



Report on the 3 Living Labs: An innovative method for enhancing EU democracy support

PUBLICATION #34



SHAPEDEM-EU Publications

Published by Justus-Liebig Universität Gießen (JLU). September 2025.

This publication is part of WP7, led by Justus-Liebig Universität Gießen (JLU).

Authors/Edited by: Fabian Schoeppner, Murad Nasibov

To cite:

Schöppner, Fabian, Murad Nasibov. Report on the three living labs. SHAPEDEM-EU Publications, 2025.

Design: EURICE GmbH

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Research Executive Agency (REA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Table of Contents

1	Introduction	4
2	Description of Activities	5
2.1	Phased Cooperation – A Structural Added Value to Interactions between the EU and its Neighbours	5
2.2	Enacting the 3 Living Labs	6
3	Results	9
3.1	Findings from the 3 SHAPEDEM-EU Living Labs.....	9
3.1.1	Thematic content of the EU democracy support	9
3.1.2	Financial & institutional support mechanism.....	10
3.1.3	Political context of EU democracy support	10
3.2	Implementing a Learning Loop for Improved Democracy Support	10
3.3	A Living Lab as a Regular Tool of the EU’s Policy Inventory	12
4	Deviations Summary	14
5	Conclusions.....	15
6	Annex	16
6.1	Annex 1 – Living Lab Programme	16
6.2	Annex 2 Consent Form	18
6.3	Annex 3 Living Lab Stocktaking Presentation.....	21

Abstract

Deliverable 7.5 “Report on the 3 Living Labs” details the implementation and results of the SHAPEDEM-EU project's Living Labs within the Work Package 7 – Academic Synthesis and Policy Recommendations. This innovative method for enhancing democracy support is a critical component of the project's Democracy Learning Loop. The Living Labs utilise a participatory action research methodology to analyse and reshape EU Democracy Support in the Eastern and Southern Neighbourhoods. The method is built on a phased approach that systematically gathers insights and fosters collaboration among a wide range of participants.

Through this structured process, the Living Labs brought together voices from EU institutions, civil society organizations, and local actors from the Neighbourhoods for a constructive dialogue. The activities, led by Justus Liebig University (JLU) in collaboration with Carnegie Europe Foundation (CEF), the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF), and the Kawakibi Democracy Transition Center (KADEM), were conducted between October 2023 and November 2024.

The following report details the methodology, the process of the task implementation, and the key findings derived from this joint effort within the SHAPEDEM-EU project.

1 Introduction

The European Union's (EU) ambition to support democracy in its Eastern and Southern Neighbourhoods is a cornerstone of its foreign policy, yet it operates in a landscape fraught with complexity, geopolitical tensions, and diverse local realities. Traditional top-down approaches to democracy support often struggle to have a sustainable impact, facing challenges of local ownership, adaptability and perceived legitimacy. SHAPEDEM-EU outlined its Living Labs task within the project's Work Package 7 – Academic Synthesis and Policy Recommendations as an innovative method designed to reshape the practice of democracy support. This approach moves beyond conventional consultations, establishing a collaborative space where policy is not merely transmitted but co-created. The Living Labs serve as the central mechanism within a Democracy Learning Loop, a framework designed to create a continuous, reflective, and adaptive cycle between EU policy formulation and on-the-ground implementation.

At its core, the SHAPEDEM-EU Living Lab is a form of participatory action research. This methodology intentionally breaks down the traditional hierarchy between researchers and subjects, or between policymakers and beneficiaries. The objective of this task is to pilot-test a Living Lab to elevate selected stakeholders from the role of passive information providers or implementers of externally-devised templates to that of genuine co-creators, whose lived experiences and contextual insights are essential for crafting more effective and resonant policies. This collaborative task aimed to generate insights that were not only academically rigorous but also deeply embedded in practical realities, thereby enhancing the legitimacy and inclusivity critical for success in democracy support. Central to its purpose, the Living Lab positions local civil society actors, activists, and regional experts from the Neighbourhoods as active and equal partners in the knowledge-generation process.

This report documents the journey and outcomes of the SHAPEDEM-EU Living Labs. It first provides a detailed account of the phased methodology and its practical implementation, including the series of online and in-person events that brought stakeholders from both the Eastern and Southern Neighbourhoods together. Subsequently, it outlines the rich, substantive findings that emerged from these interactions, offering critical insights into the thematic content, financial mechanisms, and political context of EU democracy support. Finally, the report reflects on the implementation of the

Living Lab as a learning process in itself and considers its potential to be adopted as a regular, transformative tool within the European Union's broader policy inventory. The last sections of this deliverable include notes on deviations in submitting the report, concluding remarks as well as an annex.

2 Description of Activities

SHAPEDEM-EU's Living Labs are an innovative method of democracy support. They have served as a crucial element of the Democracy Learning Loop that the SHAPEDEM-EU project has aimed to implement. As a participatory action research method, SHAPEDEM-EU's living lab has built on a phased approach to the study of subject matter – EU Democracy Support in the Eastern and Southern Neighbourhoods. The implementation of this phased approach throughout the SHAPEDEM-EU project has called upon the contributions of diverse partners, collecting inputs and knowledge from all consortium members. Moreover, the Living Lab format brought voices from both the Eastern and Southern Neighbourhood into a dialogue revolving around EU democracy support and how to improve it.

While certain partners provided conceptual and practical feedback, the task activities were led by the JLU, together with the Carnegie Europe Foundation (CEF), the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) and the Kawakibi Democracy Transition Center (KADEM) between October 2023 and November 2024, during months 13 and 25 of the SHAPEDEM-EU project.

2.1 Phased Cooperation – A Structural Added Value to Interactions between the EU and its Neighbours

Overall, the action is implemented in four methodologically identified phases:

- Phase 0: Internal Development of Conceptual Framework, Internalising, Contextualising and Tailoring the Method (*Preparation*)
- Phase 1: Identification of all stakeholder groups and early communication with their representatives (*Mapping*)
- Phase 2: Mapping issues of concern in EU democracy support (*Sensing*)
- Phase 3: Co-creation of a new policy/procedure/practice concept (*Concept Development*)
- Phase 4: Prototyping the newly co-created concepts in policy, procedure, and practice (*Changes*)

A subsequent and theoretical fifth phase can be conceived in certain Living Lab methodologies; the proposed changes in policy, procedure, and practice are expected to be put to a test in a real-life context (*Validating*). This is typically employed in the application of the living lab method in business contexts. In the case of the SHAPEDEM-EU Democracy Support Living Labs, a full, real-life application is impractical given the theoretical and hypothetical nature of these activities. In turn, the project contributed to the method by developing Phase 0.

The deployed phased approach does not merely indicate the sequence of actions taken but an incremental, cumulative, participatory process. Several advantages of the phased approach can be highlighted. Above all, such an approach provides incremental depth and cumulative nature to the knowledge generation process. Hence, it *firstly* allowed for a gradual deepening of understanding. It started as desk research effort conducted by the JLU team to review methodology literature and academic secondary sources on living lab-adjacent activities, evolved into the identification of EU democracy support stakeholders both within the EU and in the Neighbourhoods concerned, continued

with the co-exploration of insights into EU-Democracy Support together with the identified stakeholders, and eventually culminated in the co-creation of new policy ideas. This manner of evolving and cumulative process guaranteed that the insights and ideas generated are both comprehensive and contextualised.

