



# FEASIBLE

Fostering Sustainable Living Cities

Grant number 847118

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## WP5 D5.4 Methodological guideline to set up and carry out a consensus building process within the Italian condominiums.

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Deliverable nature:	Report
Dissemination level:	Public (PU)
Contractual delivery date:	Month 43
Actual delivery date:	03 01 2023
Version:	1
Keywords:	Facilitation, consensus building, building refurbishment, condominiums

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## 1 Introduction

The idea that structural interventions alone or introducing new regulations are sufficient to change behaviour or even just encourage virtuous behaviour is challenged by the failure of projects that have invested only in structures and regulations, neglecting the involvement of the actors affected by the changes themselves.

It is now a shared belief that to promote and implement energy efficiency measures, it is not enough to consider the technical and regulatory aspects. These interventions involve social, cultural and even psychological aspects that cannot be ignored.

Whether we are talking about energy transition, energy saving or energy efficiency, it is necessary to adopt a systemic approach that integrates all these aspects, which are dealt with by different professionals who collaborate with each other in an integrated way. These professionals have thus to consider the individual and collective behaviours as well as the energy practices that individuals are called to implement or improve and the decisions they have to make to implement energy efficiency measures.

This theoretical conviction constituted the basis on which we considered it essential to support the technical staff of the One Stop Shop managed by ATES with professionals with psycho-social and psycho-educational skills in order to perform a "facilitation" function and adopt tools and techniques that are typical of community work, such as planning participation, stakeholder engagement, consensus building, etc.

The integration of the psychosocial component in many areas of public policies, such as, for example. in urban regeneration projects, traffic plans, neighbourhood contracts, food plans, the circular economy, is by now an established fact, to the point that the involvement and participation of residents is considered a requirement of the design itself.

Going down the scale to the level of a single condominium, a context inhabited by several people and made up of several family units, the participation of stakeholders is essential. The individual owners, and only they, are entitled to decide on the issues concerning their condominium, albeit

assisted by the condominium administrator. Therefore, without their involvement and their participation it would not be possible to carry out any efficiency improvement intervention.

The condominium as a community- We can therefore consider the condominium not only a building to be made more efficient, but a community which, in this case, must make a decision regarding changes to be made to its environment. The people who live in the condominium are in effect a community. They live under the same roof, share spaces and services and have relationships with each other. Many things depend on the quality of their relationships, including whether or not they can decide on energy efficiency measures. The collective decision is the basis of the efficiency improvement intervention. Without this decision nothing can be done. How to involve people and how to accompany them in the decision-making process becomes a matter of considerable importance.

The condominium assemblies are the places where these decisions must be made. But the high contentiousness that occurs there is known.

Anyone who works in the social sector knows how bumpy and complex decision-making processes involving several subjects are, bearers not only of interests, but also of different expectations, experiences, orientations and cultural values.

The many subjects involved are immersed in an individualistic culture which makes it difficult to go beyond one's own interest, to see the common good and take care of it. Furthermore, often, conflicts are unleashed precisely on what is common.

The rules establish the decision-making methods that must be followed, but they cannot prescribe people's attitudes, which are the result of personal histories, family characteristics, lifestyles and thoughts, etc.

Therefore, energy efficiency is a goal, but it can also be an opportunity to foster and/or improve relationships, strengthen people's sense of responsibility and promote a sense of community.

If we assume that a condominium is a community, we can fully consider the work necessary to decide on the efficiency intervention a path of Community Building and Community Development.

In order to reach the shared decision to carry out the efficiency improvement intervention, in fact, people must meet, talk to each other, listen to each other, recognize the common interest, overcome their resistance and fears, find an agreement on various aspects of the intervention itself and decide together.

People, disoriented by the jungle of regulations and the complexity of relationships, need help. This help can be provided through attentive and respectful accompaniment and by providing points of reference to turn to in case of need.

This is what we have tried to provide through the psychosocial team, the facilitation and the consensus building process.

## 2 The consensus building steps

The following paragraphs illustrate the process required to obtain the necessary consent among the building manager and the apartment owners of a condominium in order to undertake the works for the energy efficiency improvement of the building where they live. The process was developed and tested within the FEASIBLE project and therefore is applicable primarily within the Italian reality. However, this process, with the necessary adjustments, can in our opinion be applied wherever in Europe it is necessary to reach a consensus among a community of people who live in multi-family buildings of which they own or even just rent individual apartments, to make investments for improve living comfort and overall energy efficiency.

The process develops along four steps, from the establishment of the psychosocial that will lead it up to the organization and way of working of the community built within the condominiums, as described in the following paragraphs.

