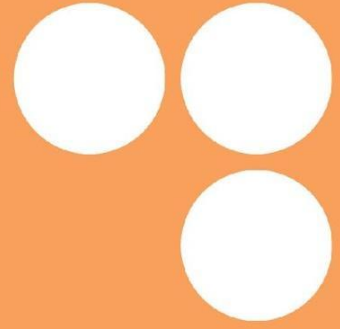


TWIN2EXPAND



# FOCUS GROUP RESULTS REPORT

Focus Group Discussion on the Strategic Planning  
of the Pedieos River | April 2025

twinning towards  
research excellence  
in evidence-based planning  
and urban design



**Document Description:** This document presents a concise synthesis of the focus group process and its outcomes within the framework of the Pedieos River Strategic Masterplan. It summarizes the key priorities identified by stakeholders, including accessibility, safety, environmental protection, and the enhancement of public space quality. The report also outlines how these priorities were spatially mapped to support targeted and evidence-based interventions. Finally, it defines the next steps for integrating stakeholder insights into planning decisions, strengthening participatory governance, and advancing a more resilient and inclusive river corridor.

General Contact:

TWIN2EXPAND Project, Dr. Nadia Charalambous, Department of Architecture,  
University of Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus

**For more information:** [charalambous.nadia@ucy.ac.cy](mailto:charalambous.nadia@ucy.ac.cy)

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**Focus Group Design & Coordination**

Dr Christina Panayi

**Focus Group Facilitators**

Michalis Psaras

Marina Pasia

**Supervisor**

Associate Professor Nadia Charalambous

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## *Executive Summary*

This report presents the outcomes of a focus group discussion held on 26 March 2025 at the Strovolos Municipality Cultural Centre, organized by the SURF Lab within the framework of the TWIN2EXPAND research project. Building on a previous focus group (July 2024) and subsequent spatial analysis, the session aimed to identify priority aspects of the Pedieos River Strategic Masterplan that require reconsideration.

Using an adapted Structured Democratic Dialogue (SDD) methodology, participants engaged in a structured process of idea generation, clarification, prioritization, and collaborative mapping. Eight stakeholders representing public authorities, research institutions, civil society organizations, and local users were divided into two thematic groups: (1) Connectivity, Public Space, and Activities and (2) Environment (Conservation, Biodiversity, Green Infrastructure).

The discussions revealed strong convergence around the need to improve accessibility, mobility continuity, safety, environmental protection, flood resilience, and the overall quality of public spaces. The Connectivity group emphasized sustainable mobility, user comfort, greening, and digital tools to enhance park awareness, while the Environment group prioritized minimizing environmental impact, strengthening greenery, waste management, accessibility for persons with disabilities, and environmental education. The collaborative mapping process linked these priorities to specific locations within the Masterplan, providing spatially grounded insights to support targeted interventions.

Participants underscored the importance of continuous community engagement, highlighting its role in fostering inclusivity, shared responsibility, and long-term stewardship of the Pedieos River corridor. The report recommends disseminating the findings to relevant stakeholders and developing policy briefs to translate the outcomes into implementable actions. The results contribute to evidence-based planning and support the refinement of the Pedieos River Masterplan toward a more resilient, inclusive, and environmentally responsive urban corridor.

## ***Focus Group Results Report:***

‘Focus Group Discussion on the Strategic Planning of the Pedieos River’

### ***1. Introduction***

#### ***1.1. Context and Objective***

The focus group discussion on the strategic planning of the Pedieos River took place on March 26, 2025, at the Strovolos Municipality Cultural Center, Nikolaos Moundis Hall. It was organized by the SURF Lab as part of the TWIN2EXPAND research project, following a previous focus group discussion held on July 3, 2024.

The TWIN2EXPAND research project, coordinated by the SURF Lab at the Department of Architecture, University of Cyprus, aims to enhance excellence in research and innovation in the field of Evidence-Based Design and Planning. The project promotes interdisciplinary research and collaboration, with the overarching goal of generating meaningful impact on the broader scientific community, relevant planning stakeholders, and urban societies. It supports a deeper understanding of urban challenges and the evaluation and utilization of opportunities offered by cities and urban communities.

The current focus group discussion built upon the previous meeting held in July 2024, as well as the spatial analysis and evaluation of the Strategic Masterplan conducted by the SURF Lab. Drawing on the prioritization established during the July meeting (see related documentation) and the outcomes of the subsequent analysis, the aim of this discussion was to map and highlight aspects of the Pedieos River Masterplan that require immediate reconsideration, based on the key issues and critical topics identified.

This report outlines the process of designing and implementing the focus group and summarizes the key findings collected from participants and recorded by the facilitators.