Secondly, by structuring the action into distinct phases - identification, co-exploration, and co-creation - the phased approach prioritised the continuous engagement of stakeholders, consequently fostering trust and ownership among participants. Hence, it helped establish the role of stakeholders not just as passive information passers but as active and equal co-creators in the process. Fundamentally, it earned more legitimacy and inclusivity which are critical to success in questions such as democracy support.

Thirdly, the phased approach enabled continuous adjustments and refinements as new insights emerged or developments in the field unfolded, ensuring that the most recent developments as well as belatedly gained insights are channelled into the process. Such flexibility also contributed to enhanced policy relevance, integrating academic rigour with practical insights.

Finally, the phased approach ensured that the process itself was not external to the subject matter under investigation but contributed towards it by promoting local democratic practices through methodology and building new bridges between the EU and Neighbourhood actors.

Overall, as a unique method, it has guaranteed the engagement of civil society actors from both neighbourhoods of the EU as genuinely righteous voices to be heard. Through a series of interviews and group discussions with multiple and diverse neighbourhood stakeholders, the project has generated important insights to benefit the revision and improvement of the EU democracy support both at the policy and practice levels. The following section summarises the rich findings generated through SHAPEDEM-EU Democracy Support Living Labs.

2.2 Enacting the 3 Living Labs

From a logistical standpoint, SHAPEDEM-EU’s three Living Labs were implemented over a 13-month period, beginning with methodological elaboration from project month 3 and culminating in three Living Labs held between May and October 2024.

Chronology of Living Lab Phases	
Phase 0 (Preparation)	December 2022 – September 2023
Phase 1 (Mapping)	October 2023 – January 2024
Phase 2 (Sensing)	January – July 2024
Phase 3 (Concept Development)	May – July 2024
Phase 4 (Changes)	October 2024

Table 1: Living Lab Phases

Phase 0 preceded the actual Living Lab activities and relates to the **preparation** of the SHAPEDEM-EU Living Lab methodology and format. This phase synergised with the drafting of the SHAPEDEM-EU Joint Methods Manual (D7.9) submitted by the JLU on 17 May 2023. The Joint Methods Manual includes a chapter on the Living Lab approach with references to key methodology texts and instructions on how

to employ this format in a project focused on democracy support in the EU's Eastern and Southern Neighbourhoods. During this phase, the JLU also drafted preliminary instructional documents and timelines for the Living Labs. In order to ensure the methodological and conceptual coherence of the task with the SHAPEDEM-EU's overall goals, the JLU also met with partners from the Roskilde University (RUC) to maintain consistency with the conceptual foundations of the project.

With the commencement of **Phase 1** of the Living Labs, the involved SHAPEDEM-EU partners began **mapping** the field of related actors. Led by the JLU, contributors from CEF, KADEM and EaP CSF drafted a network of the community of practice involved in or relevant to EU democracy support. While CEF was focused on mapping out the EU and European institutional actors, KADEM and the EaP CSF were concentrated on the Southern and Eastern Neighbourhoods, respectively. Concurrent to this task, the four SHAPEDEM-EU partner institutions also began drafting interview questions for the subsequent phase, when interviews with different kinds of stakeholders had been planned. The partners also met with team members of the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy (NaUKMA) as well as the American University of Beirut (AUB) to ensure the understandings and networks of the Neighbourhood societies were not overlooked.

During **Phase 2**, the SHAPEDEM-EU partners started the **sensing** period of the Living Lab methodology. This sensing period included conducting over 60 interviews conducted online and in person with stakeholders in the EU and the two Neighbourhoods. The interviews were conducted under guarantee of anonymity and with full consent of the involved participants. During this intense interview phase, the SHAPEDEM-EU task contributors met on a bi-monthly basis to maintain methodological alignment and to share their interim results. The interviews were conducted with individuals from a number of EU Directorates General, the EEAS, and EU Delegations, in addition to members of civil society and national institutions from Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine as well as Tunisia and Lebanon. Due to the escalation of the War in Palestine, however, the mapping of actors from Palestine was less accessible. In addition, as the War in Southern Lebanon broke out, participants from Lebanon were also less available. the SHAPEDEM-EU partners involved in this task in May 2023 held meetings with additional project partners from the Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB), the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and RUC in an effort to draw on their own contacts in the Southern Neighbourhood region and build on the broadest possible network for identifying appropriate interview partners. Hence, due to the war in Palestine and Southern Lebanon, Phase 2's period lasted longer in the Southern Neighbourhood - until July 2023. At the culmination of Phase 2, the contributing SHAPEDEM-EU partners compiled their sensing results to inform the measures to be taken in Phase 3.

Phase 3 marked the start of collaborating with multiple stakeholders to begin the **concept development period**. This primarily consisted of two separate online Living Labs held on each of the Neighbourhoods. The first online Living Lab was on the Eastern Neighbourhood and took place on 30 May 2024. The event brought together civil society representatives from Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine, along with European stakeholders. Although the participation of EU representatives was sought, including the individuals and institutions engaged in Phase 2, their willingness and availability to contribute to Phase 3 was more limited. As a consequence, the European stakeholders primarily involved participants from international and regional donor organisations. The event took place under Chatham House Rules and with the verbal consent of the participating 15 individuals. The two-hour digital Living Lab event was conducted in concert by the JLU, CEF, EaP CSF and KADEM. While the findings of the previous phase were presented, the activities were dedicated to finding common concepts for democracy support based on shared experiences.

Due to the aforementioned circumstances, the participation of individuals from Palestine and Lebanon was not possible. The second Living Lab event on 24 July 2024 included 10 individuals from Tunisia alongside European representatives, albeit not from EU institutions. The outcome of this Living Lab event, as a consequence, was much more focused on the insights gained from democracy support concepts in Tunisia, although the participants were also invited to draw on their own professional experiences in Palestina and Lebanon.

3 Living Lab Events	
Living Lab – Eastern Neighbourhood	30 May 2024 (<i>online</i>)
Living Lab – Southern Neighbourhood	24 July 2024 (<i>online</i>)
Living Lab – Eastern and Southern Neighbourhoods	14 – 17 October 2024 (<i>in-person event in Istanbul with hybrid participation</i>)

Table 2: 3 SHAPEDEM-EU Living Lab Events

The first two online Living Lab events yielded conceptual outcomes, which were used to inform the structure and contents of the in-person Living Lab event in **Phase 4**, dedicated to **changes**. The period leading up to the in-person Living Lab was dedicated to logistical planning, including securing a venue in Istanbul, Türkiye, as well as travel arrangements for participants. The venue was selected in Türkiye to ensure ease of access for participants from the Southern and Eastern Neighbourhoods, both related to travel arrangements as well as visa conditions. The in-person event included 11 individuals from both Neighbourhoods (1 individual each from Ukraine, Armenia and Lebanon (*online*); 2 individuals each from Palestine, Georgia, Tunisia) as well as two participants from the European Endowment for Democracy.

