



CIVIC
INCUBATOR

CIVIC IN National Ideathon Events

Report

June 2025



This General report synthesizes and integrates the five Ideathon events conducted by the CIVIC IN project partners: IASIS (Greece), ACA (Hungary), CISE (Poland) - the project coordinator, PACT (Romania) and SSF (Spain). The report outlines common themes, unique contributions, comparative insights, lessons learned, and a consolidated list of the ideas generated.

CIVIC IN | General ideathon report – May - June 2025

Preparation and coordination of the National Ideathon Working Package

The preparation of the National Ideathons was coordinated by the PACT Foundation (Romania), as the lead partner for Work Package 2 (WP2). To ensure coherence and alignment across countries, PACT led four online preparatory sessions with all partner organizations, hosted during the scheduled partners' meetings. During these sessions, PACT presented a proposed Ideathon methodology, a flexible agenda structure, and facilitation tools—including a simplified Theory of Change (ToC) template. Partners were encouraged to adapt the format to their specific national contexts and organizational working styles, ensuring both relevance and inclusivity. In addition to developing the shared methodology, PACT also drafted the standardized national report format used by all partners to document and reflect on their events.

1. Context

Across Europe, the civic landscape is undergoing a dynamic transformation. A growing number of informal citizen groups—spontaneous, flexible, and rooted in local realities—are emerging as key actors in democratic life. These groups are not formally registered as NGOs and often operate without legal status, structured governance, or long-term funding. Instead, they rely on voluntary engagement, shared purpose, and deep ties to the needs of their communities. This agility allows them to act quickly and responsively, but also exposes them to significant limitations, including lack of institutional recognition, limited access to resources, and challenges in building sustainable collaborations.

The Civic Incubator project, co-funded by the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) Programme of the European Commission, set out to explore how these informal groups



function, what motivates their members, and what kind of support would be truly useful to sustain and amplify their work. Led by a consortium of partners from Poland, Greece, Hungary, Romania and Spain, the project included an extensive research phase (Work Package 1) that combined online surveys with in-depth qualitative consultations in all five countries. The methodological coordination was ensured by the University of Łódź, which synthesized findings across all five contexts into a comparative analysis.

One of the most powerful research tools used was the development of fictional-but-realistic personas—composite portraits that reflect typical experiences, motivations, challenges, and values shared by informal civic actors. Alongside this, survey results highlighted patterns in levels of civic engagement, types of support needed, and the nature of relationships between informal groups and institutions.

From this synthesis, three directions emerged, defined not from the outside, but shaped by listening carefully to the voices of those already engaged in civic life. These themes became the foundation of the Civic Incubator Ideathon events.

1. Strengthening informal groups through tools and skills
2. Mentorship & institutional support for informal groups
3. Expanding informal groups' networks & civic engagement

2. Ideathon's themes

Strengthening informal groups through tools and skills

One of the most recurring difficulties encountered by informal groups is the lack of clear internal functioning mechanisms. Many initiatives start from a specific need or an impulse for involvement, but along the way, they face problems related to organization, distribution of responsibilities, maintaining the motivation of members, and management of collaborations. Also, many active people feel the need to develop skills related to leadership, communication, negotiation, or coordination.

The people in these groups are not always specialized in the civic field, but they have a genuine motivation and a keen sense of local needs. Whether they are educators, parents, young people, or local activists, what unites them is the desire to contribute and build, even if they do not have all the necessary knowledge and tools. Therefore, a priority highlighted in the research



is the need for training, contextualized support, and access to pedagogical resources adapted to the realities on the ground.

In response to this need, participants were asked to explore how informal groups can improve their collaboration, leadership, and communication while remaining autonomous.

Mentorship & institutional support for informal groups

Informal groups often find themselves in a “gray space” between activism and formalization. Although they contribute to the public good, they are rarely officially recognized or integrated into consultation and decision-making processes. The lack of a clear legal framework that allows institutional collaboration with such entities makes them vulnerable, and access to public resources or funded projects becomes almost impossible.

During the consultations, participants also reported difficulties in navigating relations with local authorities: either a lack of openness on their part, mutual distrust, or the lack of a designated point of contact in the administration. At the same time, the desire was expressed for established NGOs to assume a more active mentoring role, offering not only training but also medium-term accompaniment in the development process of initiatives.

Institutional support is not limited to funding – it is about legitimacy, access, encouragement, and visibility. Informal groups do not demand organizational status, but the right to be equal partners in the construction of a democratic society.

To address this challenge, the Ideathons focused on identifying what support systems, policies, and mentoring programs are needed for informal groups to grow and be recognized.

Expanding informal groups’ networks & civic engagement

One of the strongest messages conveyed by the groups consulted was the desire not to remain isolated. Each informal group operates in its own context, but the challenges are similar: lack of support, community reluctance, and distrust of authorities. Participants clearly expressed the need to connect with other groups for the exchange of ideas, inspiration, solidarity, and collaboration.

Networking is perceived not only as a logistical benefit but as a source of energy and validation. The possibility of learning from good practices, working together, or building joint initiatives is essential for increasing civic impact.

At the same time, a deep need for belonging was noted – belonging not only to a geographical community, but to a network of democratic values, participation, and responsibility. Informal



groups can thus become vectors of a new form of civic engagement if they are supported in their effort to connect.

For this recurring difficulty, participants were asked to imagine how informal groups can better connect, collaborate with institutions, and inspire democratic values and civic action in communities.

3. Overview of the events

The CIVIC IN Ideathon was a collaborative initiative across all consortium partners from Poland, Greece, Hungary, Romania, and Spain, aimed at fostering innovation, visibility, and empowerment for informal civic groups. Each partner hosted an in-person Ideathon adapted to local realities but adhered to the shared structure consisting of the three core themes.

