appraised.
3	**Stakeholder Engagement Formats**	**3a. Awareness Raising Activities** These activities can include campaigns, educational programs, platforms, podcasts and interactive project sites. They aim at the general public or citizens who are not necessarily stakeholders but are either beneficiaries or impacted by the project. Furthermore, these activities also focus on specific target groups such as authorities (e.g. water- or agricultural-related; public or private; at local, regional, or national level) or the private sector as well as on potential future stakeholders. Special emphasis should be paid to marginalized groups such as women, youth or people with disabilities. This can be achieved by utilizing multilingual communication, targeted outreach, and clear communication of benefits through various channels such as newsletters, websites, and public announcements.

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		3b. Citizen Engagement Citizen refers to a person who is either involved as a professional or expert in the project or to a person who is affected by the project and its outcomes. Citizen engagement usually follows the awareness raising activities and involves actively involving the public in decision-making processes through public consultations, focus group discussions, and stakeholder workshops. This engagement is aimed at all stakeholders, especially women, youth, and vulnerable parts of societies, and is facilitated by adapting approaches to local contexts, simplifying administrative procedures, and providing adequate support and resources to encourage active participation. It aims at empowering citizens in the case studies to meaningfully participate in and influence water governance. **3c. Citizen Science** Citizen Science refers to the involvement of citizens in scientific research and data collection, particularly in environmental monitoring, where a comprehensive data collection would otherwise not be feasible. Local communities and interested individuals participate in workshops and training sessions to learn scientific methods. Digital tools are used to facilitate data collection and communication, thereby enhancing public involvement in scientific and research projects. Thus, water governance processes can be modernised. However, such activities are not yet envisaged within the RETOUCH NEXUS project.
4	**Capacity Development**	Capacity development focuses on enhancing the abilities and skills of stakeholders, from the regional to the level of the European Union (EU), through training activities and workshops. These initiatives can target government agencies, private sector organizations, water sector professionals, WEFE Nexus researchers or officials at RBOs as well as the leaders of the six case studies themselves, ensuring they are equipped with the necessary knowledge and competencies. Tailored training programs that address specific needs and local contexts are essential for effective capacity building and to ensure "future-proofed" decision-making. For instance, under RETOUCH NEXUS activities around capacity development, one of the intended trainings on WEFE Nexus governance indicators will target some of the stakeholders mentioned above within the EU.
5	**Co-creation**	Co-creation is a collaborative process where various stakeholders, including public entities, private organizations, and civil society, jointly make decisions and develop solutions. This is achieved through inclusive decision-making processes and co-creation workshops that foster an environment where all voices, from citizens over wastewater treatment plant officials to EU-policymakers, are heard and cross-sectoral collaboration is encouraged. Furthermore, co-creation can also refer to the joint creation of a workshop or a training itself, for example between the RETOUCH NEXUS case studies and adelphi, lead of WP2.
6	**Community of Practice**	A CoP is a virtual or physical forum for peer-to-peer exchanges and knowledge sharing across professionals and practitioners from the different case studies. These CoPs are often established using online platforms, e.g. using the GTI Web-

