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INVOLVING CITIZENS IN CIRCULAR ECONOMY

BY ANTOINE DELAUNAY BELLEVILLE AND LAUREN MILLER

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This paper was published for the Citizen involvement in circular economy implementation (CECI) project. CECI aims at transferring knowledge among European regions to bring more relevant and efficient policies to promote citizen involvement in circular and sharing economy.

Actions include interregional learning through thematic workshops and studies, round-table policy discussions and site visits. They will form the basis for sharing expertise and boost citizen dialogue on the local/regional levels. Sharing Good Practices will help to disseminate circular solutions and save resources across Europe.

As a result, the partner regions will develop Action Plans to translate gained knowledge of the citizens' role in circular economy and new solutions. CECI will raise public awareness to create demand for sustainable services. Changes in consumption patterns will stimulate the development of circular economy business models, and create new jobs.

Find out more on the CECI website (www.interregeurope.eu/ceci/).

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INTRODUCTION

Enabling citizens to reinvest in the field of public action is one of today's major challenges to deal with social and environmental issues. According to the Rio Declaration (the 1992 report from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development), public policies on environmental issues can only be relevant and efficient when they involve the participation of all relevant citizens.

Why do we want stronger civic engagement?

- There is a need to weave trust among citizens and with institutions so that people can have a feeling of belonging and of having shared responsibilities,
- People can actively take part in public policies in different ways and on different levels,
- People can take initiatives in both the public and private sphere, on social, environmental and economic issues,
- Institutions can have access to better bottom-up information,

We believe that, today, opportunities for real and concrete citizen participation are too rare and often superficial. Therefore, in order for public action to be more civic-minded, we suggest developing actions and good practices based on 5 principles:

Transparency

Making the outline and purpose of the mobilisation clear before, during and after it occurs, in terms of its stakes, the real decision-making power, and the timeframes, methodology and tools used.

Shared expertise

Considering that each person possesses their own expertise that deserves to be shared, and that, at the same time, everyone is capable and worthy, if given the time to learn, of making relevant decisions for the common good.

Experimentation

Shaking up points of view, asking questions, experimenting, changing plans and scales, recognising power relations and avoiding red tape.

Benevolence

Being aware that collaboration cannot be decreed, but is the result of a network of natural and legal persons who feel sufficiently connected and trusted so as to be able to express themselves and work together despite their differences.

Accessibility

Making places, times and vocabulary for decision-making accessible to all. This is about listening to people wherever they are and whenever they can, with no discrimination based on class, gender, race or condition.

How to **trigger** citizen involvement



Whether you want to initiate citizen involvement plans in your region or extend existing programmes to new audiences, this first section will focus on how to spot and engage different citizens to take concrete action for a shared local agenda.

A. How to create attractive citizen communities

Communities go further than networks or movements, because they go beyond simple connections to aim for collective impact and change. They are groups of people united by a common vision or circumstances who take collective action for a common goal. There are 4 pillars to create an attractive community:

A strong identity

You have to make people want to be part of the club: the branding you offer is important and must convey the mission, atmosphere and values through appropriate name, visuals, and keywords.

You can refer to local specificities, endemic species, figures or monuments that people might identify with.

However, beware of the danger of nationalism or localism in some forms that might develop exclusive religious or ethnic groups rather than open communities.

Here is [an article](#)¹ to help you build the vision of your community. If you want to find a catchy name for your citizen community by using collective intelligence, you can organize a workshop using [this guide](#).

Learning activities

People often join communities with the goal of learning hard and soft skills they will be able to use in their personal and professional life. It is therefore important to have a clear vision of the different positions, training and opportunities you can offer them.

Connections

There must be a benevolent and respectful atmosphere that will apply to everybody and help channel divergent opinions, protecting the group from being hijacked by one particular person or thought. To ensure that there is a safe space for everybody, don't hesitate to set the frame right from the beginning.

People have a strong need for belonging, and communities are great tools to connect different issues and different stakeholders who can share, at least temporarily, similar hopes and goals.

A rewarding sensation

Members build up their reputation through their contributions.

Communities grow through role models and ambassadors who embody and catalyse its values and processes, making other people want to follow them.

Communities allow a satisfying personal balance between what people get from the community and what they bring to it, depending on their skills, time and financial resources, thus bringing collective wealth to the community.

