

E-participation: How to talk to residents?

Edited by Katarzyna Sztop-Rutkowska



Laboratorium Badań
i Działań Społecznych

SOC LAB



Iceland
Liechtenstein
Norway



**Active
citizens fund**

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Foreword

I am very pleased and grateful to you for referring to our book. It is the result of the SocLab Foundation's project called "E-participation. Residents have the power!" carried out between 2022 and 2023. The aim of the project was to increase citizen involvement in community life through new technologies, combined with more traditional public consultation techniques. That is why the area of our intervention was public participation (civic, vertical) at the local government level. The main tool we used for the project was the CitizenLab platform. It allows local governments to conduct a comprehensive dialogue with residents on any subject, collecting their ideas, opinions and voices on matters that are important to their municipality. During the participatory processes, we also incorporated "real-life" consulting techniques, i.e., meetings with residents, workshops, or consultative walks. We consider this combination very important. For several months, the residents of two municipalities, Wasilków and Augustów, could actively participate in consultations and votes on issues related to the participatory budget, the needs of young people, the condition of public space, or the direction of the municipality's development. The results of just one year of these activities are very positive: almost 2,500 users have registered on the platforms, leaving 75 comments, submitting over 160 ideas/projects, and casting more than 4,100 votes in various polls. Of course, we also gained valuable experiences together with city authorities that we want to share with you.

We intended to prepare this publication primarily for local governments who want to incorporate new technologies into participation in a planned and effective way. Here you will find an abundance of practical information and advice on how to implement and manage e-participation platforms, how to effectively talk to residents using such a platform, and how to use their ideas to improve the quality of local life. I am convinced that the book may also be of interest to community organisations, researchers, and citizens interested in the topic of e-participation. The combination of actual implementation practices with theoretical reflection may make the idea of e-participation inspiring for all those interested in co-creating a democratic political culture in Poland. We need ever better and more inclusive democratic co-governance, also at the level of local government.

When deciding to implement the CitizenLab platform in the municipalities of Wasilków and Augustów, I knew that it would be a complex process involving many stakeholders. The choice of this platform was based not only on a deep conviction

that it is the best product of its kind available in Poland (a comprehensive platform for dialogue with residents), but also because our technology partner has already carried out many numerous instances of resident involvement around the world. We discussed this at our project's kick-off webinar. Of course, there is no universal model of communication using an *online* platform and the process always depends on local conditions (both at the community and national level), but the experience gathered by CitizenLab has proven to be a very good starting point.

Having dealt with participation in Poland for years, I ask myself again about the meaning of local democracy and the inclusion of residents in decision-making at the local level. Not because I have doubts whether it is worth doing (definitely worth it!), but rather because I keep wondering about the efficiency of existing practices and about things that could get more residents wanting to find out what is happening in the municipality, join a constructive discussion, and vote or give opinions on specific solutions. The development of e-services and our daily rituals of using smartphones and the Internet, as well as the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic and the development of remote forms of cooperation, have made the SocLab Foundation pay special attention to new technologies, especially those of a civic nature, known as civic tech. This is not a coincidence, because for years we have been dealing with issues of new, socially useful technologies. Together with the Foundation for the Development of an Information Society, we spent years building a nationwide Sector 3.0 community through TechKlub Białystok. Under an international Erasmus+ project, we analysed public involvement in the creation of new e-government solutions in Poland, the Czech Republic, Spain, and Turkey.

Working daily with local government communities, both on the side of authorities and residents, I saw the need to try out new methods of participation, which would give the opportunity to involve residents more widely in consultation processes. Hence the use of the CitizenLab platform and its implementation for the first time in Poland by two municipalities in the Podlaskie region.

In this publication, we share with you our one-year experience of implementing new consultation processes in Augustów and Wasilków. We want to show our activities in a broader context, looking at what is being done in this area in other cities in Poland, but also abroad. I am convinced that platforms such as CitizenLab are one of the most important conditions for participation in Polish cities to gain new quality and momentum. And we need it badly, as local governments and residents!

Finally, I would like to thank all the people who contributed to the book and to the project. Special thanks go to the residents of Wasilków and Augustów who actively participated in our project and shared their ideas and opinions. We would also like to thank the local governments of these municipalities for their openness to cooperation and trust in our foundation. I would like to extend a special thanks to the mayors of both municipalities, but also to the officials with whom we have spent a long time talking, planning, and carrying out activities. Your daily work is invaluable. We would also like to thank CitizenLab, in particular Artur Kacprzak, for material and technical support. I also have very fond memories of working with students of the Faculty of Architecture of the Białystok University of Technology, who worked with us on the accessibility of public space in Augustów. Invaluable assistance was provided by Dr. hab. Inż. Arch. Agnieszka Duniewicz, prof. BUT. Thanks are also due to our funder – the operator of the “Active Citizens Fund – Regional” programme for their flexibility and comprehensive support.

I had the pleasure of carrying this project out at the SocLab Foundation with Monika Pietkiel and Marta Zdrzyńska – thank you both so much!

I wish you a fruitful reading, which I hope will translate into real changes in local communities in Poland. The SocLab Foundation is always open to support you.

Dr Katarzyna Sztop-Rutkowska

A model for the implementation of a participation platform in local governments in Poland

We interact with new technologies on a daily basis. They have not only changed the way we spend our free time or entertain ourselves, but also how we communicate and how authorities operate. They have also had a significant impact – both positive and negative – on national and local democracy. In this publication, I would like to focus on one aspect of this impact, namely e-participation processes at the local government level and show how to implement new technological solutions wisely and effectively in our municipalities.

We will start with a look at the numbers, firstly, to embed our reflection in a concrete framework, and secondly, to see how much the reality in Poland is changing in terms of technology, how various solutions are becoming increasingly accessible. Then we can have a better understanding of the opportunities and barriers in e-participation.

According to research conducted by Poland's Central Statistical Office,¹ in 2022 nearly 92.6% of Polish households had broadband Internet access at home. According to the European Commission, 34% of households are covered by 5G technology in 2021, which is below the EU average of 65%². In 2022, 85.7% of people aged 16 to 74 used the Internet regularly. Most often, it was people aged 16–24 (99%), people with higher education (98.2%), as well as residents of large cities (89.8%).

In 2021, the share of public administration units using fixed broadband Internet access amounted to 99.9%. 26.2% of public administration units declared the possi-

¹ All data come from the latest data on the information society of the Central Statistical Office (GUS) (unless otherwise stated in the footnote). Information Society in Poland in 2022, Central Statistical Office (GUS), Statistical Office in Szczecin, Warsaw-Szczecin 2022, [https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/nauka-i-technika-spoleczenstwo-informacyjne/spoleczenstwo-informacyjne-w-polsce-w-2022-roku,1,16.html](https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/nauka-i-technika-spoleczenstwo-informacyjne/spoleczenstwo-informacyjne/spoleczenstwo-informacyjne-w-polsce-w-2022-roku,1,16.html) (accessed: 26.05.2023).

² Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) for 2022, Poland, <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/countries-digitisation-performance>, p. 3 (accessed: 26.05.2023).

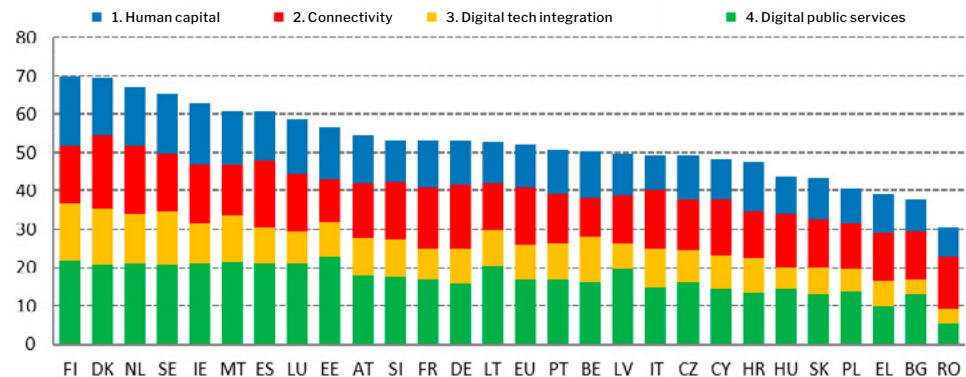
bility of citizen participation in *online* voting and public consultation (*civic tech* services, i.e., those intended to foster cooperation with residents/citizens). Electronic services increasing the effectiveness of internal activities of local governments (*gov tech*) were offered by all units of local government administration. In 2021, in the process of providing electronic services, 99.8% of public administration units used an electronic mailbox available on the ePUAP platform, and more than 21.4% of units had their own projects of this service implemented. In 2021, 59.4% of public administrations allowed citizens to apply for the “Family 500+” program electronically. Among the entities surveyed, this possibility was most often offered by municipal offices (69.9%), much less often – county offices (10.0%). In 2021, 80.9% of public administration units made spatial data available to citizens electronically. Most often, it was information on land and building registration (75.1%), and ortho-photo maps (61.6%).

As you can see, the technological conditions for e-participation in Poland are improving. We can add that in this respect we are the leader in Central and Eastern Europe, although we are still lagging behind Western European countries. According to a report prepared by the Digital Poland Foundation and Microsoft, **the state of digitisation of public services in Poland is 14% above the average for the countries from the region surveyed³. At the same time, the same report draws attention to the relatively low level of digital competence. This aspect of the information society is also confirmed** in the DESI surveys conducted regularly among EU countries since 2014⁴. In general, Polish men and women compare unfavourably with other countries in this respect, especially in the elderly categories. It is worth noting that the difference between the young and the old in everyday use of the Internet is relatively greater in Poland than in other countries of Western Europe⁵. Digital competences of Polish citizens are below the EU average. In the 2022 edition of the DESI survey, Poland ranked 24th among the 27 member states of the European Union. However, over 2017 and 2022, Poland’s aggregate DESI score exceeded the EU average slightly, which indicates that our country is catching up with the EU in this respect.

³ <https://news.microsoft.com/pl-pl/2022/09/06/poziom-cyfryzacji-uslug-publicznych-w-polsce-jest-wyzszy-niz-w-wielu-krajach-europy-srodkowo-wschodniej> (accessed: 14.05.2023).

⁴ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/pl/policies/desi> (accessed: 14.05.2023).

⁵ Eurostat, *Being young in Europe today – digital world*, 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Being_young_in_Europe_today_-_digital_world (accessed: 14.05.2023).



Digital economy and society index ranking for 2022⁶

As you can see, the technological infrastructure in Poland is of a good standard and progress is still visible, using the Internet is also one of our daily activities, although we still need to strengthen the digital competences of citizens. In general, the inclusion of new technologies in participatory processes is strongly justified and it is worth undertaking this task at the local government level, too.

There is another factor that can strengthen the processes of local e-democracy – the involvement and trust of residents. Research conducted by pollster Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS), which regularly analyses the level of trust in public institutions, indicates that local government (local authority) is one of the best rated institutions of the state and is indicated by respondents as being trustworthy. The latest CBOS data from 2022 shows that 63% of respondents trust local authorities (with 11% confidence), and 28% declare lack of trust⁷. Although local authorities are judged primarily from the point of view of investments and public services, an increasing number of residents signal that they want to have more influence on decisions made by the local executive authority. In the nationwide, representative surveys commissioned by the Shipyard Foundation in 2015, the results show clear acceptance and an expectation that residents will have an influence on decisions made at the local level.

At the same time, as residents, we still rarely take community action. How can we understand this paradox? There are intentions and declarations, but they are not carried through. I am convinced that one of the answers may lie in the improved quality of public participation, its attractiveness and accessibility. It is a long-term

⁶ Digital Economy Index..., p. 3.

⁷ Social trust, "CBOS Research Note" 2022, no. 37.

process of building local identity and democratic habits that will increase people's motivation to participate. New technologies can help a lot in this, although of course I do not treat them as a panacea for all weaknesses.

Civic technologies (*civic tech*) can be particularly effective in activating people to participate in public consultations, as they provide a more convenient and accessible way for citizens to provide information and opinions. Traditional forms of participation are often not popular. This is due to a variety of reasons. Firstly, it is an inefficient way of reaching out and encouraging participation in consultations, without indicating the benefits that residents can achieve through participation in consultations. The second reason is the lack of time and other priorities in time management. Participation in a consultation meeting often interferes with family commitments, work, or other forms of leisure. The *online* platforms we write about in this book, such as CitizenLab or Decidim, allow citizens to submit comments and ideas anytime, anywhere, without physically attending meetings or events. They are also more attractive and require less effort than filling out a boring form, which you additionally need to find in the Public Information Bulletin or on a city or municipality's website. This is important because it is sometimes difficult for residents to find the time and motivation to get more involved in cooperation.

However, it is worth noting that the impact of civic technology tools on participatory processes can vary depending on many factors, including the design and functionality of the tool itself, the level of engagement and trust between citizens in a given municipality or country, and the broader political and social context associated with democratic culture. Some of these factors, such as social trust, generally affect the quality and scale of public participation, while some relate to the specificity of e-participation.

Let us take a closer look at these major challenges:

1. **Digital exclusion.** Social research points out that this phenomenon is not only connected with the lack of access to infrastructure (this is a decreasing problem in Poland, as mentioned at the beginning of this text), but also has a social character, related to motivations and skills⁸. This is where the concept of digital and social exclusion comes into play. According to GUS data, the oldest people are the most digitally excluded, to a lesser extent people with a low level of education and people in a poor financial situation. Digital exclusion is also quite clearly correlated

⁸ A. Bartol, J. Herbst, A. Pierścińska, *Socio-digital exclusion in Poland. State of affairs, trends and recommendations*, Orange Foundation, Shipyard Foundation, Warsaw 2021.

with lack of work. Its main source is motivational exclusion. Nearly 66% of people who do not use the Internet justify it by lack of need – it is difficult for them to determine what things they could take care of via the Internet, despite the fact that they have access to it⁹. And this is the main digital exclusionary factor. Technical issues, access to infrastructure (e.g., type of Internet connection or computer equipment) are far less important.

2. **Quality of technological solutions used in participation.** The effectiveness of citizen technology tools also depends on how they are designed, especially in terms of user experience. If the tools are not user-friendly or do not meet the needs of the target audience, they will automatically create a barrier, discouragement. They should be prepared for users with low digital skills, they must be accessible and intuitive to use. It is worth ensuring that the platform that is introduced to the local authority can be used by everyone in the municipality. It is also important that the tools for e-participation are responsive and easy to use also on smartphones because they are used more and more often. According to the research conducted by the Office of Electronic Communication (UKE), 74.6% of mobile users use the Internet service on their phone¹⁰.

3. **Reactivity and transparency of local government in participatory practices to date.** If citizens have not felt until now that their opinions have been taken seriously or that they lack the political will to act based on feedback from citizens, they may be less likely to engage in civic technology tools. Unfortunately, there is still no shortage of examples of treating public consultations in a disrespectful manner. The decision-making process should be transparent and clearly provide space for co-determination of residents. A positive example, despite its various imperfections, is the participatory budget, which has gained recognition among many residents and is valued by both them and the local authority. One of the reasons is that you can see its effects, and, usually quite quickly at that, and the process of selecting projects is transparent and public.

4. **The level of social capital, especially citizens' trust.** This barrier appears like a mantra in many analyses of Polish democracy. What is social capital? It is a feeling of positive connection among strangers, outside the family. It is a feeling that we are a form of community, e.g., neighbours or residents of the municipality. It is the basis of a democratic political culture, a necessary condition for genuine

⁹ Ibid, p. 16.

¹⁰ <https://inwestycje.pl/gospodarka/969-polakow-korzystalo-z-telefonu-komorkowego-773-z-internetu-w-2021> (accessed: 27.05.2023).

social dialogue that leads to concrete solutions. Research in Poland confirms that local government is seen primarily as part of the state and public administration rather than as a community of residents¹¹. We assess the actions of politicians and local government officials primarily from the point of view of hard (infrastructural) investments. Until now, with a large share of EU funds in urban budgets, residents' satisfaction could be built on this. Mayors were assessed primarily in terms of being efficient managers who make good investments (often contracting debt to the municipal budget for many years, which is usually discussed less). However, this is a short-sighted strategy. It is therefore worth redefining what high quality self-government is supposed to consist of by paying attention to local, including social resources.

5. **The place of participation in local government activities.** The state reform establishing local government as an important level of governance and management, with its own budget and autonomy, was intended to strengthen the connection between decision-making processes and citizens. Participation in local government is a fundamental process. However, observing the actions of local authorities and the way they implement participatory processes, it can be clearly seen that this did not happen. Public consultations are often limited to those required by law. Cooperation with residents rarely occurs at the beginning of decision-making, during diagnosis, or searching for solutions. This is probably due to the multitude of other tasks carried out by local government, but it is also the result of the still immature democratic political culture in Poland.

How to effectively implement the e-participation platform?

Incorporating a tool such as a platform into participation certainly requires **preparation**. As part of the project, we decided to try our own way to introduce innovations to the office, based on the experience we and CitizenLab had, which has very well-developed implementation scenarios and educational materials for the local government¹². As part of the project, we decided to set up **participation teams** in both municipalities, with representatives of local authorities, the SocLab Foundation, and CitizenLab. These municipalities previously did not have units that dealt *strictly* with participation, with public consultation. It was very important for

¹¹ A. Gendźwił, D. Wiszejko-Wierzbicka, *W poszukiwaniu obywatelskiej opowieści o samorządzie lokalnym. Raport z Badań*, Batory Foundation, Warsaw 2022, p. 13.

¹² <https://www.citizenlab.co/resources> (accessed: 23.05.2023).

these teams to have an executive representative (mayor or deputy), because we knew that the decisions made by the team must have political legitimacy. In this way, we also wanted to inform the office that the issue of e-participation is very important. During the activity, it turned out that the opportunity of shortening the decision-making process was crucial in this team set-up. In each office, a platform coordinator was also appointed, i.e., the person who was the first contact for us, operated the platform and prepared materials for individual activities. Officials responsible for individual consultations were also expected to participate in the work of the team. They were not its permanent members – they joined at the time of planning participatory activities, which included in substance the individual department in the office. I must admit that this was a big challenge. It turned out that the difficulties arise from the persisting silo mentality of municipalities and, consequently, problems in internal communication result. This is a challenge observed in most, if not all, public offices in Poland. It is worth improving the flow of information between departments and supporting cooperation between them and different departments of the office. Without this, good participation is impossible. Despite these challenges, we managed to achieve two of the main goals of the team: planning individual processes taking into account different techniques (we assumed that it is always a platform and two *offline* techniques) and continuous project evaluation, which consisted in listening to each other's team carefully, sharing difficulties honestly and looking for good solutions, draw conclusions after each process, and flexibly design the next based on the experience gained.

Working with both municipalities in the project, we started from the initial stage of implementation, which consisted in **the technical implementation of the tool**. The officials were trained by a CitizenLab representative on the use of the platform and its functionalities. The platform was tested very quickly. Augustów started with elections to the Youth City Council. It was a very ambitious task to start with, connected with the vote among a clearly defined group, which had to verify its identity through the PESEL, the Polish ID number. The process went well – the Council was chosen by e-voting! More than 500 people voted within 24 hours! Wasilków decided to test the platform in an e-vote concerning its domain name. The officials thus had the opportunity to learn how it works by performing specific actions and were able to get used to the new tool. **Informing about the platform and promoting it** is extremely important. We approached this matter from multiple directions. We prepared a communication strategy for both municipalities – with the main points presented in a different colour. We developed uniform texts on leaflets and posters. And I must admit that this was not easy. Each municipality already had its own communication habits, design, and style, which until now had been used by officials.

Summary of the consultation on adapting the MOPS building in Augustów to the needs of people with disabilities. Presentation of works by students of the Faculty of Architecture of Białystok University of Technology (own resources)

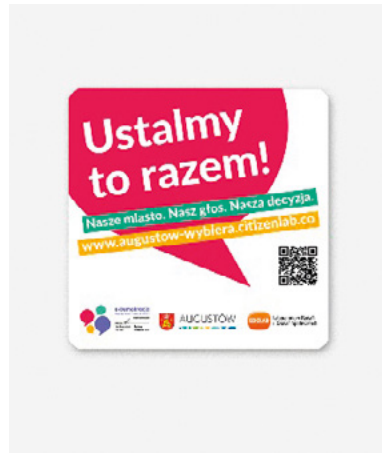


The project on the diagnosis of accessibility of public space was also attended by students of the Faculty of Architecture of the Białystok University of Technology, who prepared projects for adapting the Social Welfare Centre building in Augustów to the needs of people with disabilities (own resources).



Such decisions should certainly be made in the office, thanks to which perhaps it would be consistently implemented in subsequent communication.

A very important element preceding the official launch of the platform in both cities were **meetings with civil dialogue bodies**: senior councils, the public benefit council (Augustów), and the city council (Wasilków). We were very keen to get the word out about the launch of the platform to active residents in both municipalities. It must be admitted that this was not an easy task. Our activities were not always met with enthusiasm and understanding. Initially, it was difficult for individual groups to imagine how the platform could be used, how it could be useful for residents. For the SocLab team, how to speak clearly about the implemented innovation in order to encourage councillors or local activists was also a challenge. The next stage was the **planning of participatory processes**. We worked in project mode, which gave a limited time perspective. Looking from the perspective of experience from this project, I would start by determining what consultations are planned, because they result



Examples of flyers and posters for Wasilków and Augustów (own resources)



from the provisions of the law and are mandatory. I encourage you to create such annual consultation plans so that you have a properly pre-planned design process for at least some of them. What emerged from our discussions were processes that were not always typical consultations, but also diagnosed the needs of particular groups (e.g., young people). This certainly showed the great possibilities of using the platform to conduct a broad dialogue between local authorities and residents, which do not have to be limited only to classic social consultations.

