



# **LOCAL ADULT EDUCATION POLICY II**

**MANUAL  
FOR  
PRACTITIONERS**



## Empowering Community-Based Education for a Greener and More Inclusive Future

The Manual for Practitioners is more than a practical guide—it is a bridge between vision and reality, between the strategic ambition of Learning Cities and the grounded action of small local communities. Born from the collective knowledge and discussions in the LEAP 2 project, the manual is designed to serve as a hands-on resource for those who work closest to the community: educators, municipal staff, civil society leaders, adult learning facilitators, and all those committed to shaping a sustainable and inclusive future from the bottom up.

While international frameworks such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the European Green Deal, and the GreenComp competence framework provide strong direction in the education for sustainability and building of green skills, it is at the local level—in towns, neighbourhoods, and small municipalities—where change becomes visible, meaningful, and lasting. Yet, these same local contexts often face structural barriers: limited budgets, underdeveloped learning infrastructure, weak intersectoral collaboration, or lack of tailored educational tools.

The manual directly responds to these realities. It offers good practices, adaptable tools, and community-inspired learning strategies that emerged from the LEAP 2 project's work across six European countries. It promotes the replicability and scaling of initiatives that help develop green competences, foster citizen engagement, and embed lifelong learning in everyday community life.

Grounded in the Learning Cities ethos and inspired by members of the Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC), the manual makes the case for place-based education as a lever for sustainable development. It shows how micro-learning, community involvement, and strategic planning can be used even with modest means to foster powerful results—results that are educational, environmental, and social in nature.

Above all, the Manual for Practitioners is an invitation: an invitation to take action, to co-create local solutions, to empower learners of all ages, and to translate policy goals into practical impact—one neighbourhood, one initiative, one learner at a time.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

This manual has been designed as a practical, experience-based resource for those working on the front lines of community development and education—particularly in small municipalities and local governance contexts.

The primary users of this manual are professionals and practitioners who wish to activate or strengthen local green skills initiatives. The users may also include policy advisors, trainers, and adult learning providers who wish to mainstream sustainability competences in their programming.

The overarching aim of this manual is to translate the vision of Learning Cities into everyday, localised action. It focuses on how to use micro-learning experiences for adult citizens and foster environmental awareness, promote behavioural change, and build community resilience.

In this sense, the manual supports the development of green competences by empowering local actors to embed lifelong learning in their communities—not as an institutional luxury, but as a strategic response to ecological, social, and economic pressures.

The manual champions the idea that small municipalities, when equipped with the right tools and approaches, such as learning opportunities, can become powerful drivers of transformation towards sustainability.

In the LEAP II project, the partners examined 12 Learning Cities to find examples of green initiatives and offer the findings as case studies. They also developed micro-learning materials on selected topics that they herewith offer for further use - to local officials to get acquainted with the core topics as well as to the citizens, to learn and act.

# 2. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

The LEAP II project was developed as a natural evolution of a previous Erasmus+ initiative that aimed to support small municipalities in formulating their local education policies in the wider context of lifelong learning ([www.leap2local.eu](http://www.leap2local.eu)) as formulated at the EU level.

LEAP II focuses on sustainability and green competences, aiming to help smaller communities across Europe navigate the green transition through community-based education and training. Inspired by the LEAP II offer (case studies and micro-learning materials), the local governments can become the role models of green behaviour and introduce green practices in their offices and policies - recycle, compost, support green transport etc. On the other hand, the citizens may become aware of green practices and urge their local representatives to introduce them.

At the heart of this effort is the recognition that local governments and civil society actors are essential enablers of the green transition. The LEAP 2 initiative is aligned with several overarching policy and strategic frameworks, notably:



### 3. KEY CHALLENGES FACED BY SMALL MUNICIPALITIES

- The European Green Deal, which positions education as a key enabler of the ecological transition;
- The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially Goal 4 (quality education), Goal 11 (sustainable cities and communities), and Goal 13 (climate action);
- The UNESCO Learning Cities framework, which promotes inclusive, lifelong learning opportunities at the city level as a catalyst for sustainable development and social inclusion;
- And the GreenComp Framework by the European Commission, which provides a structured vision for green competence development across educational systems.

These frameworks highlight the need to build not just knowledge, but capacity for action, through lifelong learning that is accessible, contextualised, and connected to the daily lives of people.

Importantly, the project and this manual place emphasis on small municipalities and rural areas. These localities face specific barriers, including limited professional development opportunities, weak inter-sectoral collaboration, and underinvestment in adult education infrastructure. Yet, they also present unique opportunities: close-knit communities, motivated actors, and flexible governance structures that can quickly apply new learning approaches.