B. How to reach diverse citizens eager to participate in local actions for a circular economy

There is a crisis of trust between citizens and institutions. The following good practices can help better reach out to citizens that are seldom listened to and better understand what they have to say. They can also help create a suitable and welcoming environment to discuss local issues.

Map citizens for better representation

Rely on local actors that already have people's trust. Ask community centres to help identify such people.

Be sure to include the people affected by the decisions: controversial activities that generate a lot of problems are often located in areas where the population have little mobilisation and bargaining power, as explained in [this article](#)².

Make your intention and message clear

Be transparent about the real potential outcomes.

Always keep in mind the principles issued in [the Aarhus Convention](#) (the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters of 1998) that enforce the rights to:

- receive environmental information that is held by public authorities,
- participate in environmental decision-making,
- review procedures to challenge public decisions that have been made without respecting the two aforementioned rights or environmental law in general.

Create a welcoming atmosphere for all

Offer food and drink, kick off the meeting with an [icebreaker](#)³ so participants can relax. [Make it zero waste](#)⁴ to practice what you preach.

Encourage and enable greater accessibility for participation by finding relevant ways to meet and question citizens. You'll find in [this article](#)⁵ tools and inspiration for facilitating a constructive discussion. Find appropriate ways to do this here.

Avoid doing everything online (if there is no global pandemic that prevents you from doing so!). Go to places where people are and set up workshops to let them know about your initiatives.

Make sure that there are different options and services to include people who work, have kids, have physical disabilities, cannot afford transportation, have difficult access to language or computers, etc.

Celebrate all achievements together, no matter how small they are in the beginning.

Trigger dialogue

Talk with participants, listen, spend time with them outside of your own project.

Ask them about their needs and think about how you can meet these.

Invite existing initiatives to present their first actions, specific challenges or needs.

It can be difficult to get that first person to participate in discussions or ask the first question: avoid professional jargon and unknown buzzwords, and ask questions that they can relate to. This will help make everything seem more concrete and relevant to them.



C. Concrete examples of citizen involvement in a circular economy

Now that we have explored some ideas and theories about how to trigger citizen involvement, let's illustrate with two concrete examples from different countries in Europe.

Rural Lahti Urban-Rural Migrants 2030 Lahti, Finland



In Finland, the Urban-Rural Migrants 2030 project aims to increase understanding and experience-based knowledge about the possibilities of sharing economies and service economies in rural regions. The objective is to find solutions to local issues like disappearing local services, rural exodus and high unemployment, while creating positive environmental and social impacts at the same time. To make sure that future solutions will meet the needs of local residents, the LAB University of Applied Sciences has asked the residents of Hollola and Asikkala (two municipalities participating in the project) for ideas on how to share or rent goods, premises, and know-how instead of owning them.

Together with the project, the municipalities of Asikkala and Hollola have started trials for sharing economy services to evaluate their business potential as well as environmental and social welfare impacts. Opportunities for rural sharing and service economies include i.a co-farming, shared tools and equipment, vehicle rentals, repair services and service activities provided by farms, such as yard maintenance.

Stroom Project Mechelen, Belgium



The city of Mechelen started an urban living lab for circular economy acceleration through citizen involvement. One specific neighbourhood was chosen, because it houses people from various socio-economic and cultural backgrounds and includes a social housing district. The aim was to make the project results representative for the diverse population of the city, and to actively engage everyday people whose primary concern is not sustainable consumption. Together with Studio Dott, the city mapped people's wishes and concerns about different needs pertaining to their livelihood: energy and water consumption, food, housing, mobility, relaxation, material consumption and waste management. They wanted to explore the degree to which residents had already adopted circular thinking, perhaps without realising it. They used a range of methodologies to communicate and interact in order to reach many different people, from casual online surveys to in-depth diary studies, workshops adapted to specific target groups (young people, migrant women, etc.), an interactive info-session and a co-creation workshop.

They connected to people through key figures and neighbourhood workers, street committees, the school committee, and the youth organisations within the neighbourhood. Together with social organisations, citizen initiatives and entrepreneurs, they organised a circular market, mapped the circular consumption initiatives in the city on a physical and online map for citizens and tourists, and explored ways in which they could make the use of their circular products or services more mainstream. Taking the lessons learned from Stroom, the city will start a city-wide circular consumption campaign as of 2020. The total budget spent on the project was 140,500 euros. It took at least a year to build rapport with people, so two years were required for real results to be achieved. However, the project has stopped when people had expectations to take it further. The city now needs a plan to integrate circular consumption activities within social or neighbourhood work.