The implementation phase is a good time for the office to look at the role of participation, to take stock and learn from past practices and habits, to reflect on the communication process with residents so far. We had the opportunity to set short- and long-term goals for the platform's applications, identify key audiences, identify risks, and set indicators that we wanted to achieve together. In addition, we designed with each process what additional *offline* consultation techniques would be used from the outset. From the very beginning, we decided that we could not limit our activities to virtual ones, using the platform. This was due to the desire to involve various groups in the processes of participation (including those who could potentially be excluded digitally). This assumption was very important, because during the first trials it turned out that field activities, direct (e.g., consultation

walks), brought results in the form of entries on the platform (participants of the walk could immediately report various barriers in the public space using mapping).

The combination of online and offline activities seems necessary, especially at the beginning of implementation, because only in time can residents get used to the platform and use it as the first and/or only option to participate in the consultations.

At this stage, the biggest challenge was to find time for peaceful planning. This process, especially at the beginning, can be time-consuming, but it certainly allows the team to improve the process of managing participation in the municipality. It is worth taking care of it.

When planning, it is very important to think about the procedures and processes of internal communication. This is a very important but underestimated stage, in my opinion. It is not always a consequence of the formal division into positions or departments in local authorities' offices. Often, informal standards and values, or what we call the organisational culture of the municipal authorities' office, play an important role here. As I mentioned earlier, it is crucial to design participatory

Research walks across a housing estate in Augustów (own resources)



processes efficiently and clearly define who is responsible for what in the municipal office. This is a difficult aspect of implementation, related to the management of work in public offices. The key question is: who is responsible for this process? Who is the leader who sees the whole process and monitors the work of the team? These questions need to be answered every time.

The next step is **to design the first consultation process** on the platform. It is very important because it is to encourage residents to register and later to participate in other projects. The CitizenLab platform has an interesting functionality – after registering, it can notify users of upcoming consultations. Therefore, a snowball mechanism can work here, which will create a growing group of active residents around the platform. In the case of Wasilków, the first process was extremely ambitious: to carry out the next edition of the participatory budget from start to finish on the platform. This did not exclude the traditional (paper) version, but it was intended to encourage submission of projects and discussion on them at the very beginning of the participatory budget. Thanks to this, we managed to talk about the projects publicly before they were even subjected to formal verification. In Augustów, an easier project was chosen, but equally attractive for residents – selection of murals. It generated a lot of interest, and on top of that, the tangible effect of the process could quickly be seen. Choosing the first consultation project on the platform is very important, as it can either turn out to be a driving force for further *online* activities or at the beginning discourage residents from using the new tool.

What should you look out for in your first project/issue?

Importance of the subject. The first issue should be important for the everyday life of the city residents. This can be a consultation that affects a large part of the community, such as public transport or affordable housing. If a project is selected that resonates with the needs of the residents, then the likelihood that they will be interested in engaging in using the platform is increased.

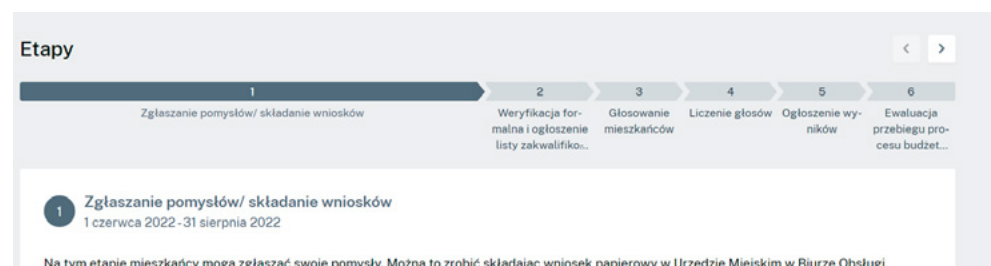
Impact: The project should have the potential to result in a visible change in the city. This can be an activity on which city officials actively seek opinions or through which citizens can influence decision-making processes.

Feasibility. The topic should be feasible in terms of implementation. This may mean a choice that is within the discretion of the city authorities or in which the city has the authority to make changes. It is important to choose a topic in which there is a simple path of action, using the participation of residents.

Topical. The project should be topical and current. This could be a project that is currently being discussed in the city or that has been identified as a priority by the city authorities. By choosing the topic that is most important to residents, we increase the likelihood that they will be interested in engaging with the platform.

Online public consultations should be organised in accordance with the same principles as *offline* activities¹³. Tools such as the CitizenLab platform facilitate their implementation. This is most evident with principles such as:

- **transparency** – thanks to a fixed timeline, linked to individual stages of consultations and dates of their implementation, residents know the course of the process from the beginning;

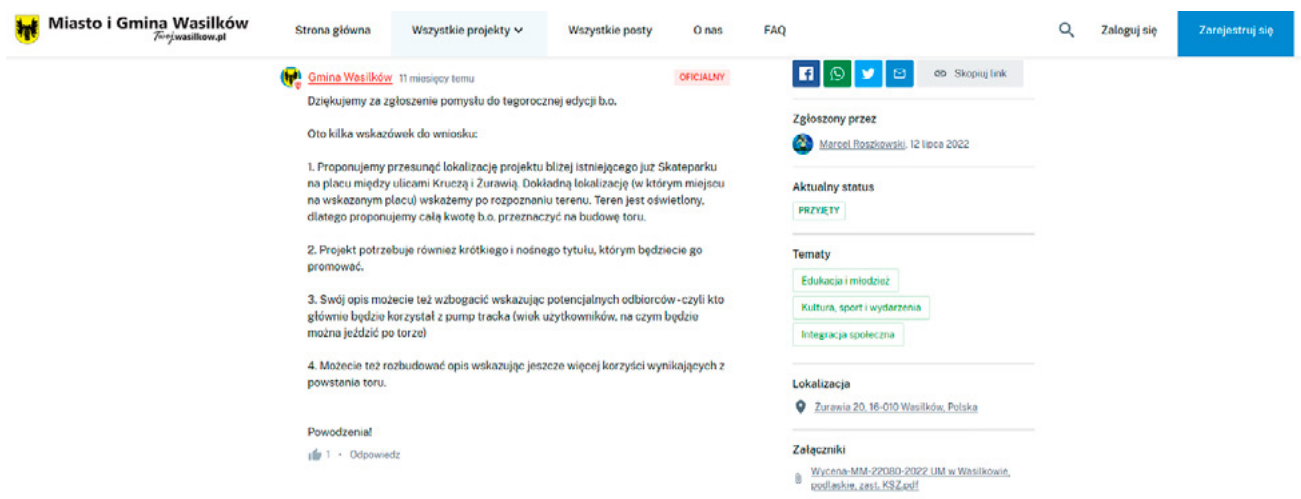


A snapshot of the timeline of the implementation of the participatory budget in Wasilków in 2022¹⁴

¹³ For example, *7 zasad konsultacji*, Ministerstwo Administracji i Cyfryzacji, Warsaw 2013.

¹⁴ <https://twojwasilkow.pl/pl-PL/projects/projekty-ogolnomiejskie/1> (accessed: 12.05.2023).

- **responsiveness** – at each stage, the authority has the opportunity to provide feedback to residents in a simple and open way (the authority's highlighted comments are visible on the platform).



Example of an official comment during the discussion of a proposed idea in Wasilków¹⁵

- **coordination and predictability** – preparing an *online* consultation requires you to rethink the entire process and plan it accordingly (need to be placed on the timeline), which ensures better project management during its implementation.

Communicating with residents

It is very important to inform residents about public consultations that are planned or have already been conducted. The introduction of a new tool to local governments meant that the communication strategies implemented so far had to be reconsidered. In addition to the use of classic methods, such as information on the municipality's website and social media, we put special emphasis on *offline* activities.

As I mentioned earlier, posters and flyers, fridge magnets with information about the platform were designed. In communication, QR codes were used, which encouraged quick access to the website using smartphones. Information about the platform and consultations was also disseminated at picnics, meetings of resi-

¹⁵ Ibid.

dents, during media briefings and at meetings with local bodies of social dialogue (public benefit council, senior council, and youth council). Local leaders were also invited to act as ambassadors for the platform (a strategy modelled on Western European countries), but this did not bring the expected results. Perhaps more attention should have been paid to working with these people. Film footage was also recorded with the participation of mayors, who presented the platform and partially individual processes.

Diagnosis of the needs of young people in one of the schools in Augustów. The 'talking walls' method (own resources)



Meeting with young people in Wasilków (own resources)





Screenshot from the video featuring the mayor of Wasilków Adrian Łuckiewicz, in which he encourages people to take part in the participatory budget on the platform¹⁶



Screenshot from a video featuring the mayor of Augustów Mirosław Karolczuk promoting the participation platform¹⁷

The last element of the processes was their evaluation. Each time we asked participants on the platform for feedback on the consultation. This proved to be quite difficult – not many people were willing to answer our questions. In the future, it will

¹⁶ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6zJ_Yg5TP1Y (accessed: 26.05.2023).

¹⁷ <https://augustow-wybiera.citizenlab.co/pl-PL> (accessed: 26.05.2023).

certainly be necessary to modify the way we collect opinions about the process in order to make it more effective.

The process of implementing and using the CitizenLab platform as part of our project lasted 14 months. In both cities it was undoubtedly an interesting and, in my opinion, effective attempt to use a comprehensive tool for participation. The platform has proven to be a good space not only for consultation, but also for community dialogue in the municipality in the broadest sense. An interesting example of this was the consultation on a mandatory document in municipalities, in this case the report on the state of the Wasilków municipality. This is an important document summarising the activities of the local executive authority. It was supposed to serve to animate discussions on the directions of development of the municipality. However, residents rarely engage in these types of activities, as the reports are usually long and not written in a very accessible way.

*Consultation meeting
with representatives of
social councils and NGOs
in Wasilków (own resources)*



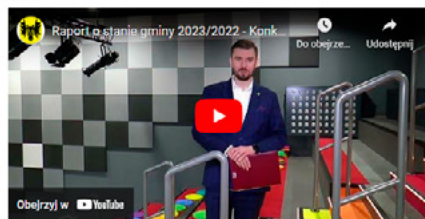
Wasilków decided to present the most important investments and cultural projects implemented in the municipality in 2022 on the platform. An *online* competition for the investment and cultural undertaking of the year was held. This was met with great interest from Wasilków residents, who were able to cast their vote and justify why the chosen measure was important to them.

Ranking Projektów Roku 2022 - KONKURS

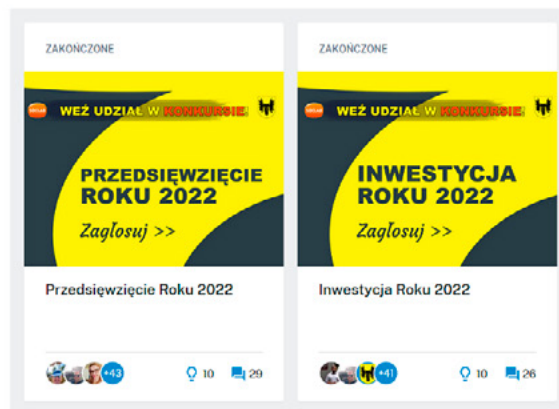
Tworzymy ranking projektów realizowanych przez Gminę Wasilków w roku 2022

Weź udział w konkursie i wygraj piękny album ze zdjęciami „Odkryj Wasilków”

Już w maju zostanie przedstawiony ważny dokument Raport o stanie Gminy za 2022 rok. Jest to podsumowanie działań samorządu w Wasilkowie w danym roku. Chcemy z Wami - mieszkańcami świętować nasze wspólne sukcesy w poprzednim roku!



Zapraszamy Was do konkursu na naszej platformie.



Screenshot from the CitizenLab platform in Wasilków¹⁸

In accordance with good public policy-making principles, the contributions of residents can be taken into account at any stage of their development (e.g., when setting the agenda or collecting needs and ideas). Such activities use crowdsourcing, i.e., the use of collective intelligence to solve problems and deal with various challenges. In the management of public administration, such innovative solutions are increasingly being used. And you can gain a lot: You can get a large number of solutions (sometimes innovative), build networks of trust and cooperation in the processes of creating local policies, create in the local government networks of residents interested in the development of the municipality, who feel that they are being listened to and that they can share their experience and knowledge. This is the basis for the transition in local governance from *government* (governance) to *governance* (co-management). The participation platform is a suitable tool for this type of activity.

E-participation, linked to the implementation of a comprehensive platform such as CitizenLab, can certainly be a factor that increases the quality of social dialogue in the municipality. Of course, it is unlikely to replace face-to-face meetings because these meetings have their value and are important for both residents and the municipality. However, it is worth expanding the possibilities of talking and finding new, innovative solutions together.

¹⁸ <https://twojwasilkow.pl/pl-PL/folders/ranking-projektow-roku-2022-konkurs> (accessed: 26.05.2023).

Recommendations for municipalities / local authorities

If you decide to include a participation platform in your municipal operations, we recommend the following actions:

- **One door policy.** Create an integrated participatory system that will serve as a single channel for all activities requiring the participation of residents. CitizenLab can be a central hub for participation, handling different types of consultation and participation.
- **Defining the objective.** Before implementing an e-participation platform, clearly define its purpose. Examples of objectives may include increasing the level of social participation among residents, increasing the transparency of decision-making processes, increasing efficiency and savings, and establishing relationships with residents.
- **Create a participation team.** Create a special team consisting of representatives of the various units of your office. You can also invite people representing community organisations and e-participation specialists. Ensure the participation of executive representatives in the work of the team so that decisions have political legitimacy and to emphasise the importance of e-participation in the office.
- **Appoint a Platform Coordinator.** The identification of the person responsible for the operation and coordination of the e-participation platform in the office will facilitate its effective implementation. The coordinator should be properly trained and well versed in the functionalities of the platform.
- **Improve information flow and internal communication.** Breaking the silo mentality in the municipal office and promoting collaboration between different units (divisions, departments). Sharing information is crucial for effective participation. Ensure regular meetings, exchange of information and cooperation. Choose a team leader who will monitor the whole process of participation and will be responsible for the effective management of the e-participation project and all e-consultations.

- **Involve different stakeholders.** It is important to involve various stakeholder groups in the planning process: municipal staff, councillors, representatives of advisory bodies and active residents. Their participation can make the platform more relevant to the needs of the community and increase their trust in the public authorities.
- **Run an information and promotional campaign.** Develop a communication strategy that is tailored to the needs and habits of the residents. Prepare promotional materials such as pamphlets, posters and graphics that are easy to read and attract attention. Take advantage of various communication channels, such as the local government's website, social media, newsletters, or local newspapers. In addition, it is worth organising training sessions and workshops for residents explaining how to use the platform and showcasing the opportunities it provides in social participation. Education and promotion are aimed at increasing the awareness of residents and encouraging them to participate actively in decision-making processes.
- **Plan participatory processes.** Establish an annual consultation plan, taking into account mandatory consultations under applicable laws. Design a variety of participatory processes that are not limited to classic public consultation. Use the platform as a tool to diagnose the needs of different social groups. Keep an eye on the process and make changes if necessary.
- **Combine online and offline activities.** Implement participatory processes that combine both *online* activities on the platform and traditional *offline* methods. Ensure a balance to include different groups of residents, including those who may be digitally excluded.
- **Rules of procedure for public consultation.** It is important to establish the rules of procedure for public consultations, which define how they are conducted with residents. The rules of procedure should also take into account the conduct of participatory processes on the *online* platform.
- **Registration and collection of personal data.** The platform should comply with legal requirements for the collection, processing, and storage of personal data. Prior to registration, residents should be provided with clear information about the purpose for collecting the data and how it is used. The local government should limit data collection to the bare minimum necessary to achieve the objectives of participation. At this stage, the collection of unnecessary or redundant information should be excluded.

Dr Katarzyna Sztop-Rutkowska

Field researcher in social life, combining theory with practice. Founder of the SocLab Foundation, professionally associated with the Institute of Sociology of the University of Białystok. At the SocLab Foundation, she is involved in the implementation of social innovations, focusing on new technologies. Trainer, facilitator of consultation processes. Areas of interest: participation, self-governance, new technologies, NGOs.

Artur Kacprzak

Introducing a culture of participation

This text, although originally edited in Polish using masculine pronouns, is addressed to all progressive-minded local government officials – both men and women – regardless of gender.

You must demand of yourselves, even if others would not demand of you.

— John Paul II

You have made a decision. You are creating a modern local government, in which residents participate in the decision-making process, contribute their ideas, and engage in the life of their city. You are not forced to do so by law. If you are successful, it will be because of you – your ambition, charisma, and determination.

Dimidium facti, qui coepit, habet. – He who has begun is half done.

— Horace

Launching a culture of participation in a city is a complex and multi-stage operation that must be carried out wisely. You need social engineering professionals who understand your circumstances and support you at every stage of this momentous undertaking.

CitizenLab is your ally. We have experience in implementing 400 platforms worldwide. Over our 7 years of experience, we have built up knowledge to help you avoid mistakes, save money, and score political support in your community.

Build a positive climate

Creating a good atmosphere around co-determination is fundamental. Build a positive climate by setting an example. By no means underestimate or attempt to bypass other political actors. If you want to seriously engage your residents, you have to win over their representatives – the councillors. To establish a participatory culture is like entering the periphery of an area previously reserved only for the representative body. Participation is a form of co-determination. With the community, rather than with the councillors. Be careful in choosing the topics you want to discuss with your residents. Make sure that you do not fall into an area of sole competence of the councillors.

Talk to your councillors

Inform the city council of your intentions. Present your vision of an involved community to its representatives. Make it clear that you have the ambition of increasing residents' participation in decision-making, not only with the participatory budget. Assure everyone that you respect the statutory powers of the municipal legislative authority. Ask the councillors for support. Look for allies in the council and neutralise potential tensions arising from their misunderstanding or sense of danger.

Ask about what decisions, areas, or parts of them previously reserved only to councillors would they agree to include the community in and on what terms. This way, you will be able to present the whole spectrum of opportunities for inclusion of citizens.

CitizenLab is a central hub for participation. You will carry out not only the participatory budget, but all kinds of polls, surveys, elections, idea collection, mapping, volunteering and voting on any topic.

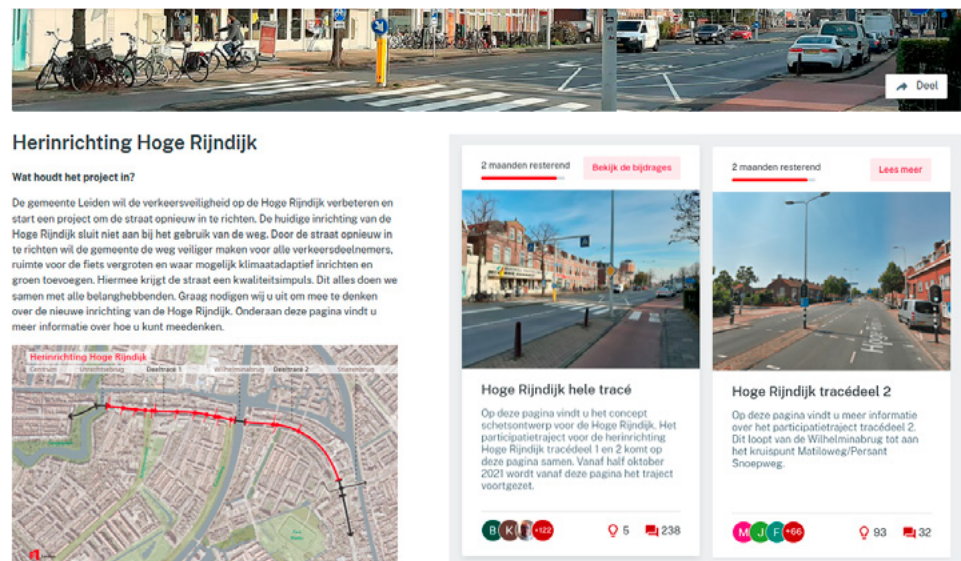
Agree on a catalogue of topics

A good idea to debate the vision of the community involved in your local government would be, for example, a discussion on an annual participation plan. Such a plan may be prepared in the form of internal rules of procedure. You can also strengthen it by giving it to the city council for deliberations and adoption, giving it the rank of a resolution. It will serve as an overview of the topics in which community participation is most welcome and accepted by the legislative authorities: participatory budget, strategic city development plan, NGO cooperation plan, energy strategy, mobility plan, road reconstruction, park revitalisation, establishing a working team for a city festival or a name for a newly opened roundabout.

Thanks to a wider discussion, you will gather more ideas for dialogue with residents and build a ready catalogue of participatory projects for the platform for the whole year. Alternatively, you can leave the document open-ended and add to your plan as new and unforeseen opportunities and needs arise. Even the smallest issue is good for building an engaged community.

Practical examples of participatory culture: improving road safety in Leiden

It is easy to involve residents when you have a participatory platform that enables mapping. On its participation website, the Dutch city of Leiden has implemented almost 50 different types of participatory projects involving more than 8 thousand residents who are constantly engaged in the city's life.



Screenshot of the Hoge Rijndijk safety improvement project on Leiden's participation website¹

One of the projects is dedicated to improving safety on one of the roads and was initiated long before the investment was launched. This is fundamental to the local government's culture of participation – ask the residents for their opinion before anyone starts investing. Under this project, Leiden addressed the residents with the following words:

The municipality of Leiden wants to improve safety on the Hoge Rijndijk and is starting the process of redesigning the street. Local authorities want to make it

¹ <https://doemee.leiden.nl/nl-NL/folders/hoge-rijndijk> (accessed: 5.06.2023).

safer for all traffic participants, increase the amount of space available for bicycles and, where possible, add green areas. This will improve the street's quality. We will do all this together with all the stakeholders. We would like to invite you to help with thinking about the new Hoge Rijndijk layout².

Then the street was divided into two parts, and for each of them separate participatory projects were set up on the platform for residents to post their comments on the map, addressing them in the following way:

Put your wishes, concerns, and ideas on the map [...]. Do you have wishes, concerns or ideas about safety, public space layout or traffic flow? Share them with us by putting them on the map. You can also respond to other people's ideas.

The project was built on seven transparent phases, combining different methods of participation: from simple information, through collecting comments and placing them on the map by residents.