### ***2. Focus Group Design and Implementation***

#### ***2.1. Approach and Methodology***

The approach was based on Structured Democratic Dialogue (SDD), a systematic process for generating and recording ideas in response to a complex triggering question. The process supports participatory decision-making while motivating participants to assume responsibility

and initiative<sup>1</sup>. The focus group methodology incorporated several core SDD steps<sup>2</sup>, idea generation, clarification, clustering, voting, and interpretive structural modelling, which were adapted to meet the specific objectives and goals of the study.

This methodology was implemented in a more interactive and hands-on format to foster an environment conducive to democratic dialogue, creative thinking, and consensus-building among participants.

### **2.2.Triggering Question**

Based on the prioritization from the previous focus group discussion (July 2024) and the results of the spatial analysis conducted by the SURF Lab, which aspects of the Pedieos River Strategic Planning (Masterplan) do you consider to have the greatest impact and require reconsideration? Which areas within the Masterplan do you believe need immediate review or improvement?

### **2.3.Methodological Structure**

The methodology consisted of two parts:

#### **1. Group Work: Ideation, Prioritization, and Mapping**

This phase involved collaborative group activities and included the following key steps:

- a) **Idea generation:** Participants individually generated ideas in response to the triggering question.
- b) **Discussion (clarification and clustering):** Participants clarified ideas, exchanged perspectives, identified overlaps, and grouped similar ideas.
- c) **Voting:** Participants prioritized the ideas considered to have the greatest impact and requiring immediate review or reconsideration.
- d) **Mapping:** Participants identified specific points or areas within the Masterplan that require attention and explored possible correlations between them.

#### **2. Plenary Session: Discussion and Confirmation**

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<sup>1</sup> Laouris & Romm, 2022

<sup>2</sup> Michaelides and Laouris, 2024

This phase brought all groups together to discuss and validate the outcomes through the following steps:

- a) **Presentation:** Each group presented the key aspects identified and the areas considered in need of review.
- b) **Discussion and confirmation:** Participants collectively confirmed the most critical issues and areas requiring reconsideration.

## *2.4.Preparation*

Based on the spatial analysis conducted by the SURF Lab and the results of the previous focus group, participants were divided into two thematic groups: one focusing on Connectivity, Public Space, and Activities, and the other on Environment (Conservation, Biodiversity, and Green Infrastructure).

A presentation was prepared by the SURF Lab to communicate the results of the spatial analysis to participants prior to the focus group discussion. The material was delivered in a clear and accessible format to support understanding and stimulate engagement.

Stakeholders who had participated in the previous focus group were invited via email and phone calls. The aim was to ensure diverse representation across actors related to the Pedieos Strategic Planning process, in order to gather a wide range of perspectives and experiences.

A total of eight (8) participants took part in the session, divided into two (2) focus groups according to the thematic areas. The composition of each group is presented below (Tables 1 & 2), with participant names coded to maintain confidentiality in the reporting of results. This structure was designed to promote active engagement and ensure effective time management. Each group was supported by a facilitator (a SURF Lab researcher) responsible for guiding the process, encouraging participation, managing time, resolving conflicts when necessary, and documenting key discussion points.

Connectivity, Public Space, and Activities   Group Composition	
Code	Organization / Role
1	Local architect and resident
2	Area activist, local NGO
3	Intermunicipal Development Projects of Nicosia (DAEL)
4	The Cyprus Institute

Environment (Conservation, Biodiversity, Green Infrastructure)   Group Composition	
Code	Organization / Role
5	Local primary school representative, area user
6	Cyprus Confederation of Organizations of the Disabled (CCOD)
7	Intermunicipal Development Projects of Nicosia (DAEL)
8	Strovolos Municipality

The stakeholders' meeting took place in a specially equipped room at the Strovolos Cultural Centre. The space included a designated area for presentation projection and a separate zone arranged for the focus group discussions. Two tables were set up, each equipped with the necessary materials, and a large map of the Strategic Plan was displayed on the wall.

### 3. Structure

On the day of the focus group discussion, and prior to its commencement, researchers from the SURF Lab presented a summary of the spatial analysis related to the Strategic Planning of the Pedieos River.

The structure of the focus group followed the methodology described earlier in this report and was organized as follows:

### ***3.1.Introduction: Explanation of the process and guidelines***

As group allocations had been arranged in advance by the SURF Lab team, participants were guided to their designated tables immediately after the presentation of the spatial analysis. At the same time, the SURF Lab team collected written consent forms from all participants for the use of photographs and recordings during the discussion.

The focus group began with an introductory session, during which the coordinator provided an overview of the process and its objectives. This included a brief presentation of the session structure, the two thematic groups and the triggering question, as well as an explanation of the roles of the participants, the coordinator, and the facilitators.