D. How to facilitate contributive meetings

How to organise recruitment and welcoming events

Make new people feel welcome and safe in this new environment. Familiarise them with the community's core beliefs, purpose, rules and guidelines.

Make sure they can express themselves and describe their issues. Help them make their first connections within the group.

Show them how to make most out of the community: they will come with curiosity and have to leave with commitments.

Clarify what commitments are expected from them. Give easy first steps and clear calls to action that match their availabilities, skills and personal issues.

[Here](#) you can find a recipe on how to design and prepare a successful event.

Neighbourhood tour

A local tour sheds light on solutions with a concrete impact in your neighbourhood. The objective is to get to know other local residents along the way and discover ideas for circular consumption. A tour can help discover 3 to 6 positive initiatives with a group of about 10 people.

Check out this [video](#) and find the resources to organise your own tour here.



Ecosystem mapping workshops

This is a two-and-a-half hour long collective intelligence workshop to understand what prevents collaboration on one specific issue. It is divided into 5 steps. You can download the [templates here](#). The steps are as follows:

1. Identifying and prioritising the issues. Participants split into groups depending on what issue they want to tackle. Each group will:

- Appoint someone to keep time and to take notes,
- Define a specific measurable realistic goal.

2. Mapping issues. Participants define their level of interest and expected contribution, resources and expertise on paper. They list out other players linked to the issue.

3. Analysing the mutual links. Lines are drawn to explicitly show how various players are connected to one another (not related, dependants, competitors, etc.)

4. Highlighting barriers that prevent solutions from emerging and what can cause them. Point out the missing, inefficient links and what can be changed in the relationship to solve the issue. Try to analyse the roots of the problem with the [“5 whys” methodology](#).

5. Identifying key players, resources and skills to develop new collaborations. Divide the mapped players into 4 categories based on their contributions and interest:

- Consult those who have expertise.
- Inform those who might later be interested in joining.
- Involve those who already try or will be impacted.



E. How can a city or region provide appropriate support?

Use communication networks

During the Covid crisis and lockdown, citizens all over the world looked en masse for volunteer opportunities to help vulnerable people. In France, the governmental platform called "[La réserve civique](#)" helped create bridges between the NGOs looking for volunteers and the volunteers offering their help. [makesense](#) launched a one-week program called Reaction, offering concrete ways to get engaged to help the most vulnerable. Half of the 11 000 participants came from this website. After a few weeks working with different NGOs acting directly in the field and in contact with citizens, they adapted the platform to make it match the needs of volunteers and NGOs by creating new themes and new ways of framing volunteer actions.

Provide premises

Circular economy business models are crippled by the high cost of rentals in residential areas. They either have to give up activities that require space for working or storage, or cope with higher transportation costs and fewer social links with citizens. Mechelen experimented with this in 2011 by granting access to municipal premises, supplies and infrastructures as well as offering technical, logistic and safety support. In the same year, Mechelen established an offer granting companies easy access to business accommodation and facilities.

Granting access to derelict warehouses or brownfields can help kickstart initiatives and can be financially profitable for local authorities. Premises were allotted to the group [la Varappe](#) in the town of Aubagne in southern France in exchange for collecting, sorting and upcycling services from the NGO.

How to **maintain** citizen involvement



There are plenty of citizen-based circular initiatives that disappear after a few years because of administrative problems, issues with human resources, or lack of funding, support or expertise. Short lived projects often generate loss of resources and potential for local authorities. This issue can be countered with appropriate support, questions, training and process.

A. Rely on existing networks

Genuine citizen involvement relies on strong international or local solidarity networks where citizen initiatives can help each other or work alongside civil servants to acquire skills, resources, and expertise. Community development nevertheless takes time, and existing initiatives must be supported to help spot which quick wins could motivate people. This will help them gain confidence in their power, become eager to bond together and get further involved in the long term, and feel legitimate to intervene in the public sphere.