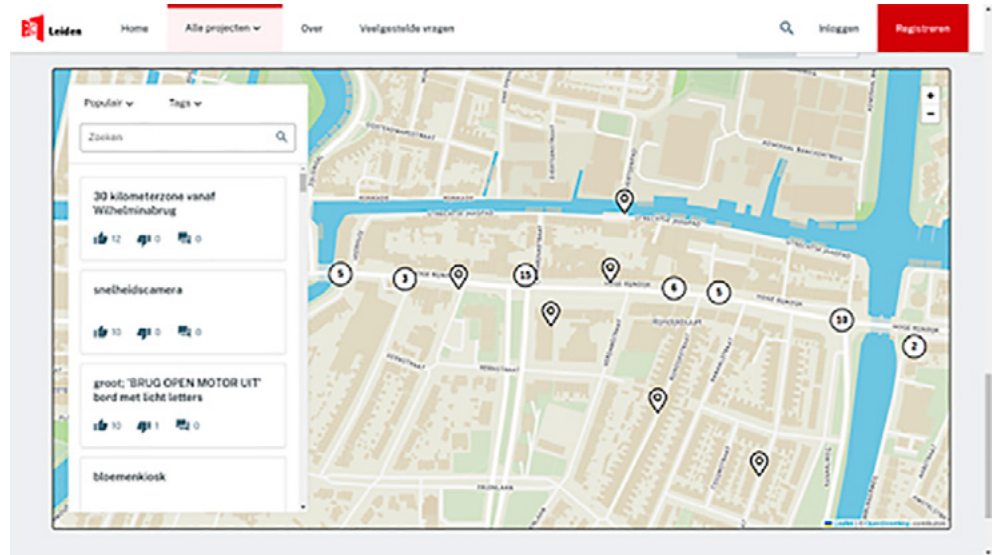
Timeline of the Hoge Rijndijk security improvement project on the participation page of the City of Leiden³

On the CitizenLab platform, you can build any participatory project and visualise the whole process on an interactive timeline. You moderate the discussions and decide what stages the project should consist of, how long they should last, when they should start and what the participation of residents should be in them.

In the case of the Leiden road reconstruction project, a second phase was launched for collecting opinions, commenting and voting. In addition, it was done right on the map to give the residents the opportunity to refer to specific locations. Thanks to this option, many residents could accurately mark the locations being the subject of the speech: cross walks, speed bumps, intersections, road signs, parking bays, bicycle lanes, etc.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.



Screenshot of the first section of the Hoge Rijndijk safety improvement project at Leiden's participation website⁴

The project proved the high maturity of the residents and that they are aware of the complexity of the needs of all stakeholders: drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians. Contrary to popular belief, the idea of removing traffic lights (sic!), which in their opinion contributed to traffic jams, was very popular among pedestrians. They felt that a better idea than lights was to improve the visibility and safety of the pedestrian crossing itself.

Among the 63 comments on just one section, one was written by Eveline Keizer, who wrote:

The draw bridge is often opened (especially) in spring and summer, and at least 80% of waiting drivers don't turn off their engine. If this is clearly communicated, we could get much "cleaner air," especially pleasant for the houses located directly on Hoge Rijndijk.

Therefore, it seems reasonable for me to place a large sign both on the traffic lights nearby and a little further, indicating that the bridge is open and therefore the engine should be switched off. There is currently one very small sign that no one notices. Especially cars standing a little further away don't see it at all⁵.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ <https://doemee.leiden.nl/nl-NL/ideas/groot-brug-open-motor-uit-bord-met-licht-letters> stan (accessed: 5.06.2023)..

Without a platform for participation in Leiden, could such an idea ever come out? Doubtful. Question: how many excellent ideas are in the minds of your city's residents? If only it was possible to know the needs of the residents and transpose them into agreed action plans. This will be possible if you invest in the right resources to extract them.

Determine the extent of resident participation

Gathering all the topics in one document is an excellent idea for putting together an annual action plan. The resolution on a yearly participation plan will make work easier for your future participation team. The document should not only contain a list of topics and an approximate schedule, but also specify the scope of participation of residents.

*The participation ladder:
From information to co-
determination – CitizenLab
training materials*



How binding is the participation of residents? Are you going to implement the ideas of the residents, or just listen to the proposals, and leave the decisions to yourself, the council, or experts? Will the name of the roundabout be what the residents choose, or will it be a set of proposals for the city council to choose?

The more clearly you define the scope of participation of participants, the more credibility you will introduce into the process. Remember: The higher the rank of the cases, the greater the interest and participation of the residents.

Bet on your people

The introduction of a culture of participation is a serious task that requires an even more serious approach. You need competent employees in the city hall. This may mean reorganising existing structures, setting up a separate department or desk. Whatever you do, you have to rely on your own team.

Outsourcing *ad hoc* consultations to an external company is a short-term solution. You will spend money to examine the opinions of your residents – it will be a report on only one topic, and you will not develop the competences of your own staff at all.

With CitizenLab you will not only get a tool, but you will build a competent team. At the price of a few externally commissioned participatory processes, you will invest in competences, thanks to which you will realise participation in a continuous manner on any topic over the years.

One door policy

You create a culture of participation. You build an organised, systematic, structured, and transparent model of involving residents in the decision-making process. From now on, all activities that require the participation of the community must leave a single broadcast channel. By opting for one integrated Civic Tech participatory system, you will set a stable foundation for your further work at every level, in terms of organisation, communication, and technology.


By choosing CitizenLab, you get a comprehensive and scalable solution. The platform is constantly being developed in response to the diverse needs of more than 400 cities around the world who want to serve their inhabitants more smartly and involve them in shaping solutions.

Examples of participatory culture in practice: Leuven fights “concreteosis,” excessive paving

The Belgian municipality of Leuven is a global leader in residents’ co-determination. In one of the most recent projects, the municipality is asking residents to suggest places previously paved that they would like to green up again.

This is a popular social topic that comes to the success of the “concreteosis” known in Poland. How many unpleasant words from city activists are poured on authorities every day. If only we could turn that criticism into constructive comments! And we can! Let’s take a closer look at the Leuven project. This is how to engage social energy in a positive way.

Wszystkie projekty
Często Zadawane Pytania



Które miejsca w mieście możemy uczynić bardziej zielonymi?

Wnika tutaj!

Oferty można było składać do 20 lutego 2022 r. Jury wybiera 8 lokalizacji, w których jesienią zastąpimy chodniki zielenią.

- Zakończył się 31 grudnia 2022
- 506 uczestników
- 4 etapy
- Dzielić się

Fazy

- Zgłoś swój pomysł.
- Jury wybiera 8 pomysłów.
- Ogłoszenie wybranych pomysłów
- Realizacja wybranych pomysłów

Screenshot of the project on the platform (machine translation from Dutch)⁶

On its platform for participation <https://participatie.leuven.be> Leuven published a simple participatory project titled: What places in the city can we make green? The participatory project consisted of four stages. In the first: Submit your ideas – Each resident could easily indicate a place that in their opinion can be made green. Thanks to the intuitive system, you could upload your proposal to the platform via mobile phone as simply as posting on Instagram. The proposal was immediately visible to the whole community. Residents can express their approval of it by so-called likes, i.e., the icon of a raised thumb.

⁶ <https://participatie.leuven.be/nl-BE/projects/hier-dringt-het-door-1/4> (accessed: 5.06.2023).

Zmiękczenie kwadratu Buineveld/Vijverlaan



Dzielnica Bruineveld/Vijverlaan jest ślełą uliczką, niemniej jest ruchliwą arterią dla licznych (szkolnych) rowerzystów i spacerowiczów. Co więcej, ta dzielnica została przekształcona w dodatkową pieszą przygodę w pobliżu domeny Provincjal dzięki pięknym dzierganym dziełom sztuki (patrz [link](#) do raportu ROB). Dzielnica częściowo położona w strefie zalewowej jest idealną dzielnicą do zazieleniania i zmiękczenia bez problemów strukturalnych. Jest to korzystne dla mieszkańców, ale także wielu (szkolnych) rowerzystów i spacerowiczów będzie mogło przedłużyć swoją trasę pieszą po domenie prowincjonalnej / opactwie Vierbeek.

👍 17 🗨️ 0

Dzielić się



Umieszczone przez

 Jeroen D., 20 lutego 2022 r.

Aktualny stan

ZAPLANOWANY

Lokalizacja

 Bruineveld 78, Louvain, Belgia

Proposal for making the pavement green by Mr Jeroen D. (automatic translation)⁷

On the CitizenLab platform, each project has a title, location photo and an author. In the above example, you can even see a hand-drawn sketch by Mr. Jeroen, who indicated the backyard pavement as unnecessary and that it could be repurposed as a lawn. He also added a description with a short justification, collecting 17 votes in support of the idea, which he could share on social networks connected to the platform: Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, or email.

Note that the city authorities clearly warn in the description of the project that regardless of public support, a jury will decide which of the eight proposals will be carried out. From the very beginning, the conditions under which the ideas of the residents are accepted are visible to everyone, so as to avoid unnecessary disappointment. From the very beginning, they are aware of what might happen to their proposals.

The content of the consultation is written in plain language, without official jargon, difficult to understand and unnecessary annexes. Even the content of the project is completely simplified and limited to just two sentences! Despite this, and perhaps thanks to this, as many as 143 proposals for greening previously paved areas were submitted. Judge for yourself, is that a lot with a population of 98,000 in Leuven?

⁷ <https://participatie.leuven.be/nl-BE/ideas/ontharding-pleintje-buineveld-vijverlaan> (accessed: 5.06.2023).

Szukać

Popularne
Lista
Karta

Kortrijksestraat przy Heuvelhof
Nele Daemen • 1 rok temu Przekształć Kortrijksestraat wokół dzielnicy Heuvelhof w...
41 0 14

ZAMKNIĘTE

Green Martelarenplein
Tom De Bruyn • 1 rok temu Martelarenplein to duża betonowa powierzchnia, która jest częściow...
23 0 0

ZAMKNIĘTE

Zmień Bornestraat w zielone i bezpieczne środowisko szkolne
Tim Van Tilt • 1 rok temu Obecnie asfalt dominuje na Bornestraat w pobliżu szkoły...
20 0 13

ZAMKNIĘTE

Kwadrat Primavera
sabine dury • 1 rok temu Gone brzydki brukowany plac, powitalny park z drzewami, traw...
19 0 2

ZAMKNIĘTE

Zmiękczenie kwadratu Buineveld/Vijverlaan
Jeroen D. • 1 rok temu Dzielnic Bruineveld/Vijverlaan jest ślącą uliczką, niemniej...
17 0 1

ZAPLANOWANY

Plac Corbeelsa
Didier Van Aelst • 1 rok temu Na tym placu znajduje się fragment nieużywanej ulicy. Wokół...
17 0 1

ZAMKNIĘTE

Duinberglaan Zmiękczone parkingi, bardziej zielony plac.
Guy Dierick • 1 rok temu Kiedy wjedziesz do Duinberglaan, zobaczysz bardzo dużą równinę...
17 0 11

ZAMKNIĘTE

Prośba BeckerRemy
ruben decuyper • 1 rok temu Pomimo tego, że to ponad 50m2, zdecydowanie chcę zgłosić tę...
15 0 3

ZAMKNIĘTE

Ideas of residents with the most votes (machine translation)⁸

Leuven makes every effort to ensure that everyone submitting their ideas to the city has the feeling of being heard. This is the highest standard of participatory culture. Such action increases the likelihood of involvement of residents in subsequent participatory projects on the participation platform. In this project, the city has responded to every idea submitted. Mr Jeroen also received a message from the city hall on the platform: first, he was thanked for his contribution, and then when it was publicly announced that his idea was approved for implementation.

⁸ <https://participatie.leuven.be/nl-BE/projects/hier-dringt-het-door-1/1> (accessed: 5.06.2023).

Oficjalne aktualizacje

Ostatnia aktualizacja: 9 czerwca 2022 r

Witaj Jeroen Dziękuję za Twój wkład. Otrzymaliśmy 143 propozycje. Jury złożone z pracowników miasta wybrało osiem pomysłów, które będziemy realizować od tej jesieni. Twój pomysł jest jednym z wybranych pomysłów! Jesteś ciekaw pełnego wyboru? Wejdź na www.hierdingthetdoor.be.

Miasto Louvain

Opublikowano 9 czerwca 2022 r

Cześć Jeroen Dzięki za twój pomysł. Jury ocenia wszystkie zgłoszone pomysły. Wiosną przekonasz się, czy Twój pomysł zostanie zrealizowany.

Miasto Louvain

Opublikowano 22 lutego 2022 r

👍 17 🗨️ 0

Dzielić się



Umieszczone przez

 [Jeroen D.](#) 20 lutego 2022 r

Aktualny stan

ZAPLANOWANY

Lokalizacja

 Bruineveld 78, Louvain, Belgia

Komentarze (1)

 Nie można odpowiedzieć, ponieważ ten projekt jest obecnie nieaktywny.

 [Katarzyna Lauwaert](#) 1 rok temu
Więcej zieleni w naszej okolicy!

replies from the City of Leuven in the comments section under Mr Jeroen D.'s submission on the participation platform (machine translation)⁹

Civic tech, or community organised around the city hall

To connect to the energy of the city, you need to aggregate the residents' ideas. The participation platform is such an aggregator – a civic tech solution that gathers and organises the community around the local government. You are starting a new chapter in the history of your local government. You will talk about a variety of issues. Participatory projects will be initiated and operated by different departments in your city, but from now on, you will all communicate using one medium – a platform for participation and consultation. It will need coordination, careful scheduling, and, simply, mutual support.

⁹ <https://participatie.leuven.be/nl-BE/ideas/ontharding-pleintje-buineveld-vijverlaan> (accessed: 5.06.2023).

Time for a review

You talk to residents throughout the year. Sometimes you get involved personally, sometimes it is done by specific departments of your magistrate. You announce something in the Public Information Bulletin (BIP) or outsource a consultation to an external company. The public budget functions as a separate entity. All this will have to be reviewed and systematised. The consultation may not have been coordinated or integrated into the overall framework of action at your city hall.

It is time to invite to the table all those who, in your magistrate, talk to the residents: divisions, departments, desks and offices that organise the participatory budget, conduct consultations and participation, poll, surveys, examine opinions – they all need to meet in one place to know and understand your vision.

Time for strategic planning!

Strategy

You have a vision. You have made decisions. You communicated your plans to councillors. You gathered your colleagues at one table – this is the right forum to answer the key question: What do you want to achieve and how?

Any CitizenLab implementation is preceded by strategic planning. Our experts in participation and consultations will meet you and the employees of the relevant departments. Together, we will review what has been done so far and give a new organisational framework to consolidate a culture of dialogue in your city.

Strategic planning is an action whose objective is to create a team of your employees, set a goal, define metrics, define recipients, predict risks, schedule communication, and specify a schedule. This stage of implementation is a classic workshop with the participation of a future team for participation, consultation, and co-determination in your city.

Karty ePartycypacji

zdefiniuj elementy składowe swojej platformy



Wyznacz swoje cele



- Jakież są Twoje krótko- i długoterminowe cele związane z platformą?
- W jaki sposób platforma wpisuje się w dotychczasowy sposób pracy w zakresie partycypacji?
- Jakież procesy zostaną umieszczone na platformie?

Zorganizuj zespół (kom. wew.)



- Kto będzie należał do Waszego zespołu partycypacji?
- Kto będzie odpowiedzialny za komunikację?
- W jaki sposób zespół będzie współpracował z kierownikami wydziałów (w celu wyboru i utrzymania projektów)?

Prezentacja cd.

Zdefiniuj odbiorców



- Kto jest docelowym odbiorcą?
- Na jakich konkretnie grupach lub organizacjach należy się skupić?

Ryzyka

- Jakież są możliwe blokady wewnątrz organizacji?
- Jakież czynniki zewnętrzne należy wziąć pod uwagę?

Wskaźniki

- Jakież czynniki sukcesu planujesz mierzyć?
- Kiedy platforma zostanie uznana za sukces?

Zaplanuj komunikację



- Jak będzie wyglądać platforma – identyfikacja wizualna?
- Jak platforma będzie wpisywać się w ogólną strategię komunikacji?
- Jakież kanały zostaną użyte?

Informacje zwrotne (kom.zew.)

- Kto będzie przetwarzal zebrane dane?
- Czy każdy projekt będzie miał dedykowanego moderatora projektu?

Określ kluczowe daty



- Jakież są kluczowe daty, na których należy się skupić?
- Które z nadchodzących wydarzeń stwarzają dodatkową możliwość do wykorzystania platformy?

CitizenLab strategic planning materials used during the implementation workshop

Objective

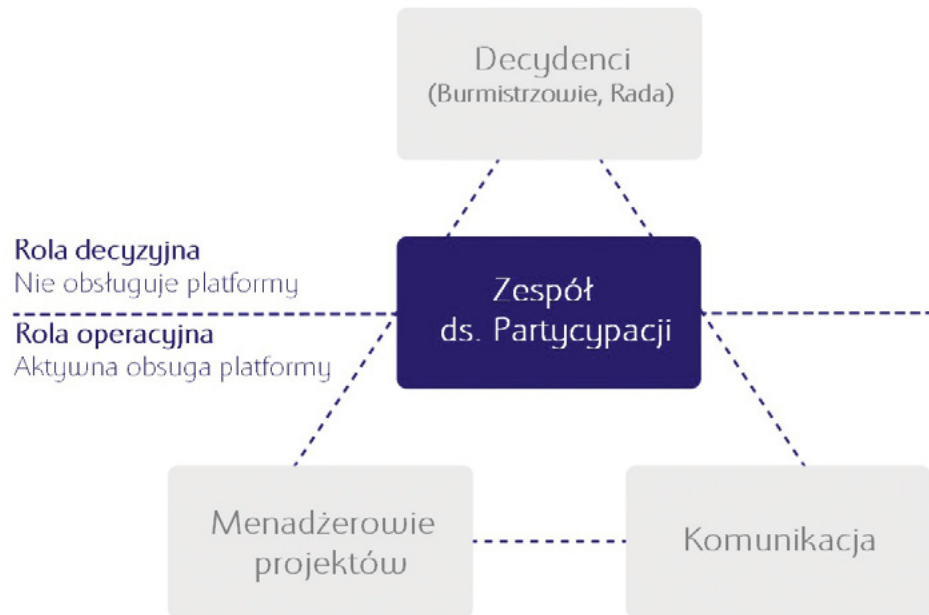
What do you want to achieve? What are the short-term and long-term goals associated with launching a platform for participation in the city? What group of people do you particularly want to include in the city's life? Or do you want to focus on a particular section or area of the city? How many registered users of the platform do you find satisfactory? Or maybe the optimal measure for you will be the number of votes, submitted projects or expressed opinions? These do not have to be elaborate answers. The simpler, the better.

Most importantly, you need to inspire the team by posing questions to guide thinking towards a new vision. Rest assured – your employees will provide you with comprehensive answers to all your questions.

The team, yet again

Who will be in the permanent participation team? Who will lead it? How will cooperation with the relevant departments work? How will participatory projects be submitted? Who will be responsible for the participation platform? How will the contributions of the residents be handled?

*Recommended way to
organise a participation
team – CitizenLab
training materials*



The right organisation and an understandable workflow will enable you to apply the culture of dialogue practically. By forming a team, you bring all participation, consultation, and co-determination together in one cell. Do you need rules of procedure or a regulation? Give your decision the right rank. A clear signal is needed for all employees in the office – from now on things are done in a new way.

The CitizenLab platform has an advanced administration panel, with which you can easily assign the management of a specific participatory project to an employee of the relevant substantive department.

Regular meetings are a proven idea. Preferably with your participation. From now on, the participation team will handle the overall dialogue with residents and all its activities both on the platform and *offline*. It is in this group that all projects sub-

mitted by the users will be presented, planned, approved, and implemented. This is where you will analyse the ideas submitted and give feedback to the residents. Be patient. Follow best practice – the benefits for building a policy that enjoys the support of the residents are undeniable.

Communication

The launch of the participation platform is one big communication exercise. More – it is a major PR operation. Therefore, your team cannot lack people responsible for communication with residents. Task number one is to inform residents about the existence of the platform as a new channel for conducting dialogue with them. Tasks number two, three and four are notifying residents about participatory projects posted on the platform. Information about individual projects on the platform will always enforce communication on the entire platform.

CitizenLab's experience of implementation in 26 countries around the world, gathered in our thematic guides, case studies and blog, where we share the latest and best ideas for engaging communities on an ongoing basis through our platform.

The first project

The choice of the first participatory project is of particular importance for the implementation of a participatory culture – its pace and scope of impact. You are introducing something new in the city. You and your team have a lot of enthusiasm, but also, naturally, a lot of anxiety. After all, you are doing it for the first time. The project you choose is a bit like an inauguration. It is the cutting of a virtual ribbon, the unveiling of a monument and a celebration in your city. The first impression is key. You have to work hard to build the best possible associations at the start.