The Learning Cities that the LEAP II partners examined are rather big, especially when it comes to the number of inhabitants. Nevertheless, the examples of good practices include such activities that are suitable also for small municipalities and we invite them to read them and get inspired. It cannot be stressed enough that the success of any such initiative is not successful if it is not built on partnership – of a local government that provides support and a local organisation that has capacities to plan and implement an initiative.

Despite their vital role in driving sustainability at the local level, small municipalities often face significant and recurring barriers when it comes to promoting green competences and lifelong learning. Findings from the LEAP 2 needs analysis and local-level interviews revealed several structural, social, and institutional challenges that limit their ability to act effectively.

A first challenge is resource scarcity—both financial and human. Many municipalities lack staff with the time or training to implement sustainability-related education initiatives.

In parallel, low levels of public engagement—driven by apathy, misinformation, or competing priorities—make it difficult to mobilise citizens around environmental learning.

Another critical issue is fragmented stakeholder involvement. Cooperation between local government, civil society, schools/Higher Education and private actors tends to be inconsistent or underdeveloped.

Across the LEAP 2 partner territories, similar patterns emerged: promising initiatives often existed, but they remained isolated, under-supported, or poorly integrated into broader strategies for community development and/or for economic recovery.

This manual encourages a realistic and strategic approach to capacity-building—one that focuses not only on what is desirable, but also on what is currently feasible, and how small steps can lead to systemic change over time.



An example of successful engagement of stakeholders comes Dublin Learning City Initiative which reflects a community to have been engaged in the development of sustainability, accessibility and enhancing the overall quality of life for its residents. Dublin City Council (DCC) promotes and supports lifelong learning through the Dublin Learning City initiative. The purpose of Dublin Learning City is to ensure that education and learning is accessible and inclusive for all citizens. They encourage their learners to progress to further and higher education. Together with their community partners in Higher Education Institutes (HEIs), Dublin City Council (DCC) and Education and Training Boards (ETBs), they encourage and promote Dublin as a welcoming and collaborative city to support all learners, identities and cultures creating a sense of belonging and a learning city for all.

## 4. THE LEARNING CITY AS AN AGENT OF CHANGE

The concept of a Learning City, as promoted by UNESCO and the Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC), is grounded in the belief that lifelong learning is essential to building sustainable, inclusive, and resilient communities. Learning Cities commit to making education accessible to all, at every stage of life, and across formal, non-formal, and informal settings. They nurture environments where citizens can continuously develop their knowledge, skills, and civic engagement based on community collaboration, identity-building, mutuality and trust.

At the heart of this model are values such as equity, inclusion, intergenerational learning, community participation, and innovation. Learning Cities recognise that education and learning does not happen only in schools—but also in libraries, parks, neighbourhood centres, workplaces, and public spaces. In doing so, they bring learning into the daily life of the community.

One of the key insights of the LEAP 2 project is that the Learning City model can be successfully scaled down and adapted to smaller towns and rural contexts. While these communities may not have the institutional reach or infrastructure of large urban areas, they often possess other strengths: strong local networks, civic trust, and flexibility to experiment based on personal, family and neighbourhood ties.

## 5. DESIGNING AND DELIVERING MICRO-LEARNING ON GREEN SKILLS

LEAP 2 drew inspiration from GNLC member cities that implemented sustainability-focused learning programmes to have been initiated and formulated on concrete needs so as to reach for legitimate actions. These examples demonstrated how local governments can build partnerships, promote environmental citizenship, and integrate green competences into everyday life and to bridge amongst environmental, economic and social dimensions.

Ultimately, small municipalities do not need to replicate the scale of larger Learning Cities. Instead, they can localise the approach, aligning it with their specific needs and priorities reflecting their character and potentials. Another message of LEAP 2 is that smaller municipalities emphasize the human dimensions of learning in cities and communities through intercultural, intergenerational aspirations in order to balance values, tradition and solidarity with those of creative and smart focuses by engaging their citizens to collect and share.

The City of Derry in the UK is an example of a smaller city to have provided extremely important forms and ways of community learning for sustainable development based on community actions to rise from grassroots initiatives of citizens, local companies and civil society associations. Derry (UK) Learning City includes diverse initiatives to promote lifelong learning in their population. It is interesting to highlight here Foyle Learning Community to imply a network of schools and educative centres, Northwest Regional College (NWRC) to provide a wide range of technical and professional courses and workshops, the Learning Cities Festival to celebrate learning, Social Inclusion projects designed and focused on vulnerable groups and Sustainability projects focused on urban agriculture and recycling.