The Ideathons served as inclusive, creative spaces where participants developed actionable proposals to support informal civic engagement, using the Theory of Change (ToC) methodology.

These participatory events took place between May and June in Łódź (Poland), Athens (Greece), Budapest (Hungary), Bucharest (Romania) and Leganés (Spain) and involved **153 (+17 facilitators)** participants representing informal groups, NGOs, public institutions, grassroots civic actors that had different roles - table contributors, jury, table facilitators and invitees.

Country	Partner	Location	Date	Duration	Participants	Female participants	Male participants
Greece	IASIS	Athens	4 June	5 hours	35 (+4 facilitators)	27	8
Hungary	ACA	Budapest	12 June	9 hours	31 (+4 facilitator)	24	7
Poland	CISE	Łódź	30 May	9 hours	27 (+3 facilitators;)	21	6



Romania	PACT	Bucharest	25 June	8 hours	27 (+3 facilitators)	17	10
Spain	SSF	Leganés (Madrid)	29 May	5 hours	33 (+3 facilitators)	29	4

4. Methodology

Participants

In some cases, participants were pre-identified during or were already part of local networks of active citizens. In others, a public invitation was disseminated through partner channels and social media, while additional participants were invited based on their involvement in informal initiatives or their relevance to the themes.

Importantly, efforts were made to ensure diversity of age, background, and experience, gender balance, and a collaborative dynamic by mixing participants across sectors and skill levels. Despite these efforts, the overall participation skewed toward women, who were more strongly represented across most national events.

Thereby, each country welcomed a diverse participant pool, featuring a range of ages, genders, and civic engagement experiences.

- Greece: participants aged early 20s to late 60s, including professionals, students, artists, and activists. Most engaged in food distribution, feminist support circles, refugee aid, and cultural events. Participants were pre-identified through local civic networks, and all belonged to active informal groups in Attica. 27 women and 8 men participated. Participants were organised into six thematic teams to enable inter-group learning and idea co-creation.
- Hungary: local civic leaders, volunteers, social workers, and educators from small towns and rural communities. Many engaged in youth empowerment, Roma inclusion, and community heritage initiatives. Ages ranged from 19 to 77, mostly women.
- Poland: a cross-section of grassroots activists, educators, students, and civic entrepreneurs. Thematic expertise included environmental justice, inclusive education, social animation, and democratic participation.



- Romania: representatives from NGOs, city halls, and informal rural groups. Included experienced organizers, youth volunteers, community facilitators, and a presidential office representative. Ages 17–65.
- Spain: participants included cultural collectives, mutual aid organizers, and informal educators. Mostly women from feminist, care, migrant support, and neighborhood action groups. Ages ranged from early 30s to late 60s.

Event organization

Ideathon—a portmanteau of “idea” and “marathon”—is a short, intensive, collaborative event designed to generate and refine innovative ideas to overcome specific challenges. While rooted in design-thinking practice, it differs from hackathons by focusing on ideation and social strategy rather than rapid technical prototyping.

Structure of our CIVIC IN Ideathons:

1. *Problem framing*
Each Ideathon opened with a contextual seed—such as a local care group or migrant support challenge—to anchor discussion in lived realities, mirroring global best practices in problem scoping.
2. *Team formation & ideation sprints*
Participants organized around thematic interests (tools, mentorship, engagement), with facilitators guiding quick-paced brainstorming sessions using Theory of Change techniques.
3. *Rapid feedback cycles*
Jurors and mentors circulated among teams, offering real-time input—a hallmark of Ideathons that accelerates solution refinement.
4. *Final pitches*
Teams synthesized their ideas into concise action plans, presented to a varied jury panel blending civic practitioners, academics, and local leaders. This laid the groundwork for evaluation and peer validation.
5. *Reflection & celebration*
Each event concluded with an evaluative ritual—a guided reflection, feedback round, and public affirmation—reinforcing learning, ownership, and local solidarity.

Shared Elements Across All Countries

- **Simplified Theory of Change (ToC)** was the unifying methodology.
- **Real-life or thematically grounded challenges** anchored discussions.
- **Group work with flexible presentation formats** (from posters to theater).



- **Non-formal learning environments** often with an emphasis on inclusion and accessibility.

This adapted Ideathon methodology created a dynamic space where informal civic actors could co-create grounded strategies, receive real-world feedback, and envision scalable group-led initiatives—all in a single session. It led directly to the rich, contextualized proposals and peer-driven outcomes documented in earlier sections.

All Ideathons used a tailored Theory of Change (ToC) framework as a participatory tool to guide ideation.

Theory of Change (ToC)

To guide the ideation process and ensure that the proposals were grounded in real-world needs and aimed at tangible impact, each Ideathon applied a simplified tool inspired by the Theory of Change methodology. This approach was not meant to lead participants toward a single “correct” solution but rather to foster systemic, participatory, and results-oriented thinking.

Each working group received a structured worksheet aligned with one of the Ideathon’s three central themes. The tool ensured a consistent process across all groups and countries, helping participants formulate clear, actionable, and context-aware solutions.

The worksheet guided participants through five essential steps: 1. long-term vision; 2. key outcomes (short and medium term); 3. concrete actions; 4. relevant actors; 5. risks and solutions.

ToC Table

	Guiding Question	Answers
1. Long-Term Vision	What change do we want to see? What does success look like?	
2. Key Outcomes (Short & Mid-Term Goals)	What needs to change first to reach the vision?	
3. Actions to Take (Activities)	What concrete steps can we take?	



4. Key Stakeholders	Who can influence or is affected by this issue?	
5. Risks & Solutions	What could go wrong? How to overcome challenges?	