In-Person Living Lab Participant Composition	
Eastern Neighbourhood: 1 Armenian, 2 Georgians, & 1 Ukrainian	Southern Neighbourhood: 2 Tunisians, 2 Palestinians (<i>in-person</i>) & 1 Lebanese (<i>online</i>)
European Institutions: 2 representatives from European Endowment for Democracy	SHAPEDEM-EU: 4 members of (JLU, CEF, KADEM <i>in-person</i>) & 1 member (EaP CSF <i>online</i>)

Table 3: 3 SHAPEDEM-EU in-person Living Lab participant composition.

The diversity of participants, both in terms of working backgrounds, nationalities, and time of experience in the field of democracy support produced an environment rife for collecting knowledge about past and present policies. Moreover, by bringing individuals from both Neighbourhoods together, the event fostered a process of mutual learning and best practices exchanges. The three-day event featured different sessions dedicated to informing the participants about SHAPEDEM-EU concepts, including the project's approach and vocabulary for EU democracy support, sharing interim findings to those individuals who had not participated in Phase 3 as well as co-productive activities used to generate policy insights.



Figure 1: SHAPEDEM-EU Partners from the Justus Liebig University Giessen (left), al-Kawakibi Democracy Transition Center and Carnegie Europe Foundation (right). Participants attended the SHAPEDEM-EU Living Labs on the basis of anonymity and were not photographed.

3 Results

The following section of this report outlines the results collected throughout the Living Lab task. These findings represent the outcome of the entirety of the SHAPEDEM-EU Living Labs, including reflections on the methodology, the phased approaches, as well as the 3 Living Lab events themselves.

3.1 Findings from the 3 SHAPEDEM-EU Living Labs

3.1.1 Thematic content of the EU democracy support

The thematic content of the EU democracy support – that is, the range of areas it covers – has continuously expanded over the last two decades and its priorities have been at least relatively tailored to local needs. Nevertheless, the issue areas have rather been dictated by the EU, with little to no input from local authorities. Local civil society actors have primarily acted as the consumers of the conceptually identified thematic areas, implementing templates externally developed and transferred by intermediary European civil society organisations. Moreover, the diversity of areas supported shrinks when sub-national regions are zoomed in, partly resulting from the lack of capacity to match the thematic templates externally produced. Urban and capital-based civil society actors which are relatively better trained in EU themes of democracy support have, thus, gained an upper hand in relation to civil society actors in rural or remote areas. Such a top-down thematic structuring, with its own bureaucratic terminology, has long suppressed the chances for local democratic knowledge to be shaped or articulated. Tailoring thematic programmes to country needs has often encouraged the subordination of local themes to selected EU templates. The EU democracy support policy needs to be sensitive to and encourage local original themes of democracy with their own language and conceptual baggage on the one hand and ensure the “translation” of EU templates into local codes, on the other hand.

3.1.2 Financial & institutional support mechanism

While the financial support mechanisms are multiple and some flexible instruments have been introduced in recent years, the EU financing instruments are still too rigid for local civil society actors, particularly those in more disadvantaged situations. The rigid bureaucratic standards set are often met formally, while realities do differ significantly. The situation is particularly severe in areas where/since when the EU (and other democracy support/development actors) have largely ceased to provide support for the institutional development of civil society actors.

In neighbourhood countries where civil society actors face constant autocratic pressure, even the capacity once built with the support of the EU and other international actors evades over time. Moreover, the priorities of different European instruments (EU and non-EU European) often do not reflect any strong prior coordination. Even though certain flexible support mechanisms have been developed (e.g. EED), EU support mechanisms are generally slow in responding to changing priorities of local civil society actors in the face of developments in the country.

The monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) mechanisms require similar adjustments to local realities. The project portfolios and outcomes are rarely publicised in detail, and often carried along the bureaucratic corridors, resulting in a loss of public accountability. Lastly, a lack of inclusiveness remains a major concern in supporting civil society actors, resulting from the rigidity of bureaucratic standards and thematically top-down approaches.

3.1.3 Political context of EU democracy support

Although the thematic focus and the financial and institutional mechanisms of EU democracy support as well as their shortcomings are generally consistent across both the Eastern and Southern neighbourhoods, the political contexts in these regions, and even within them, vary significantly. Civil society actors from Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, and Armenia advocate for a stronger integration of security aspects into the EU's democracy support framework. In contrast, civil society actors in the Southern neighbourhood express concerns that the EU's democracy support agenda is being overshadowed by its strategic interests. The latter concern is also echoed in other Eastern partnership countries (Belarus and Azerbaijan, and partially in Armenia in relation to Azerbaijan). Although these concerns are nothing new, the security-democracy support nexus has become too strained by the intensified rivalry among the major powers on the world stage. The global power competition has raised concerns about the democracy support agenda being compromised both by civil society actors in the neighbourhood regions and the EU, itself. The US shift of strategic focus from democracy promotion to preserving the established democracies has further ignited concerns about the time of democracy support being gone.

Participants noted that the EU should continuously engage in the act of balancing between security interests and democracy support agenda. To protect its reputation, it also requires hearing local voices, making them feel heard, and more explicitly acknowledging the limits of its democracy support agenda – not cultivating false promises.

3.2 Implementing a Learning Loop for Improved Democracy Support

The Living Lab methodology, as an innovative concept in social sciences, is inherently flexible and adaptable to the context in which it is applied. During the initial Phase 0, the focus was on refining the conceptual framework of the method, ensuring the implementation team fully understood it, and tailoring it to the specific research question—EU Democracy Support—and the project's unique requirements. This phase demanded extensive internal discussions, conceptual development and

meticulous planning, spanning several months. One key lesson learned at this stage was the need to allocate ample time to this process, as it involved frequent biweekly and sometimes weekly online meetings.

Upon completing this foundational phase, the project transitioned to Phase 1, which focused on stakeholder identification. This stage was underpinned by a stakeholder conceptualisation framework derived from a review of relevant academic literature. The coordinating team at Justus-Liebig University of Giessen developed a comprehensive guide for project partners to ensure consistency in implementation. Stakeholders were identified through a combination of think tank reports, early communications with preliminary contacts, institutional networks of the project partners, and a snowballing method. A collaboratively designed communication strategy—ranging from initial outreach content to effective information-sharing techniques—proved instrumental in engaging a diverse array of stakeholders. During this phase, the team grappled with complex questions about stakeholder categorisation (e.g., high influence but low stakes versus low influence but high stakes) and ideological or political affiliations, which often inspired insightful debates.

While Phase 1 (stakeholder identification) and Phase 2 (issue mapping) were conceptually distinct, their implementation occasionally overlapped or progressed in parallel across the two regions or geographies within them. Phase 2 commenced once stakeholder identification was relatively complete. It was guided by a predefined manual outlining interview and communication strategies for project partners. Instead of adhering to a rigid structure, interviews were designed to allow stakeholders to bring forth topics they considered important. Throughout this phase, frequent communication among implementing partners and regular reflections on interim outcomes facilitated the consolidation of internal knowledge and ensured a cohesive approach.

Phase 3 (Co-creation of a new policy/procedure/practice concept, Concept Development) centred on the analysis of insights gained from stakeholder engagement and intensive reflection within the organising team and the wider consortium. This process identified recurring themes and highlighted areas requiring further clarification. The outcomes of this analytical phase informed two additional group discussions with stakeholders from the Eastern and Southern Neighbourhoods. These discussions refined the emerging findings and inspired new lines of thinking, as outlined in the preceding section. These ideas were then further developed and matured during the final phase—Phase 4 (Prototyping the newly co-created concepts in policy, procedure, and practice, Changes). The prototyping phase, in fact, continued through the finalisation of SHAPEDEM-EU project and feeds various other forms of activities including democracy dinners, retreats and the closing conference, where discussions with stakeholders take place.