Value citizen expertise and success

Genuine citizen involvement relies on strong international or local solidarity networks where citizen initiatives can help each other or work alongside civil servants to acquire skills, resources, and expertise. Community development nevertheless takes time, and existing initiatives must be supported to help spot which quick wins could motivate people. This will help them gain confidence in their power, become eager to bond together and get further involved in the long term, and feel legitimate to intervene in the public sphere.⁶

Value citizen expertise and success

Experiences like The French Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change show that when given balanced opinions and facts, and time to process them, citizens that had previously no expertise on a subject can learn fast and make relevant decisions for the common good. In April 2019, 150 citizens were randomly selected to create a deliberative process comparable to a Citizens' Assembly. It was commissioned by the French President, Emmanuel Macron, to answer the following question: "How can we reduce greenhouse gas emissions in France by at least 40% (compared to 1990 levels) by 2030, in the spirit of social justice?". Find out more about the convention and how it worked in [this article](#), and discover the final propositions of the French citizens' convention on climate [here](#).⁷

Regional and international networks

There are many international hybrid professional, scientific or citizen organizations related to circular economies (Zero Waste, makesense, Low Carbon City, Surfrider, Fashion Revolution day, Disco Soupes, Repair cafés). A local chapter opening in the city will bring in tools, legitimacy, expertise, events and enthusiasm. When ushered into broader networks, citizens will feel more legitimate to participate thanks to the training and support they receive and their feeling of participating in a global movement like the fashion revolution day.

On a more local level, many similar regional structures try to work together in syndicates and unions to better express their common goals and suggestions, fostering collaboration among themselves to pool resources and skills and to get higher visibility through collective action. As an example, the [REFER](#) network helps second-hand shops work together in the Paris region.

B. Foster good governance

Transparent, open and fair process

Public authorities are often crippled by an image of bureaucracy, slow procedures, biased policy choices, or being a bag of money. Many citizens have little confidence that their participation will be useful. When organising a consultation, here are some good practices that can help you increase the level of trust. The consultation must be precise and transparent about the methodology, level and scope of participation, with an emphasis on:

- the expected results and final outputs,
- the real bargaining power of participants,
- the different steps, milestones and costs of the consultation.

Resilient organisations

References to [Community Canvas](#), [reinventing organizations](#) and [Université de nous](#) can help build adaptable and sound organisations. Using appropriate methodologies and facilitation methods is necessary to answer key questions such as:

- The vision, mission and values of the project,
- Inclusion, user journey and exclusion of members,
- Use of communication channels,
- Decision process and attribution of roles,
- Content and data management.

Constructive conflicts

Conflicts arise from change or projects for change that are perceived by local actors as being opposed to their interests. As they tend to slow down the general agenda, conflicts are often avoided by ignoring or silencing opponents, at the cost of part of its legitimacy; according to [Jürgen Habermas](#)⁸, "only deliberation is likely to have a legitimating effect".

Well-managed concertation uses confrontation to go beyond opposition and reach a common goal. The decision is legitimate when it results from a process in which the public and stakeholders have been able to participate. The legitimacy of the decision is based on transparency, rigour, impartiality, and fair procedures and debate. However, for citizens to regain confidence, the debate must take place early enough, before the decisions are taken, when key choices have not yet been decided and other options are still possible.



C. Concrete examples in a circular economy

Paris Climate plan watch



The City of Paris has a Climate Plan to ensure that it reaches carbon neutrality by 2050. Paris is divided into 20 districts (called “arrondissements”), each one having its own specificities. To accelerate the roll-out of this Climate Plan, the local council of the 10th district of Paris wanted to adapt the objectives and measures included in the Plan to take into account the local specificities of its area. Therefore, in October 2017, using quite an innovative process, the council decided to draft a local roadmap with all the stakeholders in the area, including citizens of the neighbourhood, organisations, companies and municipal services.

This roadmap was developed over 7 months with more than 400 proposals issued by hundreds of citizens, services, elected representatives, partners, and neighbourhood organizations. At the end of 2017, the Paris Climate Plan Watch was put in place.

One of the proposals included the creation of an Ambassadors Committee, made up of voluntary citizens, organisations and experts in charge of creating a mobilisation and information programme. It makes sure that all voices are represented within the municipal team. In March 2018, a group of citizens co-created the CoCiClimat Paris 10. Its main mission was to follow the actions of the roadmap, meet the actors in charge of managing the roadmap to check progress, participate in the steering committee, challenge the local council if need be, to ensure the mobilisation of the citizens of the 10th district of Paris, communicate and make sure the process is familiar to residents of the neighbourhood and giving other citizens the opportunity to participate.