Comparative overview of methodologies and key innovative approaches

Each partner slightly adapted the format to the specificity of its participants or organizational culture, as it is presented below:

Country	Core methodology	Tools used	Group formation	Key adaptations	Innovative practices
Greece (IASIS)	Interactive plenary with simplified ToC	Mind maps, mentoring circle, co-visioning	5 groups around themes like intergenerational collaboration, technology access	Strong emphasis on informal exchange (coffee, feedback circle)	Use of co-visioning tools and health equity lens applied to civic issues
Hungary (ACA)	Structured ToC sessions with participatory voting	Human Bingo, SMART tool, participatory budgeting boardgame	5 thematic groups, informal group majority	Visual and drama-based presentations; team voting with tokens	Participatory budgeting game for idea voting; creative drama as presentation method
Poland (CISE)	Story-based reflection + civic prototyping	Collage, mood boards, photo prompts, videos	4 teams which put in the center of attention communication, advocacy and access to knowledge	Use of collage-making, game-based learning, and participatory mapping	Prototyping visual narratives for advocacy, communication and solutions that promote



					access to knowledge
Romania (PACT)	Motivational plenary + collaborative ToC	Motivational talks, voting stickers, ToC templates	3 groups, mix of youth, professionals and rural actors	Use of personal storytelling as civic entry points	Introduction of "aspirational storytelling" to bridge rural civic gaps
Spain (SSF)	Real-life case study approach + simplified Theory of Change (ToC)	Adapted ToC templates, visual tools (post-its, markers), case prompts	6 diverse groups (intergenerational, cultural, gender-balanced)	Use of real grassroots cases from WP1; specific group privacy accommodations	Grounding each group's work in real, local challenges; sensitive handling of consent and visibility

Greece introduced novel civic issues into the informal participation framework, notably digital literacy among the elderly and access to informal healthcare for the homeless. The Ideathon expanded the concept of civic action to include intergenerational learning and health equity. Additionally, the dynamic jury — with public cultural figures — helped integrate arts and storytelling into civic imagination.

Hungary introduced an adapted participatory budgeting board game for audience voting — each participant voted with blue and red tokens, balancing individual and collective choices. This fostered both ownership and democratic decision-making.

Poland emphasized institutional advocacy and long-term civic infrastructure. The participants proposed concrete models like an Informal Group Ombudsman and a national-level civic knowledge hub. The Polish event's format was creatively enriched with tools like collage-making, game-based learning, and participatory mapping, helping groups articulate complex policy ideas in accessible ways.

Romania provided a model of rural inclusion and grassroots storytelling. Many participants came from small urban or rural settings and had first-hand experience transitioning from



informal activity to formal association. Their Ideathon included reflective rituals and motivational talks from community leaders who began as informal activists. This structure embedded emotional resonance and strategic clarity into the co-design process.

Spain stood out for its highly contextualized use of real-life grassroots case studies drawn from public consultations. The facilitation emphasized emotional safety, such as respecting participant consent in documentation, and created an atmosphere where informality and vulnerability could thrive. The use of actual case scenarios allowed participants to connect deeply with practical civic challenges while maintaining a strong feminist and care-based lens.



5. Summary of ideas generated

The participants in the 5 Ideathons generated a total of **27 ideas** that are summarized below, each under the approached theme:

Country Key Ideas

Theme 1: Strengthening informal groups through tools and skills

Greece

- **Bridging generations: Familiarizing the elderly with everyday technology** - Empowering older adults to become comfortable with technology through informal social initiatives and community collaboration. Connected the youth and the elderly through technology mentoring events. Main actions are: use of mobile community mentors to provide hands-on digital guidance; create informal group agreements to manage roles and avoid conflict; elevate elder visibility through storytelling in local media. Developed by the Group 'Anonymous', this idea was based on a real case of digital exclusion during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Informal medical care network for the homeless people - Providing essential healthcare services to homeless individuals** through grassroots volunteer efforts and informal community collaboration. Main actions: facilitate partnerships for medication provision; deploy mobile clinics; train volunteers in outreach and first aid; online visibility campaigns; secure institutional endorsements; leverage social media for pressure and awareness.

Hungary

- **Travelling Community Spaces – A network for mutual visibility and exchange.** The proposal envisions the creation of a structured network that enhances the visibility, cooperation, and mutual learning among informal groups across regions and at the national level. Main action: design the network model (proposed is a membership-based model)



draft a shared code of ethics; facilitate regular thematic meetings and joint initiatives - *travelling community spaces*: rotating events hosted in different cities where member groups showcase their work, exchange practices, and co-create civic actions.

Poland

- **Communication game** to foster internal dialogue in informal groups. A strengthened group heralds continued action and success; knowing your own goals and understanding them well maintains autonomy - a strong group is an autonomous group. Proposed actions: recruiting animators; promotion, reaching the right groups; designing games that build communication skills; conducting print&play games; physical copies of games available

Romania

- **"ACASĂ" workshops** (HOME Workshops - Community Workshops for Success Skills and Harmony) – ACASĂ strengthens the fabric of the community from within. An asset-based intervention model focused on developing soft skills (collaboration, communication, informal leadership) and connecting groups to local actors (e.g., community leaders, entrepreneurs, clergy). Main actions: periodically schedule interactive workshops focused on soft skills like collaboration, effective communication, conflict resolution, and informal leadership.
- **Civic summer schools & DIY toolkit** – Periodic summer learning programs combining role play, teamwork exercises, and communication workshops, complemented by a simple digital brochure of facilitation methods and decision-making tools. Main action: Short, intensive summer learning programs bringing together informal groups, youth, and active citizens for hands-on experiences: role-playing, teamwork simulations, communication games, and small group debates.