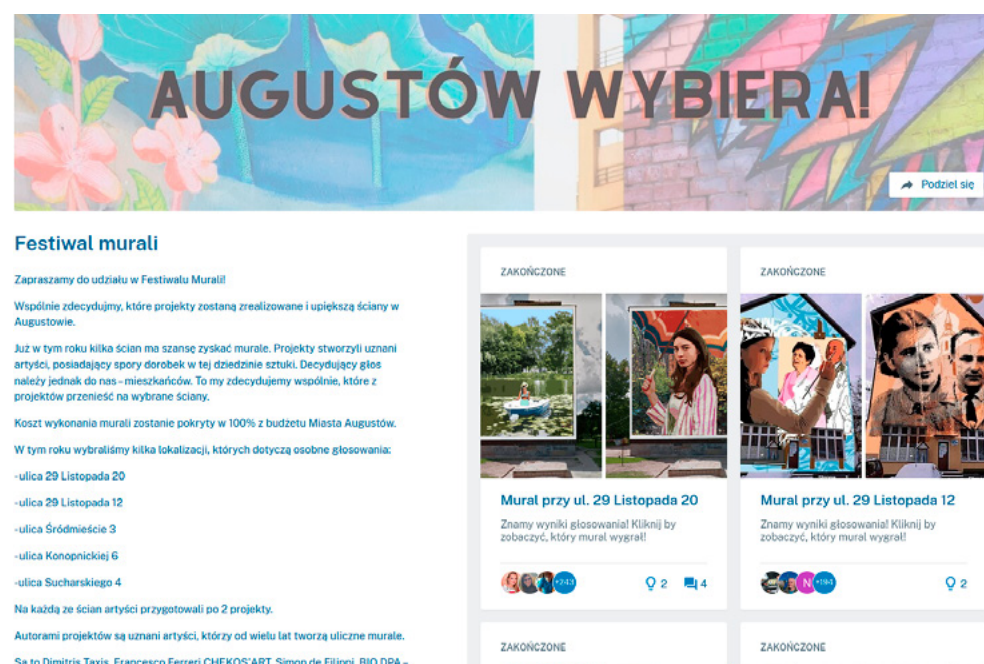
Learning self-governance

It is not just you and your team that are learning. In turn, the people of your city are learning about the culture of participation. Act prudently. Choose a project that will please your community and gently tame them with a new tool – a platform for participation. Let the first project on the platform involve as many residents as possible. Let it evoke positive emotions and be popular. It must be something simple in

terms of procedures, uncontroversial politically, and at the same time, something with instant effects. It is about becoming known to the residents. Let the residents of neighbouring municipalities talk about the work of your team. If people talk about in the queue to the greengrocer's, it means that it is a success!

Examples of participatory culture in practice: murals in Augustów

The Mural Festival – the official launch project for the implementation of the participation and consultation in Augustów under the “E-participation. Residents have the power” project. Also, a great success. In this project Augustów, decided to let the residents choose mural designs – the perfect project to launch the platform.



Screenshot of the mural selection project on Augustów's CitizenLab platform¹⁰

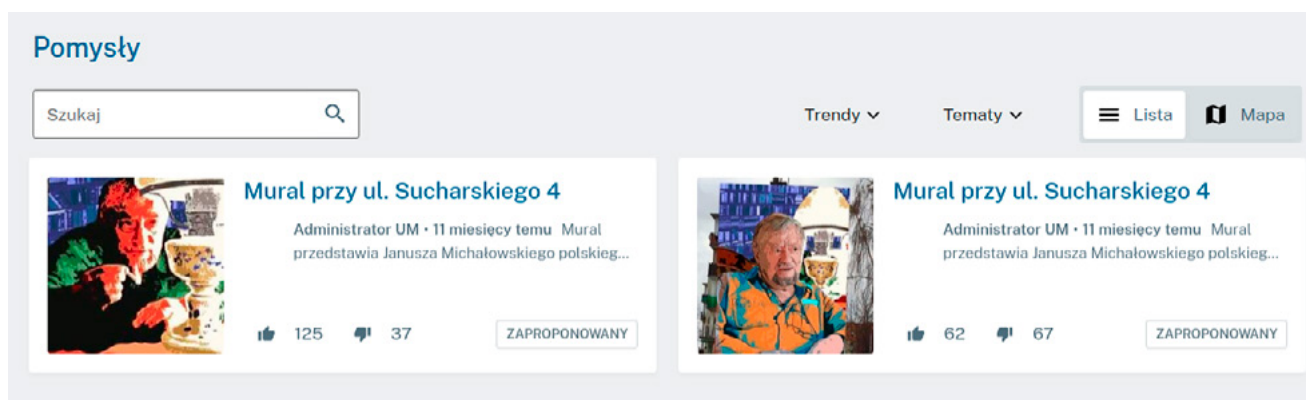
The participation team in Augustów focused on a project that would provide the simplest possible introduction to participation. Ten mural designs were ordered from artists – 2 projects on 5 walls each – and the residents were asked which they liked best. Users did not have to submit anything or comment. To participate in the vote, they simply registered on the platform and clicked on the thumb up icon (*I like*

¹⁰ <https://augustow-wybiera.citizenlab.co/pl-PL/folders/festiwal-murali> (accessed: 5.06.2023).

it) to cast a vote “for” a design they liked. That’s it! They could also express disapproval by clicking on the thumb-down icon (*I don’t like it*), but they used this option much less frequently.

With CitizenLab, you can secure decision-making and reserve participation only to members of your community. You can verify users by PESEL (Polish ID number) or integrate the platform with the official login.gov.pl website.

Thanks to this project, Augustów set a low entry threshold and gently familiarised residents with the new participation platform. We have managed to bring our community together, which will soon address more ambitious participation projects.



Proposals to commemorate the Janusz Michałowski, an actor associated with Augustów¹¹

Over the course of a week, more than 300 people chose five murals, which were created almost instantly. These projects quickly appeared in the urban space. The result of participation visible in a short time is a social proof that reassures the residents that their choice has been respected and that the tool actually works. Thanks to this, they will proceed with the next participatory projects on the platform with greater confidence and trust.

Central hub for participation

If the various departments of your city council use different forms of participation, frequently change electronic tools, apply them *ad hoc*, residents get lost in the maze of information channels, websites, and links. When a live meeting is announced

¹¹ <https://augustow-wybiera.citizenlab.co/pl-PL/projects/mural-przy-ul-sucharskiego-4/1> (accessed: 5.06.2023).

on Facebook, a survey is posted in Google forms, a webinar is held on Zoom, and the materials are located on the department's subpage in the Public Information Bulletin, we will not be able to build a single database of your residents or a single practical forum for exchanging views. Many tools means different standards, and registration systems located at many different addresses.

Diversity works against us in this respect and causes us to lose participants in the processes. Your residents may not have enough time, attention, or patience to get through the maze of not-so-clear solutions. And if we change tools every year or two and our citizens – with different levels of digital competence – have to learn them again, we will never build a culture of dialogue. That is why it is so important to make all participatory activities coherent and to focus them in one system.

By offering one well-known “gateway” to residents, one *online* address where they can always get involved, you increase their level of participation successively from one project to the next. Therefore, it is important to combine the work of different departments with the community gathered in one virtual place under the city's authorities – on a modern platform for participation. *CivicTech* solutions remove municipal debate from under the control of polarising and antagonising social network algorithms, creating calm conditions for a constructive debate on the future of the city.

Tactics of involving citizens

When you decide to introduce a culture of participation, be prepared for a long trek. CitizenLab's methodology for implementing a culture of participation is a quarterly plan. By launching the platform and subsequently using it for participation projects, we are actually starting to build a habit of participation. “Consultations? It's on the city's participation platform.”

“Participatory Budget? – Sure, it's on our participation platform”, “Legislative initiative? – The platform.” “City development strategy, mobility plan, road reconstruction plans, person of the year plebiscites, team choices for city holiday, ideas for parks, markets, streets, festival? I know that I can always talk to my city on our participation and consultation platform.” It doesn't matter if it's a survey, a webinar, collecting ideas, or voting. All participation, all methods, web tools in one place, at one address. And then there is information about live meetings.

Increment

Thanks to the platform for participation, you create one virtual place in the consciousness of the residents. They can enter it whenever they want to take part in a conversation about the future of the city. Each subsequent project will strengthen this association and attract new participants. It also saves money on promotion and information. All you need to do is reach the resident once, and they will be notified about all the next participatory activities in the city using automated mailing built into the platform.

Each publication of a new participatory project on the CitizenLab platform automatically sends an e-mail to all registered residents. This also happens when a project goes to a new stage, when a particular idea has received a comment or a vote of support, and with many other events on the platform.

A new standard for the participatory budget

The participatory budget is the most popular participatory measure in Poland and a statutory obligation for cities with county rights. On the CitizenLab platform, you will find a whole range of methods for participation. The participatory budget is one of them.

With CitizenLab, everything is visible from the very beginning: your community, projects, comments, and votes – clear and visible to everyone – full transparency. Why censor projects? Let everyone see everything. And you know why? Firstly, this prevents duplicating similar ideas. People will not lose their votes on ideas scattered across similar solutions. Second, the community has time to get to know ideas and talk about them among themselves. Thanks to the comments system, each project can be enriched with constructive comments supplementing the submissions. Even the most interesting ideas can become even better in the deliberation process. That is the strength of the community!

Improved projects by residents

The submitted project does not have to be final – it can be an initial proposal, intended for improvement. Thanks to a configurable timeline, you can build a participatory process consisting of any number of stages. In the first phase, you accept ideas, give you the opportunity to comment and vote. Are the city council's proposals not

discussed in a committee, are they not amended? Why should people be deprived of the opportunity to receive comments from other people? Let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred thoughts clash!

Give transparent feedback

You too can participate transparently in the debate and provide feedback on an on-going basis. A project that is not in accordance with the zoning plan? The plot does not belong to the municipality? Unrealistic budget? Breach of regulations? Tell them under the idea card. Our system will automatically notify the author and those who have voted for the idea. Unbelievable – how much communication this simple solution provides!

The fun is just beginning. You have projects; your team has reviewed them substantially. The community commented on each other's contribution. It is time to give money to everyone. That's right – give each resident the exact amount of money that the city council passed for this year's participatory budget. Let the citizens distribute (virtual) resources themselves and become even more involved in participatory activities, and you will get what you want. A ranking list of projects to be financed.

Visualisation of the participatory budget with the help of CitizenLab's game in which the residents themselves distribute a virtual budget for projects (machine translation)

Basket Total budget: 100 000 zł

25%

Dodano do koszyka: 25 000 zł

Zarządzaj koszykiem **Submit basket**

Pomysły

Szukaj

Przypadkowa Tematy Lista Mapa

Nowy plac zabaw dla naszej dzielnicy
Rickey Wilderman · 2 miesiące temu W Dzielnicy 2 nie ma placów zabaw w porównaniu...

0 25 000 zł **Usuń**

Remont ratusza
Corrine Simonis · 2 miesiące temu Na Placu Schumana w Brukseli został tylko jeden...

0 95 000 zł **Dodaj**

Przejęcia dla pieszych na każdej ulicy
Dario Goyette · 2 miesiące temu Niektóre przejścia dla pieszych są prawie niewidoczne, a...

0 50 000 zł **Dodaj**

Sadzić drzewa na Washington Blvd
Darron Senger · 2 miesiące temu Miasto planuje utworzyć 10-metrowy asfaltowy szlak...

0 60 000 zł **Dodaj**

Do you prefer traditional votes? No problem – you can give everyone a certain number of votes.

The fact that the participatory budget is one of the many types of projects on the platform allows you to use CitizenLab to engage residents throughout the year to participate in many matters of varying importance: a plebiscite for personality of the year, a competition for the name of a roundabout, revitalisation of a square, zoning plan, road reconstruction, improvement of safety in a district, strategic plans for the development of the city, and other proposals for involving the community not only in the participatory budget once a year.

Examples of participatory culture in practice: the Ghent participatory budget

Ghent is the tourist pearl of Flanders. Site of a fierce battle of General Maczek's armoured division, liberated by the 3rd Rifle Brigade of the Polish Armed Forces in the West.

Ghent has already carried out more than 20 projects on the participation platform:¹² mobility plans, park revitalisation, senior citizen activation, as well as further editions of the participatory budget. The participatory budget project folder included 14 sub-projects – one for each of the districts of the city of 220,000 inhabitants.

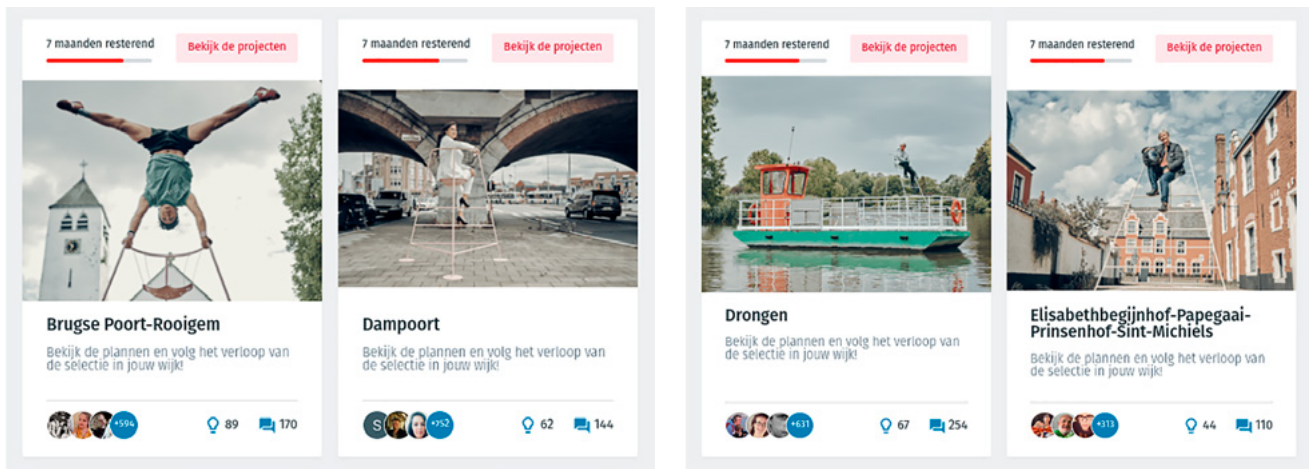


Banner on the Ghent participatory budget project page on the CitizenLab participation platform¹³

¹² <https://participatie.stad.gent/nl-BE> (accessed: 5.06.2023).

¹³ <https://participatie.stad.gent/nl-BE/folders/wijkbudget-gent-tijd-voor-jouw-plan-voor-de-wijk> (accessed: 5.06.2023).

Ghent made its budget visually appealing by hiring professional photographers, inviting people well-known in the local community, and ordering special chairs set up in distinct locations. As a result, it seems to be the same familiar neighbourhood, but in a completely new version. All these efforts, together with the promotion of the participatory budget on social networks and in the local media, further attract the attention and actively engage the citizens of Ghent.



Photos of individual districts against the background of the recognisable scenery and with the participation of local residents, which encourage participation¹⁴

The project meets high standards of participation. The simple and intuitive platform, accessible from mobile devices, makes it extremely simple.

69% of CitizenLab's global platform users are under the age of 45 and access the website using mobile devices.

The transparency of the process makes it easy to understand. Signs speak for themselves, do not require any instructions or terms and regulations. You know what the process looks like and when you can join it at a glance. It features a small metric with the number of participants, stages and votes, the whole page can be covered with one glance. The description is just a paragraph, drafted in plain language, and for those interested, an email address is provided for contact.

Ghent implements the participatory budget in four stages. The first is collecting ideas. The buzzword “project” can scare away residents, as it is often associated with collecting information, specificity, and a lot of work. However, if we simply

¹⁴ Ibid.

ask for ideas and limit the form to a minimum, there is a chance that we will attract more participants. Ideas can be commented on at the first stage and gain support expressed in thumbs up.

*On the CitizenLab platform, you decide what to call the contribution of residents in a specific participatory project. Do you collect projects or **ideas**? Or maybe you give **options** or want to identify **needs**? The choice is up to you.*

In the second stage, the city joins the game, offering to jointly turn ideas into projects. This is the stage where residents can interact with each other, review each other's ideas, add comments, or join forces (and support). The city organises support during district panels (*offline* activities) during which relevant experts help to price projects. Sometimes – due to their character, rank, or scope – ideas are directed to separate procedures for inclusion in the city's policy.

You can respond to all resident requests and at any stage on the platform with statuses: “submitted”, “reviewed”, “approved”, “rejected” or “under implementation”. Or do you need to make your own?

After such work, the residents only have to vote, and the city informs them of the results and reports on the progress of the implementation on an ongoing basis.

Updates made on a regular basis are one of the important elements of maintaining the attention of residents and building trust in the tool. In a moment, the city hall will make another joint decision with the citizens, giving them real influence and thus deepening their bond with the city.

Know-how

When you buy a licence for our platform, you get not just a tool, but our methodology and *know-how* regarding modern e-participation. You want to involve the people, and we want you to succeed. You hold us accountable. That is why, in addition to the most advanced tool for participation in Poland and after training your employees, we will teach you to create various types of participatory projects on the platform.

During the implementation phase, you will learn how to independently create participatory projects tailored to your needs. What's more, you will receive a library of templates from us for participatory projects of various types.

On the CitizenLab platform, we have defined 25 different types of ready-to-use participatory project templates, including: Local development plan, collecting ideas (on a map, research), mobility plan, prioritising ideas, questionnaire, choice of options, citizen panel, participatory budget, volunteer management, playground renovation, and many more you can use to engage your community and not waste time typing.

Czy Twój projekt spełnia niezbędne kryteria do osiągnięcia sukcesu?

- ✓ Czy projekt ma jasno zdefiniowany harmonogram?
- ✓ Czy masz wystarczające zasoby (ludzkie i finansowe) do zarządzania projektem?
- ✓ Czy stawka projektu jest wystarczająco wysoka, aby zachęcić ludzi do udziału?
- ✓ Jak i kiedy będziesz się kontaktować z uczestnikami?
- ✓ Czy wszystkie informacje potrzebne do uczestnictwa są podane w sposób przejrzysty?
- ✓ W jaki sposób chcecie podnieść poziom wiedzy o tym projekcie, aby ludzie mogli w nim uczestniczyć?
- ✓ Jakie zobowiązania podejmujesz wobec uczestników w związku z informacjami, którymi się z Tobą podzielą?
- ✓ Jeśli organizujesz działania offline, w jaki sposób będą one powiązane z tym, co dzieje się na platformie?

The participatory project configuration checklist on the platform – CitizenLab training material

Our customer satisfaction surveys show that the platform is considered simple and intuitive, saving valuable time for officials. Most functions do not require instructions – you can do it yourself. What you will not know is the subject of our training, and if you have any questions, we are always at your disposal.

A culture of participation in practice: E-legislative initiative in the Danish Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq and Hørsholm Kommunes

The Danish municipalities of Sermersooq and Hørsholm are successfully implementing a culture of participation. Sermersooq became famous for its exciting launch project, in which it asked the community whether they wanted to remove the controversial monument of a Danish colonist located in the city centre. When asked, they decided that wanted it removed.

Regardless of the active projects, residents can submit a project on any topic from the bottom up. If someone wants to report something unusual, we should not forbid them. Let everyone have the opportunity to submit a bottom-up initiative.

Thanks to the CitizenLab system, you can submit an electronic legislative initiative. Through the electronic platform, everyone has the opportunity to submit their initiative and gather the necessary support to proceed with the proposal.

The screenshot displays the Hørsholm Kommune CitizenLab interface. At the top, a navigation bar includes links for 'Hjem', 'Alle projekter', 'Borgerforslag', 'Begivenheder', 'Om', and 'Ofte stillede spørgsmål'. A search icon, 'Log ind', and a 'Registrer dig' button are also present. The main heading reads 'Aflever dit borgerforslag her og sæt det på dagsordenen hos Hørsholm Kommune'. Below this, a text block explains the process: 'Du har et forslag, som du vil sende til Hørsholm Kommune, og du er nysgerrig efter at se, om andre borgere også støtter det? Send det her, få 100 stemmer inden for 90 dage, og Hørsholm Kommune vil vende tilbage til dig: [Læs mere om hvordan borgerforslag fungerer](#)'. A green button labeled 'Opret et borgerforslag' with a right arrow is positioned below the text. The main content area shows a list of 17 initiatives. The first three are visible: 'Udendørs dansegulv for kultur, motion og fællesskab' by Tine Bonita Laursen (14 votes), 'Seniorbofællesskab' by Jonna Nielsen (2 votes), and 'Springvand i Dronningedam' by Erik Wetche (21 votes). All three are marked 'Under politisk behandling'. To the right, a 'STATUS' table shows the distribution of the 17 initiatives: 1 Active, 11 Under review, 0 Fået nok stemmer, 0 Opfylder ikke kriterierne, and 5 Under politisk behandling.

STATUS	
Alle	17
Aktive	1
Udløbet	11
Fået nok stemmer	0
Opfylder ikke kriterierne	0
Under politisk behandling	5

Screenshot of draft grassroots initiatives in Hørsholm Kommunes¹⁵

¹⁵ <https://borgerlab.horsholm.dk/da-DK/initiatives> (accessed: 5.06.2023).

It is an excellent system that gives residents an even greater sense of influence over reality, while also being safe for the authorities. Why? Because it is the community that selects the more eccentric ideas. Therefore, there is no need to restrict anything or anyone. Support speaks for itself.

The door is always open

In practice, the city defines three criteria for participation on a dedicated page in the participation platform, specifying: (1) the number of votes to be collected in support of the initiative; (2) the time allowed to gain support since its publication; and (3) information on what will happen if the previous two conditions are met. In the case of Hørsholm Kommune, with a population of 24,000, 100 votes must be collected within 90 days for the bottom-up proposal to be processed by the Council. For Kommunequarfik Sermersooq, the threshold is higher; with a similar number of inhabitants, as many as 250 votes need to be collected.

Bottom-up initiatives on the platform are like a constantly open door to the boss's office. They symbolise being open to residents and that anyone can always come and talk about any topic, knowing that they are welcome. And nothing builds closeness and trust like feeling that you can be approached about anything.

In Sermersooq, of all 73 ideas submitted, 60 expired naturally, without sufficient community support. These included: "Free December in the Nursery" – 0 votes of support, "Motocross Track" – 3 votes of support or "Car-free Sundays once a month" – 148 votes. The authors of these ideas have to swallow the bitter pill of failure, and you do not have to respond to them at all, because they did not pass the initial screening – they did not receive the appropriate support of the community. The whole process is a lesson in policy making and building support for your ideas, which is why it has a high educational value.

Thanks to CitizenLab, cities around the world teach residents what self-government is. Authorities can clearly show that decisions are sometimes influenced by other institutions. Thanks to the pictorial processes of participation, you inform the residents on whose side: the marshal's office, the regional conservator of monuments, the National Road, and Motorway Authority, etc.

Hørsholm musi mieć własną specjalną szkołę dla dzieci z autyzmem.



