Process steps for the preparation of a participatory budget:
Development of the overall process and IT implementation
using the example of the 1st Bützow participatory budget

The following steps were taken for the implementation of the 1st Bützow participatory budget:

1. **Development of the overall participatory budgeting process**

    a. Duration and deadlines
    b. Number and type of participants
    c. Type and form of participation

2. **Elaboration of the requirements/prerequisites of the IT implementation**

    a. Outline the requirements of the presentation on the website
    b. Outline the opportunities for participation on the website
    c. Consideration for the creation of a new, individual IT tool

3. **Testing for practicability and resource availability**

Initial situation

The city of Bützow developed its own participatory budgeting (PB) process for the first time in 2020 as part of the EmPaci project.[1] The conception, design, implementation and hosting of the municipal website of the city is done by an external provider.

For the time being, information, documentation on the Bützow participatory budget and participation should be offered on the municipal website www.buetzow.de. Thus, a possible comparison of PB software[2] was not pursued further and instead a mock-up (demonstration model) was created of how the PB frontend could look using the software used by the external provider.

In the further course of the project and after the implementation of the 1st Bützow participatory budget, the development of an individual website was planned. Due to the pandemic and the resulting high order volume from the external provider, the conception and implementation of the individual website could not be started in 2021. Nevertheless, the

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[1] For information on the city, see EmPaci Status Quo Analysis, p. 117 ff.
[2] A comparison of different providers of participatory budgeting software was made in the EmPaci project. The report and the analysis tool for own analysis can be found here: http://empaci.eu/index.php?id=158

move of the Bützow PB from the municipal website to an individual one is still planned and is aimed at for the year 2022.

In preparation for the above steps, intensive research was carried out on active PB processes that have been running for several years in Germany as well as in other municipalities in European countries, in order to first plan the overall process for PB. The IT-related planning builds on the overall process.

1. Development of the overall PB process

For a detailed description of the process of IT implementation, a definition of the following parameters of PB, and thus the elaboration of its overall process, is necessary:

 a. Duration and deadlines
 b. Number and type of participants
 c. Type and form of participation

Basically, PB consists of a proposal phase, a feasibility check, a voting phase and an implementation phase. Each of the phases has specific deadlines/defined durations:

	Phase			
	Proposal	**Feasibility check**	**Reconciliation**	**Implementation**
Duration and deadlines	Generally all year, but 30. April if it shall be considered in the same year	At the latest 8 weeks before the start of voting	Duration at least 2, maximum 3 weeks	Until the start of the next participatory budget at the beginning of the year, at the latest until 30. April
Number and type of participants	7 800 residents, administration, press, press portal	Administration	7 200 residents, administration, press, press portal	Administration, suppliers, proposing residents
Type and form of participation	Submission of proposals via online form or card, letter, e-mail	No external	Voting on the reviewed and approved proposals via online form or ballot paper	Proposing residents

Table 1: Overall process of participatory budgeting

This process shows the essential steps and of course also contains intermediate steps that are not explicitly mentioned here for the documentation of the IT process. The overall process was laid down in a statute that was adopted by the city council of Bützow and is

considered the first statute for a citizens' budget in the federal state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.[3]

2. Elaboration of the requirements/prerequisites of the IT implementation

The following requirements/prerequisites for IT implementation were taken into account at the City of Bützow

     a. Outline the requirements of the PB presentation on the website
     b. Outline the participation formats on the website
     c. Consideration for the creation of a new, individual IT tool

The **a. Presentation of the participatory budget** (information, documentation, process, deadlines) also considering publication obligations on the part of the funding body was no difficulty within the municipal website and could be implemented easily and quickly.

As **b. Participation formats**, the following formats were to be developed according to the overall process:

- Proposal form
- Voting form
- Commenting on and publishing the proposals

Each of these had to be individually outlined, planned and individually developed. The **proposal form** (cf. Figure 1) was developed in alignment with the statute and the proposal card. The pre-screening step, category and budget classification, mandatory information, individual data protection agreement as well as the display and input option on mobile devices had to be taken into account here.

After the end of the proposal phase, the City of Bützow checks the **feasibility** of the individual proposals and carries out a cost estimate in each case. Duplicates of proposals are merged if possible, and any open questions are clarified with the proposers. Proposals that are rejected as not feasible or exceed the maximum budget are not put to the vote later. To ensure transparency, reasons for rejection are communicated publicly.

At the time, it was also planned to publish the proposals before the review phase and to allow a **comment/rating function** for other visitors. Since in this case the proposals would be publicly visible on the website Bützow.de, an initial basic check is considered indispensable. Only proposals that contain anti-constitutional content or are obviously not meant seriously should be sorted out here. If there is any ambiguity, the submitter may be contacted and, if desired, kept informed about the current status of his or her proposal (by e-mail). After

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considering these and other various criteria, data protection requirements and the benefits for PB, the idea of a comment/rating function was rejected.
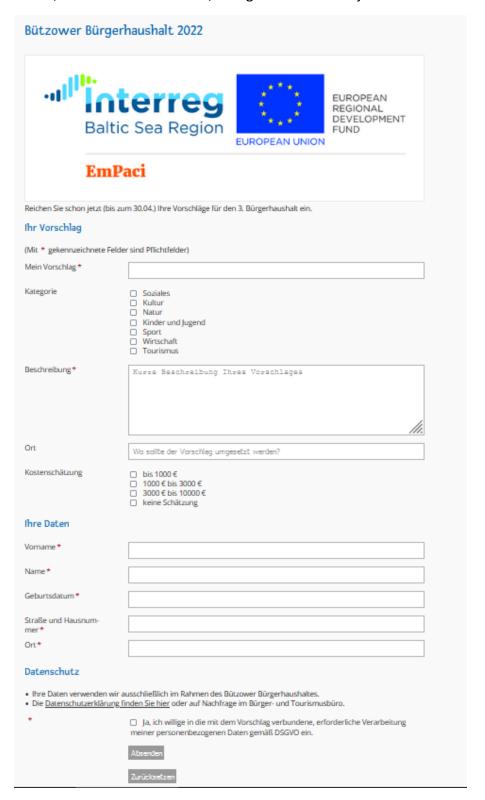
Bützower Bürgerhaushalt 2022

Reichen Sie schon jetzt (bis zum 30.04.) Ihre Vorschläge für den 3. Bürgerhaushalt ein.