Spain

- **Toolkit for internal coordination and facilitation**, aimed at helping informal groups organize activities, assign tasks, and plan collectively without losing their horizontal and informal essence. Main Actions: Developed visual tools (e.g., Trello, calendars) to manage group activities collaboratively; scheduled quarterly planning to bring strategic rhythm to informal group life.



- **System of rotating leadership and peer learning**, where members of informal groups would take turns facilitating and reflecting on group dynamics, thus supporting sustainability and equity in participation. Main Actions: facilitated peer-learning workshops to build internal facilitation capacity.

Theme 2: Mentorship and institutional support for informal groups

Country Key Ideas

Greece

- **Chaos or collaboration? Tackling internal challenges in informal groups -** A grassroots response to internal challenges of informal groups.. Tools in order bring order without formalizing the group too rigidly, maintaining the spirit of horizontal collaboration while improving fairness, participation, and strategic focus. Main actions - develop tools such as: lightweight agreements ("symbolic contracts"), a set of boundaries and role definitions, established basic supervisory functions. Developed by Group 'Visionaries', who also piloted symbolic peer agreements as part of their group process.
- **Sharing the load: Breaking expertise bottlenecks in informal aid groups** in order to promote informal group sustainability, burnout of the members, and teamwork. Main activities: skill-sharing workshops/team building to create a culture of teamwork, implement role rotation; communication efforts to ensure that the group's humanitarian mission remained at the core, even as internal capacities grew stronger.

Hungary

- **Involving informal groups in school Community Service** School Community Service is a mandatory voluntary program for students in secondary school in Hungary. They can implement their 50 hours of voluntary service in institutions or civic organizations. If informal groups can host students, that would help them as well during their community work with volunteers. Main actions: informing teachers, parents, and students about the possibility and contacting student councils, schools, and local municipalities about the cooperation.



Poland

- **Recognition of informal groups in local decision-making**
Give the opportunity to informal groups to delegate into every municipality committee an external committee member. Main Actions: election of the committee member through participative methods, like public forum, electronic voting. The representative committee member contacts and informs the informal group members.
- **Spokesman for informal groups/Ombudsman** - raising public awareness about the functioning of informal groups and drafting/proposing legal and legislative steps at local and national levels. Main actions: Designed policy advocacy campaigns and model legal protections: finding allies to perform legal steps; networking with other groups; lobbying for the creation of a law on informal groups; creation of a support program for informal groups
- **Social knowledge base** - access to broad support for informal groups, for greater efficiency and effectiveness of activities, increased recognition of groups, more funds for activities, a sense of community, and a greater number of informal groups. Main actions in order to raise awareness of the decision makers and to create a knowledge base divided into local information and national information: publicize the need; specify the institution that will manage the database; appoint a team of experts; specify the content of the database; specify the institutions at which the database will operate

Romania

- **Civic mentorship hub – an online platform connecting informal groups with volunteer mentors from NGOs, academia, and public institutions.** - A dedicated online platform designed to connect informal civic groups with experienced volunteer mentors from NGOs, academia, and public institutions. Main actions: design a program to facilitate one-on-one or small group mentorship, offering tailored advice on topics like project planning, community mobilization, legal basics, and communication strategies.
- **Local support protocol – a flexible model of collaboration with public authorities, including micro-grants, mentorship, and non-bureaucratic partnerships, ensuring support without forced formalization.** A flexible framework for cooperation between informal groups and local public



authorities, based on trust and shared community goals. Main actions: design a protocol that includes: Access to micro-grants for small, impactful projects; Opportunities for mentorship or technical support; Agreements for non-bureaucratic partnerships that avoid forcing groups to formalize as NGOs, while still providing recognition and practical assistance.

Spain

- **Public recognition and informal accreditation** from local authorities, through public events and alliances with other collectives, allowing informal groups to be heard and valued without needing legal status. Main actions: Draft a public statement of purpose and community value; Organize a community event inviting local officials; Collect endorsements from other neighborhood groups.
- **Informal mentorship network** that connects experienced activists and community leaders with emerging informal groups, fostering mutual support and capacity building outside of institutional structures. Main actions: Map local civic actors willing to support informal groups; Host informal “meet-and-share” events for cross-group learning; Create a mentorship request template (e.g., a simple one-pager); Piloted community declarations for groups to present their social value to city halls.

Theme 3: Expanding informal groups’ networks & civic engagement

Country

Key Ideas

Greece

- **Holding up mothers: Supporting single women raising children alone** - Advocating for state and community recognition of the psychological and financial needs of single mothers, especially postpartum. Main Actions: Launch local awareness campaigns; Grow social media presence; Organize joint actions with other community groups; Co-create cultural or food events; Share stories through public exhibitions or media.
- **From margins to institutions: Building civic bridges through food solidarity** - Strengthening connections between informal groups and public institutions to boost democratic participation and community



legitimacy. Main actions: Launch local awareness campaigns; Grow social media presence; Organize joint actions with other community groups; Seek local sponsorships; Co-create cultural or food events - Facilitated regional leadership retreats to deepen shared strategies.; Share stories through public exhibitions or media

Hungary

- **Dandelion** - Increase the publicity of informal groups through a yearly repeated action - Dandelion - that raises awareness about the importance of informal groups and civic engagement. The main actions: under the blooming season of dandelions, the participants will have to be at the same time on the same spot dressed in specific colours and form a dandelion, then make a picture from above; a social media campaign that shows the pictures of the performances all over the country.
- **“I have a vision” - A coalition of informal groups** - Build a local coalition among informal groups and create, through regular meetings, a common goal, a common knowledge basis, and a common program. Main actions: a good media campaign; continuous member recruitment and member meetings, organize every year a big civic festival.

Poland

- **Leadership Picnic - raising the capacity of informal groups to challenge the invisibility, work in isolation, and lack of opportunities.** Main actions: organizing a Leadership Picnic (once or twice per year); incorporating training, animation, rest, and celebration components; involving grassroots leaders and institutions.