### ***Part A: Group Work – Ideation, Prioritization, and Mapping***

During this phase, each participant engaged in a ten-minute period of individual idea generation and was asked to write down up to three key ideas or aspects in response to the triggering question. Each idea was recorded on a separate Post-it note, using clear handwriting and expressed as a single phrase or word. The facilitators ensured that participants followed these instructions correctly.



Figure 1: Group work (Idea generation, discussion and voting).

Following the individual idea generation, the group moved to a thirty-minute session during which participants presented their ideas one by one. Each participant was given a few minutes to present their three ideas, placing each Post-it note on a central board. This process led to a structured discussion in which participants clarified their perspectives, exchanged views, and identified similarities and differences among the ideas. Where ideas were found to be identical or similar, they were clustered together. During this step, the facilitators recorded the discussion and took notes on key points, clarifications, and any disagreements that emerged.

The next step involved a voting process in which each participant was given a set of voting stickers and asked to vote for up to five ideas they considered the most impactful or in need of immediate reconsideration. Facilitators then counted the votes and ranked the ideas from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating the highest priority.

In the final step, participants worked collaboratively to map the top five prioritized ideas. For each idea, the group identified specific areas or points on the map that required reconsideration or improvement, using Post-it notes and arrows to visually represent connections. It was emphasized that a single idea could correspond to multiple areas or points, and vice versa.

The facilitators ensured that participants understood the instructions and that the resulting map was clear and well organized. They also recorded the discussion and documented any significant insights that emerged during this collaborative mapping process.

### ***Part B: Plenary Session – Discussion and Confirmation***

The second part of the workshop began with a brief five-minute session during which the coordinator explained the next steps of the process.

This was followed by group presentations and discussion. Each group presented its five prioritized ideas, along with the spatial connections or specific areas identified on the map. After each presentation, a short round of questions and answers encouraged interaction, clarification, and reflection among all participants. This exchange enabled a deeper understanding and comparison of perspectives across groups. During this phase, the facilitators took notes, with particular attention to key disagreements and points of interest.

At the end of this phase, participants reviewed and confirmed the collective maps during a final plenary discussion. This closing dialogue served to draw conclusions, synthesize key insights, and establish a shared understanding of the focus group's outcomes. Throughout the process, the facilitators documented the main discussion points.



Figure 2: Group work (Collaborative mapping).



Figure 3: Plenary session (Discussion and confirmation).

### *Limitations*

While the focus group methodology proved effective in facilitating structured and in-depth discussions, several limitations should be acknowledged. The relatively small number of participants may have constrained the range of perspectives and may not fully reflect the diversity of views among all stakeholders involved in the Pedieos River Strategic Planning process. Although efforts were made to ensure balance and representation in group composition, the absence of certain key actors may have influenced the outcomes.

In addition, time constraints may have limited the depth of dialogue and reflection, particularly during the mapping and plenary discussion phases. Given the complexity of the issues addressed, a longer session could have enabled a more comprehensive exploration. Finally, while the adapted SDD methodology provided a clear and interactive framework, the hands-on format may have posed challenges for participants unfamiliar with similar participatory approaches, potentially limiting their level of engagement or contribution.

### C. Focus Group Results

This section presents the outcomes of the focus group discussion, outlining the key ideas generated by participants and recorded by the facilitators of the two thematic groups.

#### Part A: Group Work – Ideation, Prioritization, and Mapping

Based on the structure of the focus group, the first phase aimed to generate ideas individually, prioritize them, and select the top five. For each selected idea, participants identified specific area(s) or point(s) on the map that required reconsideration or improvement.

The following paragraphs present the results of the ideation, prioritization, and mapping process for each of the two thematic groups.

#### Connectivity, Public Space, and Activities

Table 3 below presents the ideas developed by the “Connectivity, Public Space, and Activities” group following discussion and collaborative refinement. Where convergence occurred, similar ideas were grouped together and rewritten clearly on new Post-it notes. The table also shows how these ideas were ranked following the group’s voting process.

**Table 3 | Connectivity, Public Space and Activities**

Ranking	Description of Idea(s) / Group of Ideas	Votes	Map Coding (Figures 6–8)
1st	<b>Better connectivity and sustainable mobility:</b> Linking services and ensuring access to the linear park; improving connections with the city centre (legibility and continuity); ensuring continuity of routes from neighbourhoods; strengthening connections with Agios Dimitrios Park and the European University; and providing direct access at the neighbourhood scale.	5	A

