

The background is a solid pink color. It features several geometric elements: a thin white triangle in the top left corner, a thin black line running diagonally from the top right towards the bottom left, and another thin black line running diagonally from the middle right towards the bottom right. The word "DIGITAL" is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font, positioned in the upper left area of the page.

DIGITAL

A guide on local practices
of digital participation

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DEMOCRACY



DIGITAL



DEMOCRACY



A guide on local practices
of digital participation

Text by: Anne de Zeeuw and Josien Pieterse, Netwerk Democratie
Designed by: Felipe Duarte Studio - felipeduartestudio.com
Contact: info@netdem.nl | www.netdem.nl
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Network Democratie (Network Democracy) is a platform for democratic innovation committed to building a resilient democracy in which citizens are better involved and in which they can actively contribute, possibly with the help of technology. Network Democratie connects theory and practice by stimulating the development of public instruments and the sharing of knowledge and practices in democratic innovation on a local, national and international level.

For more information, visit www.netdem.nl



Summary



Preface.... page 08

- > *Introduction.... page 10*
- > *About Digital Democracy.... page 14*
- > *Interview with Consul.... page 18*



1. Gathering internal support.... page 24

- > *Research by Rathenau Insituut.... page 25*
- > *Case study by OpenStad in Amsterdam.... page 34*
- > *Inspiration from Taiwanese digital democracy.... page 40*



2. Designing a successful

participation process.... page 44

- > *Case study by the city of Groningen.... page 56*
- > *Interview with David Reilly from PB Scotland..... page 60*
- > *PB projects by Angus Council..... page 64*



3. Using democratic technology.... page 66

- > *A case study by Danes je nov dan in Slovenia.... page 70*



Afterword.... page 78

Preface

Preface

In 2011, we established Network Democratie to involve more people in democracy and thereby strengthen the existing formal democratic infrastructure through new methods and (digital) instruments. Now, almost 10 years later, we can see what a crucial role our digital environment plays in elections and in shaping our democratic (un)freedoms. Digital developments are moving at a furious pace and the possibilities for citizens to use them for political decision-making seem to be in their infancy, with some exceptions. It is precisely these examples that form an inspiration for Network Democratie to build upon.

We see the most interesting developments at the local level: in the cities. That is why from 2017 onwards, Network Democratie and the Dutch Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations took the initiative to strengthen local digital democracy in the Netherlands by sharing knowledge and building a learning community. At first, this was done by introducing Dutch municipalities to a number of successful digital participation tools and practical experiences of other municipalities from abroad. Over the past three years, Dutch municipalities have become acquainted with various European developments in digital democracy through meetings and workshops, with a special focus on the use of open source participation tools. Consequently, Dutch municipalities have formed coalitions in order to work together on developing various open source instruments and to deploy these in the local context to involve citizens in decision-making. We are proud to see how Dutch developments, in turn, are being shared abroad. In this publication we aim to bring together the acquired knowledge and experiences that we have accumulated over the years in a concise guide to digital democracy. Our hope is that it will inspire both municipalities in the Netherlands and abroad.

In three chapters, this guide offers advice to local governments on how to get started with already existing instruments. Instead of being based on scientific research, the lessons that are shared in the following chapters are based on practical experiences at a local level and insights that emerged during conversations, meetings and workshops that took place in recent years. Throughout the chapters, different cities share their examples of existing digital democracy practices.

This English-language publication has been produced in collaboration with the Ministry of the Interior and also shares experiences from the Interreg Like! project of the municipality of Groningen.

Introduction

Introduction

Digital technology is increasingly becoming part of our daily lives. As such, there are more options for citizens to be informed and organized. They are also better able to follow and assess the work of the municipality. For a growing group of people, this means that they are actively involved in decision-making processes or making their opinion publicly known.

Municipal services and communication are also increasingly being digitized. Digitization plays an important role not only in the dissemination of information and communication by governments, but also in the decision-making process. Therefore, we need to make way for new forms of input in which the changing role of citizens is recognized. The use of social media creates an exponential growth in interaction between municipalities and citizens. In addition, an increasingly large part of the population finds its traditional participation possibilities, such as voting or becoming a member of a political party, not inviting or insufficiently accessible.

As part of these developments, the use of digital resources in shaping policy and in decision-making processes is increasing.

Citizens in the network society

Civic movements, protests and social media reports show that people are indeed involved and sometimes concerned about issues that affect them and that they want to participate in these issues. Instead of traditional ways of political participation, citizens take their own initiative to improve their living environment, or create their own alternatives to public facilities. However, when people are unable to connect with these bottom-up initiatives, it turns out they are often hesitant to share their ideas with the municipality.

The gap between the municipality and citizens stands in contrast with the communication and collaboration opportunities that the network society has to offer. Authorities can play a role by creating platforms that give all citizens an opportunity to participate in the decision-making process, both offline and online.

Digital tools offer new possibilities for involving large groups of people in shaping their own living environment. Most importantly, digital tools also make it easier to find consensus between different perspectives, to make better-informed decisions and to increase trust between the government and citizens.

The active participation of citizens in the decision-making process is a valuable part of democracy. Enabling constructive citizen participation is therefore essential if we want to strengthen local democracy.

In this context, communication via networks is not 'something extra' that is added to the more hierarchical work of the government, but a necessary strategy to achieve and account for results. It offers an opportunity to gain more insight into people's preferences and can provide more support, legitimacy and lead to better decision-making.

Through more interactive communication with society, it is possible for local authorities to be more responsive. Digital platforms offer an opportunity for authorities to relate to citizens differently because they can be involved in a structural way. People are not only invited to respond to existing proposals, but also to participate in shaping a policy proposal.

The need for involvement

Many municipalities are looking for new decision-making procedures and ways of involving citizens. There is a growing awareness among authorities that involving people at an early stage in the decision-making process offers many advantages. Allowing space for new forms of participation can no longer be separated from current forms of governance. Improving democracy starts with enabling real participation and involvement.

“Democracy is not the governing by the best in our society; such a thing is called aristocracy. ... Democracy, on the other hand, thrives by letting a diversity of voices speak. It is about equal control, about the equal right ‘to determine political action’.”
(David van Reybrouck, *Against Elections*).

Technological developments make it possible to add some participatory and transparency-promoting elements to administrative processes so that they can better meet today's requirements. Digital technology, for example, offers the opportunity to strengthen local democracy by offering new participation tools to both the municipality and citizens.

Often, municipalities wish to strengthen local democracy and to give more space to people's ideas, but there are doubts as to how to shape this; how to truly work differently. Government officials also often find it difficult to relinquish decisions and actually share control.

Internationally, digital technology is increasingly being used to allow people to influence public decision-making. In Madrid, an online participation platform is used to allocate 100 million Euros of the city's budget in collaboration with residents every year. In Taiwan, citizens are consulted online about controversial policy issues. And in Amsterdam, citizens of different districts are involved online in redesigning public space. Nowadays, there are many examples of local digital democracy and a lot can be learned from each other's practices.

A common denominator is that merely offering digital tools does not automatically guarantee more participation, it requires more than that. This guide brings together the recommendations and lessons from various practical experiences to provide an overview of how an online participation process can be successfully created.