Romania

- **Clarifying how informal groups can become “inspiration models”** - To serve as models for others, the success stories of informal civic groups must be not only celebrated but also documented in accessible and practical formats. For good practices to be replicable, they need to be clearly communicated and adapted for different contexts. Main actions: develop standard storytelling format for showcasing successful initiatives such as: “Success story” templates that local groups can easily fill in; Short video guides (2–5 minutes) co-produced with group members, showcasing their journey and advice for others; Peer-to-peer “toolkits” or micro-guides outlining key steps and pitfalls for those just starting out.



- **“Initiatives on the move” – Civic Caravan** - Boosting civic energy across civil society - *A traveling hub of civic energy, knowledge, and solidarity.* Main actions: to develop an event format “Civic Caravan” that stops in various communities, is hosted by local informal groups, and offer a flexible mix of: Hands-on workshops on topics relevant to civic action (e.g., community organizing, fundraising, digital tools, advocacy); Open-space conversations where participants shape the agenda and explore local priorities or common challenges; Experience-sharing circles for groups to present their initiatives, exchange lessons learned, and build peer connections; Pop-up storytelling corners or exhibitions to highlight local voices and civic action in accessible, creative formats

Spain

- **A Strategy for visibility and inter-community collaboration**, including the creation of a basic visual identity and outreach plan to build bridges with other migrant-led collectives and participate in civic spaces while maintaining autonomy. Main actions: Create a basic visual identity (e.g., logo, flyer, simple website or Instagram page); Reach out to similar groups or communities; Participate in intercultural events or civic spaces
- **Strategy for visibility and creative storytelling using Photovoice**, combining photography and personal narratives to share the group’s experiences. The aim is to connect with other women, foster intergenerational exchange, and participate in civic and cultural spaces while preserving their informal, horizontal structure. Main actions: Organize collective *Photovoice* sessions (e.g., each member shares a photo and short reflection); Curate a community exhibit; Collaborate with a local cultural venue to host a public sharing circle

6. Long-term vision synthesis - emerged from the National Ideathons

Vision summary statement

In the future shaped by CIVIC IN, informal civic groups are not peripheral—they are central to democratic life. They govern themselves with dignity, collaborate with public institutions on equal footing, share knowledge across borders, and address pressing community needs in a holistic and contextual way. Through peer networks, mentorship, creative tools, and



institutional openness, grassroots civic actors become a resilient backbone of inclusive, participatory democracy.

The CIVIC IN Ideathons across Hungary, Greece, Poland, Romania and Spain collectively envision a future where:

1. Grassroots civic ecosystems are recognized and resourced

- Informal civic groups—such as neighborhood care circles, migrant support hubs, or rural youth collectives—become visible and valued actors in local governance.
- Municipalities and institutions offer access to venues, small grants, and advisory support without requiring formal NGO registration.
- Civic mentors and spokespeople bridge the gap between grassroots efforts and policy channels, ensuring representation in decision-making.

2. Shared tools and autonomous governance flourish

- Lightweight governance tools like rotating leadership structures, peer-to-peer contracts, visual planning boards, and facilitation kits are mainstreamed.
- Informal groups enjoy peer-led training modules, DIY toolkits, and digital guides that bolster their core competencies—facilitation, outreach, and financial literacy—without imposing bureaucratic overhead.

3. Scalable, contextual models emerge

- Initiatives like Civic Caravan and “Leadership Picnic” evolve into traveling civic incubators, catalyzing group formation in rural and peri-urban areas.
- Documented toolkit formats (storytelling, video guides, board games) are adapted locally across Europe, enabling peer replication grounded in context.

4. Cross-border civic solidarity deepens

- Informal civic actors engage in transnational peer networks—both online platforms and in-person retreats—building solidarity, sharing strategies, and addressing common challenges.
- Regular peer exchanges create “mirror” groups in other countries, strengthening the European civic ecosystem from the ground up.

5. Civic equity & health Integrated in emergent engagement



- Digital inclusivity becomes institutionalized: older adults benefit from regular intergenerational mentorship and tech literacy programs.
- Community-based approaches to healthcare for vulnerable groups—like homeless outreach units fueled by volunteer networks—are mainstreamed into public action frameworks.

7. Jury composition and comment

Across all five countries, the juries brought together a diverse mix of professionals deeply rooted in civil society, education, advocacy, and community development. From environmental lawyers and civic innovators to educators, feminist activists, and communications experts, jury members reflected a broad spectrum of experience in participatory democracy, grassroots organizing, and institutional reform. Their evaluations were grounded not only in technical expertise but also in values of care, equity, and sustainability, offering nuanced feedback that balanced innovation with feasibility.

To ensure consistency in evaluation across contexts, all partners agreed to use a standardized judge evaluation form. This tool guided jurors in assessing proposals based on criteria such as innovation, feasibility, impact, and collaboration, and encouraged constructive feedback to support team learning and development. The standardized judge evaluation form used across all countries can be found in the appendix.

Greece

The jury was composed of three prominent figures from Greek civic and cultural life: a well-known singer and public advocate known for his activism in support of homeless communities and migrants, the founder of a major feminist collective working on mutual aid and gender justice, and a civic educator and author who uses literature and storytelling as tools for dialogue and inclusion.

The idea *"Bridging Generations: Familiarizing the Elderly with Everyday Technology"* obtained the highest score.

The jury commended the emotional depth and solidarity-based ethos of the proposals, highlighting their alignment with grassroots needs. They particularly valued the emphasis on mutual care, informal mental health networks, and the imaginative use of everyday spaces for civic engagement. Feedback also stressed the importance of sustaining volunteer energy and scaling small wins into broader systemic impact.