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		App, to facilitate regular interaction, collaborative problem-solving, and the sharing of expertise among members. A cross-sectoral exchange with nexus-related partner projects (e.g. InnWater and GOVAQUA) is highly recommended and will be further explored.
7	**Conflicts of Interest**	Conflicts of Interest arise when personal or organizational interests potentially influence the impartiality of decision-making processes. Especially at horizontal scale between different WEFE Nexus sectors, such conflicts of interest are likely to occur. Single-sector decisions are often accompanied by trade-offs for other sectors, that is why the WEFE Nexus tries to align sectoral interests and strengthen synergies between them. Identifying and addressing these conflicts is crucial for maintaining transparency and trust among stakeholders and the involved community. This can be achieved by establishing clear guidelines, promoting transparency, and implementing feedback mechanisms. Frequent and open communication should be formalised to ensure accountability. Successful management and disclosure of conflicts of interest possesses significant importance as e.g. water law and policy making are characterised by compromise and solution orientation.
8	**Consultation Mechanisms**	Consultation mechanisms include formal processes that enable stakeholders, mostly from the public sector, to engage with and impact on water law or policy development. They can include public meetings, online platforms, surveys, and stakeholder panels designed to gather diverse perspectives from groups such as farmers, energy providers, water managers, and environmental NGOs. Such consultations are essential for ensuring that policies reflect the needs and insights of all stakeholders involved in the WEFE Nexus. These mechanisms have a greater scope as they are formalised and thus institutionalised.
9	**Duration**	Careful planning of the duration of the sub-steps of a project is essential for a successful and punctual implementation of the project. For trainings on WEFE Nexus topics, a modular structure can be best adapted to the respective needs, for example if a three-day training course can also be shortened to half a day. For workshops and trainings, a short duration (e.g. one or a half day) is recommended. Awareness raising products such as podcasts last only about ten to fifteen minutes. Duration can also refer to long-term planning with an overall duration in place (e.g. in terms of the case studies roadmaps).
10	**Empowerment**	**10a. Gender** In terms of participation, the equal empowerment of all genders is not granted and differs in different countries and regions. One possible step towards improvement is through awareness raising activities and trainings on gender equality, detecting unconscious gender biases for staff and decision-makers. Furthermore, formats with an explicit gender-focus could also be implemented. **10b. Women**

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		Women are often at disadvantage when it comes to participation processes. This is particularly troubling, as they are on average specifically affected by lack of access to water. It is important to provide equal opportunities for leadership to women, e.g. by taking them into the lead of decision-making processes. In the case studies, that has significant influence on the development of the case itself. **10c. Youth** The younger generation is often considered a key stakeholder group in sustainable development projects, especially when it comes to long-term projects and objectives. Engaging youth in resource management initiatives ensures the inclusion of fresh perspectives and innovative ideas. Youth engagement can be fostered through innovative awareness raising, educational programs, social media campaigns, and participatory projects, empowering them to contribute to sustainable solutions (e.g. case study Germany's summer camps for kids and students). **10d. Inclusion** Inclusion refers to the practice of actively involving various stakeholders such as farmers, youth, and women. Marginalized and vulnerable groups in particular need to be included in the engagement process. Ensuring inclusion enhances the representativeness and fairness of decisions as well as their subsequent acceptance.
11	**Exchange Platforms**	Exchange platforms are digital or physical spaces where stakeholders can share information, ideas, and experiences related to resource management (e.g. the GTI App). These platforms facilitate knowledge transfer and collaboration among diverse groups. They can include (online) forums, social media, workshops, websites and conferences. They should aim to have high degrees of transparency and accessibility, to disseminate information and foster collaboration. For detailed information on knowledge exchange and transfer, please have a look at Deliverable 2.2 (Factsheets on Good Practices and Innovative Tools for Stakeholder Engagement and Public Participation).
12	**Experts**	Experts are individuals with specialized knowledge or skills in specific areas such as water management, agriculture, energy, or environmental science. This includes both practitioners and academics. Their involvement is crucial for providing technical insights, validating data, and ensuring informed and safe decision-making. Experts can participate in consultation bodies, advisory panels, and workshops, offering their expertise to guide project outcomes.
13	**Format**	**13a. Online** Online interactions like videoconferences, webinars, podcasts and surveys (e.g. case study Germany's online survey on horizontal and vertical coordination mechanisms) are nowadays very common as they represent a low-threshold and cost-efficient way of communication.