1st	<b>Greening and shading of routes leading to Pedieos:</b> Improving the comfort of park paths by increasing green spaces and providing shaded walkways.	5	B
1st	<b>Safety and accessibility:</b> Ensuring physical and psychological safety for park users along its entire length; maintaining visual and acoustic accessibility to support orientation and safety; and installing seating and water fountains of simple design to enhance comfort and usability.	5	Γ
4th	<b>Use of digital media to highlight the advantages of the linear park:</b> Utilizing digital tools and platforms (e.g., Google Maps, Pame app) to enhance public awareness and knowledge of the park.	4	Δ
5th	<b>Quality and comfort of movement as an experience:</b> Designing routes not only for functionality but also to provide a pleasant and engaging walking or cycling experience; ensuring continuous and uninterrupted pedestrian and cycling paths to support barrier-free movement.	2	—
5th	<b>Sense of ownership through co-design:</b> Encouraging community involvement in planning and designing the Pedieos Strategic Plan; involving local communities and stakeholders in different phases to build responsibility and connection to the park.	2	—
7th	<b>Bike rental policy in the linear park and nearby neighbourhoods:</b> Introducing bike-sharing systems to enhance mobility and connectivity in the park and surrounding areas.	1	—
7th	<b>Active ground floors:</b> Enhancing and promoting amenities to improve public use and accessibility.	1	—

9th	<b>User-friendly and convenient parking spaces:</b> Ensuring practical parking areas near the park for visitors and users.	0	—
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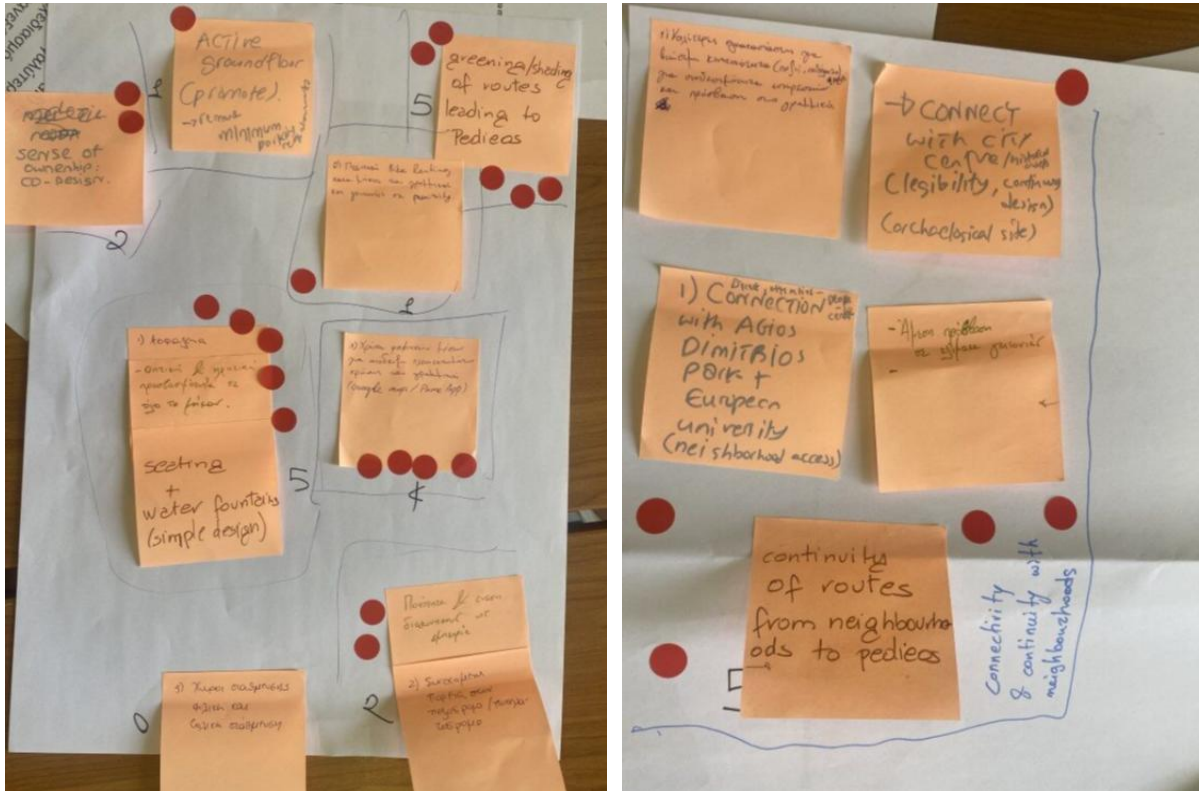


Figure 4: Ideas developed by the “Connectivity, Public space and Activities” Group  
**Environment (Conservation, Biodiversity, Green Infrastructure)**

Table 4 below presents the ideas developed by the “Environment (Conservation, Biodiversity, Green Infrastructure)” group following discussion and collaborative refinement. Where convergence occurred, similar ideas were grouped together and rewritten clearly on new Post-it notes. The table also shows how these ideas were ranked following the group’s voting process.