Micro-learning is a highly adaptable and accessible approach to adult education—particularly effective in communities where time, resources, or access to formal learning opportunities may be limited. In the context of LEAP 2, micro-learning has proven to be a powerful method for delivering green competences in formats that are practical, context-sensitive, and easy to integrate into everyday life. It also outlines key methodological principles, quality criteria, and organisational considerations necessary to ensure that micro-learning initiatives are pedagogically sound, socially inclusive, and aligned with local sustainability priorities. The section draws on practical experience from course design, piloting, and stakeholder engagement carried out throughout the project lifecycle.

Within this framework, two differentiated but complementary online courses were designed: one addressed to individual users (adult learners without prior expertise in sustainability) and another tailored specifically to municipalities and local authorities. Both courses were structured in a modular micro-learning format and developed for a fully digital environment compatible with multiple devices (tablet, computer, and smartphone), ensuring accessibility and flexibility of use.

What sets micro-learning apart is its focus on short, modular, and actionable content. Instead of requiring long-term enrolment or formal settings, it offers flexible learning moments that fit into busy lives. This flexibility allows sustainability education to reach diverse target groups, including local authorities, adult learners, educators, and the wider community, regardless of their previous experience or availability. The modular structure also enables adaptation to different learning pathways, making it possible to combine units according to specific local priorities or institutional needs. Each unit was designed to function independently while remaining part of a coherent overall structure, ensuring both accessibility and pedagogical progression.

In response to the identified needs of the project and based on examples of good practices implemented in the partner cities, the course for users was organised into four thematic blocks: (1) Core Units, including Climate Change, Introduction to the Circular Economy, Green Competences, Community Action for Sustainability, and Advocating for Green Policies; (2) Personal Sustainability Practices, covering topics such as Understanding Your Carbon Footprint, Responsible Shopping Habits, Conscious Clothing Choices, Plastic Use and Suitable Alternatives, and Sustainable Eating; (3) Resource Management and Waste, with units on Reducing Water Usage, Avoiding Food Waste, Composting at Home, Waste Classification (“Not All Waste is Rubbish”), and Electronic Waste Management; and (4) Community and Environmental Awareness, including From Space to Place, Energy Efficiency at Home, Sustainable Transportation Options, Eco-Friendly Holiday Celebrations, and Urban Biodiversity and Conservation.

These topics were selected because they translate global sustainability challenges into tangible, everyday actions relevant to adult learners. For example, units such as “Understanding Your Carbon Footprint” or “Energy Efficiency at Home” connect climate change mitigation with practical household decisions, while “Community

Action for Sustainability” and “Advocating for Green Policies” encourage civic engagement and collective responsibility. Similarly, modules on composting or electronic waste management reflect concrete practices already piloted in partner municipalities, reinforcing the link between theory and real local experiences.

The LEAP 2 project grounded its micro-learning offer in the GreenComp framework, which defines 12 key sustainability competences across four areas: valuing sustainability, embracing complexity, envisioning sustainable futures, and acting for sustainability. These competences informed the design of each learning unit, ensuring that content goes beyond knowledge acquisition to include skills, attitudes, and behaviours. Each module was intentionally structured to link everyday sustainable practices with specific GreenComp competences, ensuring coherence between theoretical frameworks and practical application. Learning objectives were formulated in measurable and action-oriented terms, promoting reflection, critical thinking, and community engagement. This ensured that the training fostered not only awareness but also empowerment and capacity-building at individual and local levels.

In parallel, the Course for Municipalities focused on five strategic units:

1. Climate Change
2. Circular Economy
3. Green Competences
4. Community Activities for Sustainability
5. Supporting and Promoting Green Solutions

This streamlined structure responds to the operational needs of local administrations, providing them with conceptual foundations and practical guidance to design policies, implement local initiatives, and promote sustainable behaviours among citizens. For instance, the unit on Supporting and Promoting Green Solutions

addresses how municipalities can incentivise responsible consumption or foster urban biodiversity initiatives inspired by successful practices in partner cities.

To ensure relevance, micro-learning modules should be co-designed with local stakeholders, reflecting real environmental challenges faced by the community, and with clear outcomes. To carry out this joint development of the materials, the external pilot phase has been crucial, as it has provided essential information about the needs and the potential scope the course may have among the target audience.