These processes culminated in a meticulously planned two-day conference in Istanbul, held from 14 to 16 October 2024, provided an intensive platform to explore the outcomes of a year-and-a-half-long process. The event offered a dual focus: reflecting on the Living Lab methodology, its implementation within the SHAPEDEM-EU project, and the substantive findings it generated, while also facilitating structured workshops on foresight analysis and policy simulation. The collaborative nature of these sessions encouraged innovative thinking and strengthened the participatory ethos of the Living Lab approach. By combining reflective discussions with forward-oriented workshops, the conference not only validated the achievements of the project but also charted a path for future applications of the methodology and the integration of its findings into EU policy frameworks.

3.3 A Living Lab as a Regular Tool of the EU's Policy Inventory

The pilot implementation of the Democracy Living Labs within the SHAPEDEM-EU project fulfilled three key objectives. Firstly, it sought to generate substantive insights into the effectiveness and shortcomings of the EU's Democracy Support policies in the Eastern and Southern neighbourhoods. Secondly, it aimed to foster a robust network of stakeholders, forging new connections among diverse actors involved in EU Democracy Support, both within the EU and across its neighbouring regions. Thirdly, as a pioneering application of this methodology in this context, the initiative adapted the Living Lab approach to align with the unique requirements of the EU Democracy Support policies.

By piloting this innovative mechanism, the project demonstrated its potential efficacy, offering a compelling model for the EU to integrate into its democracy support framework. The results (see the table below) underscore the stark contrast between conventional policy review methods and the Living Lab methodology, highlighting the tangible advantages it can deliver to both the EU and the beneficiaries of its Democracy Support policies in the Eastern and Southern neighbourhoods.

Standard Policy Review	Living Lab
Stakeholder Involvement	
Typically follows a top-down approach, granting minimal voice or active role to EU Democracy Support stakeholders during the evaluation process. Stakeholders are often relegated to peripheral positions, with their contributions either undervalued or entirely absent.	Adopts a participatory framework where stakeholders actively engage throughout all phases. From agenda-setting to final analysis, stakeholders play an integral role, ensuring their insights are embedded into every stage of the process. Adopts a participatory framework where stakeholders actively engage throughout all phases. From agenda-setting to final analysis, stakeholders play an integral role, ensuring their insights are embedded into every stage of the process.
Nature of Communication	
Operates on a one-way feedback mechanism, primarily focusing on collecting information from neighbourhood stakeholders to inform decision-makers, with limited reciprocal interaction	Promotes multilateral exchanges among diverse stakeholders, creating a dynamic environment where knowledge flows not just between the EU and neighbourhood actors but also horizontally among civil society organisations, academics and local communities.
Structure & Underpinning Power Dynamics	
Internal deliberations are conducted largely in isolation from stakeholders, with decisions and evaluations often detached from the realities faced by local actors.	Integrates stakeholders into the process from start to finish, fostering an inclusive ecosystem where collaboration informs all stages of evaluation and policy development.
Often reflects an asymmetrical power dynamic, where the EU holds a dominant role as the evaluator and decision-maker, while stakeholders are positioned as passive informants.	Encourages equal participation, creating an environment of mutual respect that enhances trust, legitimacy, and ownership of outcomes among all involved parties.
Transparency	

The processing and utilisation of stakeholder feedback often lack transparency, with limited accountability or visibility into how such inputs shape policies.	Emphasises transparency through co-creation, involving stakeholders directly in decision-making and ensuring their contributions are acknowledged and visibly integrated into outcomes.
Knowledge Generation & Learning	
Relies heavily on a static, linear approach to knowledge generation, and therefore, often fails to capture the evolving complexities of democracy support challenges.	Embodies a dynamic learning process, where iterative feedback loops and reflective practices allow for continuous improvement and innovation.
Continuity and Proactivity	
Typically operates as a one-time initiative or occurs at predetermined intervals, alternatively triggered by specific events or changes in the political landscape and hence, reactionary, lacking ongoing engagement or long-term foresight embedded in local knowledge and knowledge context.	Functions as an institutionalised, continuous policy co-review mechanism that is embedded within the policy-making process. Hence, the Living Lab method allows for ongoing, proactive engagement with stakeholders and ensures that democratic support policies are not merely responsive at best but anticipatory and aligned with evolving local demands and political contexts in the neighbourhood and globally.

Table 4: Living Lab Results¹

¹ For further reading, see Malmberg, Katariina et. al (2017): [Living Lab Methodology Handbook](#) or Kareborn and Stahlbrost (2009): “Living Lab: an open and citizen-centric approach for innovation”, in International Journal of Innovation and Regional Development 1(4), 356-370.

