

# INCREASING CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN eGOVERNANCE

## Key information

- Location: **Tartu (Estonia)**
- Population: **99 400**
- Involved in URBACT network: **INTERACTIVE CITIES**
- More information: <http://urbact.eu/interactive-cities>



Tartu used its participation in the URBACT network INTERACTIVE CITIES to develop and test actions for strengthening citizen participation in urban planning and participatory budgeting, with a particular focus on young people. Its approved Integrated Action Plan is part of an ongoing process of strengthening the city's eGovernance.



Tartu is a pretty university town in eastern Estonia

### A strong background in eGovernance

Tartu, Estonia's second largest city, has invested strongly in improving citizen participation through the digitalisation of administrative processes, including an e-government platform and e-voting. Nevertheless, key challenges remained the relatively low participation of young people and the constant and rapid evolution of the sector.

This desire to push further and deeper in issues of eGovernance led Tartu to join the URBACT INTERACTIVE CITIES network. The resulting Integrated Action Plan focuses on practical actions to help city officials use e-tools to: better engage citizens in reorganising urban spaces; improve the participatory budgeting process and outcomes; and mobilise young people to participate more actively in such processes.

Lilian Lukka, Communications Manager in Tartu City Government, explains that by working with youth organisations, NGOs, politicians and city officials in various activities of brainstorming, crowdsourcing and URBACT Local Group meetings "we managed to thoroughly consider our own weak points and set ourselves activities. We would still probably have moved in this direction, although perhaps not as methodically or consistently."

"Collaboration with other cities, learning from their experience and the feedback we got about Tartu's practices [was also] invaluable," highlights Ms Lukka. "There's no question that we got some good ideas and inspiration from the other cities. Some examples that spring to mind are Lisbon's experience of participatory budgeting and Paris' actions that benefited small shops."

### Engaging young people in participatory budgeting

Since 2013, Tartu has spent 1% of the city's annual investment budget through participatory budgeting. Citizens can submit their ideas on what could be done in the city, comment on them and eventually vote on them in an online tool (VOLIS). The two ideas that receive the most votes from residents each year are implemented by the city government.

A meeting was held in January 2017 with 16 - 19 year-olds to explore the reasons why this age group accounted for only 3% of those who voted in the process. The main challenges were found to be ones of perception, with young people feeling that such political processes were "complicated", "boring" or that their ideas would never be chosen.

Tartu supported young people to make videos introducing the participatory budget to other young people, including one starring a well-known Estonian stand-up comedian. The videos were distributed in various interactive channels by the young people themselves. There was a resulting increase in ideas submitted by young people and about subjects more closely related to youth.

### Testing the idea collection map

Tartu also piloted an 'idea collection map' – a crowdsourcing solution in which people share their proposals – for major investments or minor improvements – with only a few words on a city map. It contrasts strongly with traditional approaches requiring citizens to submit written amendments to lengthy written documents. The process was supported by an ambitious campaign using videos and posters.

Jarno Laur, Tartu's Deputy Mayor for Urban Development and Planning 2013-2017, is enthusiastic about the results: "We had more than 100 ideas collected this way that would normally not be presented... most of their ideas were great... Usually people are against something, but this time it was surprisingly constructive." Suggestions ranged from cycle



The project investigated young people's low engagement with participatory policy-making

paths and playgrounds to the more ambitious establishment of a school and new houseboat infrastructure.

The collection map provides investment ideas to city planners that might not emerge through participatory budgeting – for being too expensive or too locally specific to win a city-wide popular vote. The Tartu experience also suggests that valuable proposals can miss out under participatory budgeting through weaknesses in their marketing campaign.

The digital approach extended to the city's resulting Masterplan. Jarno Laur highlights that a masterplan is usually "something like 240 pages of rather heavy text. But in this version we have different information layers that everybody can switch off or on. For example you can see maps of schools combined with bicycle roads and that makes it easier for citizens to understand what is going on."

### Lasting impact

Lilian Lukka highlights that "The [URBACT Local Group] convened within the framework of the project will hereinafter remain a strong cooperation partner to the city." Furthermore, the actions defined by the group have been approved by the city as an Integrated Action Plan which are now being implemented. "All projects and cooperation networks launched during the URBACT project will continue and be further consolidated."

The tested actions have already had positive knock-on effects. Tartu's 2019 Youth Council elections will use the same tool as the participatory budgeting vote. Ms Lukka adds that: "Based on our initial experience we are using the same idea collection process for a number of other projects, such as the planning of locations for Tartu's public bicycle sharing system and the application process for the 2024 European Capital of Culture."

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*Lilian Lukka*