Propozycja obywatela przesłana przez Ninę
[Dowiedz się więcej o propozycjach obywatelskich](#)

Hørsholm mógł wcześniej kupować te miejsca w naszych sąsiednich gminach, ale ponieważ nie ma już takiej możliwości, musimy mieć własne. Większość z tych uczniów była wcześniej przeszukiwana w Ullerød School, która jest szkołą specjalną w Kokkedal. Niestety nie jest to już możliwe, ponieważ sam Fredensborg musi korzystać z miejsc. Istnieje duże zapotrzebowanie na te miejsca w północnej Zelandii, więc Hørsholm będzie mogło oferować/sprzedawać nadwyżki miejsc innym gminom.

potrzebujemy szkoły, w której ci uczniowie mogliby zdać egzamin końcowy i przejść do szkoły średniej. Aby to się udało, musimy mieć specjalistyczną ofertę dla naszych dzieci i młodzieży z autyzmem.

Mamy nadzieję, że poprze tę propozycję, ponieważ przyczyni się to również do mądrzejszego wydatkowania pieniędzy w wyspecjalizowanym obszarze.

Z góry dziękuję!

POD ROZWAGĘ POLITYCZNĄ



Gmina Hørsholm otrzymała propozycję obywateli i udzieliła oficjalnej odpowiedzi. Głosowanie pozostaje otwarte.

Za tą propozycją obywatelską głosowało **116 osób**

[Przeczytaj odpowiedzi](#) [Trzon](#)

Zbierz poparcie dla tej propozycji obywatelskiej



[Skopiuj link](#)

Oficjalne aktualizacje

Ostatnia aktualizacja: 2 września 2022 r

Decyzja Zarządu Miejskiego w dniu 29-08-2022: Zarząd Miejski skierował wniosek mieszkańców do dalszego procedowania w Komisji ds. Dzieci i Szkół.

Gmina Hørsholm
 Opublikowano 2 września 2022 r

Initiative Cart to build a school for autistic children in Hørsholm (machine translation)¹⁶

Bottom-up proposals first and foremost serve to meet the needs of residents and solve social problems. At the same time, thanks to this functionality of the platform, initiatives that were really needed by the population were able to participate. Among those that mobilised the residents of Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq and Hørsholm Kommune and met the designated threshold of support were: “School for autistic children,” “400-metre track,” “Mountain bike path,” “Shooting range,” “Parking space,” and “Pet cemetery”. It is worth giving residents access to the community, offering them various forms of participation that teach citizens to take responsibility for their proposals before the community and think twice about criticising local authorities.

¹⁶ <https://borgerlab.horsholm.dk/da-DK/initiatives/horsholm-skal-have-sin-egen-specialskole-til-born-med-autisme> (accessed: 5.06.2023).

With will, you can do anything

We have a huge potential for innovation, creativity and goodwill. We carry within us the future solutions to our problems of today, both on the global and local scales. Solutions need conditions to emerge: culture, dialogue and interaction. Here in Poland, in your municipality, the minds of the inhabitants hold deposits more precious than oil, gold and diamonds – their ideas, simple and small, which united constitute a powerful force of the spirit of your local government.

The knowledge of how to do this is available and does not need to be reinvented. We are happy to pass it on to you – all you have to do is trust us. With CitizenLab you will do it according state-of-the-art practices. Like a gardener who knows their job, who knows when to sow, water, when to expose to sunshine, who is patient and sure that the earth always yields. You will find many examples of action. CitizenLab solutions are already used by 400 cities, and this number is constantly growing¹⁷.

CitizenLab's strength lies in the excellent organisational framework that the modern and technologically advanced participatory platform brings to city hall. Thanks to it you can reach out to the collective wisdom of your citizens in an orderly and methodical way. Be a leader who instils a culture of participation in your small homeland, in your local democracy.

We are a society as capable of participation, deliberation, and consensus as the Belgians, the British, the French, Danes, Chileans, and Austrians. Genetically, intellectually and in every other respect, we lack nothing. Dialogue may not be a top-notch competence in Poland, but everything can be learned. But to learn it, you have taken the first step. Take that first step towards a culture of participation because, as the Latin maxim teaches, *he who has begun is half done*.

¹⁷ CitizenLab community website, 400 cities, states and organisations using CitizenLab solutions: <https://community.citizenlab.co/en/projects/community-members> (accessed: 5.06.2023).

Artur Kacprzak

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Improving participatory processes: good practices and learnings from the evaluation of the project

Is it possible to implement *online* platforms in every local government? There can only be one answer to this question – definitely yes. The question is not so much whether to implement, but how to implement. It is worth considering in advance why to implement them and what benefits it brings.

This report was based on the conclusions drawn from the evaluation of the project “E-democracy – residents have the power,” carried out by the SocLab Foundation in cooperation with the City of Augustów and the Wasilków Municipality. The various stages of the implementation of an electronic platform aimed at supporting participatory processes are presented here.

The report of the Institute of Urban and Regional Development on the digitization of Polish cities shows that the vast majority of local governments (96% of respondents) introduced new organizational or technical solutions or modified existing ones in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of them concerned internal procedures and were dedicated to the staff, such as remote access to mail or data, purchase of equipment and training. One in three local governments has introduced measures aimed at residents¹.

In the case of Augustów and Wasilków, it was important that *online* activities were not limited to platforms, i.e., twojwasilkow.pl and augustow-wybiera.citizenlab.com, but were also accompanied by parallel *offline* activities. Meetings with residents, diagnostic walks or civic breakfasts complemented the activities on the platform, and the promotion of events in social media and on local government websites enabled reaching a greater number of recipients.

¹ A. Miazga, K. Dziadowicz, P. Pistelok, *Cyfryzacja urzędów miast. Badania Obserwatorium Polityki Miejskiej*, Institute of Urban and Regional Development, Warsaw–Kraków 2022.

Preparation

An e-participation platform is a tool, not an end in itself, so before it is implemented, you should ask yourself – what is its purpose and what should it be used for?

Defining the objective is the first action that will allow you to better plan the next steps and identify the need behind the introduction of the *online* platform. Defining the objective seems quite simple. A sample catalogue of planned outcomes includes:

1. **Increasing the level of social participation among residents.** *Online* tools allow you to reach a larger group of residents and provide them with the opportunity to express their opinions and suggestions. In traditional forms of public consultation, the venue or date of the meeting can be a constraint. By complementing participatory processes with *online* activities, this problem can be partially eliminated by allowing multiple people to participate simultaneously, regardless of their location. This is particularly important for those who find it difficult to access classic forms of consultation. It is also an opportunity to involve those social groups that are reluctant to participate in consultation processes in the traditional formula.
2. **Increasing the transparency of decision-making processes.** The community has the opportunity to follow and participate in the whole process: from the presentation of the problem to the final outcome of the consultation. This, in turn, builds social trust in the local government, because citizens notice that their opinions are taken into account.
3. **Increased efficiency and resource saving.** The use of *online* tools enables local governments to effectively collect opinions and data from residents, in an organized and scalable manner. It can reduce the number of physical meetings and replace traditional surveys with their *online* versions. In addition, such tools can often facilitate the automatic analysis and processing of collected community data, resulting in a better understanding of the preferences and needs of residents and leading to more accurate conclusions. This, in turn, helps you make better informed and fact-based decisions.
4. **Establishing relations with residents.** *Online* tools allow you to maintain relations, accustom residents to dialogue with local government authorities not only during individual consultation processes, but also beyond them, in everyday contacts. This aspect can be particularly important for local authorities: heads of municipalities, mayors as well as councillors, as it can have a PR function.

The above catalogue is not a closed list. It can be expanded, modified, or aim at other objectives. Only by knowing what the purpose of action is one can move on to making it more specific, that is, to planning.

The next step is to **develop a plan and strategy for implementing** *online* tools. The specific objectives, scope and expected results should be defined, as well as the target groups and thematic areas in which the tools will be used. The budget and resources needed to implement the plan must also be taken into account in this process.

It is important to **define interest groups** and invite them to participate in the planning process – these can be officials, councillors, representatives of advisory bodies such as the senior council or the youth city council, and active residents. In the case of the “E-democracy” project, this assumption was implemented, and residents who participated in the first meetings felt more involved and obliged to participate in the next stages before the platform was launched. One participant recalls: “There was a meeting at the beginning (...) and there the ladies asked us what we could do [on the platform]. It was very good (...), then I already knew what it was about” (IDI_residents).

A collaborative, participatory approach to developing a model of consultation or participation is nothing new – it is widely used in many local governments, launching, for example, participatory budgets and setting up advisory bodies, whose task is to develop the working model, rules, etc.² Similar groups of initiatives were formed in some local governments before the appointment of the senior council or the youth city council.

Inviting representatives of various stakeholder groups may result in defining a better model of action tailored to the needs of residents (i.e., in this case the way and mode of conducting public consultations and drawing up the rules of public consultations), but can also increase people’s trust in the authorities. Established rules will have a better chance of gaining public approval. At the same time, those who are already invited to work on the project at this initial stage will become its spokespersons. It is worth to invite local councillors to such teams – it will give them the opportunity to participate in the process and reduce the likelihood of apprehension

² Rola i zadania takiego ciała zostały opisane m.in. w publikacji *Standardy procesów budżetu partycypacyjnego w Polsce*, Fundacja Pracownia Badań i Innowacji Społecznych „Stocznia” [“Shipyard” Foundation], Warsaw 2014.

that could arise if they were presented with a ready-made procedure or rules of using the platform.

The next step is **to choose the right platform** for conducting the consultation processes. There are many different *online* tools available, it is important to adapt them to the specific needs and context of the local community. Functionality, ease of use and scalability must be taken into account. Other options will be needed when the platform is to be used for submitting ideas and voting in the participatory budget, others for geo-questionnaires, and still others for *online* meetings. It is important to manage the data and information collected through the platform effectively, ensuring that privacy and security of personal data is one of the priorities. An important issue is also the local government's capacity for managing the platform and allocating the budget for this purpose. When thinking about the financial aspect, it is necessary to take into account not only the costs of implementation, but also the maintenance of the platform in the coming years.

Local governments face a huge challenge in deciding who can use the platform and how they can do it, at which stage of engagement registration is required and what personal data will be collected from residents. For many people, a major barrier is setting up an account and providing details such as an exact address or PESEL, the Polish ID number, as evidenced, for example, by people using the platform who mentioned that some of their friends said they would not participate because of the need to provide detailed information. Residents have doubts about the legitimacy of collecting personal data, so they need to be explained in an understandable way. In addition, the more steps you take to register, the more likely it is to develop technical problems that can also result in lack of commitment.

Decisions about who and how will use the platform are closely linked to user-friendly design – both for residents and officials who will work on it. It is worth applying the principles of **User Experience (UX)**³. UX of websites is based on many factors that affect the feelings and interactions of users. The key ones are:

- user research – through observation, interviews and tests, you can gain information about their needs, goals, preferences and challenges when using the website;

³ This is an area related to the design of user interactions with products, services, or systems, such as websites. UX of websites aims to provide users with a positive and satisfying experience when using the website. When looking for resources on this topic, it is worth looking at Don Norman's *The Design of Everyday Things*, Steve Krug's *Don't Make Me Think* or the works of Jakob Nielsen.

- interface design – requires consideration of aspects such as page layout, navigation, text readability, usability of forms and other interactive elements;
- ease of setting up an account and using other functionalities;
- responsiveness – a website should adapt to different screen sizes and resolutions, so that it is readable and functional on computers, tablets, and smartphones⁴; loading time – it is important to optimize the page for speed by minimizing the size of files, optimizing the code and using caching;
- testing – it involves conducting user tests, evaluating analytical data, and collecting user feedback, so that you can identify weaknesses and introduce improvements.

The problem for residents is that they need to create a new account and cannot use the option of logging in using data from Facebook or Google. Therefore, after answering questions about the purpose of the platform and how it works, there should be a conversation about possible login options and the rules of creating an account. It is worth presenting the conclusions from this debate to the residents together with the reasons for these decisions.

Another element of planning the process that requires attention is the creation **of the rules of procedure of public consultations**, i.e. a resolution defining the rules and procedure for conducting consultations with residents. Although the enactment of such a local law is not mandatory, data presented in the *Report on the State of Polish Cities*⁵ shows that by 2017 around 70% of municipalities in Poland had such documents. The rules of procedure, which provide for various types of participatory processes, including an *online* platform, and organise their rules, give both officials and residents a point of reference. This has a positive impact on the transparency of processes, as well as increasing trust in local government.

The rules of procedure can help to regulate issues that also affect the functionality and accessibility of the *online* platform and are in conflict with Article 5a of the Local Government Act of 8 March 1990⁶, which regulates the rules for public consultations. Examples of irregularities that should be avoided include:

- restricting the participation of minors in consultations,

⁴ In 2018, the number of mobile searches exceeded the number of desktop searches. Currently, there are twice as many Google searches from smartphones than from personal computers.

⁵ P. Pistelok, B. Martela (ed.), *Raport o stanie Polskich Miast. Partycypacja publiczna*, Institute for Urban and Regional Development, Warsaw-Kraków 2019.

⁶ Polish Journal of Laws 1990 no. 16 item 95 as amended.

- restricting participation in consultations of persons who are not registered for permanent residence, although registration is not proof of residence in the area,
- vague definition of the forms of consultation,
- no guarantee of a minimum time for collecting comments,
- no information on what will happen to the results of the consultation,
- lack of information about what will happen to the results of the consultation,

When planning the implementation of the platform, one must immediately think about the next steps, i.e. the promotion of the platform among residents and the organization of specific participatory processes.

Encouraging residents to use the platform

The fact that more and more people are using new technologies in everyday life will not automatically make people start using the *online* platform for community participation. This is a process that takes months (or even years) and you need to be prepared for it.

Officials should take care of **educational elements** aimed at residents who need to learn how to use *online* tools . This may include the organization of workshops, *online* training courses, guides, or user manuals. Residents who have commented on the activities carried out by the SocLab Foundation said: “The ladies showed us how to set up an account and make a proposal. After that, I knew how to do it myself” (IDI_residents).

Promoting *online* tools and informing the community about opportunities to participate in consultations is essential. In the case of the project carried out in Augustów and Wasilków, there are good practices that are worth implementing in other local governments. The promotion itself took place in many directions – through *online* channels: social media, local government websites – and the local press. What is important, the promotion took place also outside the internet – meetings were organized (before and during the implementation of the platform), and on the occasion of various events in the urban space, leaflets and posters appeared encouraging participation in individual participatory processes via the platform.

When conducting promotional activities, it is necessary to remember to adapt communication to a specific community and target groups. It is worth focusing on

the benefits that the platform brings to residents and how it can affect their lives and the local environment. The language used in communication should be simple and the examples understandable and close to the residents.

There were **ambassadors** of the project in both municipalities. It was a good step to select them among active residents who function in different social groups (e.g. senior citizens, young people, local activists); this way information about the project can be more widely available. What was missing was systematic work with ambassadors, defining the rules of cooperation with them and supporting their activities. The ambassador becomes the face of the project, so it is worth defining his or her role and tasks in such a way that both the ambassador and the official cooperating with him or her are aware of what is going to happen within the framework of co-operation. And when the rules of cooperation are defined, then it is worth signing a contract – for example in the form of a voluntary agreement (which gives the ambassador the opportunity to complete an internship, obtain an additional document certifying professional experience or use insurance if something happens during the implementation of tasks). Working with ambassadors should not be limited to preparing a list of tasks that they must perform. It is worth providing them with training and expert support: first, in terms of using of the platform itself and the participatory processes, second, in topics that may be useful from the point of view of the tasks in the envisaged in the project (e.g., on promotion in social media or storytelling).

Kraków is a city whose experience can be drawn on in terms of Local Participation Ambassadors. They could get involved in the area of the participatory budget, public consultation or local initiative. Their task was not only to promote these tools and support residents, but also to diagnose local needs.⁷ Warsaw, on the other hand, had the Participatory Budget Ambassadors, and their tasks focused on promotional and educational activities⁸.

Systematic work with ambassadors requires commitment from the local government – delegating a member of their staff to provide ambassadors with organizational and substantive support.

⁷ An example of the work regulations of ambassadors together with information on tasks is available on the participatory budget website in Kraków: https://budzet.krakow.pl/aktualnosci/237091,1909,komunikat,nabor_na_ambasadorow_lokalnej_partycypacji.html (accessed: 31.05.2023).

⁸ The work regulations of ambassadors, together with information on the tasks, are available on the participatory budget website in Warsaw: <https://um.warszawa.pl/waw/bo/-/zostan-ambasadorem-budzetu-obywatelskiego> (accessed: 31.05.2023).

Without such an opportunity, active residents who are interested in local participation can be used to focus on creating space for them to act and encourage co-creation of participatory processes (e.g., through participation in advisory groups). This allows them to become natural allies and advocates. Another option is to establish partnerships with local organizations and associations that can promote the platform among their members or represented communities. This may include sharing information on their websites, posting articles in their newsletters, or organizing joint events.

The key to the success of the “E-democracy” project lied in **parallel online and offline activities**. Each of the processes placed on the platform was also implemented through traditional forms of public consultation. In this context, two consultation processes deserve particular attention: “Wasilków Municipality for the young” and “Augustów for the young.” Both were based on a similar working model and were implemented in conjunction with youth councils. In each of them, a wide diagnosis of the needs of young people was carried out based on workshops and “talking walls”⁹ in schools. On this basis, a catalogue of needs was developed, which was then submitted to a vote on the platform. On this basis, a list of recommended actions was created. What is important – the results of the work have been presented to the city authorities, and some of the ideas of the youth are already being implemented. This example shows the complementarity of completely different types of activities conducted both *online* and *offline*.

In the case of the “Participatory Budget Wasilków,” we can see a different way of conducting the consultation process. Residents had a choice of whether they wanted to submit ideas and vote using the platform, or they could do it in a traditional form (by sending the completed form by e-mail or by post, or by delivering it in person to the magistrate). Residents could get acquainted with the projects by browsing through them on the platform or during organized meetings. The advantages of this approach were discussed during an interview: “Residents were happy that they were able to submit ideas on the platform (...), thanks to which there were more of them” (IDI_officials). In total, nearly 5,500 residents voted, of which almost 1,000 used the option to cast their vote *online*.

Elections to the Youth Council of the Augustów Municipality were also held on the platform. In this case, there was no alternative voting method. On the one hand, the very idea of *online* elections seemed very good and popular. From the perspective

⁹ A qualitative technique for data collection. It involves participants writing answers to a question on large sheets of paper fixed to a wall.

of promoting the platform and increasing the number of users, this form turned out to be a success – only in one day there were about 500 new registered users on the platform, and 532 people took part in the voting. On the other hand, it should be noted that the turnout in the vote was about 30%¹⁰ and, according to the youth representative, more people would take part in the vote if it were done in a different way: “It would be easier if you could vote at school or in some other way on paper; but here you could persuade someone, and they said they would cast their vote at home, and in fact they didn’t.” Another question worth asking is the quality of these registered users – were young people actually actively using the platform and were they interested in the activities carried out in the future? With this type of activity, it is crucial keep young people engaged.

The above examples are a great illustration of the claim that *online* tools for public consultation can be valuable if they go hand in hand with traditional tools. When planning consultative and participatory processes, it is important to remember that:

- the needs of those residents who do not have access to the Internet, have limited knowledge of technology or simply do not feel comfortable using such solutions have to be considered;
- finding consensus among dialogue participants and actually listening to the needs of residents is more difficult via *online* tools when the topic is controversial or very emotional – in such cases, meetings led by an experienced moderator are better.

Implementation of activities on the platform

In order to establish trust and engagement of residents, officials should ensure openness and transparency in the consultation process. Information on the objectives, timetable, results of consultations and how the opinions of residents are taken into account should be accessible and easily understandable. It is important to show that the opinions of residents have a real impact on the decisions and actions taken.

Wasilków and Augustów, as principle, published summaries of each consultation process, including conclusions from activities carried out outside of the platform. What is missing here is regular updates on the progress of work and decisions taken. Even if in the initial period of implementation of *online* tools for participation

¹⁰ Taking into account only the number of Augustów residents aged 14 to 19 years who could take part in the vote. Students of Augustów schools who lived outside the city could also join vote.

residents will not check the state of implementation, the mere fact that they have such a feature will make them grow accustomed to using it. The very possibility of verifying the commitments implemented by the local government increases trust and increases the likelihood of taking part in subsequent consultation processes.

If a decision is made to implement an *online* platform, then only one platform should operate at that time, especially in smaller local governments. This was the case in Wasilków. In Augustów, apart from the processes that were carried out through the augustow.wybiera.cirizenlab.co website, created as part of the “E-democracy” project, activities were carried out on other platforms: wybieram.urzad.augustow.pl (which is described as a platform for consultation) where residents could vote for artists performing at the Augustów Days festival, and the zmieniamy.augustow.pl website was used for the participatory budget. This was justified by the fact that the residents are used to these two sites. On the one hand, it was reasonable to maintain both these portals over the previous year, because the project only financed only one year of activities of the CitizenLab platform. On the other hand, this reduced interest in the new platform and made it more difficult to promote it. In many local governments, the platform for handling the participatory budget is a separate tool than the social consultation website (e.g., Warsaw, Kraków, Dąbrowa Górnicza). This is often justified from the point of view of residents – if they want to submit an idea and vote, they have a dedicated page, which is easy to find. When considering whether or not to hold the participatory budget and other participatory processes on a single website, the decision should be made based on the convenience of residents. Even when there are two websites, it is a good idea to include information about the participatory budget on the website dedicated to consultations, as Dąbrowa Górnicza does at: konsultacje.idabrowa.pl.

It is important that **each of the participatory processes** carried out by the local authority is posted on the platform, even if it is only a preview, a list of activities carried out outside the platform and the conclusions of the consultation. It is useful for the resident visiting the platform to be able to see what has happened, what is currently happening and what the plans are. If there is no new information, residents will not have the motivation to use it regularly. From the perspective of the duration of the year-long project, officials note this need: “Indeed, as I think about it now, we should put more things there. I will take this into account in the future” (IDI_officials).