Crucially, micro-learning must remain interactive and iterative. This means building in feedback loops—simple tools like post-session reflections, short quizzes, or community check-ins—that allow educators and organisers to adapt content, track impact, and strengthen engagement over time. A structured internal and external piloting process was designed to gather qualitative and quantitative feedback on clarity, relevance, usability, and impact, enabling continuous improvement of both course versions (for local institutions and for the general public). Feedback collection methods included surveys, based on user experience analysis, allowing for refinement of content, format, and instructional design. This iterative process ensured quality assurance and reinforced the sustainability and transferability of the final outputs.

With the right tools, even the smallest municipality can use micro-learning to cultivate environmental awareness and civic responsibility across generations. Hence, its cost-effectiveness, ease of replication, and alignment with European sustainability frameworks make it a strategic tool for local governments, adult education providers, and community organisations seeking to integrate environmental education into lifelong learning strategies. In this sense, micro-learning not only delivers knowledge but also contributes to building resilient, informed, and environmentally responsible communities.

## 6. STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

One of the most pressing challenges in advancing sustainability education is not the lack of content—but the difficulty in getting people involved. Particularly in small municipalities, limited outreach capacity, competing priorities, and low perceived relevance often result in limited citizen engagement.

First, effective engagement starts with tailored communication. Generic messages about “climate action” or “sustainability” often fail to resonate unless they are connected to everyday concerns—like saving money, caring for family health, or improving local spaces. Messages should reflect the language, concerns, and cultural references of each audience segment, whether young people, retirees, farmers, or local entrepreneurs.



## 7. GOOD PRACTICES FROM THE FIELD

In small towns, informal and non-formal spaces—libraries, community centres, local fairs, parks, even markets—can become powerful arenas for micro-learning.

Storytelling and local pride are also powerful tools. Framing learning through community narratives—such as how local citizens reduced waste, restored green areas, or started a food co-op—can inspire action and show that change is not only possible, but already underway. Highlighting local role models, including respected elders, teachers, or youth leaders, can also increase legitimacy and trust.

To sustain interest, practitioners can apply behavioural nudges and gamification. Simple tactics like challenges, badges, eco-pledges, or community recognition can create momentum and visibility.

LEAP 2 findings confirm that incentives matter—but they don't always have to be financial. Recognition, a sense of belonging, or the opportunity to contribute to a better community are often powerful motivators. Co-creation processes, where citizens help shape learning content or events, also foster ownership and commitment.

Participation grows when learning is made visible, social, and personally meaningful. It thrives where people feel respected, included, and empowered. With the right strategies, even modest initiatives can build a strong culture of sustainability engagement.

Throughout its implementation, the LEAP 2 project piloted a variety of approaches to promote green competences and lifelong learning across different local contexts. These approaches included online and blended micro-learning courses, workshops, dissemination events, and structured piloting phases targeting both institutional representatives and the wider public. The diversity of formats allowed the partnership to test the materials.

One of the most successful strategies observed was the use of micro-learning formats delivered through trusted community channels. The low-threshold, modular nature of the learning units enabled wide participation without requiring formal commitment. This approach reduced barriers to entry, particularly for adult learners who may have limited time or previous negative experiences with formal education. In several contexts, higher completion rates were observed when learning units were clearly linked to practical everyday actions, demonstrating the importance of relevance and immediate applicability.

Another effective practice was co-designing training content with local stakeholders, including teachers, local NGOs, and civil servants. This ensured that the learning materials reflected local priorities—such as waste management, green transport, or energy saving—and empowered participants to become agents of change in their own communities. Stakeholder involvement may also increase legitimacy, strengthen dissemination channels, and facilitate institutional uptake of the materials. In contexts where local actors are engaged from the early planning stages, greater ownership and continuity of the initiatives were observed beyond the formal project activities.

However, LEAP 2 partners also encountered barriers. In some cases, initial activities suffered from low turnout due to limited promotion or scheduling conflicts with other local events. These bottlenecks were addressed through better coordination with local networks, flexible timing, and stronger use of visual storytelling to promote events. Another lesson learned was the importance of keeping messages simple and solutions practical, especially for less engaged community groups.

The key takeaway is that there is no single model, but rather a set of adaptable principles: start small, stay rooted in community realities, involve local actors early, and build learning into daily life. These insights form a practical foundation that other towns and municipalities can draw from—whether they are launching a pilot, scaling an initiative, or simply looking for inspiration to begin. The evidence gathered through LEAP 2 confirms that sustainable impact emerges when environmental education is practical, participatory, and embedded within existing community structures. Therefore, local initiatives can progressively strengthen green competences and foster long-term behavioural change.