Table 4| Environment (Conservation, Biodiversity, Green Infrastructure)

Ranking	Description of Idea(s) / Group of Ideas	Votes	Map Coding (Figures 6–8)
1st	<b>Environmental footprint of interventions:</b> Assessing and minimizing the impact of construction or other changes on the natural environment.	3	Γ
1st	<b>Ensuring a continuous accessibility chain for persons with disabilities:</b> Creating barrier-free routes to enable independent and uninterrupted movement.	3	—
1st	<b>Flood protection and safety measures:</b> Implementing measures to prevent or reduce flood damage; addressing safety issues through appropriate lighting and removal of structural obstacles; and enhancing security through the use of surveillance cameras.	3	B
1st	<b>Waste management and protection from external factors:</b> Managing and reducing waste through municipal actions and individual responsibility.	3	—
2nd	<b>Expansion and strengthening of greenery:</b> Improving green spaces to enhance biodiversity, provide shade, improve air quality, and create a more pleasant environment.	2	A
2nd	<b>Environmental education:</b> Implementing educational programs, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, to raise awareness among students in Nicosia schools about environmental issues and sustainability related to the park.	2	—

3rd	<b>Cleanliness of the river and stagnant waters:</b> Maintaining and improving the quality of flowing and standing water bodies by preventing pollution and supporting ecosystem health.	1	—
4th	<b>Planning in accordance with accessibility legislation:</b> Ensuring that all interventions comply with legal requirements concerning accessibility for persons with disabilities.	0	—

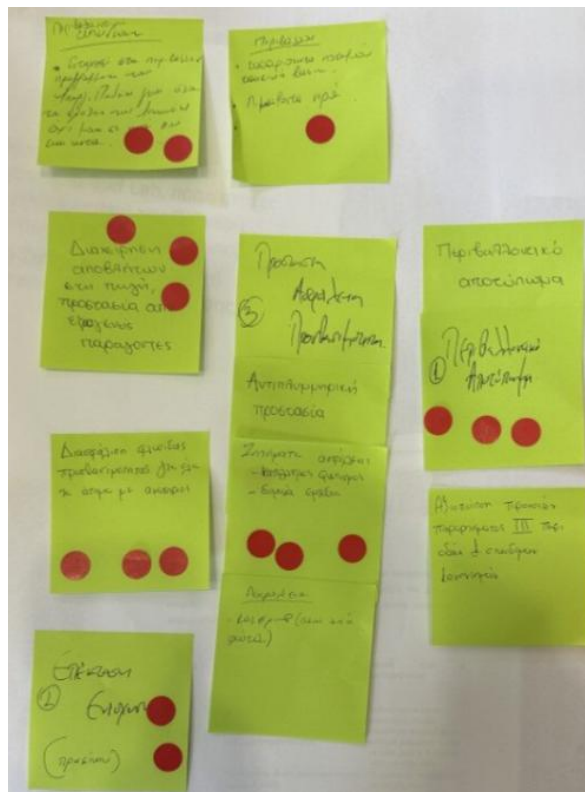


Figure 5: Ideas developed by the “Environment (Conservation, Biodiversity, Green Infrastructure)” Group.

During the collaborative mapping process, specific areas and points within the Pedieos River Masterplan were identified as requiring reconsideration. Both groups linked several of their

key ideas to particular locations. The maps below illustrate how the most important ideas were associated with specific spatial areas.