### 2.1 Establishing a psychosocial team

A psychosocial team is a group of people that work directly with apartments' owners, technicians and building managers. The team is composed by professionals who have the necessary, basic, skills in facilitation, mediation and, possibly (but this is a plus), have also a technical background. Indeed, in our case the facilitators which better "fitted" in the condominiums (and their troubles) were those with a mix of technical competencies and facilitation competencies (e.g. architects/facilitators).

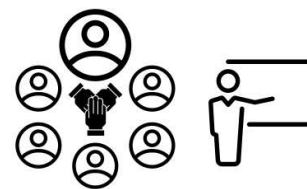
The team must be trained before starting the facilitation activities in order to share methodologies and goals and to become able to understand the different contexts it will face.

The training sessions should then focus on:

- Understanding people and their relations in a common place.
- Tools to be used to engage people.
- How to set the space used for assemblies.
- Deep understanding of the consensus building process (when speed up and when go slowly).
- Analysis of the main elements on energy consumption and energy management of the building system, strengths and weaknesses of the Eco-bonus and Sisma-bonus measures.

The training should also illustrate how to use online tools as online dashboards (Miro license) and Google drive, in case it is necessary to organize online meetings. The Google drive and Miro spaces are also useful to keep the relations among team members, as a tool for surveys, or to share materials, experiences and to collect data. To accomplish this action it's necessary a "director" (a main facilitator) that periodically stimulates the participation of the members.

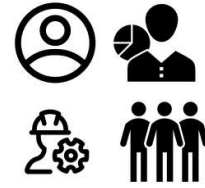
It is worth noting finally that the training process is also useful to enforce relationship within the psychosocial team members. In case a facilitator of a condominiums changes or can't go on with the same building, it will be easier to do the handover to another member of the team.



**Set up a psycho-social team  
(technical and social skills)  
and training sessions  
to prepare the team**

## 2.2 Establishing and maintaining strong relations with building managers

The building managers are the main reference for condominium owners and tenants. It is thus very important to work together with these managers establishing an atmosphere of trust with them. The facilitator can then propose helping the building managers to carry out some of their tasks by sharing some key services. Among these, a particularly important service is the assistance that the facilitator can provide in the management of condominium assemblies. In particular the facilitator will moderate the speeches of participants, to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to speak and express freely his/her point of view. Moreover, the facilitator will complement the official assembly minutes with an own report aiming in particular to take note of the participants “question and answers” taking care to use simple words and explain technical terms in an easy-to-understand way.



**The psychosocial team deals with the building managers and the apartment owners (“informal promoter committee”)**

The building manager should be seen as a partner of the process that support the “snowball effect” in the condominium, and any decision must be shared with him/her, also with brief online call or telephone call. A key goal of this relationship is to ensure the participation of more than 50% of owners in the assemblies as to guarantee that the majority of the owners wishes to realize the refurbishment works. Moreover, as the building managers have to look for and select the technicians that will have to perform the refurbishment works and then introduce them to the apartment owners during the condominium assembly for their approval, it is important that the facilitators meet the selected technicians before the condominium assembly in order to prepare with them the speech on refurbishment works they will have to illustrate to the assembly participants.

## 2.3 Defining an informal committee composed by motivated apartments owners

Despite the collaboration and concrete support offered to the condominium administrators, most of them were reluctant to start the eco-bonus procedures to commit the condominium to carrying out the renovation works, due to the complexity and uncertainties linked with this procedure. A good way to overcome this difficulty, linked to this particular Italian measure but valid for all situations of this type, was to organize counterparts within the condominium, i.e. an informal committee of promoters. To this end the psychosocial team encouraged the establishment of these committees among the apartments’ owners to have an “inner partner” to collaborate with and able to push/convince the administrator to take the road for the eco-bonus request.



**Collaborate with the building managers and the “informal promoters’ committees” to face specific issues**

The committee’s members are usually owners interested in the refurbishment works that can easily involve other residents in an informal way and through a peer relation. They were invited to explain the role of ATES Parma and OSS team to other apartment owners of the condominium assuring on the OSS neutral “third part” nature, able to provide free services thanks to the EC financial support.

The willingness to join the "informal promoting committee" is verified at the first assembly. The informal committee it's always open to new members that want to join it. The main actions to support the establishment and the tasks of "informal promoter committee" have been to:

- Interview the unit-owners either selected by the building managers or contacted directly (for example after that one or more apartment owners have contacted the OSS).
- Collaborate and support the promoter committees in their promotional activity in their buildings.
- Create a direct relationship with the condominiums to be supportive in solving problems and discussing technical/operative opinions.
- Take into account the key role of women by including them in the committee in order to facilitate the communication with other women living in the condominium (especially where women have an important role in the families living in the building). Women are usually more acquainted than men on the condominium life and social coexistence and may provide an important contribution to resolve problems or to share information.