When the consultation processes themselves are relatively small, it is worth considering other methods of using the platform. An example of such an activity is the “Ranking of Projects of 2022” – a competition implemented in the Wasilków Municipality. Residents could vote for the Event of the Year and the Investment of

the Year. The conclusions were used to prepare the *Report on the state of the Municipality*. In this case, the local government organised a “Citizens’ Breakfast¹¹” to gather more data on the needs of residents. Other examples of similar actions that can be implemented on the platform are voting for a star who will perform at the Municipal days or local harvest festivals (e.g. in Augustów, Inowłódz or Kórnik) or voting for the most beautiful garden (e.g., in Garwolin and Dębica). Such initiatives are largely aimed at promoting the platform.

The platform is a very good tool for mapping the needs of residents. In Augustów, as part of consultations on the accessibility of public space, the participants indicated architectural barriers on the map. In Wasilków, the maps was used to mark projects submitted to the participatory budget. The use of cartographic resources in this type of processes is attractive and convenient for both authors of entries and recipients. It is easier to locate something on a map than to decipher where a certain place is based on an address.

It is worth using *online* tools to consult spatial development plans, which are mandatory according to the Spatial Planning and Development Act of 27 March 2003.¹² In the *Report on the State of Polish Cities. Public participation*¹³ we can find that consultations of planning documents in most cities is limited to providing information and allowing stakeholders to submit proposals and comments.

Only 29% of local governments use additional, non-mandatory forms of consultation of such documents. In part, this may be due to the fact that the already mandatory procedure for their opinions by the community is quite time-consuming. However, an *online* formula can speed it up (and make it more attractive), for example by using a geo-questionnaire.

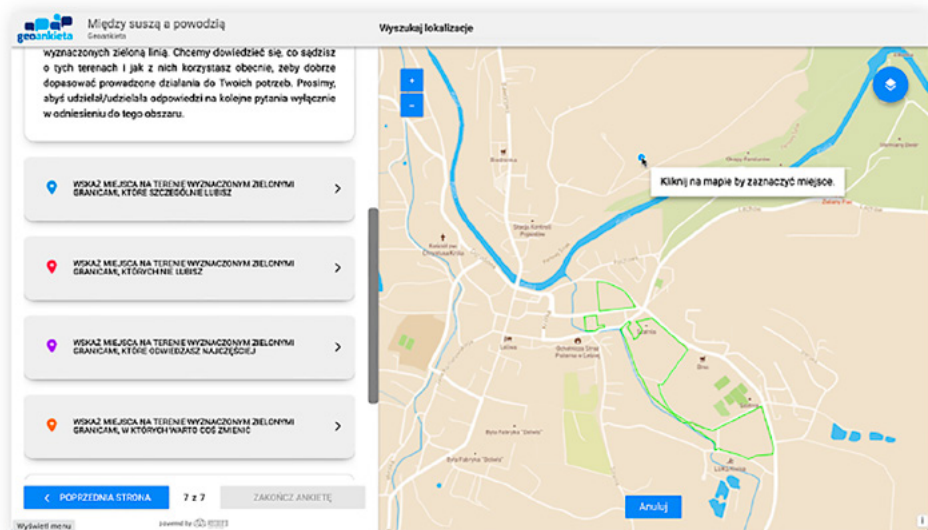
Geo-questionnaires can be useful for consulting on spatial or communication design, revitalization, participatory budget, or urban greenery management. It serves to get to know the opinions of the “silent majority”, i.e. people less involved but interested in the implemented urban project¹⁴. An example of how a geo-questionnaires works can be seen in the graphics presented below.

¹¹ This is one of the ways of establishing dialogue with residents in the form of open and free meetings between local government officials and residents.

¹² Polish Journal of Laws 2003 no. 80 item 717 as amended.

¹³ P. Pistelok, B. Martela (ed.), *Raport o stanie Polskich Miast...*

¹⁴ Civic participation. Geo-questionnaire, <https://partycypacjaobywatelska.pl/strefa-wiedzy/techniki/geoankieta> (accessed: 23.05.2023).



Example of using a geo-questionnaire¹⁵

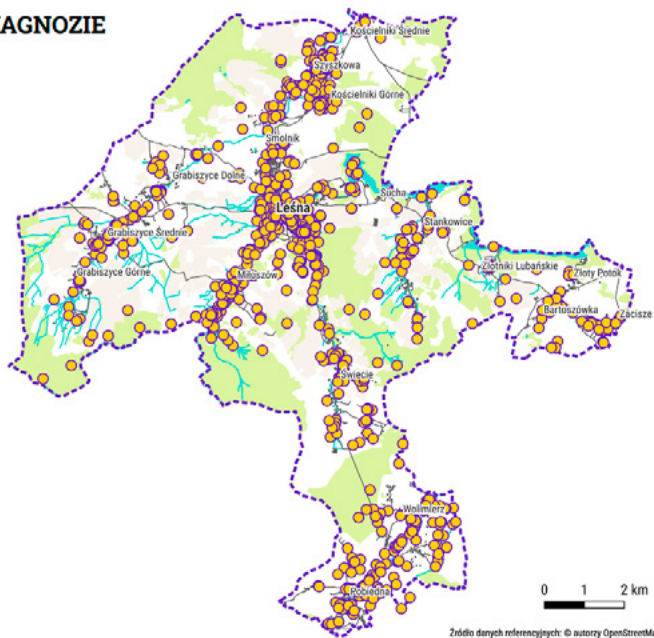
UCZESTNICTWO W DIAGNOZIE

217

liczba respondentów geoankiety

1346

liczba naniesionych na mapę punktów



Example of presentation of results from a geo-questionnaire¹⁶

¹⁵ Source: *Między suszą a powodzią – raport z geoankiety poświęconej wyzwaniom wynikającym ze zmian klimatu na terenie gminy Leśna*, [Between drought and flood – a report from a geo-questionnaire on the challenges arising from climate change in the Leśna Municipality], analysis and report by: dr Edyta Bąkowska-Waldmann, 3SYMETRIE Pracownia Urbanistyki, 2022.

¹⁶ Source: *ibid.*

Another, currently very popular method of collecting opinions of residents are *on-line* surveys, which can be posted on the platform. It allows you to ask questions and obtain quantitative data that can be presented in the form of statistics. An interesting option to use internet tools is the organization of *online* meetings. They can be done directly on the platform or through other tools (e.g. Zoom and Microsoft Teams). Meetings can have a closed formula – the link is sent only to people who sign up for them beforehand (this solution is recommended when the meetings are to be workshop) or open – the link is publicly available and anyone can take part in such a meeting. It is worth considering a parallel streaming channel (e.g., on Facebook or YouTube) and give residents the opportunity not only to actively participate in it, but also to be an observer, with the possibility to ask a question or add a comment during the meeting. Such a solution is used in some consulting processes, in Warsaw, for example¹⁷.

Regardless of the methods and tools chosen, it is important that **officials are re-active and actively involved in the consultation process**. Answers to questions, comments and comments of residents should be provided in a timely and professional manner. Engaging in dialogue and discussions with residents makes it possible to build bonds and improve the involvement of the local community.

Support for local governments

In the case of the “E-democracy” project, local governments were not been left alone to introduce of the *online* platform to the public. The SocLab Foundation supported the process not only in terms of conducting meetings, but also, more importantly, provided assistance during the planning and design of individual activities.

The support of external experts was particularly helpful for meetings that required moderating and guidance. An experienced, external moderator has a completely different impact on the activity of residents than an official. Such a person is a neutral party, not involved directly in the project or topic of the meeting. This allows it to ensure objective and independent discussion and avoid prejudice or bias. This is especially important when the meeting is of great strategic importance, concerns controversial topics, the group of participants is large and diverse, which may require more complex moderation.

¹⁷ Examples of recordings of consultation meetings that were broadcast on YouTube can be found on the channel run by the Social Communication Centre of the Warsaw City Hall: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC39MSJg3MvRg7WnD_QSmtng (accessed: 31.05.2023).

However, it is not always necessary to involve an external moderator. In smaller groups or meetings of a less complex nature, where participants already have experience in moderation and discussion, internal resources can be used. It is important to adapt the decision regarding the choice of the moderator to the specific situation and needs of the meeting.

Working with an external partner, it is worth using methods that have worked well in cooperation between the SocLab Foundation and local governments:

- regular, cyclical meetings, during which tasks were set for the coming period and problems were discussed,
- the possibility of telephone contact, which was particularly useful when it was necessary to decide on something promptly,
- planning activities in advance – so that both parties have the opportunity to prepare.

The challenge that is worth paying attention to is often a different way of making decisions – in local governments it is longer, because often the final disposition is given by local authorities. Therefore, it is worth taking this into account when planning activities and at the beginning of cooperation, make it clear to the foundation or company with which the cooperation will be undertaken.

Summary

From the point of view of technological progress, the introduction of *online* tools seems inevitable. It is worth doing this in such a way that the needs of the residents are taken care of. Well-planned activities should involve them from the solution design stage. It should be borne in mind that participatory processes must involve the possibility of expressing opinions in different ways by interested persons, and whatever happens on the internet should correlate with other activities.

The Canon of Public Consultations brings up the most important principles. According to the Canon, important aspects that affect the quality of the public consultation process are: potential participants knowing that consultations are ongoing, a sufficiently long time period for expressing opinions, understandable communication of the project under consultation, starting consultations at an early stage – so that the opinion of residents expressed during the consultations is relevant to decision-making units¹⁸.

¹⁸ Siedem zasad konsultacji, Drugi Kongres Wolności w Internecie, Ministerstwo Administracji i Cyfryzacji [Seven Principles of Consultation, Second Congress of Internet Freedom, Ministry of Administration and Digitisation], <https://kanonkonsultacji.fise.org.pl> (Accessed: 30.05.2023).

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Interview with **Dominika Jocz-Lenkiewicz,** Deputy Mayor of Wasilków

Katarzyna Sztop-Rutkowska (KSR): What was the experience of the Wasilków Municipality before our joint project when it comes to the use of new technologies in participation?

Dominka Jocz-Lenkiewicz (DJL): Prior to joining the project, new participation technologies were mainly used in the process of voting for projects within the participatory budget through a mobile app that we have been using for some time now. The Municipality of Wasilków has experience in using IT tools in communication with its residents – we use, among other solutions, *online* meetings with residents, which we started doing during the pandemic, live broadcasts of City Council sessions, questionnaire consultations on various solutions with residents – recently, for example, concerning parking spaces. We also strongly focus on active communication through our Municipality’s social media (Facebook page).

KSR: What encouraged you to implement the CitizenLab platform in the city?

DJL: The layout of the platform is inviting and clear, and the fact that it is being used (successfully) by many local governments around the world was also an important factor. I see a new quality in communication with residents in the CitizenLab platform. It is very important to know the opinions of the residents in order to give them the opportunity to speak or vote. I think people expect and need it. Participation in the project and implementation of the platform in our municipality was possible thanks to the initiative of the SocLab Foundation and our excellent cooperation, for which I thank you very much.

KSR: What was the most difficult part of implementing the CitizenLab platform and its subsequent use?

DJL: In order to implement new solutions in local governments, good cooperation of the executive and legislative body is needed. The barrier to starting consultations in some areas was resistance from some councillors. Another challenge was to get residents used to this form of communication and encourage them to use the platform. Wasilków has wonderful residents who often engage in the life of the

local government and who have a strong sense of local identity. Still, however, not all residents (especially the elderly) have the necessary digital skills, which is why we organized *offline* meetings for them in the library, the magistrate, schools, in the open. These were labour-intensive activities and the implementation of all tasks in a fairly short time was a big challenge.

KSR: You mentioned meeting people. From the perspective of our year-long cooperation on e-participation, what role do you think was played by the traditional *offline* consultation techniques that we also conducted, while, at the same time using the *online* platform?

DJL: The role of this part of the consultation process was significant, without a doubt. *Offline* activities are designed to inform residents about the projects implemented on the platform and arouse their need to set up an account and join the consultation process. Some of our users, especially those who are older or do not have digital skills, need encouragement or prior conversation to access the platform. What is also important are the leaflets distributed during *offline* events and other promotional materials.

KSR: What do you consider to be the greatest success of “E-democracy. Residents have the power!”?

DJL: The result of our collaboration on the project is the implementation and development of a new tool, which will certainly facilitate communication with residents in future activities. The platform performed excellently in the participatory budget procedure and aroused the interest not only among young people, but also of residents of all ages. The biggest success of the platform is the implementation of the eighth edition of the participatory budget – thanks to the platform, it was, for the first time, carried out entirely *online*. You could vote *online*, but also submit your proposals. *Online* consultations were held – through the possibility of commenting on projects. Publishing feedback from the representative of the municipality on an ongoing basis ensured full transparency of the entire procedure.

KSR: Do you have any recommendations for local government officials who would like to implement the platform?

DJL: It is worth being open to new solutions. In the local government there are many areas that require consultation (which is required by law), but it is worth communicating with the residents and enabling them to co-decide on the directions of development of the municipality, also when consultations are not obligatory. Here the use of new technologies and platforms is very helpful.

KSR: Thank you very much for the interview.

Dominika Jocz-Lenkiewicz

Lawyer by education, graduate of doctoral studies specializing in financial law, MBA. She gained her professional experience in administration and the judiciary as a teacher and lecturer, and inspector of state control in the Supreme Audit Office. Elected member of the Wasilków City Council from 2014 to 2018, Chairperson of the Spatial Order and Technical Infrastructure Committee. Since December 2018, deputy mayor of Wasilków, head of the Strategy and Development Department of the Wasilków City Hall.

Interview with **Filip Chodkiewicz,** Deputy Mayor of Augustów

Katarzyna Sztop-Rutkowska (KSR): How far in the past, before the E-democracy project, did you use new technologies for participation?

Filip Chodkiewicz (FCh): The City of Augustów has used an IT system since 2016 to vote in the participatory budget and to organise the plebiscite for the star of Augustów Days. We also conducted two *online* surveys on the introduction/elimination of paid parking zones in the city.

KSR: What encouraged you to implement the CitizenLab platform in Augustów?

FCh: For me, the partnership with the SocLab Foundation and the support in preparing and conducting the consultation processes we had planned was the most significant. We do not feel like great specialists in this field, but we want to improve constantly. So I treated the project as an excellent opportunity to gain knowledge and experience and an opportunity to introduce our staff to new participatory methods. I also hoped that the tool used would be good for the future.

KSR: What was the most difficult part of the process and the subsequent use of the platform?

FCh: As usual with consultations – energising the “municipal machine” and prioritising activities accordingly. Some difficulties also arose from the use of the new tool. Not everything was straightforward from the get go. It was necessary to spend time on it, but there is never enough time in the magistrate.

KSR: What role did *offline* consultation techniques have in the project?

FCh: Traditional methods proved to be very relevant. In some projects, they were even more important than the *online* form. It is certainly easier and more effective to discuss some issues in direct meetings. For now, it seems to me that we are more convinced to conduct deliberation with the residents “live” rather than virtually. But certainly, the use of the platform has shown some officials and councillors that participatory tools can be treated as an important support for city management, and not only in terms of sham action.

KSR: Thank you for the interview.

Filip Chodkiewicz

Graduate of law at the University of Warsaw. Scouting instructor. Deputy Mayor of the City of Augustów since 2019. Leader of the Non-Partisan Local Government Activists in the Podlaskie Voivodeship until 2020. Chairman of the Augustów City Council from 2014 to 2018. Currently, head of the National Local Government Coalition in the Podlaskie Voivodeship.

From Barcelona to the world. *Decidim*, a platform for active democracy

Decidim (from Catalan: “we decide”) is a digital participation platform that coordinates most of the democratic processes in Barcelona. Created as an open source software, it is currently used by institutions and organizations in 30 countries, including the *Dialogue Platform* in Gdynia, Poland. The aim is to make it radically easier for the people of Barcelona to participate in decision-making processes.

The Decidim platform cannot be discussed only in terms of e-participation software. Its creation, available functionalities, the way of writing code, the logic of interaction between users are the result of wider social processes that swept through the city after the economic crisis of 2008. The moment of deep debate about the dysfunctions of democracy, the frustration of separating politics from the real problems of the middle class can be called the “democratic wave.” Since 2011, the Indignados Movement has been protesting in the streets of Barcelona and one of its main slogans has been: “Real Democracy Now!” The wave brought with it the need for change, creating new forms of participation and deepening democracy.

The pressure exerted by the Indignados movement and broad public consensus have enabled the introduction of tools in public institutions to increase transparency and prevent corruption, giving wider access to information. Barcelona opened up to exploring new participatory and decision-making systems. The historical moment is crucial to understanding why the development of Decidim was so rapid in the years that followed. The turning point came in 2015, when the Barcelona elections were won by the municipal En Comu movement, with strong ties to the movements established in 2011. It was led by the first woman mayor in the city’s history – Ada Colau.

At that time, most of Barcelona’s residents were already using social networks on a daily basis. Although they played a very important role in grassroots mobilizations between 2011 and 2016, since 2015, more and more criticism started to emerge, including the scandals exposed by WikiLeaks and Cambridge Analytica. The unethical electoral campaigns by Donald Trump in the US and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil used

social networks to manipulate political narratives. The same tools that supported grassroots democratic processes have become their greatest threat. Add to this the fact that power quickly began to concentrate in the hands of the tech giants, who became the most influential and richest people in the world. It is not surprising that both public institutions and the public have begun to undermine the direction of technological development and to look more closely at the role of data, privacy, and security policies in the processes of democratic development.

Bag with Decidim logo
(photo: Barcelona City Hall,
CC licence)



Decidim is not only born on the wave of post-2011 movements, but also arises from a rich cultural heritage, in which an important element of Catalan identity has always been grassroots association and active participation in local politics. In addition, urban life takes place at a very local level and residents are keenly interested in what is happening in their immediate area. Barcelona is a city composed of 10 districts and 73 neighbourhoods (*barrios*), with which the residents identify very much, often living in their *barrio* for generations. The basic and most commonly used functionalities of the Decidim platform are *procesos participativos* (parti-

patory processes) and *espacios de participación* (participatory spaces), which are organized around districts and *barrios*. Decidim was established in 2016. By then, Ada Colau is in charge of the city and is radically transforming the way politics is made. She does not want to introduce top-down changes, but to create a vision of the city's development in the most participatory way possible. Establishing a new development strategy, called the Municipal Action Plan (PAM) for the 2015-2019 term is such an ambitious participatory process that it requires new tools and technologies. The first version of Decidim is created in collaboration between Barcelona and Madrid. It is based on Madrid's Cónsul platform. It is created from the bottom up by the global community using open source Ruby on Rails software and *creative commons* licenses. In 2017, thanks to city funding, the code is being rewritten from scratch, redeveloped and improved. According to the vision of the new Barcelona authorities, public funding is to give open access to goods created with common funds. Thanks to the success of the consultation of the Urban Development Plan, in which 40 000 residents participated, Decidim has developed a lot and started to support other participatory processes. It spread to Catalan cities and quickly crossed the borders of Spain. According 2022 data, the platform has more than 450 independent implementations worldwide, located in 30 countries, in more than 100 cities. The platform is used globally by 1,300,000 users, and by more than 100,000 people in Barcelona alone. The Decidim community is constantly developing and improving the platform, adapting to the realities of each city, new technological challenges, and local democratic processes.

The goal of Decidim is not to replace *offline* democratic processes, but only to improve and reinforce them. The platform supports cyclical meetings in districts and *barrios*, but does not replace them. Traditionally, participation in Barcelona is based on direct meetings of residents with the city authorities, organized in local community centres, museums, and libraries. Therefore, each process of participation created on Decidim exists in parallel in a non-virtual reality, where meetings are held, where neighbours have the opportunity to get to know each other and talk directly with representatives of the local government. A slogan that often appears in the context of participation in Barcelona is that "the city is made up in *barrios* and squares." Face to face meetings, city events, joint neighbourhood activities are the heart of the city, and the ambition of Decidim is only to add another layer to the existing mechanisms and traditions of participation.

Participatory meeting in the
Sant Antoni neighbourhood
(photo: Barcelona City Hall)



Even the best e-tool will not build social capital, it will not activate residents who are not interested in their neighbourhood on a daily basis. Decidim was therefore designed for hybrid participatory processes. It will not patch existing social holes, but seeks to promote, facilitate, develop, and integrate various democratic spaces and processes. In-person participation in Barcelona's residents' meetings continues to play a key role, and Decidim opens up new opportunities for digital interaction and participation that provide transparency in processes and increase opportunities for participation.

In Barcelona, the phrase "active democracy" is more likely to be used than "participatory democracy." Fernando Pinado, director of Active Democracy in the Barcelona City Hall from 2016 to 2019, gave a good description to this seemingly minor difference in terminology. He emphasized that the introduction of new tools is about the development of democracy, not about participation:

The word "participation" has begun to live its own life and has moved away from democracy, and we easily forget that civic participation is its essence. That is why we prefer to define democracy as "active" to describe a system that does not limit itself to the choice of representatives, but supports civic initiatives (citizens' activity), provides channels of dialogue (public debate), promotes cooperation and shared responsibility, enables civic control over political actions and facilitates cit-

izens' decision-making (direct democracy). The starting point is confidence in the ability of individuals to actively participate in community-wide action¹.

Therefore, Decidim is described as a platform for active democracy.

What functions will we find on the platform? The main area of activity of residents are participatory processes, within which both strategic planning processes and participatory budget are created. One gets the impression that the bottom-up elaboration of urban development plans is the heart of Decidim, is more important than participatory budgeting. It is more in line with the trend of “radical democratization of politics,” which is close to the current authorities and assumes deep participation of residents in planning processes. The last major process was co-creation of the city strategy for 2020–2023 (Programa de Actuación Municipal – PAM) and district strategies (Programa de Actuación de Distrito – PAD). The aim of working on both strategies was to select the main development axes and specific topics for further, in-depth work. Working out PAM and PAD strategies, however, took place in parallel with the participatory budgeting process. Neighbourhood meetings sought to answer to the question of whether these two processes overlap somewhere, and projects that could be implemented within the participatory budget were defined.

How, in practice, can residents participate in the co-creation of city and district strategies? The starting point of the process is the initial PAM and PAD proposal developed by the local government. Through the participatory process, citizens can complement it, introduce modifications or new proposals for action, which will be assessed with a view to possible inclusion in the final PAM. As Decidim is promoting a hybrid model of democracy, residents can take part in shaping the city's strategy by physically participating in meetings of neighbourhood councils, thematic councils, and mobile participation points in all districts of Barcelona. On the platform you can find all documents, proposals, records of meetings. Registered participants can comment on and evaluate the initial proposals of the city authorities and create their own proposals of action or comment on proposals of other residents.