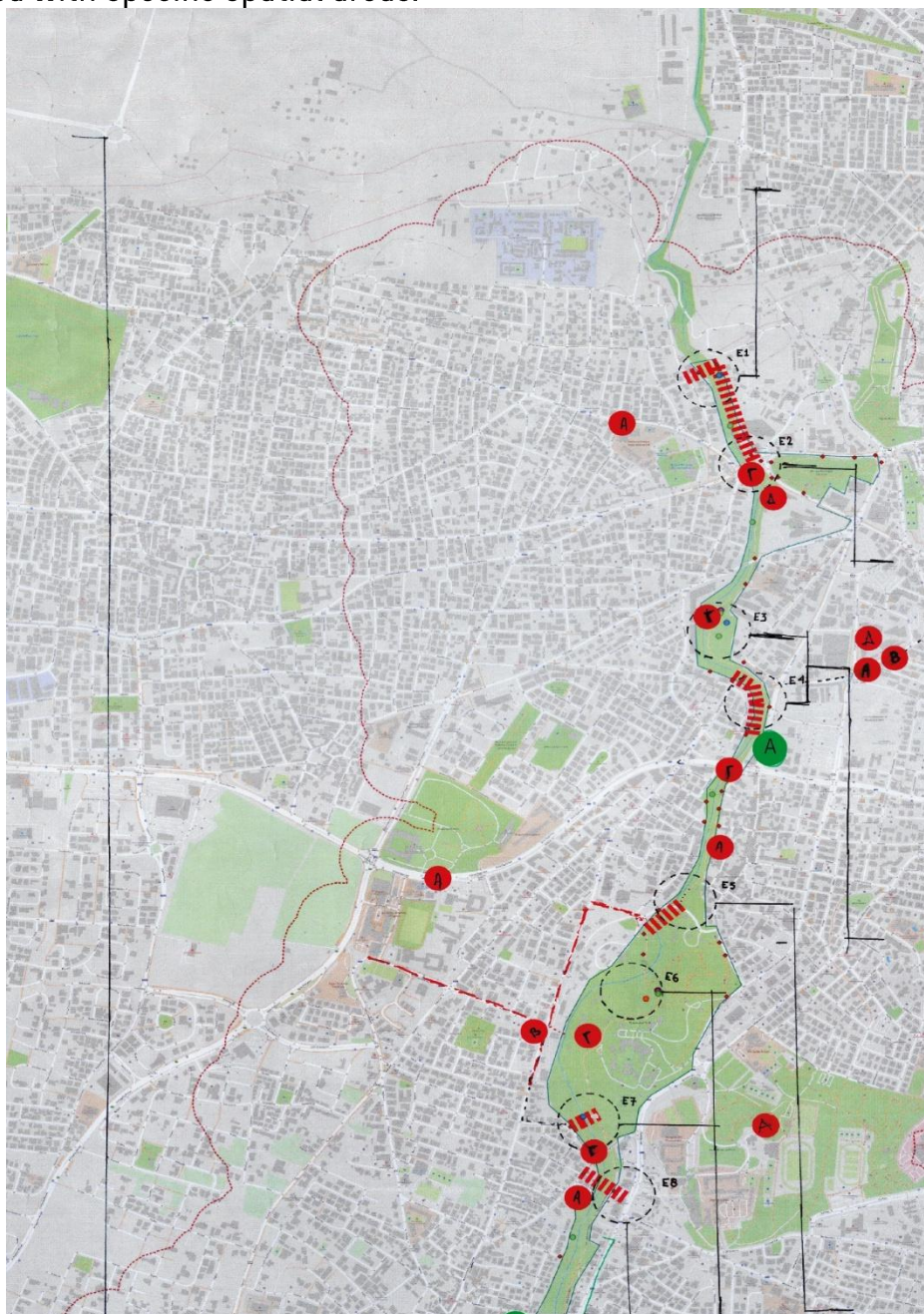


Figure 6: Map showing how the key ideas are related to specific locations in the masterplan (a).