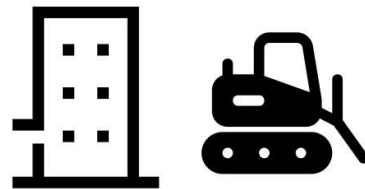
## 2.4 Organizing informal meetings

The facilitators start to organize informal (online or directly) meetings with building managers, first of all to better understand the composition of the owners (age, ethnicity, social background), their opinion on refurbishment works and any judgment positions. These meetings are also useful to design the setting, the program and the subjects of each assembly together with the building managers.

One lesson learned during the process is that it's extremely important to avoid treating multiple topics in a single assembly. In each condominium there are not so many assemblies in a year, so the building managers, owners and tenants usually want to use this time and space to discuss all problems in the condominium. The facilitators should ask the building managers to organize specific assemblies to discuss only the refurbishment works and to keep other topics separated (to discuss them on other meetings or at the end of the assembly).

The psychosocial team provides the necessary tools for the on-site training, consultation and the facilitation activities needed to make the acceptance process easier. This means to i) achieve the decision by ensuring the widest possible sharing of the project; ii) avoid divergences among the apartments' owners that are difficult to solve, and which would compromise the quality of condominium cohabitation; iii) convince and push the building manager to play a proactive role in this acceptance process, iv) use this activity as an opportunity to revitalize the community spirit. To this end in each building it would be advisable to find, or be invited to find, a physical place in which to exchange opinions and were the apartments owners can express their concerns, gather the information they need and discuss the issue they care about.

It is necessary to be aware that the meetings and assemblies should continue through bilateral or small group dialogues to help settling possible quarrels and mutual incomprehension. The numbers and the duration of these meetings can't be planned in advance because this depends on the social situation



**Collaborate with the building managers and the OSS to define the refurbishment intervention**

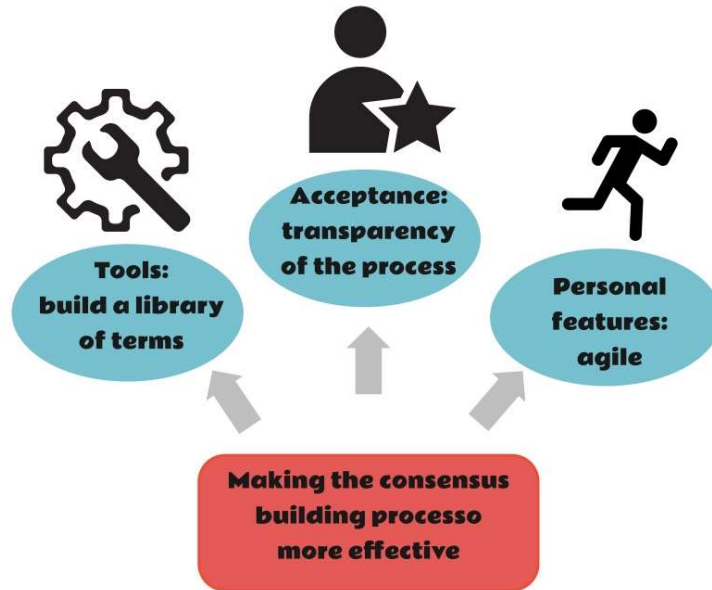
of the condominiums and on the complexity of the refurbishment works. So the facilitators should be ready to continue their work with these informal extra meetings. This means that the commitment for each condominium could request dedicated working efforts that can exceed the planned workload as it happened in the more difficult situations where the continuous change of law regulations created many “stop and go” and the constant need of updating and decisions reviews.

### 3 Making the process more effective

This paragraph provides some suggestions, based on the experience accrued thanks to the work carried out within the FEASIBLE project with the condominium communities in the city of Parma, to make the consensus building process more viable and effective.

The following figure shows the main features required, at both team and personal level, by the consensus building process to make it effective.

*Figure 1: How the psychosocial team should gear up to make the process more effective*



#### 3.1 Transparency of the process

The facilitators team must support the participants: a) to better understand the regulation changes and explain the obstacles to the realization of the refurbishment works; b) to reassure about the process's correctness or about possible risks or unexpected results (such as extra unforeseen costs, administrative fines for wrong or incomplete documentations, etc).