What topics are discussed? PAM and PAD cover actions in six main areas: social rights, climate crisis, economic development, the rights to the city, learning and city management. During the process, more than 5,000 proposals for city and district strategies were presented, which is more than twice the number of proposals for participatory budgets (1,920 projects). In terms of user activity, but also the possi-

¹ Marc Sera Solé (ed.), *Innovació Democràtica. Barcelona 2015-2023*, Barcelona City Hall Publishing, Barcelona 2023, p. 21.

bility of real impact on the development of the city, it seems that the participatory process in creating the strategy is the heart of Barcelona’s Decidim.

Let’s take a closer look at the participatory budget, which was introduced in Barcelona very late, because only in 2020. The city allocated 30 million Euros to be divided between 10 districts. Selected projects were to be implemented in the years 2020-2023.

Budget allocation between districts (photo: decidim.org)

Districte		Import	
Ciutat Vella	8,5 M €	Gràcia	6 M €
Eixample	7,5 M €	Horta-Guinardó	8 M €
Sants-Montjuïc	9 M €	Nou Barris	9 M €
Les Corts	5 M €	Sant Andreu	7,5 M €
Sarrià Sant Gervasi	5,5 M €	Sant Martí	9 M €

Submitted projects can only concern infrastructure, that is, according to the regulations of those matters that “can be constructed, built or purchased and are durable in time”, e.g. new pitches, benches, IT equipment, vegetation or lifts and ramps for people with restricted mobility. The process of selecting projects in the participatory budget is divided into 7 phases. The first is “debate and collection of projects.” Projects can be submitted via the Decidim platform or in designated locations, including mobile participation points. The residents submitted 1,982 proposals. Then they undergo a “technical evaluation” based on criteria such as transparency, financial measurability, usefulness for the general population (it must be in line with at least one of the goals of the PAM city development strategy) or lack of negative impact on the environment. Once the basic criteria are met, the projects move to the third stage, i.e. “prioritization”, which takes place by vote by residents over 14 years of age. Each eligible voter must vote for a minimum of two projects and a maximum of 10. You can vote for projects outside your neighbourhood. The projects with the highest number of votes go to the “concretization” phase, where details are clarified in larger teams, composed of the originator, residents, representatives of the local government. Then there is a “vote” in which residents can vote for projects from their and one other district. In each of the two districts, they can cast as many

votes as the planned budget allows. For example, if the district of Les Corts has a budget of 5 million euros, four votes for projects of 1 million euros and two votes for projects of 0.5 million euros can be cast. The results of the vote are announced on the Decidim platform, other sites run by the city and in physical form in urban spaces, such as community and neighbourhood centres. In each district, a committee responsible for evaluating the implementation of the project is also established.

*Participatory Budgeting
(decidim.org)*



Barcelona's first experience with participatory budgeting has been met with great interest by residents. There were 375 face-to-face meetings, 39,433 people took part in the final vote, casting 216,628 votes (on average for 5.6 projects); 52,718 interactions took place on the platform, and over 50,000 new users of the platform registered during the promotional campaign. However, it is not hard data that is the most important proof that Decidim has created new levels of democracy. It is urban reality – projects that are created, strategies that are defined jointly, and residents who build bonds with each other.

The project, thanks to which many people heard for the first time about Decidim and the participatory budget, was the “Cricket pitch at the Montjuic hill.” Since 2012, Barcelona has been running a “Co-existing through sports” project, which supports so-called identity sports, i.e. those that are part of the cultures of national minorities living in Barcelona. Cricket is one of the most important identity sports in the city, as it is very important for immigrants from India and Pakistan, who make up 2.3% of the population (in districts such as Raval and Poble Sec making up to 16%). Since 2017, the Criquet Jove BCN organization has started to promote this sport among women and it has received a very positive response. An all-female cricket league was formed. At first, the girls played in sports halls, but they wanted to have real games on the pitch. They began to meet on one of the old pitches on Montjuic hill next to Poble Sec and Raval districts, inhabited by the Indian and Pakistani minorities. Unfortunately, the infrastructure was in such a bad condition that the pitch had to be closed quickly. To train, the players had to travel to distant parts of the city, which made it very difficult for the league to function.

*Women's cricket team
(photo: decidim.org)*



Sort projects by: With more support ▼

Results per page: 20 ▼

Reform of the Julià de Capmany Sports Field for the practice of minority sports



Ana

SELECTED - Short description: Conditioning and refurbishment of the Julià de Capmany Sports Field for ...

Sports equipment and spaces

Poble-sec

CREATED ON

21/05/2020

▲ 758 FOLLOW

■ 175

2441 Supports

Disabled supports

Sports and inclusive playgrounds Pau Casals Gràcia School



AFA Pau Casals Gràcia

SELECTED DESCRIPTION BREUL'The aim of the project is to renovate and condition the school's courtyards, both the ...

Educational equipment and school environments

the Camp d'en Grassot and Gràcia Nova

CREATED ON

21/05/2020

▲ 502 FOLLOW

■ 15

705 Supports

Disabled supports

Let's recover the Muntanyeta from the Àngels Garriga School!



Àngels Garriga School

SELECTED Short description: This project consists of the formalization of educational and recreational uses ...

Educational equipment and school environments

the Font d'en Fargues

CREATED ON

15/05/2020

▲ 500 FOLLOW

■ 11

635 Supports

Disabled supports

Co-educational, naturalized and community schoolyards



Co-educational, naturalized and community playgrounds

SELECTED Short description: Adequacy of schoolyards in two main areas: their naturalization ...

Educational equipment and school environments

extension

CREATED ON

20/03/2020

▲ 470 FOLLOW

■ 16

531 Supports

Disabled supports

Results of the vote for the "Cricket Pitch" (photo decidim.org)

When they found out about the participatory budget, they thought of putting forward a proposal to renovate the Julia de Campany pitch on Montjuic hill and adapt it for cricket: “It seemed impossible to us because Barcelona is such a big city, there are so many priorities and other projects, and cricket is not a well-known sport,²” said Hisfa Butt, one of the players. Despite the concerns in the first phase, this project that won with as many as 2,441 votes. A minority from India and Pakistan mobilized, often voting despite the lack of Internet access at home. Although the project was submitted by the all-women’s league, the stadium was to be accessible to all interested parties. The cricket pitch turned out to be a successful project. Ana, who works for Criquet Jove BCN, reminisces: “We didn’t ask for 1.6 million euros, we aren’t architects, we don’t have a construction company, but at meetings with officials and specialists from the city, we defined the project and came up with that amount – we were just looking for a place to play the game.³” The pitch was the second most expensive project implemented under the participatory budget. The interest of the press, the great kindness of the inhabitants, and the fact that minorities who rarely participate and feel represented in the democratic process have been included in the democratic process is one of the greatest symbolic successes of Decidim.

Decidim has a lot of functionalities: it allows you to collect ideas, organize debates, gather assemblies, create decision-making bodies and councils, conduct voting, follow district council meetings *online*, conduct civic consultations. One of the most interesting projects organized with the support of Decidim in Barcelona was the Youth Forum in 2021 – the first deliberative process involving randomly selected residents. It was an experiment that allowed to test new ways of participating in democratic life. The initiative was initiated by the ERC (Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya), one of the left-wing groups that wanted to identify the real needs of young people. The City Hall agreed to the proposal and understood that an innovative methodology for conducting the process had to be found. To this end, he set up an interdisciplinary group composed of officials and external experts. It was they who decided what question they would ask young people, how many people and at what age they would invite to participate, how they would choose them, what topics would be discussed and whether they should receive per diems or other compensation.

The group decided that people aged 16 to 29 will participate in the Youth Forum. From the registered residents lists, 20,000 men and women were selected at random. On the basis of such a sample, representation quotas based on gender, age

2 Ibid, p. 139.

3 Ibid.

and socioeconomic situation were determined. Each of them was sent an invitation signed by mayor Ada Colau. From the submitted response, looking at the previously determined quotas of representation, 99 people were selected, and reserve lists were created. The participants received a salary comparable to that received for participation in electoral commissions. One of the key issues was to pose the right question. After many discussions, it was decided to ask the young people: “What do you need to fulfil your life plans in Barcelona?” In the groups, specific proposals were developed, which were to be included in the City’s Youth Strategy. Over six sessions, seven hours each, 22 proposals were drawn up. They included ideas on the mental health young people, such as creating a round-the-clock psychological help line on WhatsApp, free psychological consultations for people under 24, educational campaigns. The proposal to conduct “bureaucracy for dummies” courses explaining how to handle the maze of city regulations. There were also ideas related to vocational training, increasing the availability of courses in order to combat unemployment. Access to apartments turned out to be a very difficult issue in the city, which is why it was proposed to allocate 30% of new municipal apartments for young people and special bonuses for owners who decide to rent.

It was very important for the creators of the process that young people really had an impact on the city’s activities, so that their proposals were taken into account and implemented. Therefore, at the end of the trial, the participants met in the historic hall of the City Council with Mayor Ada Colau, who accepted all the proposals. After a thorough analysis, the local government approved 20 for implementation, and rejected two. The participants of the forum were given an thorough justification for each decision. The Youth Forum was a huge success. All meetings were held offline, and Decidim enabled the organization of the process, facilitating day-to-day contacts with 99 participants, efficient circulation of documents and information.

Decidim has also proved useful during the COVID-19 pandemic. The people of Barcelona were subjected to a very restrictive quarantine for more than two and a half months, during which they had to stay at home. Therefore, a new participatory space was created at Decidim, where everyone could propose an action. The platform publicized mutual support and care initiatives, taking into account the different districts of the city, so that every resident can easily access them.

During the quarantine, the platform had over 300 initiatives proposed by residents, local NGOs, cultural institutions and shops. Suggestions included fitness, dancing, yoga, virtual exhibitions, collaborative *online* games, educational materials for children, including VR, explaining what COVID-19 is, reading books together, meditation workshops, neighbourhood outreach, concerts, film festivals, virtual travel,

thematic debates. The “Barcelona from Home” section, in addition to submitting and searching for initiatives, filtering as always across districts, also featured a “Square” tab. The “Square” was used for organizing debates, exchange information such as addresses of open shops and businesses during the pandemic. It also contained information about COVID-19, with links to the websites of the relevant institutions.

It is very important for the Barcelona government to take care of the collective memory. Residents have the right to tell their own story; this task cannot be left to the media and researchers alone. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the city’s story was to be narrated by the residents. That is why, on Decidim, testimonies were collected, which are now part of the public catalogue of the Barcelona Municipal Archives as a documentary collection for the protection of memory. Memories could be submitted in written, pictorial, or audiovisual form. Their aim was to preserve individual and collective experiences and to guarantee the right to a universal remembrance of quarantine in Barcelona.

For Barcelona, Decidim is not just an *online* platform. It is much more than that. It is a grassroots project, a large community that is redefining forms of active democracy. Therefore, the existence of only “in the cloud” is definitely not enough for this project. In the 1960s, a modernist building and greyhound racing track, the Canòdrom, was built in the San Andrés district. When racing was banned, there was no idea what to do with this beautiful building. An abandoned racetrack has degraded the whole area. The “democratic wave” carrying bold, ambitious projects has also

Canòdrom
ATENEU D'INNOVACIÓ DIGITAL I DEMOCRÀTICA

Tecnologies obertes,
democràcia participativa i
cultura digital



Decidim headquarters
(photo: Barcelona City Hall)

reached the abandoned spaces of the Canodrom, turning them into an urban hub of Digital and Democratic Innovation. It is a unique laboratory of civic creativity around technology and democracy. The space is open to the nearest neighbourhood, the whole city, and the world. A place where open technologies, digital rights and participation are born. The Canodrom features a *coworking* space for democratic projects, a place for the creators of incubated ideas, debates, and educational events. It is also the headquarters of Decidim.

The relationship between residents and their city and with local politics needs constant innovation, searching for new models of deeper interplay. The channels of neighbourly engagement must be clear, fast and give a sense of real influence. Decidim streamlines, shortens, speeds up such processes and makes them more transparent. It is not a substitute for everyday neighbourhood relationships. Participation through a screen will never be able to compete with them. Therefore, during the pandemic, Decidim served to support and share the trauma of isolation rather than trying to replace bonds. In Catalonia, closeness, touch, community life are the energy to create a city – they are its heart. Decidim is a virtual filter imposed on existing bonds, social capital, and the desire to actively participate in the creation of the future of your city.

Aleksandra Zemke

Graduate of Conflict Resolution and Governance at the University of Amsterdam and the Institute of Applied Social Sciences at the University of Warsaw. In 2011, she founded Smilemundo, a non-profit based in Spain, creating innovative educational tools to support progressive social change. For years, she has been collaborating with institutions working for local policy: United Cities and Local Governments, UNDP, UN – Habitat, Educating Cities, and the Province of Barcelona. She creates educational programmes related primarily to the 2030 Agenda and innovations in the field of Social and Solidarity Economy. The tools she designed have received numerous awards, including the prestigious Word Summit Youth Award by the United Nations. She is an activist in the En Comú municipal movement.

E-participation in Gdańsk and Gdynia

Why don't we have a single electronic platform for social participation in Gdańsk yet? This is a question I ask myself. Working for many years in the area of resident outreach, I know that it is worth having one place where residents could learn about all the consultations, meetings and activities in which they could participate.

And I have one doubt that, as I'm writing this text, I would like to verify. Isn't it too late for Gdańsk to have one common tool/platform for e-participation? Let's see.

Participatory budget

The first electronic platform used for participation is the participatory budget system. When it was decided in 2013 that the participatory budget was a necessity, a decision was immediately made that a tool was needed to handle the whole process. There was not much choice on the market, but a company in Bydgoszcz had a zetWIBO platform on offer. We used it until 2020, with a short break for another platform which turned out to be hugely problematic. The decision to switch to the electronic system from the very beginning, especially in terms of voting, has definitely paid off. As it turns out, to this day, some major cities still use paper voting forms and are dreading the moment of transition to *online*-only voting. This is the first big advantage of the platform – we do not use paper.

I mentioned the break in the collaboration with zetWIBO. In one edition we used a different platform and unfortunately we had trouble voting. The new platform was not properly adjusted to our rules of participatory budget and as a result we had incorrect voting results. It was a very difficult situation – the level of trust in the participatory budget plummeted and to this day there are questions about whether the system is properly secured. Another time we had trouble voting because the system was not prepared for mass voting in the last hours and it froze during the voting. Therefore, there are also risks associated with platforms – possible IT errors in their configuration.

For three years now, we have a new electronic system to handle the entire participatory budget process, written from the scratch according to our contract specification. The system works very efficiently and is safe, also because the entire administration panel is completely separate from the residents' panel.



Participatory budget landing page in the electronic voting system¹

However, even here the beginnings of the system implementation were very difficult – mainly because it was done from scratch. The scale of the difficulties was underestimated both by us, participatory budget officials and the company offering to develop it. Developing software for specific requirements, which in some ways stemmed from our idea of what the application should look like, showed that the ideas of developers were not the same as ours. For us, some solutions were obvious, for example, that as the project is submitted in the system there is the possibility of saving the a “draft” version; the software developer writing this module did not foresee such an option. Ultimately, all our specifications were included, but the time pressure and the fact that we managed to carry out this first edition of the budget in the new system without any major problems amazes me to this day. Then there is the second risk – if the system is created from scratch, there is a high probability of delays and corrections at the testing stage, and even after launch.

The advantage of using one platform in the participatory budget, but also in other participatory processes, is their chronological continuity (tracking the history). Both people conducting consultations and residents can check all the activities that have already ended, in which they participated, and in the case of the participatory budget in some cities, the status of successful projects can be verified. Another

¹ <https://www.gdansk.pl/budzet-obywatelski> (accessed: 1.06.2023).

advantage is that the platform allows you to gather all information about completed, ongoing or planned activities in one place.

Going back to the beginnings of the participatory budget, it is worth mentioning that residents very quickly and easily accepted the use of an electronic platform for submitting projects and voting. In recent years of the development of the internet, social media, and apps, this is basically a necessary requirement. However, in order to reach elderly residents or those who do not use these tools, we constantly organize consultation points during the voting stage, where you can count on the help of our staff.

Officials also quickly welcomed the electronic means of verifying projects. The advantages are obvious: simple, effective, and quick information from all project evaluators, no circulation of paper documents, the ability to edit the evaluation at any time.

For past two years, residents can also vote in the participatory budget system by logging in to it using the Resident Card. Both systems have been integrated at the voting level, so residents can vote in another app faster and with less personal data.

And here we come to another tool used in Gdansk, the Gdańsk Resident Card.

*Gdańsk Resident Card
(photo: Gdansk Tourism
Organisation)*



A special card with a package of benefits for Gdańsk residents has been in circulation for several years now. It is a plastic or virtual card that allows you to use many benefits within the city. It is used by almost 300,000 residents of Gdańsk. Its integral part is the “Jestem z Gdańska” [I’m from Gdańsk] app, which, after setting up an account, provides comprehensive information about available service packages. The app can also support family accounts.

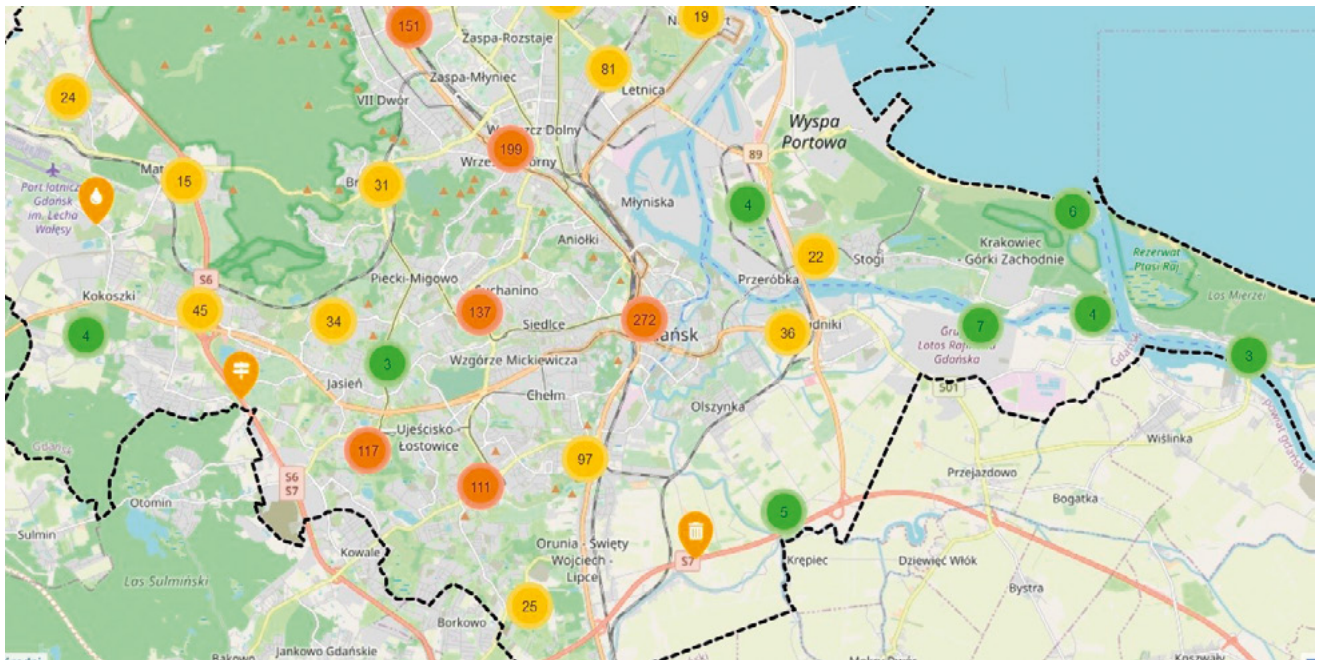
There are a number of benefits of having it, but one is particularly important – the increasing possibilities of integrating the card with other services or apps. For example, it can be topped up with paid, personal periodic public transport tickets, it can serve as a library card, which allows you to borrow books in Gdańsk libraries or book machines. Another novelty is that Resident Card users can use the services of the Gdansk Contact Centre (GCK) directly from the “I’m from Gdańsk” app. On its home screen, a corresponding button will be displayed, after which the user will be able to go to the Gdańsk Contact Center app and use the form enabling to report an issue. I will return to Gdańsk Contact Centre will later, because it is another platform for contact with residents.

The use of the card, in addition to many benefits facilitating access to city services, discounts, etc., also has an additional advantage – it allows communication with residents. The database of almost 300,000 inhabitants is a huge number of recipients of municipal information, a simple, free and effective channel of communication. On the other hand, it is information about the residents themselves – what activities they are interested in, where they are, what cultural offer they use, etc. We can send invitations for public consultations or meetings to those who have given their consent to the use of *the newsletter*, or encourage them to vote on projects of the participatory budget.

In conclusion, while the Resident’ Card app is not a platform for participation, although it does have the ability to conduct surveys, it is extremely helpful in communicating with residents and encouraging them to participate in the various processes of co-determination about the city.

Another platform that we use in our contacts with Gdańsk residents is the app for the Gdańsk Contact Centre.

The GCC has been operating in Gdansk since 2018 and allows residents to report issues that require the intervention of city services. Submissions are accepted around the clock, seven days a week. Anyone can submit comments or obtain relevant information without having to know which department or municipal unit to contact. The GCC mobile app was developed in 2021. It makes it possible to quickly report an issue requiring intervention, pinpoint the location on a map and attach photos, and view the status of the case on your phone.



An example map of notifications of residents' interventions in the Gdańsk Contact Centre²

In addition to access to various types of applications and information, you can also submit your own ideas and suggestions for better functioning of the city, which is why the Gdańsk Contact Centre is a platform whose main idea is to contact the residents.