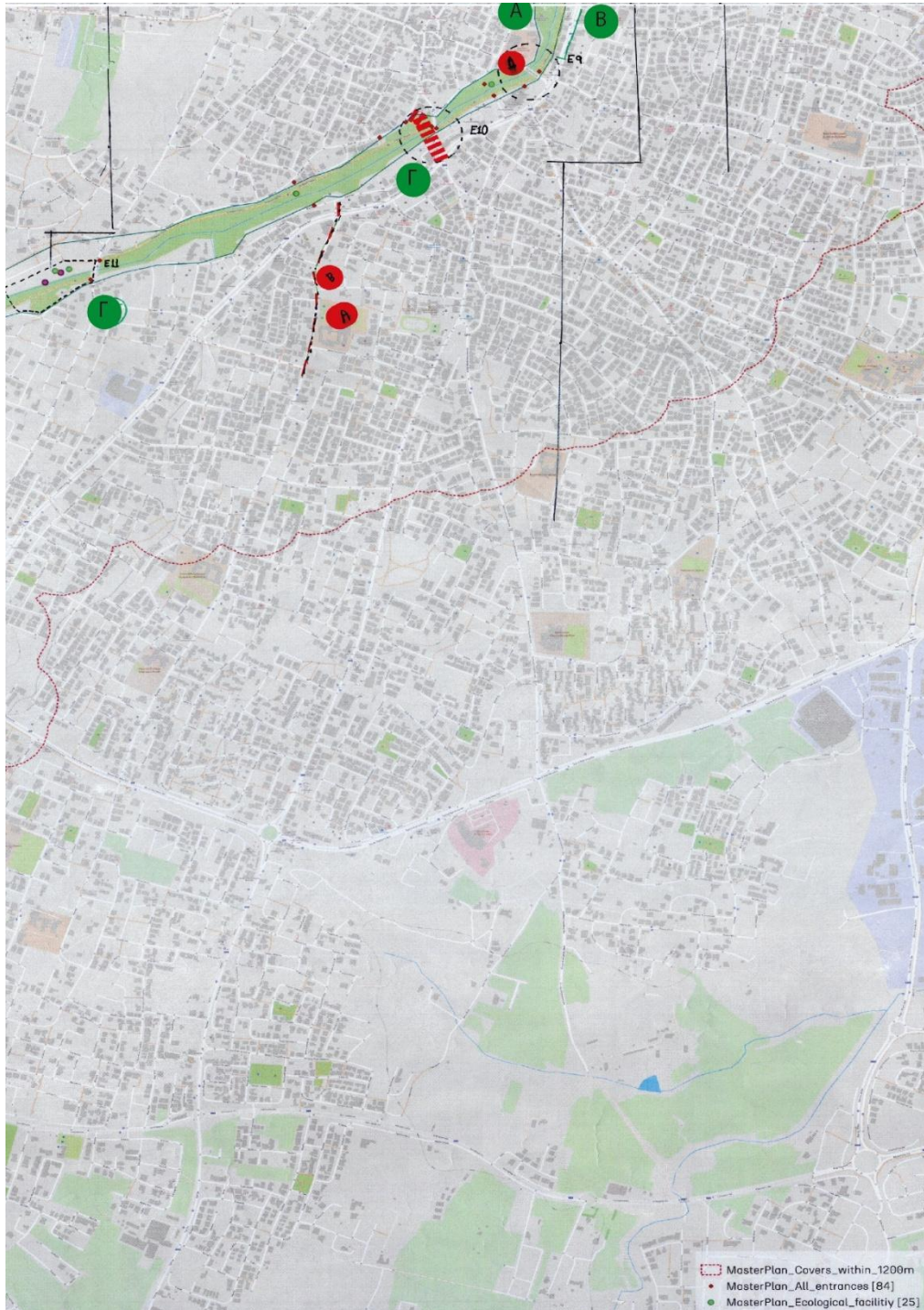


Figure 7: Map showing how the key ideas are related to specific locations in the masterplan (b).