Crucially, micro-learning must remain interactive and iterative. This means building in feedback loops—simple tools like post-session reflections, short quizzes, or community check-ins—that allow educators and organisers to adapt content, track impact, and strengthen engagement over time. A structured internal and external piloting process was designed to gather qualitative and quantitative feedback on clarity, relevance, usability, and impact, enabling continuous improvement of both course versions (for local institutions and for the general public). Feedback collection methods included surveys, based on user experience analysis, allowing for refinement of content, format, and instructional design. The piloting phase also generated specific comments related to formatting consistency, visual coherence, navigation elements, and the need for greater unification of terminology and layout across modules. These aspects were carefully

addressed and harmonised during the final revision phase prior to translation, ensuring a coherent structure and common identity across all materials before their adaptation into the partner languages (English, Slovak, Hungarian, Spanish, Italian, and Romanian). This iterative process ensured quality assurance and reinforced the sustainability and transferability of the final outputs.



# 8. TOOLKIT FOR LOCAL PRACTITIONERS

To support the hands-on implementation of green learning initiatives at the local level, the LEAP 2 project has developed a set of adaptable tools and templates. These are designed to help practitioners—whether from municipalities, civil society, or education providers—plan, deliver, and monitor activities more effectively, without needing advanced technical skills or large teams.

The toolkit is structured around the three key phases of a local initiative: planning, implementation, and evaluation. For each phase, the toolkit offers simple, flexible resources that can be printed, edited, or used digitally, depending on the practitioner's needs.

## Planning Tools

To begin, the toolkit includes:

- A project design template to define objectives, target groups, learning outcomes, and local relevance
- A community mapping worksheet to identify key actors, spaces, and existing initiatives
- A timeline planner and task matrix to clarify roles, deadlines, and logistics

These tools are particularly useful for municipalities that want to launch small pilots or test ideas in a structured yet lightweight format.

## Engagement & Delivery Tools

To ensure meaningful participation and smooth delivery, the toolkit provides:

- A participant engagement checklist, including outreach channels, accessibility tips, and inclusion considerations
- A micro-learning session template, guiding structure, duration, and key takeaways
- Templates for feedback forms and interactive activities that can be used in workshops or informal events

These resources help organisers stay focused, adapt to local dynamics, and keep learning citizen-centred.

## Monitoring & Evaluation Tools

For measuring outcomes and informing future actions, the toolkit contains:

- A basic impact tracking form for recording attendance, behavioural changes, and citizen feedback
- A GreenComp alignment checklist to assess which sustainability competences are addressed in each activity
- A reflection log for facilitators to document what worked, what didn't, and lessons learned

These tools support not only accountability but also a culture of continuous improvement.

All templates are developed based on real-life testing. They are intentionally kept simple and adaptable so that practitioners can customise them to fit their own priorities and capacities. Whether used to coordinate a one-off training, design a year-long programme, or build cross-sector partnerships, the toolkit aims to make green education delivery more structured, visible, and impactful.

# 9. CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

This manual has presented a practical roadmap for small municipalities, educators, and community actors to embed sustainability and lifelong learning into local development strategies. LEAP 2 project has shown that even with limited resources, it is possible to design and deliver meaningful green learning experiences that raise awareness, foster engagement, and inspire behavioural change.

At its core, the manual conveys three key messages:

- First, that education is a critical enabler of the green transition, and must be accessible to all citizens, not just students in formal systems.
- Second, that small municipalities are not too small to lead—on the contrary, they can act as agile, community-driven learning ecosystems.
- And third, that micro-learning, local engagement, and cross-sector collaboration are powerful tools for making sustainability relevant, inclusive, and actionable at the local level.

Readers are encouraged to start where they are—with the resources, people, and ideas they already have—and take small, strategic steps toward implementation. This might mean piloting a single learning unit, convening a local working group, or adapting one of the templates provided in this manual. Each small action builds capacity, momentum, and public trust.

Looking ahead, the manual calls for continued experimentation, collaboration, and knowledge exchange. No single actor can drive this agenda alone. Partnerships—with schools, NGOs, cultural centres, environmental groups, and peer municipalities—can amplify impact and create new learning pathways for citizens of all ages.



The legacy of this manual should not only be a set of tools and methods, but a mindset of learning-led sustainability: it invites its users to view their community as a living classroom, where every space, citizen, and issue offers an opportunity to learn, grow, and contribute to a greener and more inclusive future.



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