In terms of interesting IT facts relating to the electronic system handling the GCC mechanism, it can be revealed that the first platform was prepared specifically for us, according to our idea of how such a system should function. After four years of use, we have come to the conclusion that it is too complicated. It turned out that not all functions were needed, not everything had to be automated and we are currently using a simpler, more universal tool, which other cities offering a similar service can also use.

This is an important note – too complicated systems have reduced flexibility and become obsolete faster.

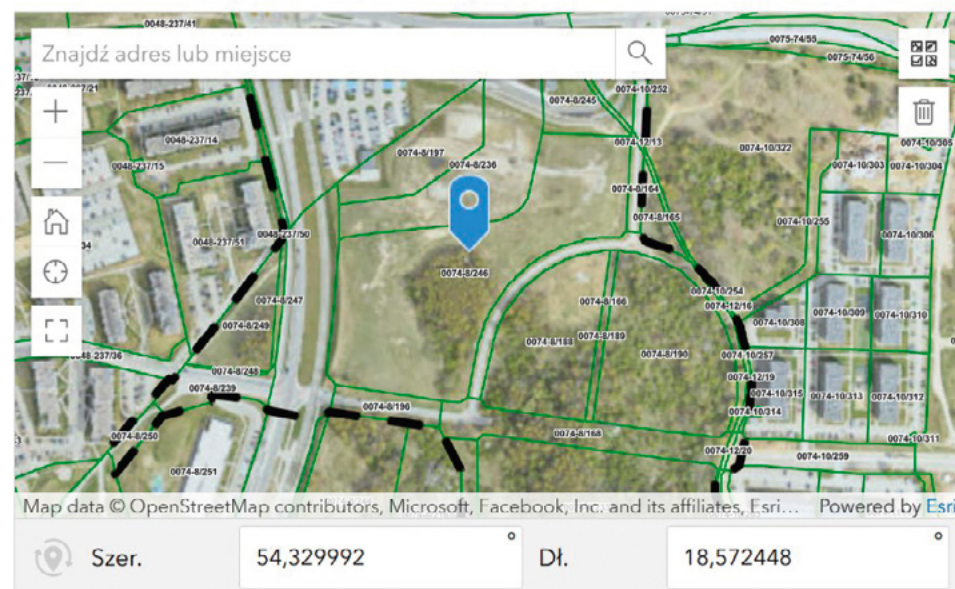
² <https://zglos.gdansk.pl/mcity/incidents/index> (accessed: 2.06.2023).

Geo-questionnaires

The above-mentioned applications, i.e. those supporting the Resident's Card or the Gdansk Contact Centre, do not fully support the area of participation, which is why there has been a definite shift towards e-participation at the Gdańsk Development Office in 2022. For our staff, involving residents in urban planning is their daily bread, but these new solutions have significantly increased the scale of residents' participation. In addition to the preparation of local development plans, the department participates or prepares many documents and processes affecting the development of the city. A very large undertaking is the process of revitalization of parts of Gdańsk districts and preparation of strategic documents, such as *the Study of conditions and directions of spatial development* or the *Gdańsk Water Policy*. For several years now, the office has been making modern maps available to all residents. Thanks to them, without leaving the house, everyone can, among other things, see the selected plot (its shape and borders) or compare the changes that took place in the city in the Obliview app.

ZŁÓŻ WNIOSEK*

(wskaz na mapie lokalizację wniosku)



Obliview app³

³ <https://obliview.brg.gda.pl> (accessed: 1.06.2023).

Since 2022, in Gdańsk, a geo-questionnaire, i.e. a detailed map of the area with the highlighted boundaries of the plan is made available to residents before each local development plan is drawn up, giving them the opportunity to comment on it. Additional information is also provided on the map: who is the author of the draft plan, the text of resolution of the Gdańsk City Council on starting the planning works.

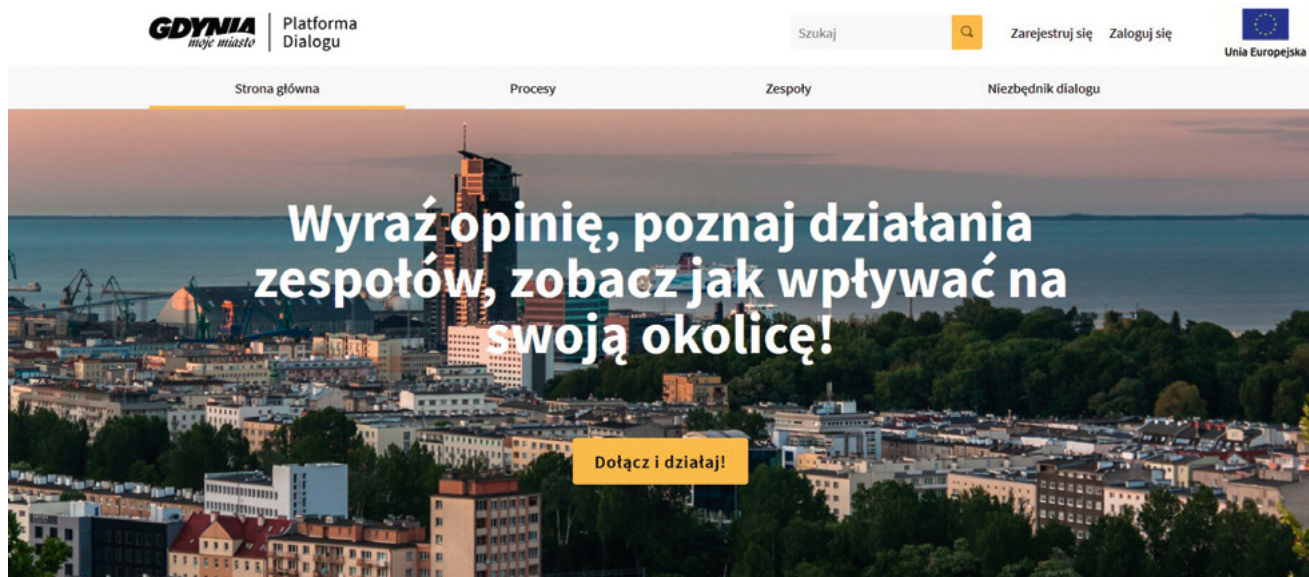
Navigating the map is intuitive and easy. The map informs about the plots covered by the plan and the structure of land ownership, and about the buildings: their functions, year of erection, number of floors. On the map, you can then select an object, area or point and type your comment. A few seconds after submitting the comment it is visible on the map of the designer responsible for preparing the draft plan. This makes it easy for the planner and the resident to find a common language. An interactive map facilitates understanding, minimizes ambiguity, and gives interested parties the opportunity to accurately convey an idea.

The geo-questionnaire is used only at the stage of preparing a new development plan, that is, at the very beginning of the planning procedure, but this is enough to say that the level of social involvement has definitely changed. Suddenly, residents' requests began to be counted in hundreds, not dozens. While earlier in the consultations comments were scarce, now, for example, about 400 responses were received from consultations on the course of bicycle lanes using the geo-questionnaire.

These are not all the electronic tools used in Gdańsk to collaborate with residents, but I will now try to analyse the solutions used in Gdynia and Warsaw.

Gdynia Dialogue Platform

Gdynia, unlike Gdańsk, decided to introduce a tool for e-participation which combines various consultation processes, and more, in one place. Among the possible solutions, Gdynia selected Decidim, an open source *online* platform (a license available to everyone, according to the rules set by the international community, which focuses on the selected software). The solution was created in Barcelona and is used worldwide, including Finland and France, but needs to be adapted to local needs.



Landing page of the Gdynia Dialogue Platform⁴

Initially, even before the pandemic, we were planning to use Decidim in Gdańsk, but ultimately it did not come to be. Several factors contributed to this. 2019 has been a very difficult year for Gdansk: the assassination of Mayor Paweł Adamowicz, new mayoral elections, and a number of changes accompanying these events. At the same time, we knew that the weak point of open-source platforms was the cost of adapting the tool to the needs of individual cities and the fact that they were not suited to support the participatory budget. Ultimately, however, Decidim was successfully adapted, for example, in Warsaw, but it was not a simple and fast process.

The main idea behind the Gdynia Dialogue Platform is to build a community around participatory processes, to gather in one place the knowledge about all participatory processes as well as the working councils and teams operating in the city, as well as to standardise the city's activities involving residents and provide opportunities for easy participation in the processes handled by the platform.

However, before the platform was handed over to residents, it had to be adapted to their needs. This is the first step when you think about an electronic platform – setting goals, that is, why it is developed and for whom. Only then can the implementation and modification process proceed. In the case of Decidim, cooperation

⁴ <https://konsultujemy.gdynia.pl> (accessed: 2.06.2023).

with an IT company was crucial, which also had to learn this platform. You can read more about the required modifications in the contract documentation for its implementation⁵.

It is worth noting that Gdynia was the first city in Poland to use Decidim, so the scope of the contract also included translating the interface into Polish. In addition, it was necessary to provide training to employees, IT support (also in the period after the launch of the platform), provision of servers and many other elements listed in the tender. Ultimately, the cost of implementation amounted to slightly more than PLN 110,000 including VAT.

As you can see, an open source code requires significant funds. In the case of Warsaw, which modified Decidim even further and added a participatory budget module, the costs turned out to be much higher, because about PLN 600,000 (the contract included the developing the system specifically Warsaw, 18 months of system maintenance, and analyses for implementing additional functionalities in the platform).

Of course, the specifics of the contract and the extent of the modifications are important, but it must be remembered that once the platform is up and running, there is still the cost of ongoing maintenance and updates.

Warsaw has set its sights on consolidating participatory services. It paid off, because for its large-scale implementation of Decidim, the city was nominated for the Smart City Award under the “Smart City over 300,000 inhabitants” category⁶.

To sum up, the starting point for both cities was the same, but the differences in the adoption of platforms are significant. The Gdynia Platform has fewer functions and is not tied to the participatory budget, i.e. it is not a place for submitting proposals, verification and voting. It was launched in September 2021 at www.konsultujemy.gdynia.pl. The platform offers three main modules: “Processes,” “Teams” and “Dialogue Essentials.”

The “Processes” tab collects all of the participatory processes taking place across the city. Here you will find information on the progress, forms of participation, how to engage in a given process, dates of meetings or a direct place for residents to submit comments or proposals. The “Teams” tab contains information about the

⁵ <https://bip.um.gdynia.pl/zamowienia-publiczne-do-30-tys-euro-4,8326/zamowienie-na-uslugie-implementacji-platformy-decidim,554839> (accessed: 1.06.2023).

⁶ <https://smartcityforum.pl/nominacje> (accessed: 1.06.2023).

working councils and teams that operate in Gdynia. “**Dialogue Essentials**” is a collection of key information on how to get involved in the city or how to implement your ideas for changes in the local community.

The use of basic platform features, such as browsing the tabs, is accessible to all interested parties and anonymous. Its important functionality is the ability to establish contacts between users.

Warsaw’s approach is broader. There are separate modules for the participatory budget and public consultations, which are also more interactive and therefore easier for residents to use.

The participatory budget module is a system for handling proposals, verification, and voting. Our system in Gdańsk is based on a similar principle. In both the Warsaw and Gdańsk systems residents receive information about the submitted initiatives on an ongoing basis, and they can send a message to the author or even promote the project themselves. It is also a place to view the status of submitted ideas. In a word, comprehensive information, and communication⁷.

The second module for public consultation in the Warsaw version of Decidim is also richer than in the Gdynia’s instalment⁸. First of all, it supports immediate comments on the subject of the consultation. If you are organizing consultations, you can check the meeting location on the map or use the shared link to the meeting location, if it is also held *online*. It is worth noting that the Warsaw platform also included the processing of local plans, which was certainly a challenge, because this procedure has its own specificity.

⁷ <https://bo.um.warszawa.pl> (accessed: 1.06.2023).

⁸ <https://konsultacje.um.warszawa.pl> (accessed: 1.06.2023).



Graphic design of Warsaw's public consultations platform⁹

I carefully review Gdynia and Warsaw's solutions and notice that even if Gdańsk did not decide on using Decidim, its current platform has measurable benefits:

- bringing the consultation processes together in one place and presenting information about the consultation in a uniform way;
- the possibility of ensuring active participation (e.g. submitting comments, links to meetings, marking meetings on the map);
- bi-lateral communication – to residents and from residents;
- knowledge base, report generation, data analysis.

There are probably more advantages, but these ones provide a solid basis that it is worth considering introducing a single platform for e-participation.

Of course, there are risks: potentially high costs of implementation, adaptation or maintenance, the need for modifications and updates, lack of sufficient staff to provide up-to-date content, etc.

⁹ <https://konsultacje.um.warszawa.pl> (accessed: 2.06.2023).

The above-described platforms and IT systems used in Gdańsk show that the failure to introduce one platform a few years ago has caused many of our units or even departments to use their own tools. They are not always utilised fully for participation, but often support it – for example in communication with residents or *online* surveys. In the meantime, our unit preparing local development plans began to pave its own path to e-participation, i.e., geo-questionnaires. And, it must be said, we're doing it successfully! The number of proposals or comments by residents has increased significantly, which supports the necessity of using *online* tools.

With the participatory budget, which also has an efficient electronic system, no one even imagines that the verification or voting takes place on paper. And the benefits are shared by both the residents and the officials.

However, when deciding on tools or electronic platforms for handling consulting processes, you should carefully think about the scope of requirements and functions that we expect from the platform. Our experience shows that, despite everything, the orientation towards overly customized tools entails more preparation, tests and, in the long run, may prove unnecessary (following the example of the system for the Gdańsk Contact Centre).

In my opinion, it is worth looking for ready-made tools or platforms, which results not only from the experience gained in other implementations, but also enables a faster response to the changing reality and user requirements. And as the examples of Gdynia and Warsaw show, ready-made tools can also be adapted to individual needs. We need to remember, however, that the ideas and requirements of officials are not always the same as the residents. Ever since we had our voting issue, we have been checking the system every year together with the residents at the stage of submitting projects and voting (preceded, of course, by wide-scale testing). And every year our stakeholders make new comments.

In principle, this topic could be closed, because the advantages of participation platforms are obvious and confirmed by facts, but there is one thing that is crucial before deciding on their introduction, and it is the number of planned or declared public consultations or participatory processes. If the policy of the city or municipality is focused on cooperation with the residents, discussions about decisions, even small ones, such as the development of a local square, then it makes sense to implement *online* platforms. Otherwise, it is a waste of energy and commitment from all parties.

Returning to the question posed at the outset – in the case of Gdańsk, it may not be too late for a single participation platform, but the use of many tools certainly encourages us to start preparing for a solid analysis of our resources and needs. I think this is where we are at now. The process of updating the city's strategy, launched last year, identified four development programmes for the coming years. These include: The "Common City" and the "Innovative City." Common, and therefore also concerning joint decision-making on its development, and innovative – a smart city. E-participation is key in both of these programmes, so we are still doing our jobs and still searching.

Sylwia Betlej

Director Office for District Councils and Cooperation with Residents, Gdańsk City Hall. I have been involved in participation for more than 10 years, starting with the participatory budget. The shift toward more and more extensive cooperation with the residents meant that in 2016 we were the first city in Poland to organize a citizens' panel. I also organize meetings with residents, prepare and implement social consultations. The most recent is an update of the Gdańsk 2030 Development Strategy. I also cooperate extensively with Gdansk's district councils. Areas of interest: participation, civil society development, new technologies.

Description of the “e-Democracy. Residents have the Power!” project

The project was created on the initiative of the SocLab Foundation, but without important partners it could not have been implemented. The City of Augustów as well as the City and Municipality of Wasilków – these were the two entities that implemented and tested a new way of involving residents in the affairs of the city or municipality. This new way was the introduction of the CitizenLab digital platform, which was aimed at facilitating the process of reaching out to residents by local authorities and deepening the processes of participation in both municipalities.

Over the course of the project, the two similar processes took place in parallel. Analogous activities took place in Augustów and in the Wasilków Municipality. In each of them, participatory teams were established for the implementation of the platform in order to supervise the proper course of the process from the level of the local government. Before the activities aimed at residents began, the teams held numerous meetings with the SocLab Foundation, during which the platform was configured and designed to meet the specific needs of the city and the municipality, as well as the needs and requirements of their residents, and planned and discussed the processes related to the implementation of the platform. The next stage was to design the platform itself, the slogan with which residents will identify it, the e-participation processes, and choosing the domain name. The slogan of the platform in Augustów is “Let’s figure it out together! Your city, your voice, your decision,” and the slogan in Wasilków: “Can Wasilków be like I want it to be?” It can, if you dare to speak out!”

When creating the project, we assumed that it will not be easy to transfer the activity of residents to the internet, although the time spent at home during the Covid-19 pandemic got people used to it, so we envisaged participatory processes that would be carried out both *online* and *offline*. We wanted for the platform to become a presence in the consciousness of the entire local community, which is why we targeted some activities to all residents, and some to specific social groups. We worked with seniors, the youth, people with disabilities and their carers, councillors, institutions and social organizations, we met with residents during local festivals.

Augustów is a tourist city, so the challenge for the Magistrate was to configure the platform primarily for the needs of residents, not tourists. Hence, verification of platform users with the Polish PESEL ID number emerged. The inaugural project involved residents voting for murals that were to be created around the city. They were not merely commissioned; it was the residents who, through votes on the platform, decided which ones would be painted. The event sparked a lot of interest in the platform among the residents, who eagerly voted and commented on the murals.

The platform in Augustów was also the place where the first Youth Council in this city was established. It was on the platform that the campaign and voting took place, which was done quickly and with great turnout.

It was also possible to implement a project of accessibility of urban space, which is very important for the city and people. We took several field walks with people with disabilities and seniors, marking and describing problematic places on the platform. The Magistrate checked who owned the designated place and sent a summary report asking them to address the indicated problems or, if the area was public, tried to solve the problem itself. Other residents of Augustów could also report problematic places on the platform and did so.

*Inauguration of the project
on accessibility of public
space in Augustów
(own resources)*



*Research walk with
representatives of
the Senior Council
(own resources)*



An important and broad issue was the diagnosis of the needs and problems of the youth in Augustów. We met and trained school authorities on how to make perform such a diagnosis in schools in the form of “talking walls.” The second tool was an anonymous questionnaire, which the young people could fill in on the platform. Young people responded to the process very positively, feeling that someone was listening to them and that they could say what they really feel and what they need, and the results proved to be helpful both in further designing the activities at the school and the by local government.

The revitalization of the “Koszary” [Barracks] housing estate is another important topic that touched the residents closely and brought a lot of emotions. During the meetings in the neighbourhood, residents expressed their gratitude for listening to their requests and needs and willingly shared their knowledge about the place, both during diagnostic walks and on the platform, where they could submit their comments on the future revitalization. Several minor problems were solved immediately. This is an important, long-lasting process, and such solidified the knowledge about what should take place and what is already happening, but, perhaps, is not visible at first glance.

Wasilków is the seat of a dynamically developing rural and urban municipality. Its residents (especially the youth studying at secondary schools and universities) are often involved in the social life of nearby city of Białystok. It was therefore necessary to design participatory processes that would reach active residents in Wasilków or encourage young people to transfer their interest towards their hometown.

The official inauguration of the platform took place on June 1, 2022, at a press breakfast, during which residents were informed about the possibility of “talking” with the magistrate via platform. The war in Ukraine created a specific situation, and Poles very quickly, and in various ways, organized help for the Ukrainians. The platform was also used for such assistance shortly after its creation. It served as a space for the exchange of information on aid activities. The platform was also used by young people to campaign in elections to the Youth Council. They could use it to present their election program.

The most important event in Wasilków was transferring the participatory budget to the platform, which had been implemented successfully in Wasilków anyway. Moving it to the platform proved to be an incredible success. Residents were very active both in submitting and commenting on ideas on the platform and took part in the voting process. Before that, we met with residents and discussed how to submit a project proposal on the platform.

*Civic breakfast in Wasilków.
Consultations of the
report on the state
of the municipality
(own resources)*



At the end of the project, a very important action was carried out: involving the residents in the creation of a report on the state of the municipality. During the civic breakfast and meeting with representatives of community councils and non-profits, we managed to create together with the residents a ranking of projects and initiatives of the year, which were an important part of the report on the state of the municipality.

In Wasilków, similarly to Augustów, we also conducted a diagnosis of the needs and problems of the municipality's youth. The whole process took place like it did in the other city – we trained school councils which then did the “talking walls” in their institutions, we posted a questionnaire on the platform, and additionally we held workshops with a group of young people from the Wasilków brass orchestra.

*Training for school councils.
Diagnosis of the needs of
young people in Augustów
(own resources)*



The processes were enthusiastically received by the residents, who were eager to take part in the proposed participatory activities. However, the effects and conclusions were often a good insight for local government officials into the problems of residents.

Throughout the project, we paid special attention to the monitoring and evaluation process, because the whole project was innovative, and we wanted to respond quickly if there were situations that differed significantly from the general assumptions of the project. As a whole, the project was very interesting and surprising, both for us and the local governments we collaborated with.

Monika Pietkiel

Passionate about participation. Local patriot and coordinator of projects promoting multiculturalism and ethnographic richness of Podlaskie. Specialist in the field of “green” educational paths and didactic spaces. Employee of the SocLab Foundation. Coordinator of the “E-democracy. Residents have the power!” eco-advisor in the framework of the National Federation of NGOs project “Funds for the climate – NGO advisor network”.



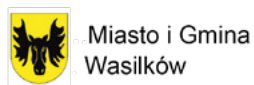
Iceland
Liechtenstein
Norway

Active
citizens fund

From the foreword

This publication is intended primarily for local governments who want to incorporate new technologies into participation in a planned and effective way. Here you will find an abundance of practical information and advice on how to implement and manage e-participation platforms, how to effectively talk to residents using such a platform, and how to use their ideas to improve the quality of local life. I am convinced that the book may also be of interest to community organisations, researchers, and citizens interested in the topic of e-participation. The combination of actual implementation practices with theoretical reflection may make the idea of e-participation inspiring for all those interested in co-creating a democratic political culture in Poland. We need ever better and more inclusive democratic co-governance, also at the level of local government.

Dr Katarzyna Sztop-Rutkowska



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