Hungary

The jury comprised an environmental specialist and NGO director, a communications expert, a long-time civil society supporter, and an educational reform advocate.

Feedback emphasized the relevance and democratic nature of the proposals, especially those promoting informal group inclusion in municipal decision-making. Judges appreciated the creativity of formats, though they noted challenges in idea clarity and implementation sustainability for some groups.

The jury decided to award the first prize to Idea 4, which proposed a participatory model for involving informal group representatives in municipal decision-making. Meanwhile, the audience voted for Idea 1, "*Travelling community spaces*", as their favorite. This proposal envisioned a network of traveling community spaces organized by peer groups.

Poland

The Polish jury included experts in civic engagement, social entrepreneurship, participatory planning, and policy advising. Members came from institutions such as the National Freedom Institute, the University of Łódź's Center for Social Innovation, and the Social Enterprise Incubator.

Jurors praised the clarity and practicality of proposals like the "Spokesman for Informal Groups" and the Social Knowledge Base, noting their potential to bridge gaps between grassroots groups and formal institutions. They also appreciated the creative, low-threshold presentation methods, including collages and role-play, which made civic challenges more relatable. Judges emphasized that ideas showed both systemic awareness and community-based feasibility, recommending further piloting.

The "*Spokesman for Informal Groups*" developed by the Blue Team was selected as the winning idea. The proposal included lobbying for a legal framework, creating support programs, and organizing public campaigns to raise visibility and legitimacy for informal groups.

Romania

The Romanian jury featured a board member of the PACT Foundation, a university professor of sociology, and two representatives from national-level funding foundations (the Romanian-American Foundation and Orange Foundation).

The jury noted the strength of the proposals in connecting theory with practice, particularly through the structured use of the Theory of Change framework. They valued the replicability of the proposed solutions, such as the mentorship platform and the Civic Caravan, and highlighted their ability to scale organically across different communities. The integration of local assets, the emphasis on informal leadership, and the storytelling components were especially appreciated. Suggestions focused on clarifying implementation pathways and strengthening communication strategies.



The winning team was Group 1, which proposed “*Atelierul de Acasă*” (The Home Workshop), a series of locally hosted workshops designed to foster leadership, communication, and social cohesion within rural communities. Their idea was praised for its coherence, potential for replication, and emphasis on community-driven capacity building.

Spain

The jury in Spain included a civic innovation consultant, a specialist in community participation, and a representative from a feminist advocacy organization.

Judges highlighted the strong connection between the proposals and the lived experiences of participants, particularly in the context of migration, caregiving, and neighborhood activism. They praised the inclusive tone and practicality of the solutions, as well as the teams’ ability to work from real-life case studies. The use of creative tools—such as the “Emotion Tree” for peer feedback—was noted as a model for reflective civic practice. The jury emphasized that many ideas were ready for direct application or small-scale piloting and recommended further support for their testing and documentation.

Following a participatory voting process using a color-coded card system, participants collectively shortlisted two standout proposals. Ultimately, the jury selected the “*Toolkit for internal coordination and facilitation*” (Group 1) as the most promising initiative. The jury highlighted the proposal's strong grounding in the real-life dynamics of informal collectives, immediate feasibility and adaptability, high potential for replication in other contexts and communities and the clear alignment with the needs expressed during the consultation phase

8. Challenges. Lessons learned. Good practices

Challenges

Across the five countries, several common challenges emerged during the Ideathon events. Time management proved to be a significant obstacle, with multiple partners (Greece, Romania, Poland, and Spain) reporting that participants needed more time for group work and presentation preparation. In Hungary, group dynamics presented difficulties, particularly when dominant individuals disrupted the democratic flow of collaboration. Additionally, the absence of several expected participants led to last-minute regrouping, which, due to time pressure, resulted in imbalanced team compositions.



Conceptual clarity was also an issue; in Hungary, for example, the definition of “informal group” was not clearly communicated, leading to some confusion. Similarly, Spain noted that the informal and dynamic nature of the event made it difficult to systematically capture valuable discussions and outputs. In Greece, participants expressed a desire for better visibility and archiving of their proposals beyond the event itself, highlighting the need for clearer follow-up processes. Logistical flow and transitions between activities also required greater facilitation than expected in several contexts, affecting the pacing and energy of the events.

Lessons learned

These challenges offered important lessons. Careful planning and structured facilitation were crucial, but flexibility remained key. Several partners emphasized the need for one facilitator per group to ensure balanced participation and focus—Hungary’s experience especially underscored this. Romania and Poland also highlighted the value of having experienced mentors or opportunities for intermediate feedback to guide teams through the ideation process.

Grounding activities in real-life contexts proved to be highly effective. Both Greece and Spain noted that using local stories, news, and lived experiences led to more meaningful engagement and authentic proposals. The diverse backgrounds of participants—whether generational, geographical, or professional—also enriched discussions and helped teams think across perspectives.

Simple, inclusive tools played a powerful role in fostering participation and reflection. For instance, the Emotion Tree used in Spain allowed participants to express responses non-verbally, while storytelling and theatrical methods in Greece, Hungary, and Poland helped build group cohesion and energy.

Good practices

Several good practices emerged with potential for replication. The adapted Theory of Change frameworks used in Spain, Greece, and Romania supported strategic thinking without overwhelming participants, particularly when presented visually or co-created in teams. Participatory voting mechanisms—such as the spot-voting system in Hungary or the use of color-coded cards in Spain—proved engaging, transparent, and inclusive, ensuring all voices were part of the decision-making process.

Creative and low-threshold methods, such as collages, dramatized presentations, and symbolic actions (e.g., Hungary’s “dandelion” campaign concept), added energy and accessibility.