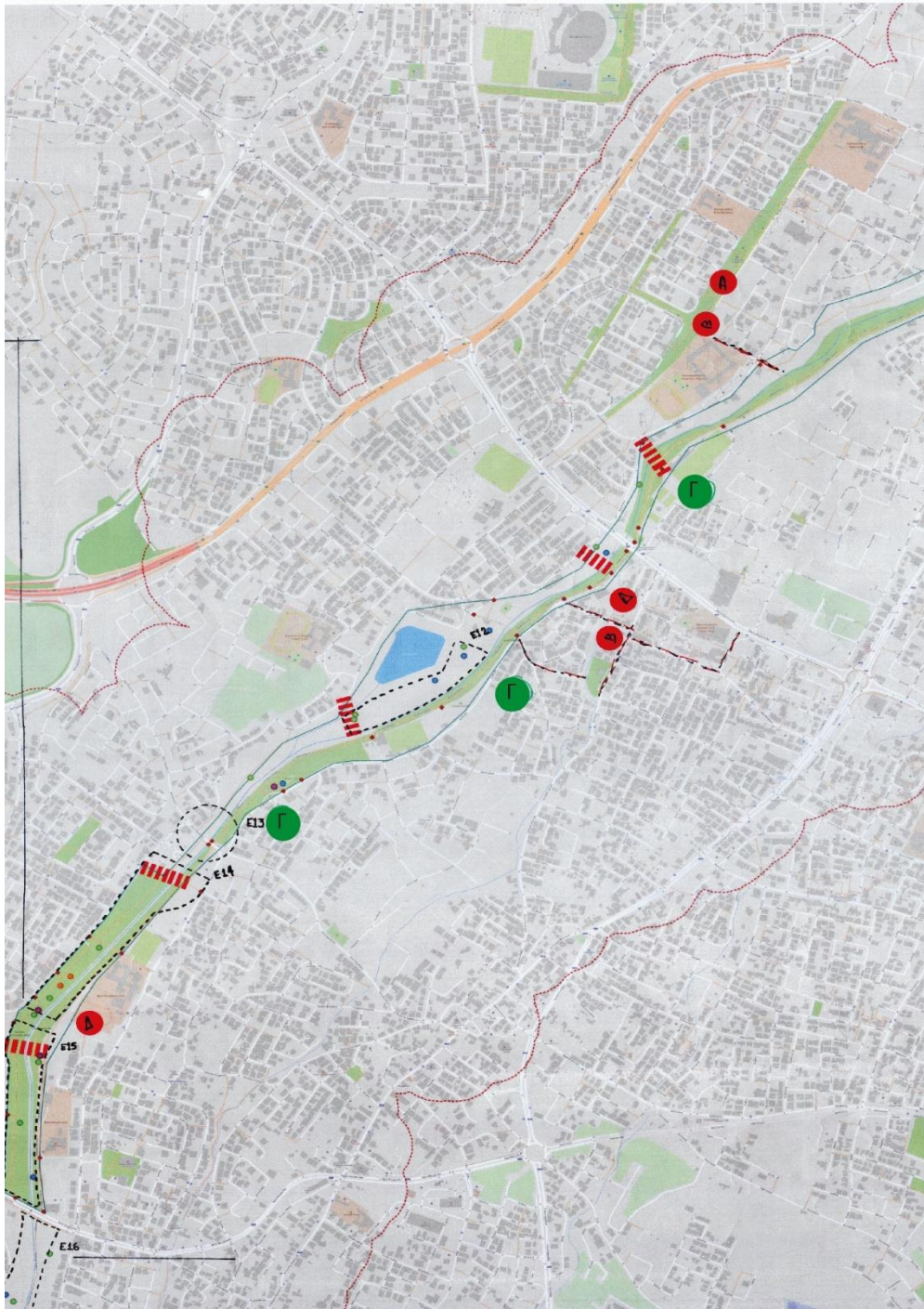


Figure 8: Map showing how the key ideas are related to specific locations in the masterplan (c).

## ***Part B: Plenary Session: Discussion and Confirmation***

During the plenary session, the groups came together to present and review the outcomes of their discussions. Each group presented its proposed top priorities and mapping, which were confirmed through collective discussion.

The participation in different phases of the process emerged as an additional important topic during the plenary, although it had received only two votes in the “Connectivity, Public Space and Activities” Group. This addition was considered essential for ensuring inclusiveness and for emphasizing that engagement should not be limited to a single stage but should extend throughout the entire process.

A central point of this discussion was the sense of ownership. Participants reflected on how active involvement in both decision-making and implementation stages can foster responsibility and strengthen commitment to the agreed outcomes. Cultivating this sense of ownership was seen as a vital element for the success and sustainability of planning. Additionally, the discussion addressed the challenges and limitations related to participation, related to practical difficulties such as resource constraints, varying levels of engagement, and logistical barriers. This exchange helped in identifying potential strategies to overcome these challenges and maintaining realistic expectations.

## ***C. Summary and Next Steps***

The focus group discussions generated and prioritized key ideas that were subsequently mapped onto the Pedieos River Masterplan, revealing strong convergence around accessibility, safety, environmental protection, flood resilience, and the enhancement of public space quality. The “Connectivity, Public Space, and Activities” group emphasized sustainable mobility, user comfort, greening, and improved awareness of the park, while the “Environment” group prioritized minimizing environmental impact, strengthening greenery, waste management, accessibility for persons with disabilities, and environmental education. The collaborative mapping process linked these priorities to specific locations, providing spatially grounded insights to support targeted and place-sensitive interventions. Participants also stressed that continuous community engagement is essential for fostering ownership, inclusivity, and long-term stewardship of the river corridor.

The next phase should focus on disseminating the findings to relevant stakeholders, integrating the identified priorities into the ongoing refinement of the Masterplan, and developing policy briefs to translate the outcomes into actionable recommendations. These actions will support evidence-based decision-making, enhance transparency, and ensure that stakeholder input remains embedded in planning and implementation processes. In parallel, future participatory activities could deepen engagement with underrepresented groups and expand dialogue on site-specific solutions, further strengthening the legitimacy and effectiveness of the planning process.

## *Conclusion*

The focus group process provided a structured and participatory framework for evaluating key aspects of the Pedieos River Strategic Masterplan. Through the adapted Structured Democratic Dialogue methodology, participants articulated shared priorities, identified spatially specific concerns, and collectively validated critical issues requiring reconsideration. The integration of ideation, prioritization, and collaborative mapping enabled the translation of stakeholder perspectives into actionable spatial insights, reinforcing the value of participatory approaches in evidence-based planning.

The findings demonstrate a clear convergence around interconnected themes, including inclusive accessibility, mobility continuity, safety, environmental protection, flood resilience, biodiversity enhancement, and the improvement of public space quality. These priorities highlight the systemic nature of urban and environmental challenges and underscore the need for integrated, place-based interventions that address both ecological performance and user experience.

Equally significant is the strong emphasis placed on sustained community participation. Participants identified ongoing engagement as a key condition for fostering social inclusion, strengthening local ownership, and supporting the long-term stewardship of the Pedieos River corridor. This reinforces the role of participatory planning in enhancing the legitimacy, responsiveness, and durability of urban strategies.

Overall, the outcomes of the focus group provide a robust qualitative foundation to inform the refinement of the Pedieos River Masterplan. By integrating stakeholder knowledge with spatial analysis, the process supports more inclusive, resilient, and environmentally responsive

planning, contributing to the development of a river corridor that serves both ecological functions and community needs over the long term.