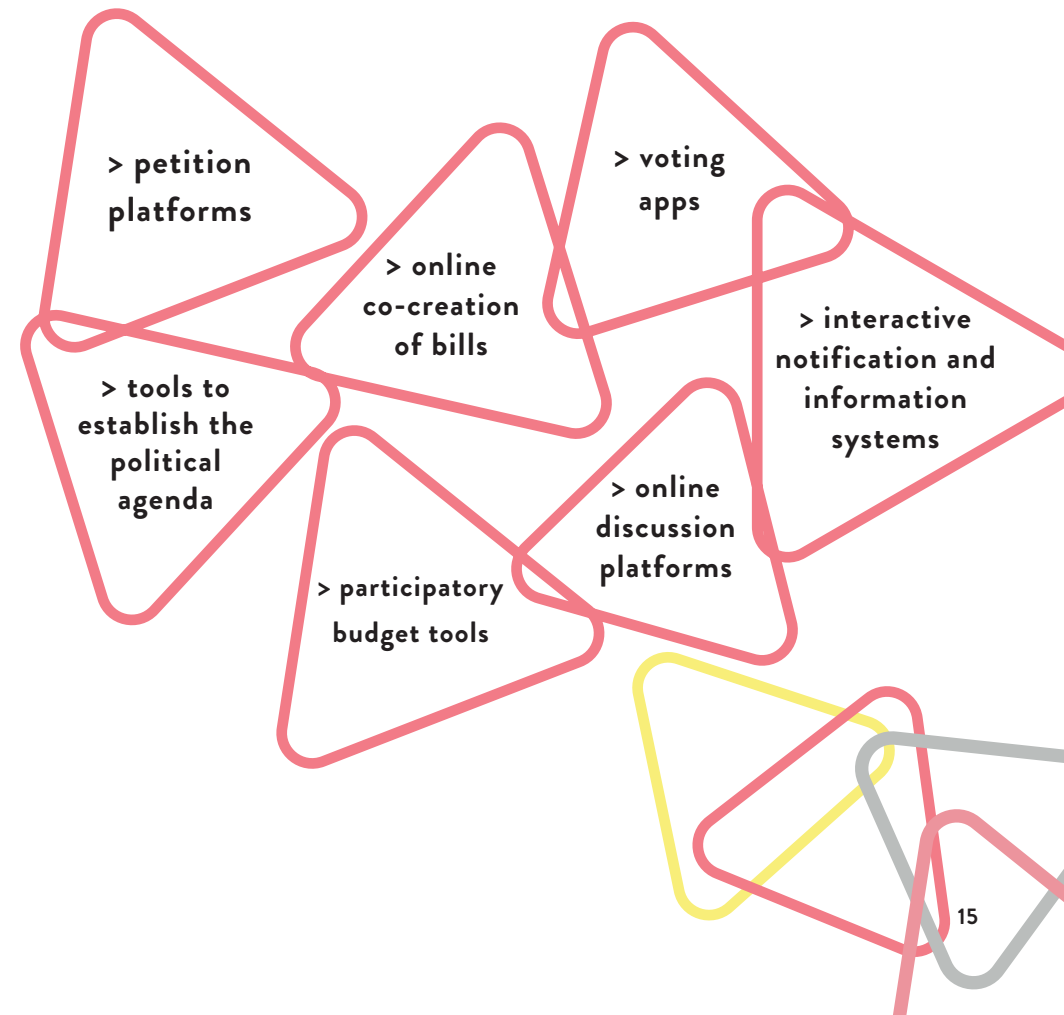
About Digital Democracy

Digital technology offers individuals the opportunity to exert more influence on the political and administrative process. It also offers opportunities for groups of people to organize around a shared goal. Digital democracy therefore covers all kinds of platforms and instruments on which knowledge, ideas and individual views can be created, exchanged and brought together.

Digital democracy=

Using digital technology to support democratic decision-making processes.

Examples are:



There is therefore no definite definition of digital democracy. In principle, it is about realizing democratic processes in the digital domain. Digital democracy is often linked to terms such as public consultation (crowdsourcing) and collective intelligence (wisdom of the crowd).

Public consultation means getting a group of people involved by encouraging them to post comments, share knowledge and work on an issue collectively. By bringing individual arguments and ideas together, often with the help of technology, a form of collective intelligence is created. Together we are smarter. If properly facilitated, a large group of people can achieve more than the sum of its parts - this is utilizing collective intelligence.

Digital democracy utilizes collective intelligence by offering people both more direct and more interactive opportunities for participation. This means that people are given the opportunity to be directly involved in decision-making processes by, for instance, voting on a proposal they support, or voting on projects that they believe money should be spent on. At the same time, digital democracy offers the opportunity to jointly come up with new solutions by exchanging ideas and arguments. Establishing this type of public consultation is called 'deliberative democracy'. Central to this are information gathering, consultation and the exchange of arguments.

In this way, even between elections, citizen's voices can be heard in a continuous way. By enabling better communication and interaction with the municipality, digital tools offer citizens the opportunity to have a say in decisions that affect them and to experience ownership of the democratic process.

Digital democracy only works if people are given a real say. If the interactions and exchange have no influence on the final decision-making, it makes little sense to participate in the process. It has also been found that participation without influence is potentially disastrous for citizens' willingness to participate elsewhere, as well as their confidence in the government. Digital democracy offers the tools, but they must be part of an existing decision-making process.

The more people take part in a participatory process, the more they become familiar with the various considerations and interests involved. Making decisions about public space, the city budget, or new legislation offers people the chance to gain new democratic experiences.

Involving people in agenda setting, policy making and transparent decision-making are important parts of local democracy. Digital tools can improve these processes so that they fit within the countless possibilities that the network society has to offer.

Good use of digital democracy:



When digital democracy is properly applied, citizens can gain a better understanding of local policy-making and have more opportunities to participate in the process. Consequently, this has a positive effect on the legitimacy of the local government. Transparent decision-making processes and digital participation possibilities thus contribute to the support and quality of local policy.

Interview

Interview



Miguel Arana Catania is the former director of Citizen Participation of the Madrid city council and initiator of the international Consul project. He has worked on designing and implementing digital instruments and participation strategies in various political spaces such as Ahora Madrid and the 15M movement.

Yago Bermejo Abati was project manager of the Collective Intelligence for Democracy Lab within innovation hub Medialab-Prado in Madrid. Here, research and prototyping is linked to the Open Government and Citizen Participation programmes of the municipality of Madrid.



Interview on Consul: from protest movement to democratic innovation

In the last five years, the city of Madrid has been the epicentre of innovative practices by trying to integrate aspects of deliberative and participatory democracy into the existing political structure. The digital platform '[Consul](#)' was developed to give citizens more say in the traditional two-party system and to make use of people's collective intelligence to create a more inclusive and transparent city. Decentralizing policy proposals and decision-making addresses the growing demand for responsiveness. The methods and technology from Madrid have spread worldwide and more than 100 governments are using their own versions.

How did Consul start and what need did it arise from?

Miguel: The Consul platform was established after an administrative change took place in the city of Madrid in 2015. Local authorities prioritized new channels for input and they were very ambitious. The idea was to connect everyone in the city and for that we needed a digital platform, because otherwise this would have been impossible.

That's how we started setting up Consul, but luckily we had experience from the civil movement of previous years. Digital participation had already been used on a large scale in the 15M Indignados movement - the largest protest movement in Spain's democratic history. Many of the people involved with Consul had been active in this movement. So we used this experience from the previous four years to design the Consul platform. We were essentially confronted with the same problems: how do we create a space where thousands of people can decide on ideas together and how can we use this collective intelligence?

The Consul instruments and the local platform Decide Madrid were created by the city council, so it is not the civil movement that tried to cooperate with the local government but rather the government that opened itself up to the people. We worked from the outside in and this was very valuable because, even though we worked as part of the government and had this institutional role, we knew from our own experience what the situation in society was.

What motivated the municipality of Madrid to open up to initiatives like this?

Miguel: Madrid is quite a unique case. The party in the new government was a civilian party, which was very new. It was set up a few months before the elections by citizens who had no previous experience in political movements and institutions. The idea that citizens must work together to make decisions was therefore prevalent within the party, so that's one of the reasons why it has become one of the priorities of the new government.

Yago: The input from the civil movement, showed us the connection between direct democracy and collective intelligence and the possibility of linking these two things together to create a 'techno-political hypothesis', as we call it. This entails that connected groups of people conduct politics on the basis of bottom-up proposals. That is what we hoped to achieve. It was an attempt and we still think it will happen at some point, although probably not in Madrid. It was this hypothesis of direct democracy and collective intelligence with interconnected communities and individuals that would create a new administrative paradigm.

Miguel: In addition to strengthening the power of control, we also focused on developing open source instruments and actively sharing them with other governments. A factor that often acts as an incentive for more reluctant politicians to implement such changes is that other governments are already doing it. If they see that it is a general trend and realize that this also gives them the opportunity to collaborate in new ways with other governments, they will be more open to these digital methods. That means that sometimes it is not enough to just share the democratic value of the project or how it can improve efficiency, but also to show that this type of technology and methods are becoming commonplace all over the world.

What do you think is an important result of the Consul project?

Miguel: The project already offers more than 130 local authorities and organizations from 33 different countries the tools to innovate their decision-making processes. The place where the effect has been greatest so far is Madrid, where more than 400 million Euros have been allocated through participatory budgeting in recent years, and 1200 policy proposals have been made and voted on by citizens without any interference from institutions. This is really very special.

Interview

Yago: I think digital platforms have proved very useful in creating original proposals and showing the creativity and diversity that society has to offer. At the same time, digital interaction acts as a way to create new collectivity of people who live in different places, but who can still connect to create ideas, knowledge and ultimately policy proposals.

