



TARTU: Participative budgeting — citizens influencing mobility investments

Many municipalities utilize participative budgeting as a tool for budget planning. Tartu was the first city in Estonia that opened its budget designing process to citizens and began experimenting with participative budgeting in 2013. Citizens of Tartu can decide how their city should spend 200,000 EUR, which is about 1% of the subsequent year's investment budget. Following Tartu's lead, many other Estonian municipalities have taken advantage of participative budgeting. The method has become more of a norm than an exception in Estonia and it is mostly due to Tartu being a role model and a success story. Participative budgeting is an extremely important measure for Tartu, Tartu's governing and Estonia. The measure is a large part of Tartu's democratic and liberal identity. Participative budgeting has also been an innovative solution thanks to Estonia's digital identity and signature.

Participative budgeting was approved by Tartu City Council and the initiative has been taking place annually since 2013. The budgeting process is managed by the city's PR department. The actual procurements and investments after the approval of the budget are done by the Tartu City Government. The departments involved are usually the Department of Municipal Property and Communal Services as the departments are responsible for most of the investments in the municipality. The initiatives gather a lot of local and national media attention. The call and the ideas are promoted in social media, internet and in public spaces.

Tartu has set three goals for its participative budgeting:

1. To improve understanding of the city budget and its shaping process;
2. to boost cooperation between communities;
3. to find solutions to practical problems within the city by implementing the citizens' ideas.

The call for proposals usually starts in April. The selection and voting take place during a period of 6 months and the implementation is usually done in 12 months. The ideas can be presented in the [Estonian System for Local Democracy Procedures \(about the portal in English\)](#), by email or by regular mail. Every citizen can present an idea, but the criteria is that the idea must qualify as an investment (object, building, etc.) and that the cost of the realization should not exceed 100,000 EUR. Each year, at least two ideas are developed into projects, totaling the overall budget of 200,000 EUR. The ideas must be connected to Tartu, for public use and of benefit to ordinary citizens. The implementation of the ideas must not generate unreasonable costs in future budgets for the city.

In May and June, the ideas are analyzed by experts in their respective fields. An expert group is compiled of wide range of stakeholders from university representatives to private and third sector. The experts consider the feasibility of the ideas from various aspects, including financial, temporal and technical viability. In-depth discussions of the ideas and their impact are held between the experts and the people behind the ideas. These discussions will determine which ideas go forward to the final vote. The presentation of ideas takes place after the experts have finished evaluation and last throughout the summer to September. The city government will present all the selected ideas on the city's homepage, in public city spaces, via social media, etc. The individuals who proposed the ideas will then seek support for them.

Public voting takes place during 7-14 days in October. Citizens have the opportunity to vote for all of the ideas that are in accordance with the budget and received positive expert evaluation, using both traditional and electronic means. Every resident of Tartu, aged 16 years or more, is eligible to vote (3 votes per person). The two ideas with most votes win and will be approved by the City Council. Implementing the ideas takes place during the next budget year.

Examples

The measure has not been used in the cities. multimodal project per se. But often the measure results in activities aimed at mobility, active transportation and public transportation measures. Indicating that multimodality and active mobility are near and dear to Tartuvians. Below are three examples of how participative budgeting has been applied to mobility investments in Tartu:

1. **2014 - "Comfortable sidewalks and crossroads"**

The problem was that sidewalks had curbs that were not leveled with the road. It is a big problem for crossings and crossroads. The small step of 10-20 cm can be an obstacle for parents with trolleys, people with injuries or disabilities and to people using any active mode of transportation. Thanks to the citizens budgeting proposal the steppingstones on more than 70 crossroads were removed making road crossings more comfortable and smoother. The activity also added embossed tiles into the crossings for the visually disabled. Since 2014 the process of redesigning has continued, and the standard has found a place in Tartu's street design. By 2020 there were no street crossings in Tartu with a steppingstone.

2. **2017 - M.Reiniks School Active Movement Court Yard**

Tartuvians voted for M.Reinik School to have a brand new courtyard. The yard was redesigned to promote active leisure for the students and nearby citizens. The courtyard got equipped



with sport grounds, everything from basketball to table tennis, swings, climbing and hanging bars and a trampoline. Private car parking spaces were removed to make room for cycling, skating and skateboarding. Extra facilities for storing over 100 bikes were installed. New lighting was installed and cycling roads were renovated.

[Link to photos of the opening ceremony](#)

3. **2019 - "Ideas cycling roads"** - An independent group of cycling activists wanted to design and implement a perfect street that is friendly towards pedestrians, cyclists and motorized transportation. They wanted to redesign a stretch of Kroonuaia street between Jakobi street and Kroonuaia bridge going past Kesklinna School. The project received an overwhelming amount of 1840 votes from the public. The project will be implemented during 2020. The project author's own description of the cycling road project: Tartu is a smaller city, perfect for bicycle traffic. Many road users still perceive the quality of bikeways as poor and their marking as a 'bottleneck'. Cyclists don't feel safe and they switch between sideways and roads depending on the situation. Bikeways need to be properly marked and physically separated from the road where possible. Building safe intersections that would be comprehensible for everyone is also extremely important. Critical places such as areas near schools and bike-share stations need special attention. The exact choice of objects to be financed from the participatory budget (bikeway markings, lowering curbs etc.) can be made in cooperation with bike users.

Recommendations

Having electronic identification helps a lot. Smaller municipalities use other means for voting, but only the Estonian electronic ID enables us to validate that the voters are residents of Tartu which is a prerequisite for voting. Electronic ID also makes the voting independent of time and place of voting.

Media coverage is extremely important and key to the success. The media coverage history can be found here: <https://www.tartu.ee/et/meediakajastused-kaasava-eelarve-kohta>

Statistics

Year	Number of presented ideas	Ideas presented to voting	Number of voters	Number of votes
2013	158	74	2645	2645
2014	92	25	1938	4029
2015	57	24	3772	6929
2016	87	25	4178	8211
2017	56	20	4635	9090
2018	57	25	5291	10318
2019	78	25	7312	15510

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