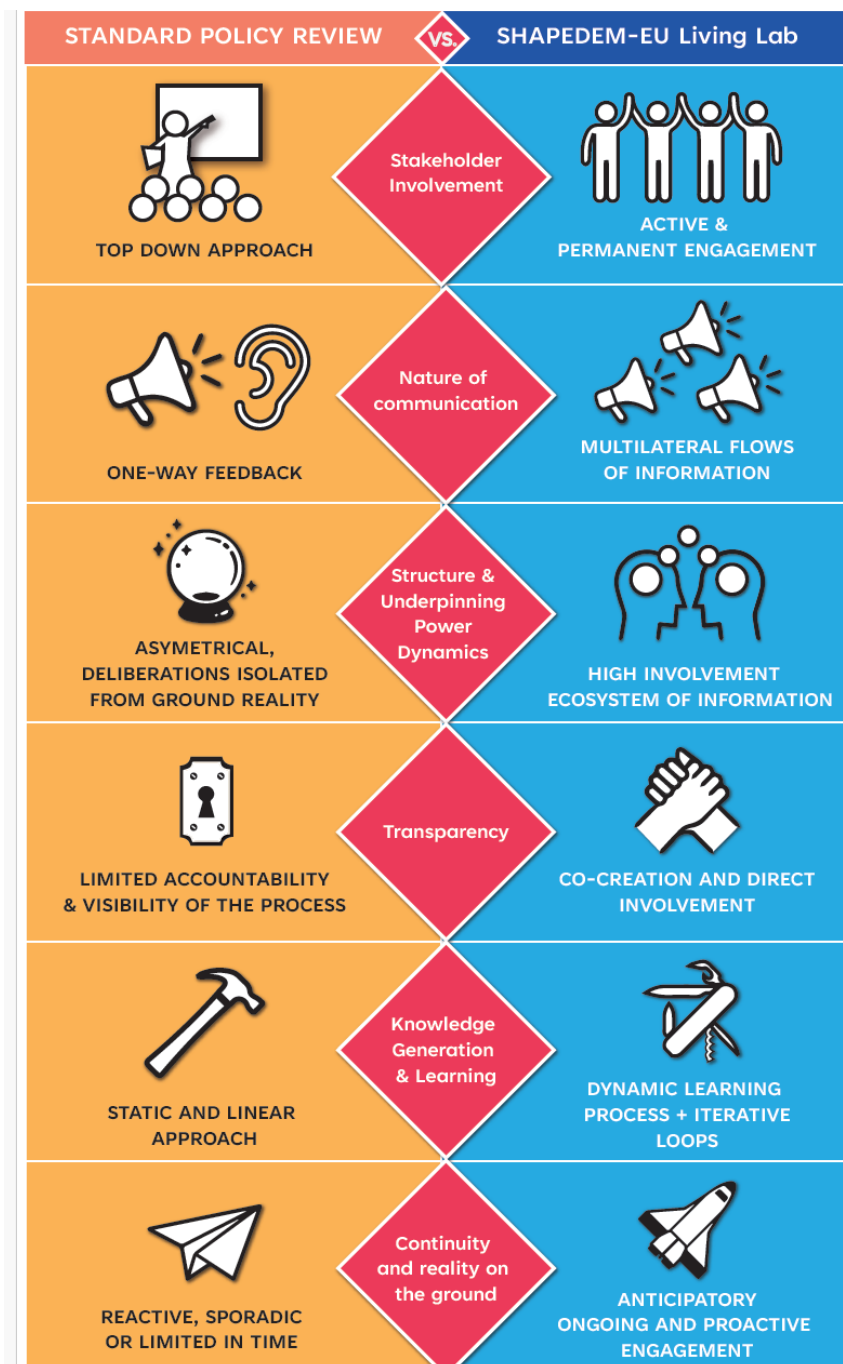


Figure 2: Added Value of SHAPEDEM-EU's Living Lab Methodology

4 Deviations Summary

Although the Living Lab task foresaw the participation of EU officials, their attendance at in-person events was not possible. Although many contacts were willing contributors to bilateral interviews throughout the task, their participation at the in-person event in Istanbul was precluded by their inability to accept travel and accommodation funding.

The participation of a Lebanese contributor at the in-person event was made logistically impossible due to the War in Southern Lebanon, though a participant was able to join via a digital connection.

The submission of this deliverable was originally foreseen in November 2024. However, this coincided with a number of other events within the project as well as delays in the submission of other

deliverables for the JLU Team. These delays did not interfere with the achievement of the task, Work Package or SHAPEDEM-EU objectives.

5 Conclusions

In conclusion, SHAPEDEM-EU's Living Labs as a means to pilot test a Democracy Learning Loop represents more than an alternative methodology; it marks a fundamental shift in how EU democracy support can be conceptualised, evaluated and improved. As the comparative analysis demonstrates, the Living Lab model stands in stark contrast to standard policy review mechanisms, offering a more inclusive, dynamic and ultimately effective pathway to fostering democratic practices in the EU's Eastern and Southern Neighbourhoods. The Living Lab methodology embeds a participatory framework, transforming stakeholders from passive informants into active co-creators, ensuring their voices are integral from agenda-setting to final analysis. This fosters a multilateral dialogue where knowledge flows freely not just between the EU and its neighbours, but horizontally among the diverse actors on the ground. Such an approach inherently rebalances power dynamics, building an ecosystem of mutual respect, trust, and shared ownership over the outcomes.

Furthermore, the Living Lab's emphasis on co-creation ensures transparency and fosters a dynamic, iterative learning process. It moves beyond static, linear knowledge generation, creating a continuous policy co-review mechanism that allows for constant adaptation and innovation. This transforms EU democracy support from a reactive instrument, often responding to crises, into a proactive and anticipatory framework that is aligned with the evolving needs and contexts of its partners. By institutionalising this approach, the EU can ensure its policies are not only more relevant and effective but also more legitimate in the eyes of those they are designed to support. The SHAPEDEM-EU experience, therefore, offers a compelling case for adopting the Living Lab not as a one-time initiative, but as a regular and essential tool within the EU's permanent policy toolbox.

6 Annex

The following Annex contains three exemplary documents used during the SHAPEDEM-EU Living Lab task.

- Annex 1 presents the programme of activities followed during the in-person Living Lab event in Istanbul, Türkiye in October 2024.
- Annex 2 includes a sample consent form from the event used to maintain the high ethical standards of the project.
- Annex 3 contains a presentation used at the in-person event to share a stocktaking of the Living Lab task insights.

6.1 Annex 1 – Living Lab Programme

Day 1: Arrival & Introductions		
Monday, 14 October, 2024		
Venue: Lionel Hotel		
Time	Topic	
18:00 - 18:30	Informal Gathering Welcoming remarks by Fabian Schoeppner & Andrea Gawrich (JLU), Elena Ventura (CEF)	
20:00	Reception	
	Day 2: Shaping Policy	
	Tuesday, 15 October, 2024	
	Venue: Lionel Hotel	
Time	Topic	Chair
from 09:45	Login for hybrid participants	
10:00 - 11:30	Stocktaking of SHAPEDEM-EU Living Labs Reviewing the Interim Results of Phases 1 – 3 Elena Ventura (CEF) Kristina Pitalskaya (EaP-CSF) Zouhour Ouamara (KADEM)	Andrea Gawrich & Fabian Schöppner (JLU)
11:30 - 12:00	Coffee Break	
12:00 - 13:30	Thematic Content of a Democracy Learning Loop	Kristina Pitalskaya digital (EaP CSF) & Fabian Schoeppner (JLU)
13:30 - 14:30	Group Picture & Lunch Break	
14:30 - 16:00	Procedural Mechanisms for an improved EU Democracy Support	Zouhour Ouamara (KADEM)
16:00 - 16:30	Coffee Break	
16:30 - 18:00	Political Context of Joint Democratic Learning	Elena Ventura (CEF)
18:00 - 18:15	Wrap Up	Fabian Schoeppner (JLU)
18:15 - 18:45	Evening Break	
18:45 - 20:00	Fireside Discussion	Andrea Gawrich (JLU)
20:00	Living Lab Group Dinner Restaurant	

	Day 3: Recommending Policy Wednesday, 16 October, 2024 Venue: <i>Lionel Hotel</i>	
Time	Topic	Chair
<i>from 09:15</i>	<i>Login for hybrid participants</i>	
9:30 - 11:00	Setting the Agenda for Mutual Democracy Support	Kristina Pitalskaya <i>digital</i> (EaP-CSF) & Fabian Schöppner (JLU)
11:00 - 11:30	<i>Coffee Break</i>	
11:30 - 13:15	Simulating a Policy Cycle for New Practices and Interactions in EU Democracy Support <i>Discussion and Debate</i>	Andrea Gawrich (JLU)
13:00 - 14:30	<i>Lunch Break</i>	
14:30 - 16:00	Where do we go from here?	Fabian Schöppner (JLU)
16:00-16:15	Final Reflections	
16:15	End of Meeting Optional Tour of Istanbul	
20:30	Group Dinner	

[Information on the Event](#)

SHAPEDEM-EU has the ambition to pilot-test a Democracy Learning Loop through living labs

This task tests the Democracy Learning Loop in living labs (as experimental real-life settings) throughout which participant-driven innovation is generated. By bringing together a wide array of stakeholders and societal groups from both neighbourhoods and the EU, the task simulates policy cycles of agenda setting, agenda implementation, feedback loops, and output control of democracy support practices. The living lab findings are modelled in methods of scenario development in foresight analyses to enable stakeholders to make informed predictions on a policy toolkit for democracy support.