Assigning color identities to groups, as seen in Hungary, also helped strengthen team identity and navigation. Finally, light-touch tools like storytelling moments, informal debriefs, and reflective prompts helped build emotional connection and provided closure, reinforcing a sense of shared experience beyond the technical outputs.

Together, these learnings suggest that balancing structure with adaptability, ensuring inclusive facilitation, and grounding creative processes in real-world relevance are key to running successful civic ideation events.

9. Participants' feedback

Participant feedback across all five countries highlighted the transformative potential of the Ideathon format. While the methods for collecting input varied — from formal surveys to creative tools and spontaneous verbal reflections — several strong themes emerged, revealing both the emotional and practical impact of the events.

In Hungary and Greece, participants completed brief evaluation surveys, while Greece and Romania supplemented these with facilitated closing circles and symbolic activities that encouraged personal reflection and emotional connection. Poland and Spain relied on informal methods — including one-on-one conversations, group sharing, and in Spain's case, a creative tool called the Emotion tree — which allowed participants to visually represent their feelings using symbolic figures instead of words (Spain: "The Emotion Tree helped me put into words what I wasn't ready to say out loud. I left feeling hopeful"). This low-barrier approach was especially appreciated by those less comfortable speaking publicly, reinforcing the horizontal and inclusive climate of the events.

Across all countries, participants expressed gratitude for the opportunity to connect with others working in informal or grassroots civic spaces. Many reflected on the value of being heard and recognized, especially in environments where informal actors are often overlooked (Greece: "This was the first time I saw my small informal group as part of something bigger. I feel recognized"). The diversity of participants — in age, background, and experience — contributed to a sense of solidarity and mutual respect, with several attendees noting that this was the first time they truly felt part of a broader civic ecosystem.

In Greece and Spain, participants emphasized how empowering it was to move from abstract frustrations to concrete plans, with the Theory of Change framework frequently cited as a helpful and accessible tool. In Poland and Romania, the open, collaborative format was praised for fostering real dialogue between institutional and grassroots actors, breaking down perceived



hierarchies (Poland: “Finally, someone asked what informal groups really need — and let us answer in our own language”). Participants in Hungary highlighted the inspiration they drew from the collective process, describing how the experience would inform their local initiatives moving forward (Hungary: “For me, this day is about inspiration, learning and connection. Because what I experience here, I take home”).

Common themes included a strong sense of belonging, emotional safety, and renewed motivation to stay engaged. Many participants left the events feeling more confident in their work, particularly after seeing how their lived experiences and informal practices were not only welcomed but celebrated. Reflections from Spain, Poland, and Greece also pointed to a desire for ongoing connection — participants expressed interest in future collaborations, follow-ups, or ways to share their evolving ideas with the wider network.

In short, feedback underscored the importance of relational, inclusive spaces in civic innovation — spaces where participants can share honestly, plan collectively, and feel that their contributions matter, regardless of their formal status or organizational ties.

10. Conclusions

The CIVIC IN Ideathons generated not only creative ideas but also important insights into how informal civic groups can be better supported across different contexts. Drawing from the outcomes and reflections across all five partner countries, the following strategic recommendations are proposed to guide future action at both local and European levels:

1. Build bridges between informal groups and formal systems

One of the clearest lessons emerging from the Ideathons is the need to reduce the distance between informal civic groups and formal institutions. This can be achieved by establishing peer-based mentorship schemes, where experienced activists or municipal advocates act as civic mentors. These figures can help informal groups navigate public systems, apply for funding, and connect with local authorities, offering guidance without imposing formalization.

Additionally, several proposals emphasized the value of creating roles such as community spokespersons or informal group ombuds—trusted intermediaries who can represent and advocate for informal actors within civic dialogues and local decision-making processes.

2. Enhance visibility through grassroots storytelling



Many groups expressed a strong desire to make their work more visible by telling their stories in their own voices. Public recognition can be enhanced through participatory methods like photovoice, regionally organized civic caravans, or micro-videos produced by the groups themselves. These tools allow informal initiatives to shape public narratives and strengthen their presence in community life.

Supporting small-scale intercultural events and online campaigns can also play a crucial role in raising awareness—particularly for collectives working in the fields of care, migration, or feminist solidarity—while fostering stronger connections between diverse community actors.

3. Provide custom tools for group self-governance

Rather than formalizing, informal groups need lightweight, adaptable tools that help them organize effectively while preserving their flexibility. Simple kits such as rotating facilitation frameworks, symbolic peer agreements, or visual planning boards can strengthen internal cohesion and support decision-making.

Participants also expressed interest in short, peer-led training modules that demystify core group skills like facilitation, conflict management, or time coordination. These should be practical, hands-on, and rooted in the lived experience of informal groups.

4. Focus on replication through context-sensitive models

To expand impact without one-size-fits-all approaches, successful local practices should be documented and shared through replication models that respect context. Examples like the Toolbox videos or Civic caravan offer inspiring and concrete formats for capturing and disseminating civic action in diverse environments, especially in rural or underserved areas.

Facilitating cross-border exchange among informal actors—through online forums, civic residencies, or regional leadership retreats—can foster transnational learning and strengthen a shared culture of civic participation

5. Sustain impact without forcing formalization

Lastly, long-term impact depends on removing the barriers that often exclude informal groups from institutional opportunities. This means creating low-threshold mechanisms such as microgrant programs, flexible partnership protocols, or introductions to decision-makers, that provide support without requiring groups to become formal NGOs.

Where possible, municipalities and public bodies should be encouraged to recognize informal groups as legitimate community actors, for example by including them in local planning



documents, participatory processes, or community bulletins. This type of acknowledgment fosters inclusion while respecting the autonomy and diversity of informal civic life.