Ihr Vorschlag

(Mit * gekennzeichnete Felder sind Pflichtfelder)

Mein Vorschlag *

Kategorie
- ☐ Soziales
- ☐ Kultur
- ☐ Natur
- ☐ Kinder und Jugend
- ☐ Sport
- ☐ Wirtschaft
- ☐ Tourismus

Beschreibung *
Kurze Beschreibung Ihres Vorschlages

Ort
Wo sollte der Vorschlag umgesetzt werden?

Kostenschätzung
- ☐ bis 1000 €
- ☐ 1000 € bis 3000 €
- ☐ 3000 € bis 10000 €
- ☐ keine Schätzung

Ihre Daten

Vorname *

Name *

Geburtsdatum *

Straße und Hausnummer *

Ort *

Datenschutz

- Ihre Daten verwenden wir ausschließlich im Rahmen des Bützower Bürgerhaushaltes.
- Die Datenschutzerklärung finden Sie hier oder auf Nachfrage im Bürger- und Tourismusbüro.

*   ☐ Ja, ich willige in die mit dem Vorschlag verbundene, erforderliche Verarbeitung meiner personenbezogenen Daten gemäß DSGVO ein.

[Absenden]

[Zurücksetzen]

Figure 1: Final design proposal form[4]

After the review phase, all proposals are published in a **proposal booklet**[5] and presented in pdf-format on the website. The proposals can also be viewed on a map in the booklet and are filtered by categories.

Setting up the **voting form**, in an online format was not feasible with the available resources. The main hurdles that made the online implementation impossible by the end of the EmPaci project were the lack of resources on the part of the system provider and the automatic real-time check between online and offline voting to prevent double voting.

The IT process took into account the identification of online voters. Various possibilities were discussed, e.g. sending a unique access code to all residents, sending the access code on request and also verification of the voters. Minimal security gaps were found in each method, so that the decision was made to manually check the voters against the list of eligible voters and to separate the online and offline voting phase.

Thus, external providers of survey and voting tools were used for online voting, which were able to fulfil all the display requirements and functionalities for the purpose.

3.   Feasibility check for practicability and resource availability

In the course of the development of the stand-alone website, the development of an individual voting tool will be considered once again. For this, the goal of PB and the large number and variety of proposals must be taken into account. The city of Bützow aims to increase the participation rate to at least 10 %. In preparation for this, the quality of the presentation of the complexity of the participatory budget on the website and in the social media must be examined.

It should be noted that the voting process in participation procedures is particularly sensitive and susceptible to manipulation. The following options were therefore weighed up in a discussion with the EmPaci project partner University of Rostock:

1. Access codes for online voting: While all residents should be able to submit proposals without registering, only residents of Bützow with at least the age of 12 years should be able to vote. To simplify the voting process, a one-time access code could be used instead of personal data to legitimise the casting of votes. Ideally, a code would be sent to all authorised participants by post at the beginning of the submission phase. The identification of the eligible residents would be done with the help of data from the residents' registration office. At the

same time, the postal letter could be used to draw attention to the participatory budget, e.g. via a small flyer enclosed.

The code must meet common security criteria, i.e. it should not be easy to read. A 16-digit code with numbers is conceivable, as it is, for example, widely used for voucher cards. However, it cannot be ruled out that such a code could be passed on to relatives, for example, who would then cast several votes.

2. Synchronisation between online and offline voting: One of the requirements for the Bützow participatory budget is that voting should not only be possible online, but also physically, in order to cover as many target groups as possible. A small Bützow participatory budget stand/booth at a local folk festival was mentioned as an example of this. Identification could then be done by ID card, users could either vote by slip of paper or physically with, for example, coins[6] that are thrown into vases depending on the proposal. Manipulation prevention should be provided to ensure that no person votes twice. Several approaches were discussed here:

a) **Blocking of online voting for the period of the offline event:** On-site verification of those voting. Disadvantages: Only feasible for short durations, as online users usually expect 24/7 availability of online services.
b) **Live synchronisation of the voters:** During voting, offline voters are removed from the list of eligible voters live, e.g. on a tablet or notebook. This would prevent multiple voting. Disadvantages: Permanent online connection required, high personnel costs.
c) **Checking only afterwards:** A check to see whether a person has voted twice takes place only after the voting phase has ended. However, it is then questionable which of the two votes is invalid (online/offline, first vote cast, both votes). Disadvantages: Not compatible with a secret ballot, possibly non-transparent.

For the 1st and 2nd Bützow participatory budgets, the town of Bützow has decided to add a one-week offline voting option to a two-week online voting option. Double voting is avoided by matching the online voters before the voting card is issued. This procedure can be re-revised for future participatory budgets. In any case, media breaks between online and offline voting options should be considered.

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[6] Cf. participatory budget of the city of Eberswalde: https://www.eberswalde.de/Buergerbudget.2159.0.html