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		13b. In Person In person communication like workshops (e.g. case study Slovakia's stakeholder engagement workshop on resilient water governance under climate change), trainings and conventions are more cost-intensive and complex to set up. That can lead to fewer participants but at the same time it also has advantages compared to online or hybrid formats. Especially the WEFE Nexus field bears potential for conflicts and discontent among stakeholders. Face-to-face discussions and conversations tend to solve potential conflicts better. **13c. Hybrid** The hybrid format provides the opportunity for face-to-face conversations, while still offering the possibility to participate online, thus raising the number of potential participants (e.g. participation of RETOUCH NEXUS partners in the InnWater General Assembly (GA) – WaterGovernance2027 (WG2027) session).
14	**Goals**	Goals are specific objectives that a project or engagement process aims to achieve. Clearly defined goals provide direction and purpose, helping to align stakeholder efforts and measure progress. In the context of resource management, goals often include improving public participation, fostering collaboration, and achieving or improving sustainable development goals (e.g. goal of case study Malta's first Business Breakfast: "Establish the basis for effective stakeholder engagement to support the development of the Malta case study").
15	**Governance**	Governance refers to the structures, policies, and processes that guide decision-making and ensure accountability within an organization or project. Effective governance involves transparent practices, inclusive participation, and clear roles and responsibilities. Governance mechanisms such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Principles on Water Governance are essential for coordinating stakeholder activities and integrating their inputs into policy and project decisions.
16	**Innovation**	Innovation in stakeholder engagement involves adopting new methods, tools, and perspectives to enhance participation and collaboration. This can include the use of digital platforms and tools (e.g. the Dutch Context Scan Tool Omgevingsscan, the GTI Web-App), interactive workshops (e.g. school summer camps), and creative communication strategies (e.g. podcasts, VITO's water experience container). Innovation helps to engage stakeholders more effectively and address complex challenges with new approaches.
17	**Key Performance Indicators**	KPIs are specific, quantifiable elements used to evaluate the success of a project or engagement activity. They provide a way to track progress, assess effectiveness, and identify areas for improvement, e.g. through the variables expected outcome and wider impact. In the context of stakeholder engagement, KPIs might include levels of participation or stakeholder satisfaction. It is very

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		important to account for representatives of all groups of interest when doing the assessment.
18	**Living Lab**	Living labs are innovative user-centred ecosystems that operate within real-life environments, establishing partnerships between public, private, and communities. They use a co-creation approach, integrating research and innovation processes within real-life communities and settings, fostering a bottom-up policy coherence. However, such activities are not yet envisaged within the RETOUCH NEXUS project.
19	**Marginalised and Vulnerable Groups**	Marginalized and vulnerable groups include populations that face social, economic, or environmental disadvantages. Engaging these groups in decision-making processes is crucial for ensuring equity and addressing specific needs. Strategies highlight the importance of including refugees and minorities in environmental and climate-related initiatives (see also the definition of Inclusion mentioned before).
20	**Number of Participants**	The number of participants of engagement activities should be planned carefully. Dissemination activities allow a higher number of participants than trainings or workshops, where active exchange is encouraged. As staged in KPI 14, a total number of 1500 citizens (see for clarification definition of citizen before) should be engaged via engagement mechanisms and guidelines (expected outcome). The wider impact foresees a total number of 3000 engaged citizens. A gender balance should be achieved as well as a balanced participation of the different WEFE Nexus sectors.
21	**Podcast**	A podcast is a digital audio program that can be used to disseminate information, share stories, and engage with stakeholders. Podcasts are an accessible way to reach a broad audience and can be used to highlight project updates, expert insights, and stakeholder experiences. They are particularly useful for engaging youth or expert networks (e.g. the Trend Observatory on Water Podcast).
22	**Policy and Decision Makers**	Policy and decision makers are individuals or institutions responsible for creating and implementing policies. Engaging these stakeholders is essential for ensuring that project outcomes align with regulatory frameworks and public policies. Effective engagement with policy and decision makers helps to influence and shape policy decisions that support project goals. This can happen within a ministry of a WEFE Nexus sector (e.g. water professionals at the EU-Level) but also across different WEFE Nexus sectors' ministries.
23	**Participation**	**23a. Public** Public participation involves engaging citizens (see for clarification definition of citizen before) in decision-making processes. This can be achieved through public consultations, surveys, community meetings, and other inclusive practices. Public participation ensures that the voices of citizens are heard and considered in policy and project development.

