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# From local action to systemic change: Community-based initiatives and perspectives for ocean resilience

*5th REMEDIES Policy Workshop Report and Policy Recommendations*

6 May 2026 | Athens, Greece

**Impact Hub Athens**

## Contents

- Introduction: Purpose and policy relevance of the workshop
- Workshop overview and agenda
- Methodology and participants
- Roundtable A: Scalability, from local pilots to cross-regional implementation
- Roundtable B: Participatory governance, from participation to decision-making



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- Cross-cutting insights
- Policy recommendations
- Conclusion

## Introduction: Purpose and policy relevance of the workshop

The 5th REMEDIES Policy Workshop, titled “From local action to systemic change: Community-based initiatives and perspectives for ocean resilience”, took place on 6 May 2026 in Athens, Greece. The workshop focused on the transition from local, community-led environmental action to broader systemic change in ocean restoration, marine litter prevention, and ocean resilience.

The workshop was designed to identify restoration practices developed and implemented by communities that demonstrate strong potential for replication and scaling. It also examined the enabling conditions required for these practices to be transferred and adapted across regions. Particular attention was given to the financial, technical, institutional, and social resources needed to sustain community action over time, including access to funding, skills development, supportive governance structures, and cross-community networks.

A further objective was to explore how community-based monitoring and citizen science can be integrated into official data systems, indicators, and reporting frameworks at EU and national levels. This is important because citizen-generated knowledge can strengthen transparency, legitimacy, and evidence-based decision-making when it is collected through reliable protocols and connected to formal governance processes.

The workshop provided an opportunity for experts, entrepreneurs, academics, policy actors, and civil society organisations to collaborate on common proposals and policy learning. The results of the roundtables were harvested as policy recommendations addressed to relevant decision-making bodies, project partners, and innovation ecosystem actors in Greece and the European Union.

## Workshop overview and agenda

Field	Description
<b>Title</b>	From local action to systemic change: Community-based initiatives and perspectives for ocean resilience
<b>Workshop</b>	5th REMEDIES Policy Workshop
<b>Date</b>	6 May 2026
<b>Location</b>	Athens, Greece
<b>Moderation</b>	Impact Hub Athens





<b>Main format</b>	Presentations followed by two facilitated roundtables
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<b>Time</b>	<b>Session</b>	<b>Speaker / Responsible organisation</b>
16:00-16:10	Welcome speeches	Impact Hub Athens
16:10-16:20	REMEDIES presentation, Green Paper	Milica Velimirovic, VITO / REMEDIES
16:20-16:30	NURISH presentation	Andriani Galani, Senior Researcher, NTUA
16:30-16:40	TASC-RestoreMED presentation	George Triantaphyllidis, HCMR
16:40-16:55	Instructions and transition break	Impact Hub Athens
16:55-18:10	Roundtables	Two parallel groups

## Methodology and participants

The workshop followed a facilitated co-creation methodology. After the introductory presentations, participants were divided into two thematic roundtables. Each roundtable worked around a core policy question and structured its discussion around challenges and potentials, enablers and support tools, and possible solutions or strategies. The purpose was not only to document opinions, but to translate practical experience into actionable policy recommendations.

The two roundtables were:

- Group A: Scalability, from local pilots to cross-regional implementation.
- Group B: Participatory governance, from participation to decision-making and policy adaptation.

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Organisation / affiliation</b>
Andrei Geica	Sporos
George Triantafillidis	HCMR
Ioannis Christakopoulos	refeelme
Angelos Manglis	ATLANTIS Consulting
Elias Caracatsanis	REMEDIES
Christina Brempon	Technical University of Crete
Alexandra Sarma	Orange Grove





Daniel Mamais	NTUA
Andreas Gontikas	NKUA
Dionysia-Theodora Avgerinopoulou	Politician
Milica Velimirovic	REMEDIES
Kledisa Cela	REMEDIES
Giorgos Sachinis	Urban Dig
Thanos Smanis	CLIMAZUL

## Roundtable A: Scalability, from local pilots to cross-regional implementation

**Core question:** What policy changes, governance structures, and practical support are needed to translate locally successful, community-led ocean restoration practices into scalable, replication-ready actions across regions while ensuring equity, transparency, and measurable impact?