11. Closing notes

Across Greece, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Spain, the CIVIC IN Ideathons did more than generate proposals, they created a shared civic moment. Participants were invited not only to come up with ideas for different challenges, but to recognize themselves and each other as part of a wider, often invisible ecosystem of care, creativity, and commitment.

Rather than celebrating winners in a competitive format, each country chose to highlight diverse forms of recognition that emphasized participation over rivalry. The most valuable outcome was not a single selected proposal, but the collective affirmation of informal civic actors as essential contributors to democratic life. Across all contexts, participants reported feeling seen, validated, and connected as their informal efforts, typically overlooked or marginalized, were acknowledged and honored. The process itself reinforced a stronger, more inclusive civic fabric, where recognition was rooted in mutual respect and shared purpose.

The proposals generated, from festive Leadership picnics that combine learning with civic celebration, to rotating leadership models, mentorship platforms, civic ombudsmen, or symbolic public actions, will inform the next phase of the CIVIC IN project. In particular, they will shape the development of capacity-building tools and community-based resources tailored to informal groups' realities.

In closing, the CIVIC IN Ideathons demonstrated that when civic processes are designed to be inclusive, flexible, and emotionally resonant, they can unleash the collective intelligence and energy that already lives within communities.



APPENDIX

A. Standardized judge evaluation form

<h1 style="text-align: center;">IDEATHON JUDGE EVALUATION FORM</h1> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Empowering Informal Groups & Civic Engagement</i></p>

Instructions for judges

Welcome, and thank you for serving as a judge for this Ideathon! Your role is essential in identifying and uplifting innovative, feasible, and impactful solutions created by emerging civic leaders. This form guides you through the evaluation process and ensures a consistent and fair assessment.

How to Use This Form:

1. **Review each team's project** during the final pitch presentations.
2. **Score each criterion** from 1 (poor) to 10 (excellent).
3. **Sum all scores** for the final score out of 60.
4. **Provide constructive feedback** in the comment sections to help teams learn and grow.

Evaluation criteria

#	Criteria	Description	Score (1–10)	Weighted Score
1	Innovation & Creativity	Is the idea original, bold, and inventive? Does it address the challenge in a novel way?		
2	Feasibility & Viability	Can the idea realistically be implemented given time, cost, and local context?		



3	Impact & Relevance	Will it make a meaningful difference for informal groups or civic engagement?		
4	Scalability & Sustainability	Can this solution grow or be replicated? Is it sustainable in the long term?		
5	Presentation & Communication	Was the presentation clear, convincing, and well-structured?		
6	Team Collaboration	Did the team demonstrate strong collaboration and use diverse perspectives effectively?		
		TOTAL		

Judge's feedback

o Strengths of the idea:

o What impressed you most about this project?

o What could be improved or better developed?



- o Any other feedback, observations, or suggestions?

Judge's Name: _____

Team Name: _____

Project Title: _____

Signature: _____

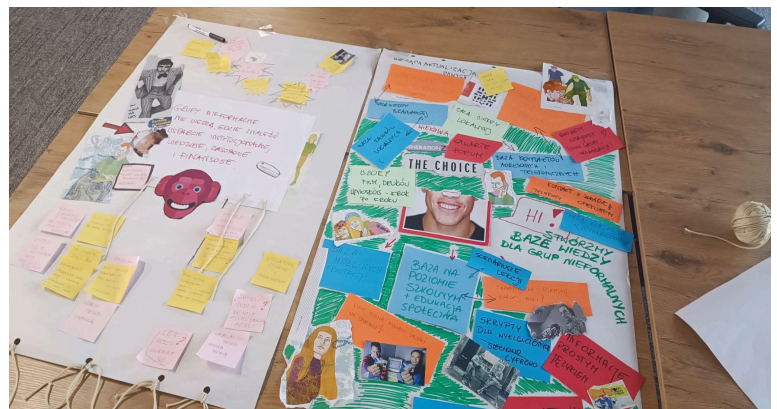
Date: _____





B. Photos

1. CISE



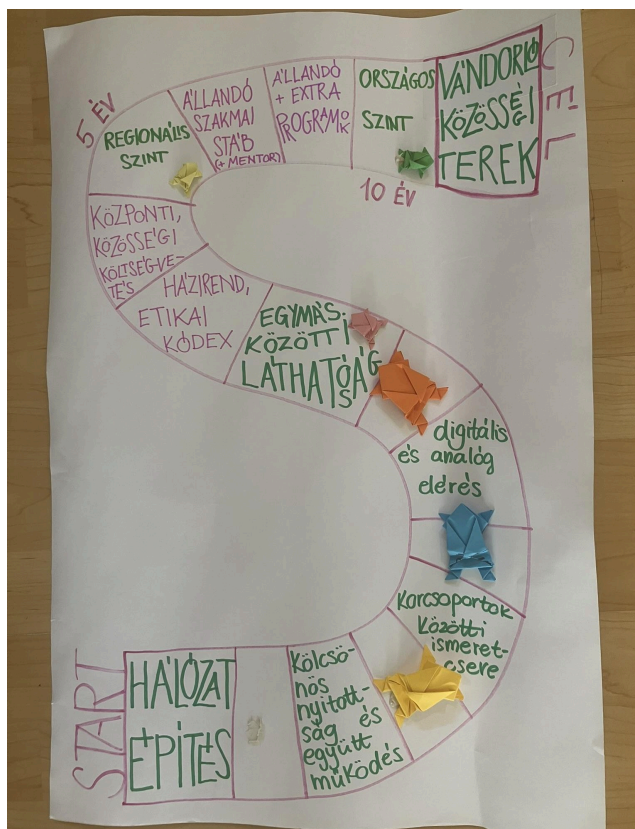


2. IASIS





3. ACA





4. SSF





5. PACT