Phase 4 of the SHAPEDEM-EU Living Labs will be conducted at an in-person event in Istanbul, Turkey with 15 participants from the Eastern and Southern Neighbourhoods as well as European institutions. The ambition is to unite these guests to collaborate on a new policy of European democracy support over a three-day event. The SHAPEDEM-EU Living Labs have been prepared and organized by its partners from the **Kawakibi Democracy Transition Center** (KADEM) in Tunis, the **Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum** (EaP-CSF) and **Carnegie Europe Foundation** (CEF) in Brussels as well as the **Justus Liebig University of Giessen** (JLU) in Giessen, Germany.

6.2 Annex 2 Consent Form



SHAPEDEM-EU Living Lab

14 – 17 October 2024

Istanbul, Turkey

Informed Consent Form

Information on research activity

The SHAPEDEM-EU Living lab in-person event will take place 14-17 October 2024 in Istanbul Turkey. It is implemented in the context of Work Package 7 – Academic Synthesis and Policy Recommendations by the coordinating partners Justus Liebig University Giessen, together with the Carnegie Europe Foundation, Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum and al-Kawakiby Democracy Transition Center.

Informed Consent for Participants in Research Activities in the context of the SHAPEDEM-EU project

Thank you for your interest in participating in our research project. This document provides you with information about the research, your role as a participant, and what we will do with the data collected from you. Please read this document carefully and feel free to ask us any questions before deciding whether or not to participate.

Our research project SHAPEDEM-EU sets out to rethink, reshape, and review the EU's democracy support policies in its eastern and southern neighbourhoods by developing a Democracy Learning Loop. It is funded by the European Union's Horizon Europe



Funded by the
European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Research Executive Agency (REA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. Research outcomes will be used in scientific publications, a digital dashboard, a confidential databank, as well as policy recommendations. We will conduct a Living Lab event with participants like you to gather information about EU democracy support in its Eastern and Southern Neighbourhoods. The Living Lab event will not be recorded or transcribed for analysis; however autonomous notes will be taken. Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

Your Role as a Participant:

If you choose to participate in this research project, you will be asked to do the following:

- Participate in group discussions with one or more of our researchers as well as with other participants.
- Answer questions related to democratic practices, practices of democracy support as well as practices of contestation.
- Allow us to take notes on comments made.
- Agree to the use and storage of the data collected as detailed below.

Data Collection and Processing:

- All personal data related to the Living Labs will be treated confidentially and in accordance with the applicable data protection regulations (most notably the General Data Protection Regulation of the European Union). It will only be made public based on informed consent. We will only use the data for research purposes and will not disclose any identifying information to anyone outside of the research teams. Appropriate steps will be undertaken to anonymise data from communication, in order to guarantee the safety of participating individuals and organisations. We will securely store the data for a period of for no longer than three years after the project's completion before destroying it in a responsible and confidential manner.

Confidentiality:

- The event will take place under Chatham House Rules. We will not share any pictures or other information related to individuals participating in the Living Lab event. We will ensure that any identifying information you provide us with during the interview is kept strictly confidential. We will not disclose any identifying information to anyone outside of the research team, except where required by law. The data collected from you will be anonymized and aggregated to ensure confidentiality.

Risks and Benefits:

Since all gathered information will be anonymised, participating in this research project carries risks. However, you may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions or sharing your personal experiences during the exchange. If you feel uncomfortable or distressed at any point, you can choose to stop or take a break. If you experience any adverse effects as a result of participating in this research project, please let us know.

We will not disclose your participation in this research activity, however, please be aware of other evidence that could give away your participation (i.e. journey here, surveillance, unsafe communication etc.) if this is among your concerns.

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research project. However, your participation will help us to better understand EU democracy support and contribute to knowledge in this field.

Statement of Consent/Assent:

By agreeing to participate in this research project, you are consenting to the following:

- You have read and understood this informed consent document.
- You have had the opportunity to ask questions to the researchers and have received satisfactory answers.
- You understand that participation in this research project is entirely voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.
- You agree to participate in the SHAPEDEM-EU Living Lab Event and have your data recorded and transcribed (if applicable).
- You agree to the use and storage of the data collected and understand that the data will be treated with the utmost care and confidentiality.

If you are under the age of 18, you may not participate in this research project.

Participant Signature: _____ Date _____

Thank you for participating in our SHAPEDEM-EU project!

The SHAPEDEM-EU consortium



**Rethinking and Reshaping the EU's Democracy
Support in its Eastern and Southern
Neighbourhoods
SHAPEDEM-EU**



**SHAPEDEM-EU
Living Labs
In-person Event
Istanbul 14 – 17 October 2024**



1. Consent and Data Useage
2. Code of Conduct
3. Information about the Project
4. Communities of Practice Approach
5. Living Lab Method and Results



CONSENT AND DATA USAGE





CODE OF CONDUCT

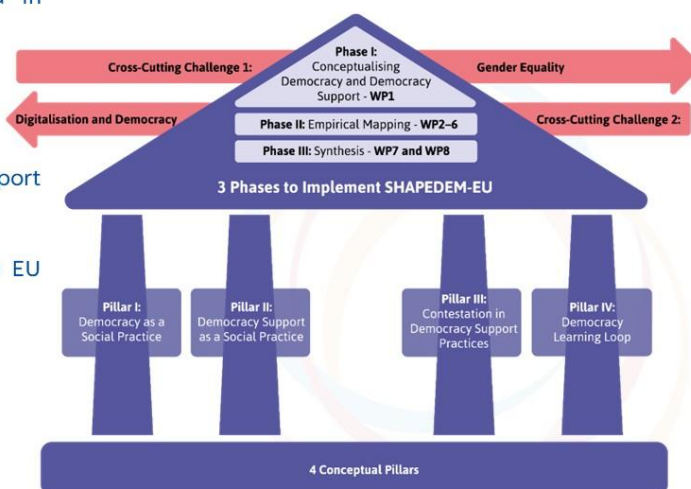


SHAPEDEM-EU is a multi-national and multifaceted research consortium of twelve academic, think tank and civil society institutions based in Europe and the Southern and Eastern Neighbourhoods. This EU-funded project sets out to rethink, reshape and review the Union's democracy support policies in its Neighbourhood countries. Through its research, SHAPEDEM-EU aims to increase the EU's accountability, transparency, effectiveness and trustworthiness and to make Neighbourhood countries more resilient, equitable and responsive to the needs of their local populations.