### Main challenges and tensions

- Pilot success does not automatically lead to scale. Many research, innovation, circular economy, blue economy, and ocean restoration solutions work technically at pilot level but cannot move into full implementation because policy, finance, procurement, governance, and market systems are not ready to absorb them.
- Scalability is strongly connected to finance, but the financial sector is not a single actor. Banks, private equity, pension funds, public agencies, and grant schemes have different risk profiles, expectations, and time horizons. Ocean restoration initiatives therefore need to identify the right financing pathway and communicate in the right language.
- Environmental success is not always profitability. Ocean restoration, water pollution control, plastic prevention, underwater cultural heritage protection, and ecosystem recovery generate public value, but this value is not always converted into direct revenue.
- Public finance is often necessary for solutions that generate public goods, but public funding follows political priorities, budget cycles, and public pressure. This makes it necessary to frame local pilots clearly in terms of public value and policy relevance.
- Legal and policy frameworks can either unlock or block scaling. Participants noted that municipalities and public authorities often act only when there is a clear legal obligation, fear of fines, or political pressure.
- Bureaucracy and risk-aversion create bottlenecks. Public employees and institutions may hesitate to approve new technologies because they lack knowledge, fear liability, or are uncertain about unfamiliar solutions.





- Research often struggles to reach the market. Research teams may focus on technical proof and impact, while business development requires user value, customer demand, revenue, and return on investment.
- Universities and innovators face weak spin-off pathways. Bureaucracy, limited market connections, and lack of business support can prevent promising research from becoming scalable services, adopted technologies, or enterprises.
- Public procurement is not sufficiently adapted to start-ups, spin-offs, and innovative SMEs. Administrative and financial requirements often favour larger established companies and reduce the capacity of the public sector to benefit from emerging solutions.
- Mindset, resistance to change, and local culture remain central barriers. Scaling requires not only technology and regulation, but also education, communication, marketing, and behavioural change.

## **Enablers and support tools**

- Open data can support scalability when it is aggregated, analysed, visualised, and communicated in ways that are useful for citizens, policymakers, investors, and implementers.
- A shared “single source of truth”, such as dashboards or central platforms, could help projects demonstrate needs, compare results, identify gaps, and support decision-making.
- Social engagement can turn evidence into political pressure. Citizens who understand a problem and value a solution can influence political priorities and create demand for policy change.
- Environmental benefits should be translated into financial and public value, including avoided costs, compliance benefits, tourism value, ecosystem services, cultural heritage protection, local development, and long-term resilience.
- Specialised procurement mechanisms can open the public sector to innovative SMEs and start-ups through challenge-based procurement, smaller lots, lighter administrative requirements, and demand pooling.
- Open innovation can connect real operational problems with scalable solutions. Problem owners, such as industries, ports, municipalities, or public authorities, should help define needs before innovators propose solutions.
- Incubators, accelerators, and ecosystem intermediaries can support pilots by providing business support, mentoring, policy translation, proposal support, investor readiness, and access to networks.
- Communication and marketing should be treated as strategic tools for scaling. Data must be presented in ways that mobilise citizens without creating fear, rejection, or disengagement.





## Strategic direction from Group A

The group converged around the need for a practical scaling pathway that starts from a specific, operational problem, connects the problem to the right governance and finance actors, builds public demand, and uses open innovation and evidence to move from local pilot implementation to broader adoption.

Element	Group A synthesis
Strategy focus	Create a scalability protocol linking specific local ocean restoration problems with data, social engagement, open innovation, finance, procurement, and policy implementation.
Policy relevance	Supports marine litter reduction, ocean restoration, water pollution control, circular economy, maritime spatial planning, underwater cultural heritage protection, blue economy innovation, and EU Mission Ocean objectives.
Governance level	EU, national, regional, municipal, port authority, industry, research organisations, public agencies, investors, incubators, and community actors, with clear role allocation.
Monitoring method	Baseline data, open data platforms, dashboards, sensors where relevant, impact indicators, third-party verification, citizen-facing communication, and policy-relevant reporting.
Finance pathway	Combination of public funding, private finance where viable, industry co-financing, open innovation calls, specialised procurement, and support for public-good solutions with limited commercial return.
Key enabler	A demand-driven scaling pathway combining open data, social engagement, open innovation, and clear policy or procurement mechanisms.





## Roundtable B: Participatory governance, from participation to decision-making

**Core question:** How can participatory governance and citizen engagement be effectively embedded in ocean restoration processes to strengthen legitimacy, data integration, and long-term sustainability of community-led actions?