Quynh, the co-founder of the CoCiClimat, explained that she had never created or managed an organisation before, and that she had never participated in a contributive democratic process like this one before. She said that participating in these initiatives allowed her to develop her interest in politics. More precisely, it allowed her to better understand the different actors, better understand how laws and institutions function, discover democratical tools and realise that citizens have a role to play in the system, and that they have to seize this opportunity to make their voices heard.

Organisation of a municipality forum in Aragon

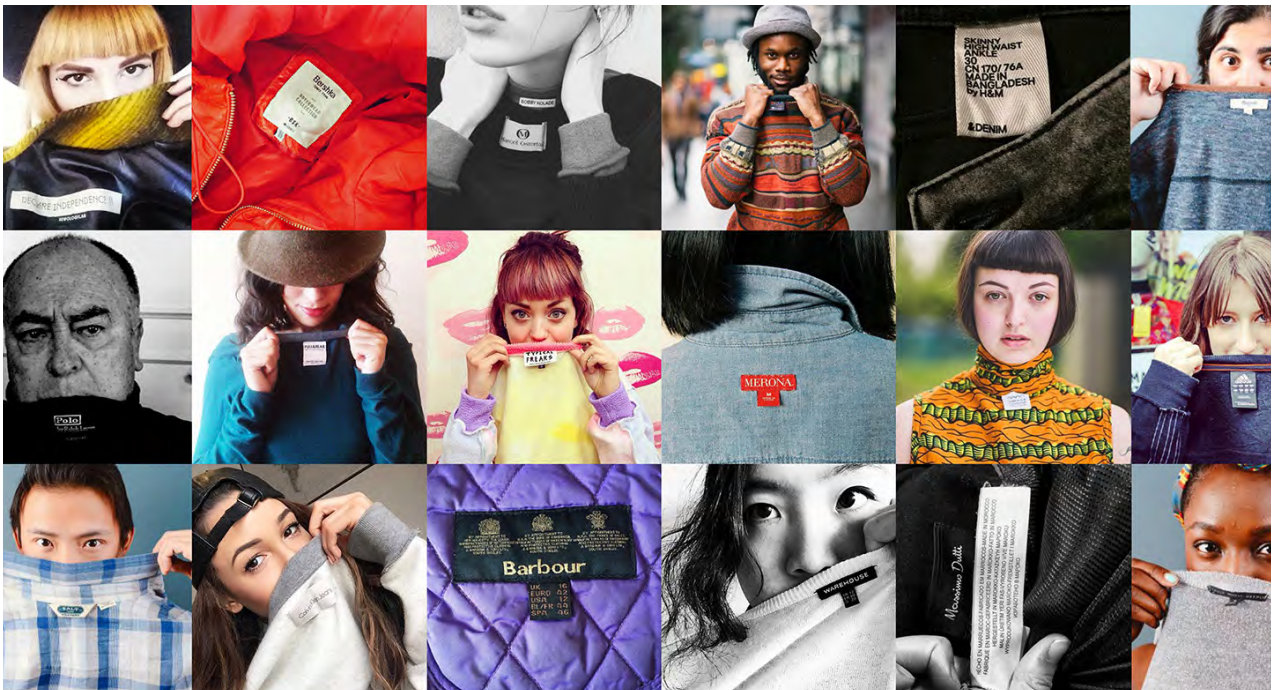


Aragon is made up of 730 municipalities and has a total population of around 1,200,000. In Spain, it is the municipalities that are responsible for collecting and managing household waste. They are the closest institutions to citizens, which can make prevention, reuse, repair and separate collection **real and effective**. The Directorate General for Climate Change and Environmental Education (DG) organised a **Forum of Municipalities for a circular economy in Aragon**, using its own budget. It is intended to be a meeting place and a channel for participation, to share initiatives and good practices on the circular economy through education, information and training. The goal is to:

- Generate a channel for communication between the different actors involved in household waste management in order to agree on how the measures provided by the 2018-2022 GIRA Plan are to be carried out.
- Seek new solutions and work alternatives in local waste management.
- Promote an informal network of people responsible for waste management in local entities which allows the improvement of daily work towards more “circular management”.

35 participants (technicians and policy makers from Aragonese municipalities who are involved in waste management) were recruited alongside institution representatives and municipal civil servants. The Phillips 6-6 facilitation technique was used (appreciative inquiry, which “consists of making up six groups, which are asked to emit new ideas in six minutes staring from a given topic⁹⁾). This was followed by a prioritisation of the most urgent measures and the necessary means to carry them out. (Find more about the outcomes [here](#).)