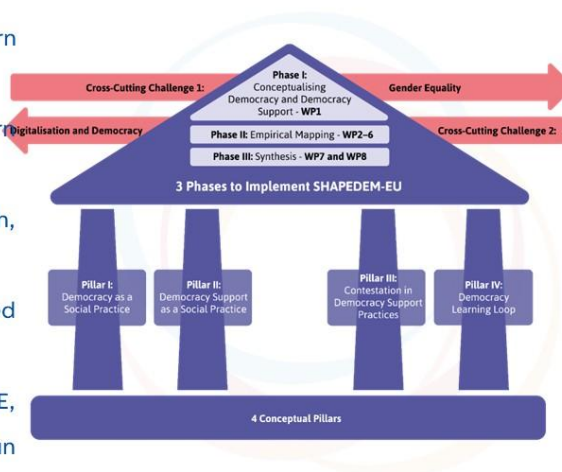
SHAPEDEM-EU's 3 phases are grounded in four key conceptual pillars:

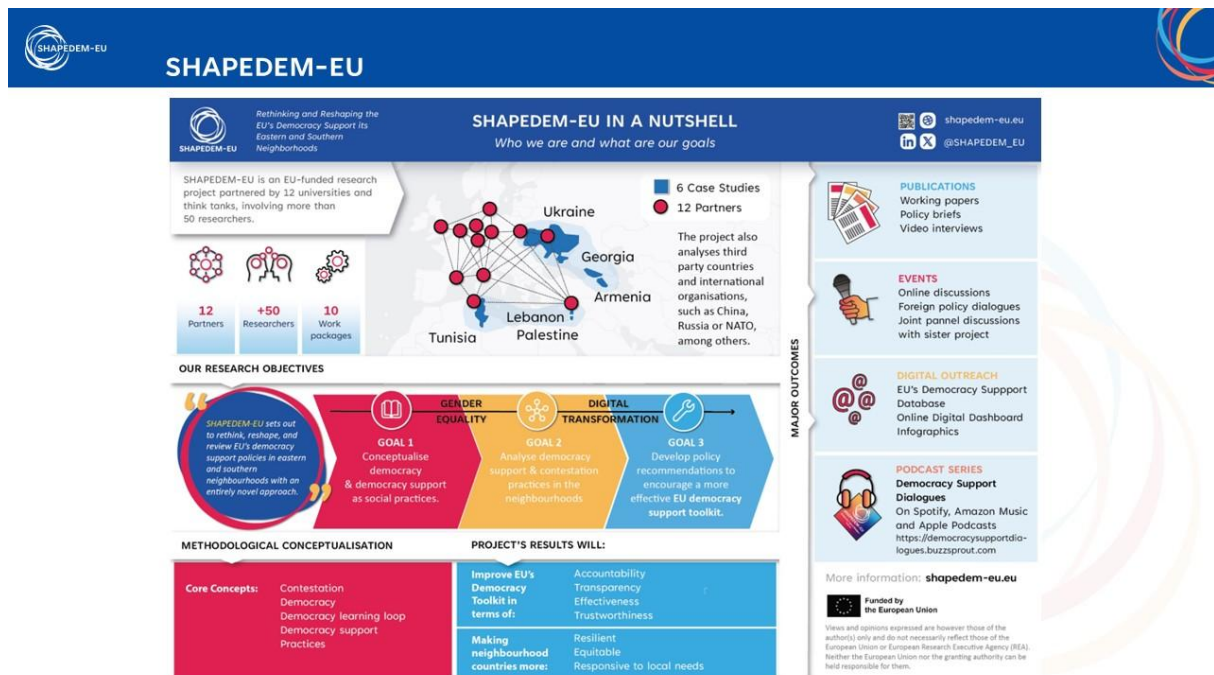
- Democracy as a social practice
- Democracy support as a social practice
- Contestation within democracy support practices
- A democracy learning loop to improve EU democracy support



SHAPEDEM-EU's work has important empirical focuses on:

- Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine in the Eastern Neighbourhood
- Lebanon, Palestine and Tunisia in the Southern Neighbourhood
- Austria, Denmark, France, Italy Germany, Spain, Poland, Sweden
- the United States, China, Russia, the United Kingdom, Turkey and Saudi Arabia
- the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, NATO, the League of Arab States and the African Union





Conceptual Approach – Communities of Practice (CoPs)

EU democracy support is conceptualized as practices performed within a multi-layered constellation of **communities of practices (CoP)** in which different CoPs can be ordered in 3 broad groups:

- communities of **EU DS practices**,
- communities of **local democratization practices**,
- and communities of **other EU foreign affairs practices**.

All CoPs within this constellation are (often loosely) connected due to their practices which are (or should be!) part of EU DS, but they are all based on a **different habitus** (Bourdieu 1977) and thus function according to their own logic, whereas ideas and knowledge hardly ever travel between them.



Communities of Practice are bound together by three central aspects:

- 1) **High degree of ongoing mutual engagement:** Forged in participating in a practice together, members of the CoP “interact with one another, establishing norms and relationships of mutuality that reflect these interactions”
- 2) **Sense of joint enterprise:** Members collectively develop an understanding of what the CoP is about, and they hold each other accountable.
- 3) **Shared repertoire of communal resources:** To negotiate meaning of the joint endeavour of a CoP, members produce a heterogeneous set of tools and resources, which can include, among others, terminology and language, narratives and stories, gestures and symbols, routines and concepts. These tools and resources are then used in the community’s practices.

Pace, Michelle; Achraimer, Christian 2024



In the field of EU Democracy Support we have identified a number of different Communities of Practice:

Communities of EU DS practices (divided into country- or neighbourhoodspecific subgroupings)

CoP 1: The usual suspects (e.g., representatives of EU institutions and of EU (implementation) agencies, European civil society actors, European researchers, think tankers and experts, activists operating in Europe, etc.)

CoP 2: Contesting unheard voices (e.g., former EU officials, members of the EP, exiled activists who fled from the neighbourhood to the EU, small less connected NGOs, critical researchers, etc.)

Pace, Michelle; Achraimer, Christian 2024



In the field of EU Democracy Support we have identified a number of different Communities of Practice

Communities of local democratization practices (divided into country-specific subgroupings)

CoP 1: The usual suspects (e.g., state officials, MPs, representatives of state agencies and of large wellconnected NGOs, well-known researchers and local experts, etc.)

CoP 2: Contesting unheard voices (e.g., state representatives and MPs whose ideas are not considered, representatives of small and lessconnected NGOs or social movements, activists or human rights lawyers, etc.)

Pace, Michelle; Achrainer, Christian 2024



In the field of EU Democracy Support we have identified a number of different Communities of Practice

Outsider Communities contesting EU DS

CoP 3: (eg, EU outsiders, local outsiders, and other international contributors

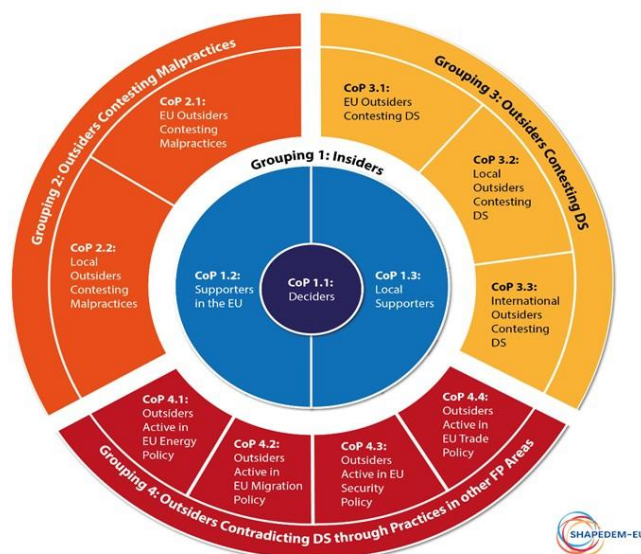
Communities of other EU foreign affairs practices (divided into country- or neighbourhood specific subgroupings)

CoP 4.1: energy
CoP 4.2: migration
CoP 4.3: security
CoP 4.4: trade Etc. (e.g., representatives of EU institutions and of EU (implementation) agencies, European civil society actors, European researchers and experts, etc.)