### Main challenges and tensions

- Participation often remains limited to information-sharing, consultation, or stakeholder validation. Citizens and local actors are frequently invited after a project has already been designed, when the main decisions have already been taken.
- Community engagement in EU-funded projects can focus too heavily on institutional stakeholders, experts, researchers, and project partners, while local communities directly affected by environmental decisions are not sufficiently included from the beginning.
- Mistrust between citizens and public authorities is a major barrier. When participatory processes are perceived as political or imposed, local resistance can intensify even when the environmental intention is positive.
- Participation can be distorted by over-representation from well-organised groups, petitions, or narrow local agendas. Participatory governance must manage both under-representation and over-representation.
- Citizen engagement is often conducted too late. When local needs, fears, motivations, and ownership are not explored before proposal design or early implementation, projects may face resistance later.
- Fragmented governance and unclear roles prevent movement from participation to decision-making. Without clear responsibilities among local authorities, regional authorities, national government, scientists, NGOs, and citizens, accountability remains weak.
- Communication and language gaps divide scientists, policymakers, citizens, local authorities, NGOs, and funders. Different actors use different terminology and assumptions, making shared action difficult.
- Capacity limitations affect small organisations and local initiatives. Participation requires time, people, facilitation, translation, relationship-building, and resources, which are often underfunded.
- Citizen science offers strong potential but raises questions of data validity. Citizen-generated data can provide volume, local coverage, and continuity, but it needs protocols, quality assurance, and pathways into formal data systems.





- Youth participation remains underused, even though young people can support environmental monitoring, advocacy, behavioural change, and community mobilisation when given education, tools, and decision-making opportunities.

## Enablers and support tools

- Clear multi-level governance is essential. Participatory processes need to define who decides, who advises, who implements, who monitors, and who remains accountable.
- Local authorities can act as bridges between policy and citizens when they have the mandate, capacity, and tools to adapt rules, implement measures, and support local processes.
- Multi-stakeholder platforms, such as the Attica Water Lab model discussed by participants, can connect ministries, stakeholders, technical expertise, education, and implementation planning around concrete issues.
- Concrete policy entry points, such as wastewater treatment, micro-pollutants, microplastics, public fountains, and plastic bottle reduction, can help organise participation around actionable issues rather than abstract environmental goals.
- Inclusive engagement tools should support listening, problem-framing, co-design, deliberation, monitoring, and ownership, not only institutional consultation.
- Cultural and informal engagement methods can make participation more accessible. Local events, public interventions, and community activities can reduce intimidation and build trust gradually.
- Local organisers, ambassadors, and trusted community members can translate between project teams and communities, reduce mistrust, and mobilise meaningful participation.
- Intermediary organisations, including civil society organisations, cultural actors, universities, think tanks, and facilitators, can mediate between citizens and government.
- Citizen science can bridge science and society when citizens collect data through clean-ups, monitoring, and observation, and when researchers provide protocols and validation methods.
- Long-term feedback loops are needed so communities see how their input was used, which decisions were taken, what data shows, and what adaptations follow.

## Strategic direction from Group B

The group proposed a participatory governance protocol that embeds citizens and local communities from the earliest stages of problem-framing through co-design, monitoring, decision-making, and policy adaptation. Participation should be treated as a core governance function rather than a communication activity added at the end of a project.

Element

Group B synthesis





Strategy focus	Develop a participatory governance protocol that embeds citizens and local communities from early problem-framing to co-design, monitoring, decision-making, and policy adaptation.
Policy relevance	Supports ocean restoration, pollution prevention, water protection, marine litter reduction, circular economy, biodiversity, and local environmental governance policies.
Implementation summary	Start with local problem-framing and stakeholder mapping. Establish a multi-stakeholder platform or living lab. Define governance roles. Use inclusive engagement formats and local ambassadors. Integrate citizen science and data visualisation. Create feedback loops and connect the process to concrete policy windows.
Monitoring method	Use mixed monitoring methods, including citizen science protocols, scientific validation, digital platforms, visual dashboards, public reporting, and periodic governance review.
Key barrier	Participation often remains symbolic or late-stage because citizens do not have clear influence over decisions and because governance roles are fragmented.
Key enabler	Early engagement, trusted intermediaries, citizen science, clear role allocation, and long-term feedback loops.

## Cross-cutting insights

- Local action becomes systemic only when it is connected to governance ownership, finance pathways, data systems, and decision-making mechanisms.
- Community-led initiatives need both social legitimacy and institutional pathways. Without trust and participation, even technically strong solutions may face resistance. Without institutional uptake, community energy may remain isolated.





- Citizen science can serve both scalability and participatory governance. It can generate local data, build ownership, support monitoring, and create evidence for policy adaptation, but only when protocols, validation, and data pathways are clear.
- Open innovation and participatory governance should be linked. Communities, public authorities, industries, and researchers need to define problems together before solutions are funded, piloted, or scaled.
- Public value needs to be made visible. Environmental restoration and marine litter prevention may not always generate direct commercial return, so benefits must be translated into avoided costs, compliance, biodiversity, tourism, local resilience, cultural heritage protection, and public wellbeing.
- Intermediary organisations are essential. Incubators, accelerators, civil society organisations, universities, facilitators, and ecosystem builders can translate between policy, science, finance, business, and communities.