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		23b. Private Private participation refers to the involvement of businesses and private sector entities (e.g. business parks) in stakeholder engagement processes. This includes collaboration with industries, corporations, and private organizations to leverage their expertise, resources, and influence. Engaging the private sector can enhance innovation and drive sustainable development initiatives.
24	**Stakeholder**	A stakeholder is any individual or group that is interested in or affected by a project or decision. Stakeholders can include government agencies, private sector organizations, civil society groups, local communities, specific groups (e.g. farmers) and citizens. Effective stakeholder engagement involves identifying, understanding, and addressing the needs and interests of all relevant stakeholders.
25	**Stakeholder Engagement Mechanisms**	**25a. Formal** Formal stakeholder engagement mechanisms are structured processes with defined protocols and procedures. These include official consultations, advisory committees, public hearings, and formal partnerships. Such mechanisms ensure accountability and systematic inclusion of stakeholder inputs and can be beneficial when engaging with larger groups of stakeholders. **25a. Informal** Informal stakeholder engagement mechanisms are more flexible and less structured. These can include casual meetings, informal discussions, social media interactions, and ad-hoc collaborations (e.g. case study Germany's informal preparation meeting with representatives of the Government of Upper Franconia). Informal mechanisms allow for more spontaneous and dynamic interactions, often fostering creativity and innovation, and can be more suitable when engaging with small groups or individuals, e.g. in RBOs.
26	**Target Group**	A target group is a specific segment of the stakeholders identified for focused engagement efforts (e.g. WEFE Nexus-related stakeholders). This group is selected based on shared characteristics or interests relevant to the project or policy. Targeted engagement ensures that the needs and perspectives of particular groups are adequately represented and addressed.
27	**Training**	**27a. General Training** General trainings are used to establish, enhance and strengthen the skills and knowledge base of stakeholders on a specific topic (e.g. indictors). They can include seminars, online courses, and hands-on training sessions. Training empowers stakeholders to contribute meaningfully and ensures informed participation. **27b. Indicator Training**

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		For a better understanding of current baseline conditions and a streamlined monitoring and evaluation process of water governance, indicator training is essential. The training is targeted towards the six RETOUCH NEXUS case study leaders and their respective target group (e.g. government officials, water- and agricultural-related authorities, non-governmental stakeholders such as farmer associations or environmental groups, RBOs, residents, and more). As part of the training, a context-specific set of indicators should be identified, and their use and application should be trained. Important indicators for a governance enabling environment focus for example on policy coherence, institutional settings, innovative governance and stakeholder engagement.
28	**Training Materials**	Training materials are resources used to support the training process. These can include manuals, guides, presentations, videos, exercises and interactive tools. Well-designed training materials enhance the learning experience and provide stakeholders with reference information to support their ongoing engagement. For the RETOUCH NEXUS project, these training materials will be developed under Deliverable 2.4 by adelphi (WP2 leader).
29	**Training Modules**	Training modules are structured learning units that cover specific topics or skills. They can be part of a larger training program and are often delivered in a specific order. Modules provide a targeted training approach that allows participants to gradually build their knowledge and skills. They further provide flexibility, for example by exchanging a three-day training course with a half-day session. This will be provided for the indicator training.
30	**Water Governance**	Water governance refers to the political, social, economic, and administrative systems in place to manage water resources and services. Effective water governance ensures sustainable and equitable access to water, balancing competing needs and protecting water ecosystems. Engaging stakeholders on different spatial and administrative levels in water governance is crucial for addressing complex water management challenges (e.g. lack of stakeholder/public concern and awareness of WEFE Nexus issues, inadequate availability of information, lack of political will and leadership for engaging stakeholders and/or the public, lack of human and financial resources to carry out engagement processes, and more).
31	**Workshop**	A workshop is an interactive session designed to engage stakeholders in discussion, problem-solving, networking and knowledge exchange. Workshops are effective for generating ideas, building consensus, and developing practical solutions. They often involve a mix of presentations, group work, and plenary discussions to facilitate active participation. Collaborative activities like these are essential in the WEFE Nexus context, as there is often a special need to empower and engage a large and diverse number of stakeholders with different interests.

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