Pace, Michelle; Achrainer, Christian 2024

- Each of these groups has different background knowledge and different practices.
- Some are more homogenous and better connected with a distinct and defined sense of purpose.
- Exchange of ideas and knowledge only happens between CoPs which have a more similar habitus; between these CoPs some form of learning is possible.
- The CoPs which differ more fundamentally, in turn, hardly ever interact and do not learn from each other with varying degrees of capital and power distributed among them.

Pace, Michelle; Achraimer, Christian 2024



Pace, Michelle; Achraimer, Christian; Farres, Oriol 2024



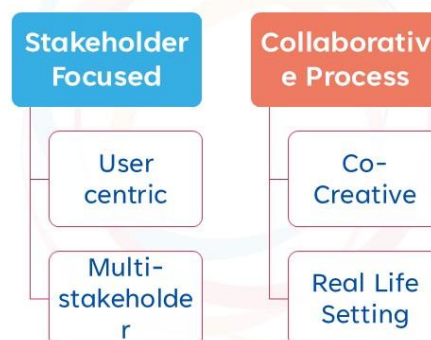
SHAPEDEM-EU has the ambition to pilot-test a Democracy Learning Loop through living labs

This task tests the Democracy Learning Loop in living labs (as experimental real-life settings) throughout which participant-driven innovation is generated. By bringing together a wide array of stakeholders and societal groups from both neighbourhoods and the EU, the task simulates policy-cycles of agenda setting, agenda implementation, feedback loops, and output control of democracy support practices. The living lab findings are modelled in methods of scenario development in foresight analyses to enable stakeholders to make informed predictions on a policy toolkit for democracy support.



Living Labs are characterised as both **practice-driven organisations** and **real-life environments**. They are intended to facilitate and foster open, collaborative innovation, providing arenas where open innovation and user innovation processes can be studied and experimented with, and where new solutions are developed. There is no single methodology for Living Labs as they can be implemented very differently.

4 KEY FEATURES UNDERLYING ALL LIVING LABS





Inés Arco
• CIDOB



Kristina Pitalskaia
• EaP-CSF



Akram Ezzamouri
• IAI



Fabian Schoeppner
• JLU Giessen



Murad Nasibov
• JLU Giessen



Elena Ventura
• Carnegie Europe



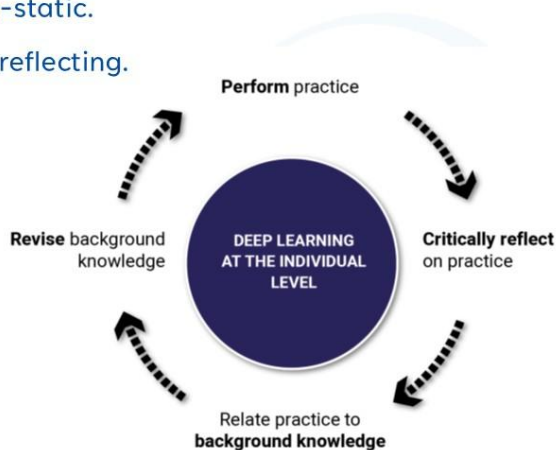
Zouhour Ouamara
• KADEM

- **Total interviews:** 30 interviews for the Southern Neighbourhood
- **Total interviews:** 29 interviews for the Eastern Neighbourhood
- **Semi-structured** interviews
- Interviewees included representatives from **EU institutions** (EC, EEAS), **CSOs** (in the EU and in the Southern Neighbourhood), **IOs**, **academia** and **think tanks**.
- **2 online group discussions** (although for the Southern Neighbourhood, the group discussion only included Tunisian participants)
- Our approach focuses on the **THEMATIC CONTEXT**, **PROCEDURAL MECHANISMS** and **POLITICAL SUPPORT** within EU Democracy Support.

- Practices are not determined by deliberation or conscious reflection on choices. Instead, they rest on tacit background knowledge which is “unreflexive and inarticulate through and through” (Pouliot 2008: 265).
- However, the ability to learn and unlearn certain practices is difficult to harness.
 - Especially non-learning poses a challenge here, since many CoPs can be resistant.
 - Deep-learning to overcome these issues to allow for scrutinizing and revising the background knowledge shaping our practices.
 - Unlearning misleading knowledge.

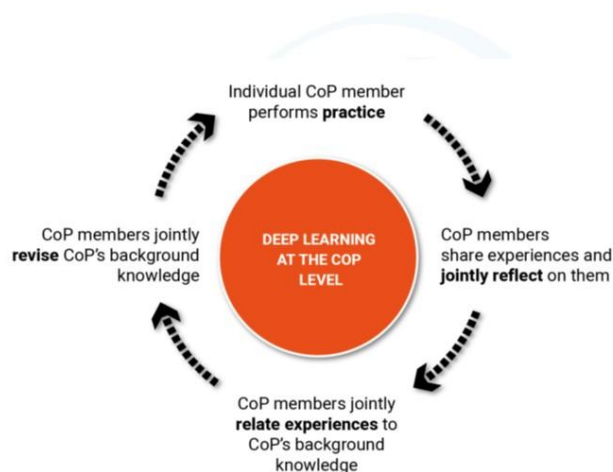
Pace, Michelle; Achraimer, Christian 2024

- To learn in such circumstances, we must acknowledge that knowledge and practices are co-constitutive and non-static.
- Dynamic processes of practicing and reflecting.



Pace, Michelle; Achraimer, Christian 2024

- However, learning is not just an individual but also a collective process with cognitive and social elements.



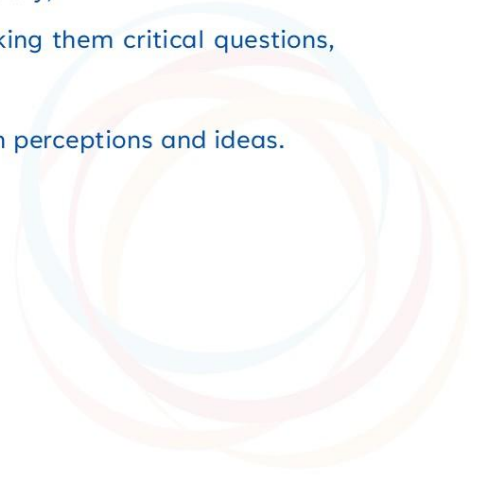
Pace, Michelle; Achraimer, Christian 2024

- 1) **listen carefully** to the contributions of others in discussions and deliberations, and
- 2) ask **questions of clarification** if something is unclear about the frames of reference of other participants. In the second component ("co-construction"), actors
- 3) draw **conclusions** from the ideas that are being discussed,
- 4) **elaborate** on each other's information and ideas, and
- 5) **complement their initial frame of reference with information** and ideas that follow from the interactions with the other actors in the collaborative arrangement.

Pace, Michelle; Achraimer, Christian 2024



- 6) share **the relevant information** and ideas they have,
- 7) **handle differences of opinions** by addressing them directly,
- 8) **verify opinions** and ideas of other stakeholders by asking them critical questions,
and
- 9) **act upon comments** of other stakeholders on their own perceptions and ideas.



Pace, Michelle; Achrainer, Christian 2024