Fashion revolution day



Fashion Revolution week happens every year in the week of the 24th of April, the anniversary of the Rana Plaza disaster in Bangladesh (when a building collapsed, killing 1,134 people and injuring more than 2,500 others, making it the fourth largest industrial disaster in history. The victims were mostly young women). A global organisation spearheads the global network of official Fashion Revolution Country Offices and volunteer Country Coordination teams. Among their resources, you can find:

- Visuals and communication guides,
- Educational resources,
- Text to be sent to brands and politicians,
- Manifestos and articles to understand the issues,
- [Simple steps](#) for anyone to take action.

D. How to facilitate contributive meetings

Citizen Jury

“The Citizen Jury method is a means for obtaining informed citizen input into policy decisions. The jury is composed of 12-24 randomly selected citizens who hear information from several perspectives, often by experts referred to as ‘witnesses’. The jurors then go through a process of deliberation and subgroups are often formed to focus on different aspects of the issue. Finally, the jurors produce a decision or provide recommendations in the form of a citizens report. The sponsoring body (e.g. government department, local authority) is required to respond to the report either by acting on it or by explaining why it disagrees with it. Usually a 4-5 day process, the Citizens Jury is intended to provide a means for more democratic decision-making.” The process is demanding in time and resources. Check the source [here](#).

There are some differences in the process and outcome, but [21st century town](#) meetings can also be an inspiration.

Hold-up methodology

A hold-up is a 2-to-3-hour workshop open to anyone motivated (8 to 15 people), which means no requirements or conditions to participate. Its goal is to help an entrepreneur grow their impact-driven project by using the collective intelligence created by everyone’s participation in a friendly and respectful environment. The hold-up methodology matched all the above values to foster and improve skills for citizens and to help build sound organisations. On the makesense website, you can find various tools for facilitation techniques, attitudes, templates, etc., as well as various challenges that can be addressed (finding a catchy name, starting or growing a community, etc.). Given the amateur participants and the short amount of time you have, you may have to organise several workshops to reach actionable ideas.

E. How can a city provide appropriate support?

Citizen Jury

In France, big cities are compelled by law to set up neighbourhood councils. Civil servants are hired to organise them by collecting applications and sharing information between councils and city representatives. Some civil servants argue that their role requires them to be as discreet as possible so as to not hinder free speech and so as to empower citizens in their position of getting connected with local NGOs, taking notes, voting, giving their opinion about infrastructure scenarios, etc. Any citizen can participate in general assemblies or propose projects, even if only 30 selected applicants can vote on them. This political organism gathers monthly and either votes on budgets or works on specific issues. It has helped create a second-hand shop and a repair café in a neighbourhood of 25,000 residents in Paris.

Break silos

Before trying to reach new citizens, local institutions should try to better collaborate among themselves to build a more united front office dedicated to citizens. It is a recurrent theme that organisational responsibilities are split across so many different departments that citizens who would like to take innovative circular initiatives are thwarted by bureaucracy, particularly if their project has to simultaneously meet the requirements of street cleaning services, sustainable development, and social services, among others.

The city of Mechelen developed an “Innovation Cell” to establish a team of experts that make innovation happen within the city's structure. Specifically, this means that internal and external professionals address legal and financial issues, such as contract awarding procedures, long-term contracts or funding models for innovation projects. They also monitor city-wide requests for innovation support within city services and assist city services in defining and specifying problems or policy issues that are in need of an innovative or “smart” approach.

Organise a participatory budget

The city of Lahti in Finland invited residents to decide on the use of 100,000 euros of public funds for 2020. The goal was to change the way the city operates and direct funds into a more participatory system by involving the residents. The idea-collecting phase of the participatory budgeting received 713 project proposals on the city website.

Citizens were encouraged to become project supervisors who, along with what are called PB-coaches (participatory budgeting coaches), help develop participatory budgeting by supporting its implementation and coordination. The city of Lahti nominates 4 PB-bosses, one to each area, as well as 12 project supervisors from the residents of Lahti. The 4 PB-bosses support the units in their own area and are part of processing, evaluating and implementing ideas, participating in their joint development. The 12 project supervisors distribute information and activate residents in their own areas.



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