Can participatory technology such as Consul also be misused?

Miguel: It may sound strange, but I'm also happy if populists, or anyone else, want to use these instruments. By definition, they cannot be appropriated in a bad way because of the way they are designed. They are structured in such a way that they place power outside the person in charge. So it doesn't matter who is in charge - it doesn't matter if it's a populist, a socialist or whatever - because the method only works by granting the decision-making authority to the citizens.

How do you see the future of Consul outside of Madrid?

Miguel: It is time for other governments to further develop and share this type of public tools. There is not just one way in which digital democracy can be shaped. What we have experienced in our cooperation with other governments is that no matter how much resources and knowledge we share, ultimately they have to experience certain things themselves locally. They have to try, fail, abandon, understand what the problem is, and then try to do it again, but better. We put a lot of effort into guiding them through this process by saying, 'don't do that, do this, focus on that' and in many cases they just don't listen; they prefer to do it the way they like best and they have to go through the trial and error themselves.



Miguel Arana Catania during New Democracy - Beyond the experiment, 20 June 2017 in Amsterdam.

The most important thing that we have learned with this participation process and other experiments is that people can be trusted. That means that you really have to rely on the people involved in the processes from the start and relinquish control. So if, for example, you are going to budget in a participatory way, it must be a substantial amount and you really have to let people decide what they want to do with it. If you start small and throw up too many barriers, it won't work. You have to start big from the start, choose the most relevant process and above all trust people!



[Consul Democracy Foundation](#)

The Consul Democracy Foundation is founded by a global network of renowned human rights, democracy, open government, civic tech and open source software organisations. The not-for-profit organisation aims to coordinate the further development of the open source Consul project, keep the tool free and open for any organisation to use in democratic processes, build a self supporting community of users, and play an active role in spreading knowledge and best practices on fair and inclusive digital democracy.

1. Gathering internal support

1. Gathering internal support

The aim of creating political and internal support is to build a participation process in which citizens can trust that their input in policy and decision-making will be taken into account. Political support also serves to dispel the prejudice that online participation processes could be a threat to representative democracy.

How do you involve political representatives in online participation processes?

Digital democracy requires sharing of control and allowing citizens to participate in decisions regarding policy. This is only possible if the municipal organization, including political representatives, is open to the input of citizens and recognizes the value of it. One of the most frequently asked questions from participation project leaders is therefore how they can properly involve politicians in organizing online participation.

The Rathenau Instituut conducted research among Dutch clerks on how digital citizen participation can strengthen local democracy. In the contribution below, they explain the opportunities that online participation can offer municipal councillors and their role as representatives of the people.

Creating support with digital citizen participation: #how?

The [Rathenau Instituut's](#) report 'Clerks and Digitization - Towards a Stronger Local Democracy' (Griffiers en Digitalisering – naar een sterkere lokale democratie) addresses one of the key challenges for local politicians: staying connected with society. Councillors are looking for new ways to strengthen their ties with residents. But this is complicated. Often, they are occupied with the policy agenda of the municipality and the interaction with the municipal council. Additionally, monitoring the Mayor and Executive board often overshadows the importance of inspiring these politicians to give more voice to the people. This is a missed opportunity.

Involving residents not only leads to new knowledge and perspectives, but also strengthens support for local democracy.

Not all council members want to use citizen participation to the same extent. Some feel that their task as elected representatives is to make their own judgments in the public interest and from a certain political viewpoint – ‘without interference or consultation.’ Others consider themselves the voice of the people and seek close contact. Council members differ in the extent to which they want to be bound by the voices of society - they all see the relationship between representative and participatory democracy differently. After all, greater involvement of people in political decision-making leads to a shift in the distribution of power between citizens and politicians. It also opens up more possibilities to arrange things through informal relationships between residents and the municipal council. This can come at the expense of the possibilities for councillors to determine the course of the municipality through political means.

Clerks also think differently about their role in supporting the representative function of the council. Some want to leave citizen participation to the board as much as possible, not only because of a lack of time and capacity, but also because they believe councillors should first be concerned with their own constituents. Others believe that the representative function requires a visible role for councillors in citizen participation.

The Rathenau report provides tools for organizing citizen participation according to the council's own needs, using digital instruments. This is done on three levels:

Level 1

Making politics transparent

The basic aim is to make the democratic process transparent by providing insight into the debate, decision-making and underlying documents. Greater transparency increases democratic legitimacy.

Level 2

Consulting residents

The next step is to allow citizens to participate in consultation procedures. This allows the council to respond more directly to people's needs and show a responsive attitude. As a result, people's concerns are put on the agenda sooner, and the wishes and priorities of the public are better reflected in discussions and policy.

Level 3

Allowing residents to participate in decision-making

One step further is actually giving residents control of power - within set frameworks. This involves facilitating people's initiatives, or partially transferring decision-making authority. This way, a council gives residents more control over their own living environment.

Connection with society

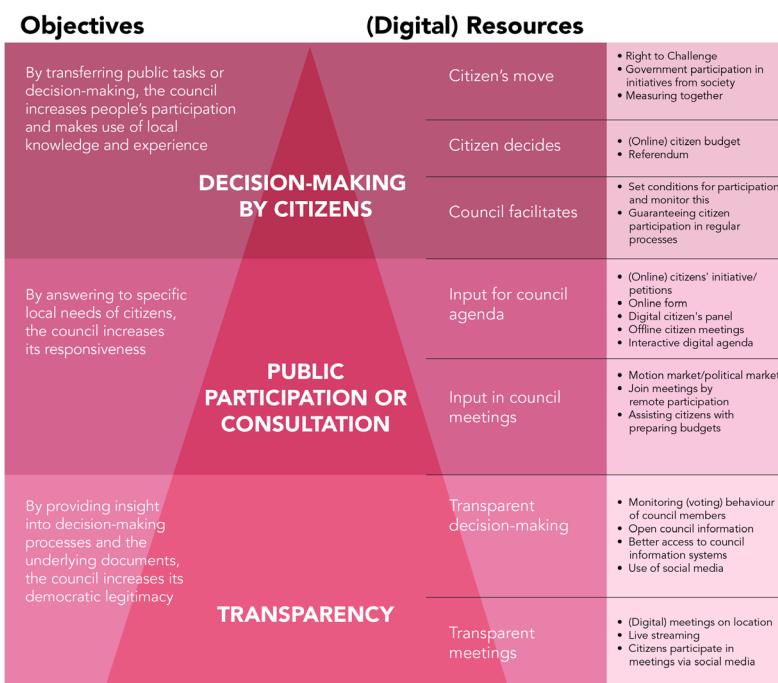


Figure 1: Connection with society

Figure 1 shows which (digital) resources may be suitable for achieving the various goals. The goals are arranged from bottom to top, from “basic” to increasing openness. It is a matter of discussion and choice to find a good balance between representation and participation in any specific municipality. What is desirable and realistic depends on the involved council members’ views regarding democracy and their ambitions. To what extent do they believe it is their job to make a connection with the people; and when is it a matter for each individual political party? The nature of the local administrative culture plays a role in this: how much mutual trust is there, how much room is there to experiment and innovate?

Councillors and the clerk must come to a mutual agreement about what is expected from citizen involvement and customize accordingly. Keep in mind that citizen involvement is not a quick fix. It must be carefully prepared and executed, otherwise there is a danger of an adverse effect. From another research conducted by the Rathenau Instituut into 22 initiatives of digital citizen involvement, six conditions emerged for successful participation with political impact:

- 1 a clear connection with a formal agenda or a specific decision;
- 2 clarity about the purpose and the process of participation;
- 3 feedback to the participants as part of the process;
- 4 clarity about the method of aggregating the input (for example, through voting or prioritizing);
- 5 an active and differentiated mobilization and communication strategy to engage residents;
- 6 future prospects: citizen participation as a learning process over time.