## Policy recommendations

The following recommendations synthesise the results of the two roundtables and translate them into policy-relevant directions for decision-making bodies, public authorities, funders, EU projects, local authorities, research organisations, innovation ecosystem actors, and community-based initiatives.

### **Recommendation No1: Create a standard scalability protocol for community-led ocean restoration pilots.**

Every pilot should define its specific problem, governance owner, target users, legal and policy pathway, financing route, data needs, monitoring approach, communication strategy, and replication conditions. This would reduce the risk that pilots remain isolated and would make successful local practices easier to adapt across regions.

### **Recommendation No2: Integrate citizen participation from the earliest stages of project and policy design.**

Participation should begin with local problem-framing, not after solutions have already been designed. Programmes should require early engagement with local communities, local authorities, researchers, businesses, schools, and civil society so that actions reflect lived realities and create ownership.

### **Recommendation No3: Establish multi-stakeholder governance platforms around concrete ocean resilience issues.**

Platforms or living labs should be organised around specific issues such as marine litter, microplastics, water reuse, coastal monitoring, port pollution, public water access, or underwater cultural heritage protection. These platforms should define roles, clarify decision pathways, and connect citizen input with policy adaptation.





**Recommendation No4: Recognise citizen science as a complementary evidence source for monitoring and reporting.**

Citizen-generated data should be integrated into official monitoring where clear protocols, quality assurance, validation, and data pathways exist. This can strengthen local coverage, transparency, legitimacy, and evidence-based decision-making without replacing scientific data.

**Recommendation No5: Develop open data dashboards that translate project evidence into policy and public value.**

Projects should not only collect data. They should visualise and communicate evidence through dashboards and accessible tools that allow policymakers, citizens, investors, and public authorities to understand gaps, compare results, and identify replication opportunities.

**Recommendation No6: Adapt procurement and funding mechanisms for innovative SMEs, start-ups, spin-offs, and community initiatives.**

Public procurement and funding schemes should include challenge-based calls, smaller lots, reduced administrative burdens, open innovation formats, demand-driven calls, and co-financing models. This would help public authorities access innovation and help smaller actors secure first clients and implementation opportunities.

**Recommendation No7: Translate environmental benefits into financial, social, and public value.**

Restoration and prevention initiatives should communicate benefits in terms of avoided costs, compliance, biodiversity protection, ecosystem services, local economic development, tourism potential, cultural heritage protection, and long-term resilience. This can help justify public support and attract the right type of finance.

**Recommendation No8: Invest in facilitation, local ambassadors, and intermediary organisations.**

Participation and scaling require trusted facilitation, local presence, translation between technical and public language, and mediation between citizens and authorities. Programmes should allocate resources to local organisers, ambassadors, incubators, accelerators, civil society organisations, and ecosystem intermediaries.

**Recommendation No9: Use existing laws and policy tools more effectively before creating new rules.**

In some cases, implementation gaps can be addressed through practical actions such as mapping protected areas, clarifying permissions, improving enforcement, or making existing obligations visible to local actors. Low-cost policy implementation can produce significant environmental benefits.

**Recommendation No10: Create long-term feedback loops between communities, data, and decision-makers.**

Communities should receive regular information on how their input and data were used, what decisions followed, what results were achieved, and what adaptations are planned. This can strengthen trust, reduce engagement fatigue, and support long-term stewardship.





## Conclusion

The 5th REMEDIES Policy Workshop showed that community-based action is a critical foundation for ocean resilience, but it cannot create systemic change alone. Local initiatives need structured pathways that connect them to governance, finance, procurement, data integration, and policy adaptation.

The discussions highlighted that scalability and participatory governance are deeply connected. A pilot can scale only when it solves a clearly defined problem, generates visible public value, is supported by appropriate financing and procurement mechanisms, and is embedded in a governance structure with clear roles. At the same time, participatory governance becomes meaningful only when citizens influence the full cycle of action, from problem-framing and co-design to monitoring and decision-making.

The recommendations emerging from the workshop point towards a practical agenda: standardise scalability planning, embed participation early, use citizen science responsibly, make data actionable, adapt funding and procurement, support intermediaries, and connect local evidence with policy processes. This agenda can help transform local environmental action into replicable, legitimate, and sustained contributions to ocean restoration and resilience in Greece and across Europe.