In order to better illustrate this information, before, during and after the assembly the psychosocial team, together with OSS team, used some information material structured as follow:

- Premise: who are we?
- Energy poverty: what is meant
- The project: objectives and actions
- The Super Ecobonus 110%
- Who can benefit from it
- To do what?
- Facilitated interventions - Pulling & Trailed
- The maximum costs
- The payments
- Not only Super Ecobonus 110%



In addition to these introductory points, the psychosocial team prepared a presentation to explain the meaning of the consensus building approach and the services offered by the facilitators:

- The facilitation approach: objectives
- The process proposed and the number of meetings offered and the purpose
- What is the promoter committee and why it's so important
- What are the rules of good dialogue: to facilitate comparison between owners

In each assembly the facilitators used “the rules of good dialogue” to manage the assembly. Setting the space means to be sure the rules are visible to each participant and can be quoted any time if needed during the assemblies. The rules are very easy to follow, but it's important to share them to guarantee a strong tool to the facilitator for managing the speeches.

Here a resume of the rules used during the assemblies:

- The participants are given the floor by the facilitator through a show of hands.
- When a participant speaks, no one can interrupt or overlap him/her.
- Each participant must introduce himself and make it clear if he speaks for himself and / or on behalf of other owners.
- Each participant has a maximum of 3 minutes to speak.
- All opinions must be respected.
- At the end of the meeting it is possible to join the informal committee of the condominium owners (provide name and direct contacts).

### ***3.2 Build a library of terms, Q&A and collect data***

The psychosocial team and the OSS prepared summary documentation to explain the technical works to be realized and their corresponding timing and problems. The team wrote a library of terms that could be of difficult understanding for participants. This sort of glossary was helpful to support the technicians and the building managers in the use of “non-technical terms”. Indeed one of the main and strategic effort carried out by the team along all the process was to translate technical issues into understandable words so that every person could be properly informed about the refurbishment works and its context.

Each member of the psychosocial team has the duty to write a report of any assembly. The report is an important instrument of transparency and must contain a specific section with “question and answer” using “simple words” and a glossary to explain technical terms. The report must contain, at the beginning, a resume of decisions taken in the condominium assembly. The report is written by the facilitator, then shared with the condominium manager and OSS (in case they want to integrate it) and finally is sent to the owners by the building manager. The facilitators must be sure that the report of the assembly is delivered in a short time to all the owners (by emails and sent by mail). In some cases, it's useful to translate the report in different languages, as to guarantee each owner could read the report.

Never forgive that the project is complex and each condominiums engaged has different types and timing of refurbishment interventions.

Moreover the psychosocial team carried out extra and operative tasks like:

- build a register with the telephone numbers and emails contacts of each stakeholder that want to be engaged in the process.
- write a diary of the process to underline numbers of meeting organized, difficulties faced, solutions, perceptions, etc.
- draw up and share a report concerning the promoter committee's interviews and informal meetings.
- assist in the preparation of the presentation of contents related to energy auditing data.
- assist the promoting committee to organize informal meetings and information meetings open to all condominiums.

### *3.3 Main features of the psychosocial team: adaptability and independence*

At the end of the Feasible project we could certainly say that key elements for a successful facilitation process of this kind are: ability to tailor to the context, alliance with the condominium owners and residents, independence and impartiality of the team.

As regards the first point, one of the main effort the team have to make is to deeply understand the condominium features: residents and owners compositions (age, sex, ethnicity, educational and social background, life style and economic possibilities) and cohabitation situations (present and conflicts, contentions, under-groups, etc.) in order to tailor its work and tailor its action to the specific settings. Of course the team should be aware that every condominium has its own characteristics and that the same approach can not fit the same in all the condominiums.

The same regards the services that can be provided by the OSS: some condominiums needed mainly technical support while others needed more facilitation to make all the residents aware of the importance of the refurbishment benefits. In this context timing revealed to be crucial: some condominium applied to the project at the very beginning and needed all the services (from informational meeting to involving activities and commissioning), while other applied when they had already taken the decision to refurbish the building and needed on going services. So, in this second case a specific facilitation/mediation process has been proposed just before and during the refurbishment work, also to explain the interventions, nuisances and troubles and to give feedback to the architects and engineers.

As a domino effect, this approach allowed to increase the trust of the building managers in the project and generated positive results in all the phases of the consensus building process. As each building manager usually deals with more than one condominium, the ones who were satisfied of the services engaged others of his condominiums in the project.

The second key point emerged by the Parma experience regards how the psychosocial team is perceived by the building manager and especially by the owners/residents. In this context it is crucial to be considered an ally which is working independently to support the process with no other personal purpose. The building manager should come to see the facilitators as assistants who help him to go through the complex renovation process, relieving him of some pressures and duties, without taking on his role or creating new problems with the owners/residents. At the same time owners/residents should see the facilitator as a precious ally and a mediator which is impartial and reliable (very well informed and easy to reach). And here it comes the importance that the service is public and free, so it cannot be involved in specific economic interests.