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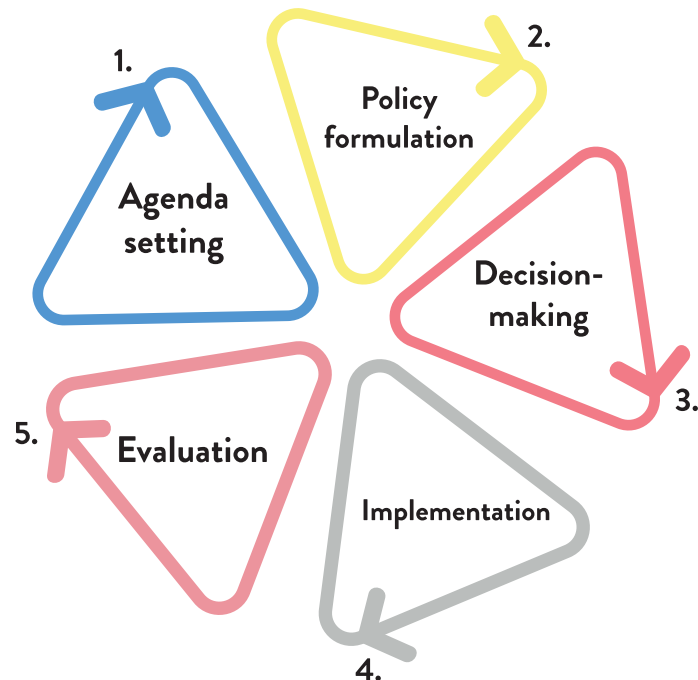
How can you choose the right type of digital participation?

The use of online participation has many advantages. It makes it possible to involve a larger and more diverse group of people than, for example, with a consultation evening. Nevertheless, consideration must be given to whether or not there is a need for online participation. Not every subject is suitable for online participation. Sometimes a subject is too complex to allow citizens to make concrete choices, or too many parameters have already been set to be able to make an impact.

Every situation requires a different type of online participation. Which type you choose depends on the following two questions:

- ➔ What do you want to achieve?
- ➔ What degree of participation is appropriate?

What you want to achieve depends on the phase of policy-making in which citizen participation takes place. Online participation can take place during the entire policy-making cycle. The different phases consist of:



A different form of online participation is possible in each phase. With agenda setting the focus lies on getting to know people's priorities. With policy formation, the focus is on developing plans and getting ideas. In decision-making, citizens can participate by indicating their preference or by distributing money. In policy implementation, residents are asked to come up with their own initiatives. Finally, policy evaluation is about collecting opinions, feedback and advice for better policy implementation.

In addition to the form of participation, the degree of participation must be chosen. In every policy phase, citizens can be asked to advise or to participate in the decision-making process. Both the municipality of Groningen and the OpenStad innovation team of the municipality of Amsterdam developed worksheets that can help project teams to design an online participation process. Both worksheets are designed to formulate a set of questions and to further shape the process in collaboration with stakeholders.



<https://gemeente.groningen.nl/participatiewerkboek>

OPENSTAD INTAKE FORM amsterdam.nl/openstad Gemeente Amsterdam

Project Information Name Team	Objective / Question (what is the task of the project?) Question Objective	Stakeholders (who should be at the table? Why?)	Interests (needs, obstacles, opportunities, what else is going on?)
Frameworks (political, technical, policy, etc. what has already been determined?)	Target audience (who are they? what influence do they have now?)	Participation (what is already happening? (online/offline) and why involve residents in this project?) This is already happening Objective of online participation in this project	Opportunities to involve residents (what influence can they have?)
Planning (process, how much time for (online) participation, at what moments / in which phase) 			

How do you connect internal departments with digital democracy?

To create internal support for an online participation process, it is important to continue to involve various departments in the municipality throughout the process. The input from residents will most likely not fit into pre-formed frameworks and requires good communication between departments. Knowledge of and involvement with the goal and the course of the process can help to create internal support within the organization.

These are some tips for involving internal departments:

- ▶ Connect the online process to existing policy agendas and programmes. Connecting to existing dossiers and issues where input from citizens is welcome increases the support to take the collected input seriously. It also ensures that the online participation process fits into the work processes of colleagues.
- ▶ Create short lines of communication, for example, ensure that the project leader maintains contact with the project team, the official initiating the project, the communication department and area teams. Also communicate regularly about the results of the process and ask stakeholders for feedback.

1. Gathering internal support

- ▶ Test the online platform internally before it goes live. This testing phase ensures that colleagues can experience how the online platform works and become involved in improving it.
- ▶ Give colleagues ownership of the platform. A good way to do this is to let colleagues moderate the platform.

How to set up a project team?

Within the project team it is advisable to organize at least the following roles:

Project leader

The project leader is the architect of the online participation process within the municipality and sets up the framework for the preparation, implementation and evaluation of the process.

Communications adviser

The use of digital means of participation is all about communication: both internal and external.

IT/functional manager

Because a new digital channel has to be added to the existing channels such as the municipal website, citizen portal and the like, IT involvement is very relevant.

It is advisable that the project team's first line of support at least involves the following people:

Council members, alderman or mayor

As mentioned earlier, the involvement of political representatives prior to the participation process is highly recommended: the stronger the political support, the better the digital participation process.

Participation employee and social worker

Together with an engaged colleague who knows what is going on in the neighbourhood, such as a social worker, youth worker, community worker or involved neighbourhood team, the content of the online participation process can be properly designed.

Case study OpenStad in Amsterdam

1. Gathering internal support

[OpenStad](#) (OpenCity) is an innovation team of the municipality of Amsterdam with the aim of creating accessible and interactive tools for collaboration between inhabitants of Amsterdam and the municipality. The innovation team investigates how digital tools can improve local processes and decision-making of the municipality by looking at the wishes and needs of all parties involved in each project and translating these into an online participation tool.

The working method

- ▶ **Step 1. Intake & defining the question**
Colleagues within the municipality that want to involve citizens in their projects can turn to OpenStad for support and expertise. The OpenStad team does an intake and together with them maps out the question, the process, the target group and the degree of influence. Can online participation add anything? An estimate is made of the work.
- ▶ **Step 2. Assessment of needs**
A small-scale or more extensive research is conducted into the needs of residents, so that the online tool fits with their questions and motivations.
- ▶ **Step 3. Matching the question with the tools**
An assessment is made of the extent to which existing tools match the demand, the process and the desired digital interaction and influence. How much customization is needed?
- ▶ **Step 4. Customize the tool**
A tailor-made tool is made for the project in which existing 'Lego pieces' of functionalities are deployed or a new customized functionality is built.

Starting points

- ▶ Learn by doing, testing and improving.
- ▶ Focus on the users.
- ▶ The objective is to improve interaction with the municipality and enhance the influence of citizens in local decision-making.
- ▶ Communicate clear rules for participants.
- ▶ Participation is always connected to decision-making.
- ▶ Online and offline resources reinforce each other.
- ▶ Participation tools that are created by Amsterdam are scalable and reusable by others.

The municipality of Amsterdam has deployed digital tools in all sorts of projects, such as online voting for projects in public space, online design competitions, agenda-setting tools for local district committees, co-creation of a neighbourhood vision, or drawing up an action plan with an online interactive map. OpenStad also supports participatory budgeted projects in the various city districts. In 2019, 52.000 people in Amsterdam budgeted 1 million Euros online in three districts. The turnout for the participatory budget was between 18.7 percent and 13.2 percent of the number of people allowed to vote.

In neighborhoods with a low education level additional measures were taken to adjust the online platform to local needs, for example by making the website multilingual and adding the functionality to share an idea via a whatsapp voice message. Additionally civil servants with tablets went into the neighborhood to different public places where they supported residents to learn about the platform and participate.

Open source collaboration

Other Dutch municipalities now also use Amsterdam's open source software. For example, the municipality of The Hague has used the software for the online division of budgets in two city districts. In 2019, Amsterdam and The Hague worked together to make the participatory budgeting software modular to be able to scale it themselves, but also to make the software more accessible to other municipalities. The municipalities of Alphen aan den Rijn, Haarlem and Utrecht have joined this open source partnership. Alphen aan de Rijn has now gone live with its own participatory budgeting site, the other municipalities will go live in April 2020.

1. Gathering internal support

Case study from The Hague

The municipality of The Hague has used the code of OpenStad Amsterdam to create a platform which allows residents to indicate which issues in their neighbourhood need attention. It is a good example of municipalities working together to develop each other's software. On the platform, residents could submit proposals on an online map about what needs to be renovated. Based on these proposals, a committee of residents then drew up concrete plans for the refurbishment of the neighborhood Nieuw Waldeck. After the municipality has made a calculation of the costs and has checked the plans for their feasibility, they are announced and all residents of the neighbourhood can vote for their favourite plan. This way, the available budget is spent well in collaboration with residents.

The screenshot shows the website for 'Buurtbudget Slotermeer Noordoost'. At the top, there is a header with the Gemeente Amsterdam logo, the title 'Buurtbudget Slotermeer Noordoost', and navigation links for English, Türkçe, and العربية. Below the header is a navigation bar with 'Home', 'Thema's', 'Plannen', 'Stuur uw plan in', and 'Mijn account'. The main content area features an aerial view of a residential neighborhood. Below the image, the text reads 'Buurtbudget Slotermeer Noordoost' and 'Maak uw droom voor de buurt waar!'. It then states: 'Stuur uw plan in voor één van de 3 thema's (Samen dingen doen; Cultuur & kansen creëren; Veilige, groene & prettige buurt) en bepaal waar €500.000 naar toe gaat.' There are two buttons: 'Bekijk de thema's' and 'Stuur uw plan in'. To the right of the text is an illustration of a person holding a large Euro coin and placing it into a box. Further right is a WhatsApp chat bubble containing the text 'WhatsApp helpdesk' and links to 'Stuur een bericht!', 'Send a message!', 'Lütfen mesaj yollayın!', and 'إرسال رسالة'. At the bottom right, there is a blue button with the text '017 plannen'.

CHECKLIST for creating internal support

Political support

- ☐ Focus on increasing democratic legitimacy
- ☐ Determine together with what purpose a connection with society is made
- ☐ Choose customized solutions per participation process
- ☐ Make sure a political representative is on board

Process design

- ☐ How does it fit in the policy cycle?
- ☐ What level of participation is possible?
- ☐ Design the process in collaboration with stakeholders

Internal support

- ☐ Connect with existing policy agendas
- ☐ Take an internal test and communicate transparently about the results
- ☐ Give councillors or the neighbourhood council ownership over the platform

Project team

- ☐ Involve a communications advisor
- ☐ In case of an open source tool, involve someone with IT knowledge
- ☐ Make sure there are short lines of communication with internal stakeholders and external ambassadors

Interview

Inspiration from Taiwanese digital democracy Four lessons from Audrey Tang



Network Democratie spoke with one of the most influential innovators of digital democracy today: Audrey Tang. As a programmer, Tang worked for the private sector before becoming a civic hacker and eventually Taiwan's first ever digital minister. Under her leadership, the Taiwanese government has implemented a series of groundbreaking developments in the field of Open Government that are inspiring local and national governments around the world.

1) The 'why' of digital democracy

Innovation (and in particular digital innovation) in the world of politics is sometimes viewed with scepticism and suspicion. The current democratic system in the West, which is typically based on the principle of debate, has been around for decades. The question therefore arises: why would you change anything?

Tang's answer is simple: "Change is not a necessity; it can be done as it has been done so far, but it is not really enough to provide bits of information and make people feel that their voices are being heard in the policy-making process once every four years."

According to her, this is the reason why we see the rise of a so-called social sector. "People mobilize in social movements because the pace at which the government is changing direction is not fast enough to tackle new problems."

"The result is that people take matters into their own hands, but if a government wants to be closer to people, it makes sense to also look at social innovation and technology. And then to apply some of the principles from these developments in our government so that governance remains relevant for people."

2) Important principle: 'Trust your citizens'

When asked which principles of social innovation should be included in governance, Tang's answer was again surprisingly simple: "The most important principle is by far to put trust in your citizens - and that is it! Everything else follows. We know that if we make our mistakes public, talk to people and show how we adapt to changing situations, we gain credibility, especially online."

"Similarly," she adds, "we turn to citizens when we are uncertain or when we are confronted with new problems, in order to investigate these problems together. By continuously doing this, people realize that if they complain, it also makes sense to put some of that energy into developing a solution."

"The first step is to trust people," she adds, "the second step is the use of social technology. Municipalities used to conduct surveys or hold consultations, both are expensive - a medium-sized municipality can maybe do five a year and it costs a lot of political willpower and capital because it's expensive and time-consuming. Open source online participation tools, on the other hand, are free. This method drastically reduces political costs, and where previously such a process had to be launched by a mayor or a minister, every department head can now start these conversations."

3) Reaching consensus in a polarized digital world

One of the participation tools that is used to crowdsource opinions in Taiwan is an open source platform called Polis. "You can just start a conversation, and people will reach a rough consensus a few months later."

"There is a misconception that digital spaces cultivate polarization when in fact these technologies have the potential to do the opposite: social media focus too much on divisions through the mechanism of spectacle that encourages marketable addiction cycles, but public participation instruments are designed to bring people closer together. Every time we do this, we can show that citizens are actually a community, that they all feel more or less the same about an emerging problem."

"We start with statistics, raw data and facts; then we ask people how they feel. Gradually, ideas start to emerge - the best ideas take people's feelings into account. Finally, we include those ideas in the policy agenda."

4) The domino effect of digital democracy in the government

Perhaps the most important thing is how you can put theory into practice - how do you get the organization on board?

"No one in the government would argue for more risks, for longer working hours or for less credibility - that is unheard of. By only working according to Pareto improvement (meaning, when progress is made, no one's situation worsens) we only continue work when all conditions such as more credibility and fewer risks are met. In other words, it is impossible for an administration to feel more fear, uncertainty or doubt about this way of working, the least they can say is that it is harmless."

"To become part of digital innovation you need to master the art of 'working out loud'. This means that you should not be afraid to let other ministries or departments of the local government know about your work. Initially, few ministries in Taiwan were interested in opening up their way of working. These were the 'usual suspects': the Ministry of Communications, Finance, Internal Affairs and Culture. However, more and more ministries became interested over time."

"In short, the implementation of digital democracy works through voluntary cooperation. If the forerunners experience synergy, they are soon prepared to involve more colleagues; if they see little synergy, they do not send people. But there is no need for them to criticize it."

2. Designing a successful participation process

2. Designing a successful participation process

The purpose of carefully designing a digital participation process is to ensure that the process connects to people's lives and that all participants feel proportionately motivated and facilitated to share their input. The result is an inclusive participation process that enhances the quality and legitimacy of the outcome.

How do you determine a suitable topic?



Small versus large

Especially if online participation is new, it is better to work with concrete and manageable topics so that the effect is noticeable by both the organization and residents. Concrete tasks, such as the redesign of a square or bicycle tunnel, make it easier for both sides to become engaged with the issue.

It takes time to educate people on how the democratic process works. To achieve this, a user community must be created for the tool. This is only possible if the tool is used long term and not only for matters with high urgency. For example, distributing part of the city or neighbourhood budget has a clear impact and is easy to implement because the budget has already been reserved for it. By repeating the process of participatory budgeting every year, more people get the opportunity to learn about the process.

Although it may be interesting for residents to talk about matters of high urgency, it is advisable to first carefully consider whether something is actually being done with the requested input. The most important prerequisite for a good topic is feasibility. Topics of high urgency with few options for implementation can damage the use of a digital tool. It is therefore best to alternate issues with a higher and lower intensity. Ultimately, the size of the issue is less important than formulating the right question, one that is relevant for the target group.

2. Designing a successful participation process

→ Bottom-up versus top-down

Many platforms offer the opportunity for both residents and the municipality to pitch an idea. Especially for citizens, it can be very disappointing if they have actively submitted ideas that are subsequently not used. If a tool is used that allows residents to submit proposals, it is important to include this input in existing participation processes. This can, for example, be done by giving the platform an agenda-setting function. The most supported ideas within a certain time-frame automatically are taken up by the municipality to respond upon. Beforehand, it should be clear for citizens what steps are taken to deal with proposals. Also for topics that are put on a platform top-down, it is important that these link up with existing participation projects and decision-making processes.

However, a question from the municipality is not something that residents automatically want to be involved with. A policy problem is not always a social problem as well. It is therefore important for the municipality to first formulate the right question.

→ Be clear about existing frameworks

For each topic, it is important to provide clear boundaries within which citizens can and cannot participate. Be clear about how the participation process works, frame the objectives and share them. Clearly communicate in advance what will happen with the results. Each platform must find a balance between predefined frameworks and flexibility to allow participants to make their own contribution.

Subsequently, don't turn it into a one-off project, but work towards structural collaborative decision-making by citizens.

How to arrive at a suitable communication strategy for online participation?

→ Ensure continuous communication

Dialogue and transparency are not only a result of the participation process; the process itself must also constantly remain transparent and interactive. Throughout the process feedback must be given by informing participants of the stage of the process and of the choices that are being made. This constant interaction has many positive effects and keeps people involved for a longer period of time.

When people have been involved in the entire process, the chance of them being satisfied with the outcome is much greater. Even if the results do not match with what they initially suggested.

So it is indeed possible for the municipality to say "no" if a certain proposal cannot be implemented. As long as there is openness regarding the considerations for rejecting a proposal. Being heard and exercising influence are the main drivers for citizens to participate.

→ Involve media, social organizations and social networks

Share milestones of the participation process with journalists and media such as newspapers, radio and television. Important moments are the launch, the start of a voting period, the announcement of the results and communication about the implementation of the results.

Creating a user community for a participation tool can be challenging. However, as a municipality you do not have to start from scratch. Often, communities and platforms where specific target groups come together already exist in the municipality or within a specific neighbourhood. The trick is to involve the right citizen networks and social organizations (for example NGOs, business associations, welfare organizations and migrant organizations, etc.) from the outset, as there is often a great deal of knowledge already present regarding a certain topic, and these organizations are able to reach certain target groups. It is also important to make it easy for key figures and ambassadors to share the content on the platform. Most users are generated by participants who share their own ideas with their private networks via social media.

The government must also play a participatory role in relation to other stakeholders.

How do you ensure that your online participation process is as inclusive as possible?

→ From diversity to inclusion

Involving different groups of citizens is not the same as inclusive participation. Diversity is about the mix of different people, while inclusion is about allowing everyone in this mix to participate. For this, it is necessary to meet the needs of people or a specific neighbourhood by, for example, organizing a combination of offline and online meetings and, with the help of intermediary organizations, to support people from specific target groups to participate digitally.

→ Different forms of participation

The use of digital technology offers more extensive possibilities than traditional forms of participation such as town meetings. The majority of the population has access to the internet and is able to visit a website. This offers them the possibility to inform themselves and to perform simple actions, such as voting, or more complex actions such as submitting arguments or proposals.

A solution for attracting different target groups is to facilitate different levels of participation. This can be done by making it possible within a tool to vote on ideas or arguments of others, to give your opinion on a subject, but also to formulate a proposal yourself, or even to contribute to writing legislative proposals. By supplementing these participation options with offline consultation meetings you create the opportunity for as many groups of people as possible to participate in the process.

A large part of the communication and interaction with residents also takes place offline. If it fits the objectives of the tool, it is valuable to include offline deliberation in which dialogue is key. Face-to-face meetings have by far the most impact on social cohesion, but also on the quality of the results: people are more likely to listen to each other's arguments when they physically meet.

However, online you can make different voices heard than offline. For example, people who do not have the time to visit offline meetings or those who would rather participate from home where they can get support from family or friends. During traditional town meetings or consultation rounds, it is often the majority that prevails over the minority. A platform that offers room for an exchange of arguments and can make both the views of the majority and the minority equally visible ultimately results in a sustainable solution. There is also an educational element. Instead of having the possibility to merely complain or dismiss a proposal, citizens are instead asked to offer novel, alternative solutions; as a result, the overall process is more constructive and thoughtful arguments are encouraged. Citizens also quickly discover when their argument is not supported by others. In this way, there is more understanding among the participants about how decision-making comes about and the various considerations that underlie a democratic decision. This insight contributes to the 'democratic skills' of the participants.

Online involvement of citizens in a vulnerable position A recommendation by Mellouki Cadat-Lampe, senior employee at [Movisie](#) (national knowledge institute of social issues)

Individuals and groups of people with vulnerable positions in society - for instance people with a disability or belonging to an ethnic minority - have a democratic human right to citizen participation. Empowerment of these groups by members of the groups themselves is an added value for society at large. The flexibility and possibilities of digital democracy offers an opportunity for groups who are disadvantaged to mobilize, become visible and make their voices heard. A community approach is fundamental here. Those involved know best what fits their lives, adapted to the needs of their own group. If people are not being asked by their own community, they will not become active in a sustainable way. Their own leaders are best able to find their own supporters, bring them together and activate them to talk and co-decide.

Here lies a possible role for social workers in consultation with key figures from the communities: supporting people in a vulnerable social position with their empowerment and making their voices heard in the design of the digital transition. Social professionals represent a professional group that is perfectly capable of bridging the gap between citizen communities and institutions. They do this - based on their professionalism and social alertness - by making sure various and inclusive participation processes are being made available.

How can you combine online and offline participation methods?

There are many offline participation methods that can be perfectly combined with online participation. A small selection of the possibilities are the following methods:

- ➔ **Town meetings & offline voting:** it is important to link an offline process to every online process. Regular information evenings can offer a solution for those who cannot figure things out online. Particularly in neighbourhoods with a low literacy rate, it can be helpful, for example, to hand out paper voting passes that can be handed in at polling stations in the neighbourhood.
- ➔ **Sortition & citizen jury:** The most representative offline method besides an online process is by sortition. By putting together a citizen jury through sortition, you can bring together a cross-section of residents who, based on information and conversation, can come to a legitimate decision that supports the online process.
- ➔ **Neighbourhood councils & themed assemblies:** With their knowledge and involvement, existing neighbourhood councils and panels can play a role in formulating widely supported initiatives for the online platform. It can also give people who want the neighbourhood to be greener, for example, a boost to come together with initiators of similar ideas so that they can jointly come to an even stronger proposal.

The City Observatory



Event of the City Observatory in Madrid 2019

In Madrid, people can submit policy proposals on the online platform Decide Madrid. If a proposal collects more than 27,000 votes, this is about 2% of the Madrid population, an official vote will be organized by the municipality on whether the proposal should be turned into policy. Many proposals are submitted on the platform, but few of them reach the required amount of votes. That is why the Participation Department, together with the city council, developed a new body that can legitimately and representatively ensure that more proposals get the votes needed.

The result is the “[City Observatory](#)”, also called citizen jury. This is an official body within the municipality of Madrid that meets eight Saturdays a year in sessions of 7 hours. The sessions take place at an interval of approximately one month and outside of the holiday periods. The citizen jury consists of 49 members who have been chosen through sortition in two stages to represent the people of Madrid. In the first phase of the draw, 30,000 randomly chosen residential addresses in Madrid receive an invitation with information about the function of the jury, the calendar of sessions and a survey that asks about their age and gender. Anyone who receives the letter at home can register as a volunteer for the citizen jury via a reply letter or an online form. Subsequently, 49 people are drawn from the applications based on quotas regarding age, gender and place of residence, so that the resulting group matches the demographic distribution in the city.

Per session:

- Participants receive a reimbursement of 65 Euros
- Participants work in worktables of 7 people led by a team of moderators
- The jury evaluates the proposal that currently has the most votes on the online platform
- It is decided by vote, based on deliberation and by inviting initiators and experts, whether an (adapted) proposal, will go on to an official city-wide vote
- A report is written and publicly shared on how a decision has been made

The annually rotating City Observatory is now a permanent part of the online consultation processes in Madrid.

How to monitor and evaluate an online participation process

One purpose of monitoring and evaluation is to learn. With monitoring, the focus is on continuously keeping track of data. By evaluating this data you can map the extent to which policy objectives are being achieved and you can learn to improve the process.

Another purpose of monitoring is to assess accountability. This means that the increased participation can be reduced to the online participation process. To assess this, there are various metrics to keep track of.

These include:

- Did more residents get involved with municipal policy after the online participation period? Have more residents' initiatives emerged?
- Did the online participation process engage a diverse group of people (age, gender, place of residence)?
- Through which channel do people end up on the platform?
- How many of the visitors register? How many visitors participate by voting and how many submit an idea?

- At what point do visitors drop out of the platform and what does this say about how the submission of a proposal could be facilitated?
- What is the quality of user satisfaction? This can, for example, be measured with a survey.
- How many proposals have been approved and selected? How many proposals have been implemented?

By keeping track of the answers to the above questions, it is possible to learn what the successful aspects of online participation processes are and to improve your own process. It is important to remember that every case is different, and online participation processes will have a different impact in different municipalities. You can learn from each other, but it is equally important to evaluate your own process and to learn what a successful process entails in your own context.

Tip: at the start of the process, formulate specific goals and expectations, this makes it easier to measure success.

Case study by the city of Groningen

2. Designing a successful participation process

In the city of Groningen, digital democracy started with the Department of City Districts. Their approach of 'area-oriented working' means that the municipality is looking for ways to give residents more control over their own living environment. Intensive contact with people is essential, as well as connecting different groups. From this approach the municipality saw the need to also maintain contact with residents through digital means. The department was commissioned to find out what tools there were and to make a provisional choice based on the wishes and ambitions.

From this vision, digital democracy was linked to the innovation programme within the municipality of Groningen that focuses on improving digital services. Groningen also participated in the 'Local Digital Democracy Lab' that was organized by the Dutch Ministry of the Interior. Within this testing ground, municipalities were able to work together to experiment with online participation and learn from each other. Groningen chose to work with the open source tool Consul because it offers many different functionalities so that the tool can be used for various processes.

The Lab brought Groningen into contact with other municipalities that used the same tool. They decided to follow each other's initiatives and investigated how they could work together. Four municipalities now work together. The functional managers help each other with questions and project leaders advise each other on different participation processes. The municipalities have also applied for funding to work together on the development and improvement of Consul.

Case study: Stem van Groningen in the Oosterparkwijk

Officially, the process "Oosterpark, always a good idea" on the participation platform Stem van Groningen (Voice of Groningen) is a commission from the Coöperatieve Wijkraad (Cooperative Neighbourhood Council) to the municipality to organize an online participation process. The Cooperative Neighbourhood Council is a democratic experiment by the municipality of Groningen that successfully combines representative democracy with participative democracy and recently won the European Innovation in Politics Award 2019. The council is made up of 11 local residents who were chosen through sortition in collaboration with 6 councillors from the municipal council. Together they make decisions for and with the neighbourhood. To support the neighborhood council, also a panel of 400 residents were selected through sortition. This panel is regularly asked for their opinion online, for example through surveys.

2. Designing a successful participation process

The Cooperative Neighbourhood Council asked the municipality to support them in organizing an online citizen budget. They had a budget to give subsidies to good initiatives for the neighbourhood. But they wanted the conversation about which ideas that money should go to take place between people in the neighbourhood. Starting point was to let the neighbourhood decide for itself what 25,000 Euros should be spent on.

On the platform “Voice of Groningen”, local residents can submit ideas and choose which ideas are implemented by distributing a neighbourhood budget of 25,000 Euros. The proposals are viewed by the members of the Cooperative Neighbourhood Council and residents. In addition, both people submitting ideas and the Cooperative Neighbourhood Council receive support from the area teams and other civil servants. A number of evenings are organized in which people who submitted ideas are invited to develop the proposal further, with each other, with the support of the Cooperative Neighbourhood Council and officials of the municipality. After the voting phase, 11 proposals won the support of residents and these proposals are now being implemented by the municipality in close collaboration with the initiators. To exchange practices with other cities the pilot was part of the European Like! project.



Campaign poster Stem van Groningen

CHECKLIST for a successful digital participation process

Topic

- ☐ Keep the process open for input as much as possible
- ☐ Communicate clearly about already existing frameworks
- ☐ Would you yourself like to join in the discussion on this topic?
- ☐ Focus on citizens' own input

Communication

- ☐ Make a plan
- ☐ Use different communication tools
- ☐ Choose communication channels that suit your target group
- ☐ Create continuous feedback about the process, decisions and other news
- ☐ Be active in attracting different target groups
- ☐ Use simple language
- ☐ Involve residents in the phases of the process

Inclusivity

- ☐ Make participation accessible to people with different skills
- ☐ Involve key figures
- ☐ Offer opportunities to participate online and offline

Offline deliberation

- ☐ Link existing panels to online participation
- ☐ Increase support for online participation through sortition and deliberation

Evaluation

- ☐ Set clear goals
- ☐ Monitor results during the process
- ☐ Share results transparently
- ☐ Repeat and improve

Interview

2. Designing a successful participation process



Interview with David Reilly from PB Scotland

David Reilly is Development Manager at PB Scotland. PB Scotland is hosted by Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) with funding from the Scottish Government. In this text we use “PB” as the abbreviation for Participatory Budgeting.

Can you tell us in short what PB Scotland is about?

PB Scotland was set up as a sharing and learning network to share lessons and capture learnings from PB initiatives around Scotland. They bring people together for learning events, focusing on specific issues within the roll out of PB in Scotland and host national and international conferences.

[PB Scotland](#) has also been resourced to directly support PB process in Scotland’s communities, both those led by communities themselves and by local authorities. Its website is a platform for updates on events, contains toolkits, policy and profiles good examples of PB and is visited by an average of 1,500 unique users per month.

Central to the website is the PB Charter. Developed with PB practitioners across Scotland, the [PB charter](#) describes seven features that really matter when using PB processes, they need to be:

- Fair and inclusive
- Participatory
- Deliberative
- Empowering
- Creative and flexible
- Transparent
- Part of our democracy

2. Designing a successful participation process

It is crucial to involve communities and to focus on topics that really matter. An agreement like such as the charter can really evoke effort and action. On the other side, if PB is just being used as a technocratic process it has the opposite impact.

Furthermore, Scotland is in a unique position because the Scottish Government have funded a supporting infrastructure for PB. COSLA, a membership body representing local governments in Scotland, has been funded to have four posts to support work on digital PB, inclusion and training. The Democratic Society in Scotland has been funded to help Scotland develop the tools to support online and in person PB. The Church of Scotland supports a network of churches and community organisations delivering PB, often in areas of highest deprivation. They developed an excellent, accessible PB film which has been really useful in creating understanding in Scotland.

We have heard that local communities in Scotland need to spend 1% of their budget on PB. How does this 1% rule work?

Well this is not an obligation but rather an agreement. The idea is that by 2021 1% of Local Authorities budget in Scotland spending is subject to PB, with some caveats. This agreement was made by the Scottish Government and COLSA. The purpose is to drive the active participation of citizens in local decision making and go beyond the current arrangements for consultation and engagement.

A target like this can be a good way to provoke and motivate action. One worry however might be that this leads to initiatives designed to meet that target rather than to use the values of the PB charter and actually increase meaningful participation, or share power with citizens; tweaking consultation but with a different name. We want to avoid a situation where we meet the target but miss the point.

2. Designing a successful participation process

What are really good PB practices according to your experience?

Glasgow recently did a major PB process on tackling of poverty and inequality. Four areas experiencing some of the highest levels of deprivation were involved. What was really impressive was that local community groups were commissioned to host these processes within the communities where they had deep roots, and that citizens panels were recruited and supported to deliberate and make decisions on how the process worked. It was also impressive that there was an evaluation approach in which they look back and assess the process and outcomes.

I also really like Leith Chooses, a partnership approach between citizens, community councils and the local authority and its elected councillors which shows how local democracy can realise national priorities.

How are learnings captured? Do people really share their experiences and build on earlier pilots?

Well there is support available and there is the infrastructure. Some Local Authorities use the available tools and learnings on the website whilst others don't. As said Glasgow and North Ayrshire are some good examples of doing PB with communities, not all approaches are as citizen-led. Angus Council is also one of the partners in the Like! project where it shares its many practices in PB projects.

2. Designing a successful participation process

What is your opinion on online and offline involvement?

One thing is clear as PB develops and online tooling develops: the combination of on- and offline is a must have. The challenge is how to 'replicate' the engagement and collaboration you have at events and how people form relations there. An interesting development is in the future the online platform Consul. However there is still a world to win in online!

Angus Council PB projects

- In Brechin, PB events have been running for 3 years (2015 onwards) and 31 projects have received funding so far.
- In Montrose, 11 projects received funding in 2018
In Edzell, 9 projects received funding in 2018
- In 2018, to mark the Year of Young People 40,000 Pounds was set aside for youth work projects. Over 1100 young people voted and 15 projects across Scotland were awarded funding.
- By 2020-21, Angus Council will look at mainstreaming PB as all local authorities have to spend at least 1% of their budgets through the PB process. In Angus, Scotland this equates to 2 million pounds.



2. Designing a successful participation process

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3. Using democratic technology

The purpose of a digital participation platform is to facilitate a municipality and its citizens to communicate with each other in a responsive and legitimate way. For this you need a platform that you can trust and facilitates the functions that your participation process needs.

In the field of digital democracy, both commercial platforms and public open source platforms are used to facilitate the participation process. In both categories great tools are available with the functionalities to support different participation processes. For many municipalities, working with open source technology is still unknown territory. However, for the benefit of democracy it is relevant for municipalities to inform themselves about managing and developing participatory technology. Open source technology offers authorities the opportunity to jointly invest in public instruments and to make online democratic processes transparent.

- With closed source (proprietary software) the development of the code is in the hands of a company or institution and the source code is protected.
- With open source technology, the source code is published on sharing platforms such as GitHub, where it can be downloaded, used, scrutinized and developed by various users.

Open source code and privacy by design

The transparency of decision-making processes increases if open source tools are used. With an open source code, users can see how the tool works and how the results are processed on the platform. Especially with participation tools transparency is of great value to increase trust in the government.

Moreover, open source technology offers the government the opportunity to innovate sustainably. Ultimately it is not about creating the best tool, but about creating the best possible participation process. Every participation process is different. By using open source software, the technology can easily be adapted to new situations. Open source technology offers a lot of flexibility to adjust or add functionalities. New functionalities can be shared between users and, in this

way, improvements can be made collectively. When developing open source instruments, it is important that this is properly documented and communicated back to the open source community.

Democratic tools should not only be democratic at the front, but also at the back. In addition to using open standards and open source, privacy-conscious technology is also an important part of this. Participation tools must be built in such a way that the personal data and data of citizens are safe and cannot be used for commercial or political purposes. One method to guarantee this is by designing a tool according to the principle of privacy by design. This means that from the start of the design, privacy is one of the highest priorities in the development of the software by making sure that no unnecessary data is being gathered or it is anonymized. This way, privacy and the use of personal data is dealt with attentively.

When important democratic decisions are made, it is also of great importance that the hosting of the tool and the management of data (including the discussions) take place at a reliable (local) location. Using platforms of internationally operating multinationals to have discussions can be user-friendly. However, it has the major disadvantage because no insight is offered about what happens with that data, which parties are watching and whether it may influence our democratic process. Dependence on large commercial organizations for local decision-making comes with risks.

User-centered design

Online participation must be as easy and accessible as possible to attract a large user group. By applying user-centered design, the user's perspective is central to the development of the tool. This leads to unexpected insights and priorities. A preliminary investigation or test panel can provide insight into this. In general, more people participate if it doesn't take too much effort and the user experience is tailored to their needs. A good trick is to ensure that a participant has to go through as few steps as possible in order to participate.

Another tip to make a tool user-friendly is by linking it to the municipal website, so that the tool is easy to find. When choosing the style and appearance of the platform, there are several points to take into consideration:

- Be flexible with the style of the platform. A participation tool often requires a different look and feel than the visual identity of the municipality;
- Do not only provide textual content, but also visual content, such as videos, photos and infographics;
- Pay attention to language requirements. Use accessible and simple language.

Authentication methods

Make the login method dependent on the participation process. If no login is required to participate on the platform, leave it out. When collecting good ideas, for example, it is not necessary to verify whether someone is a registered resident of a neighbourhood or someone visiting from elsewhere. When participating in decision-making by casting votes, users can, for example, be asked to log in with their zip code, a SMS code or an e-mail address in order to limit abuse by casting multiple votes. By using simple login methods, you effectively limit the amount of personal data that you request from people. Logging in via link that has been sent instead of an account with a password also lowers the threshold for people to participate.

However, the more impact a process has, the more important good authentication becomes. For decision-making processes such as money distribution, it is important to verify people as residents of the city or neighbourhood. This can be done, for example, by checking the registration in the population register and then linking the user to an anonymous user code. Another option is the use of physical authentication 'tokens' such as voting codes. People will then receive a letter at home with a unique code that is valid for one vote which they can cast via the platform.

Case study by Danes je nov dan

3. Using democratic technology

[Danes je nov dan](#) (Today is a new day), 'Institute for other studies' is an NGO based in Slovenia that uses digital technology and the internet to create dialogue on public issues, facilitate participation, and push for transparency. Our mission is to promote open data and participatory decision-making processes on the internet by developing and implementing open source web-based tools and platforms for this purpose.

**DANES JE
NOV DAN**

Using Consul in small Slovenian municipalities

Citizen participatory tool Consul was primarily developed with big cities like Madrid in mind that have budgets, staff, and time to engage with citizens on all the aspects of citizen participation (consultations, debates, citizen proposals, collaborative legislation, and participatory budgeting). Smaller municipalities usually struggle to follow the richer and bigger sisters due to a lack in substantial funding and staffing. This is especially the case in Slovenia where more than half of the 212 municipalities have less than 5000 citizens and only 17 have more than 20,000 citizens. Also the level of digitisation of public services varies a lot among these municipalities.

3. Using democratic technology

'Danes je nov dan' took the local elections of 2018 as an opportunity to remind potential mayoral candidates about the importance of participatory budgeting through an online campaign and ask them to vow to implement the processes needed if they win the elections. We received 275 promises, out of which 57 candidates won the election. In total 13 municipalities out of 212 have run participatory budgeting processes in 2019 and we have so far helped 3 municipalities with the implementation (Kranjska Gora, Hrpelje-Kozina, and Koper). We have discussed possible cooperation with several other municipalities however we have noticed many of them are reluctant to make participatory budgeting digital due to municipality's lack of experience with digital processes or even fear of the tool not being used or not being user friendly.

Adjusting to the local context

In order to make the platform ready for use in the Slovenian context, we had to strip it of all other functionalities except participatory budgeting. Additionally, we simplified the whole process for the user and added some extra features. For example we adapted the user verification system so that users can sign-in with their unique citizen identification number, which is a number that can be validated and cross checked with official databases if needed. Because of our background in UX and UI design we also identified a strong need to clearly and concisely communicate the steps users have to take in order to participate in the whole process of participatory budgeting. We added a simple landing page that explains the process (see next page), while also simplifying the actual steps of the process that participant needs to take.

3. Using democratic technology



Explanatory landing page of the Consul tool in Slovenia. Three steps that citizens are invited to take in order to participate in the participatory budgeting process (Creating proposals, Voting, and Monitoring the progress).

Case study from Koper

The biggest municipality that used our redesigned Consul was Koper: a city municipality with 52,540 inhabitants which makes it the 4th biggest municipality by population in Slovenia. The local government allocated 480,000 Euros to be granted to projects proposed and selected by citizens through the Consul platform. Our support went beyond just installing the platform: in order for the local government's staff to successfully lead and execute the project, we held an educational workshop explaining the processes behind the Consul tool and the use of moderation interface, helped them organize offline proposal collection and voting, and also participated in presentations in front of the municipal legislative body that was in charge of confirming the project. During the actual participatory budgeting process, we offered consultations and led them through all the internal processes they needed to execute, like checking and evaluating proposals, while also offering full technical support. 147 projects were passed onto the next phase, of which 36 were selected by voters to be implemented in 2020.

This was the first participatory budgeting process that Koper municipality implemented so typically there were some initial hiccups. Users experienced some difficulties in using the platform, for example we had numerous calls regarding failed registrations due to users making mistakes in typing in their national identification number, registering with the same email more than once (for example for their elderly parents or grandparents) or forgetting they have already registered. All these problems were eventually resolved and can be mostly attributed to users' lack of experience with computers. Throughout the process we have identified some of the most common challenges and will be adjusting the Q&A section to better serve our users. We also plan to put more emphasis in future installations on how we can improve user experience on one hand and on the other hand how to better train local administrators who are supposed to assist citizens in the process.

3. Using democratic technology

Another area where we wish to see improvement was voter participation, which was 4%. While this is not the area of the project that Danes je nov dan was responsible for, we are always looking for new ideas on how to support municipalities in engaging and mobilizing their citizens. It should be noted we have received a substantial number of proposals, which makes us optimistic about the future of this project and excited about the city's second round of participatory budget due in autumn of 2020.

CHECKLIST to make your technology democratic

Working with open source

- ☐ Base the choice of a platform on the required functionalities
- ☐ Work transparently through the use of open standards, open source and privacy-conscious technology
- ☐ Make coalitions with other municipalities

Authentication methods

- ☐ Make the login method dependent on the process
- ☐ Do not request or store unnecessary personal data
- ☐ Keep the threshold low by means of voting codes, sms or email tokens, or zip code log-in

Afterword

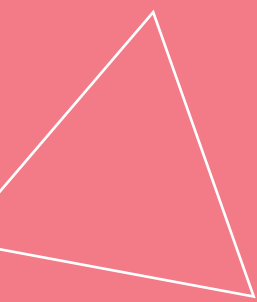
Afterword

This guide gave an overview of the most important points to consider when working with digital democracy in your community or municipality. Although there are commonalities, every local process will inevitably look different. The recommendations given are therefore not a blueprint, but will be used differently in every local context.

What is central to every local process is the focus on collective intelligence and interaction. Digital participation tools are part of a new form of cooperation between government and citizens. One in which equal access to information and sharing of control are central. This method of working requires a great deal of mutual trust, which can be achieved through good process design and, above all, by making online citizen involvement a structural part of municipal policy.

There are plenty of tools to get started with. We therefore hope that this guide has inspired you to collaborate, exchange and invest together in the best possible public participation technology.

Let us know if you want to share your own examples. This is how we work together on a learning community for digital democracy.



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