

An aerial photograph of Madrid, Spain, showing a dense urban landscape with numerous buildings. In the foreground, a large, ornate building with a prominent dome and classical architectural details is visible. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds. The text is overlaid on the upper portion of the image.

Expanding and Strengthening Engagement on Decide Madrid: A Data-Driven Evaluation

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Executive Summary

In 2021, the Madrid City Council commissioned The Governance Lab (The GovLab) to conduct an evaluation of Decide Madrid, the City Council's online platform for resident engagement. Decide Madrid is a pathbreaking initiative that allows individuals to 1) submit proposals for policy changes and other actions for consideration by the City Council (Propuestas), 2) respond to online consultations posed by the City government around new policies or regulations (Procesos), 3) partake in online debates with other users (Debates), 4) participate in the City's annual participatory budgeting process (Presupuestos Participativos), and 5) vote directly on policies, decisions or actions of the City government (Votaciones).

This report contains a data-driven evaluation of who participates on the platform, based on self-reported user data that was collected over the lifetime of the project and shared with The GovLab by the City Council.

Our analysis of who participates on Decide Madrid reveals the following trends:

Lack of youth engagement

1

Fewer than 6% of users are under age 30. We argue that the lack of opportunities for people under age 16 to participate on the platform, lack of awareness, and the lack of impacts from the Proposals feature may be suppressing youth participation. Despite the direct democratic nature of the Proposals feature, only one Decide Madrid initiative has been translated into policy.

Lack of engagement among older people

2

Though 23% of Madrid's population is age 65 or older, this group only accounts for 17% of registered Decide Madrid users and 12.2% of proposals. Possible reasons for this disparity include the overall lower levels of Internet use and digital literacy among older adults. Although Decide Madrid offers face-to-face participation opportunities, online hesitancy might act as a barrier to website use and lack of impact might lead to a lack of overall participation.

Lack of engagement among organizations

3

As the City primarily solicits input from businesses, nonprofits, and other organizations through stakeholder meetings, there are few opportunities for organizations to participate through the Decide Madrid platform.

Underrepresentation of women and girls

4

While individuals who describe their sex as female make up a larger percentage of registered users, individuals who describe their sex as male are overrepresented in participation on every section of the DM platform. Further research is needed to better understand this disparity.

Declining proposals, increasing processes

5

Participation on the Proposals feature has declined over time, while engagement on the Processes section has increased in recent years. We posit that differences in outcomes and design drive the disparity. Processes are consultations initiated by the City and therefore reflect questions to which the institution seeks a response increasing the likelihood of real world relevance. Proposals, by contrast, require support from 1% of the City's population to have a chance of being considered by the City Council. Furthermore, the design of the Proposals feature leads to many duplicative proposals that are often of lower quality.

Roadblocks, Not Speed Bumps.

6

To ensure that direct democratic engagement did not devolve into plebiscitary rule, DM's design (both technical and legal) incorporate "speed bumps," including a drawn-out process from proposal to translation into new legislation. Those hurdles include the need to secure support from 1% of the population, and over a year of waiting from submission to final consideration. What were intended as design features, however, have become "bugs," impeding participation.

Summary of Recommendations

Based on our analysis of Decide Madrid and extensive additional research into global best practices from other cities, we provide a set of recommendations for how the City can improve the Decide Madrid platform and create new opportunities to engage more engagement by underrepresented groups. The City Council of Madrid should:

- 1** **Collect additional data to deepen its understanding of differences in participation (not only registration) among groups of people.**
- 2** **Experiment with machine learning to process comments more efficiently, reduce the number of duplicative proposals and improve the quality of proposals.**
- 3** **Provide individuals with personalized feedback to help them create higher-quality, more implementable proposals.**
- 4** **Create a Groups feature that would allow individuals to find and join existing groups around common interests, in order to build in more opportunities for group collaboration.**
- 5** **Replicate the City Challenge model to co-create solutions to challenges with residents.**

6 Create a youth-focused participatory budgeting initiative, similar to those in Helsinki and Vienna.

7 Build on the Observatory of the City and Social Council experiences to create a “citizens’ assembly” as an alternative participatory policymaking method, like those examples in Paris and Belgium. Explore connecting these alternatives to Decide Madrid.

8 Redesign Decide Madrid by learning from other best practices to make participation more streamlined or eliminate the Proposals feature.

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Introduction

In 2015, the Madrid City Council launched a pathbreaking new platform for online resident engagement in response to growing demands from residents for greater opportunities to participate in democratic processes. Decide Madrid was intended to foster a more direct democratic culture within the larger, representative democratic system. Called Decide Madrid (DM), the platform allows individuals to submit legislative proposals to the City Council (“Propuestas”), participate in online discussions (“Debates”), contribute to consultations posed by the City (“Procesos”), vote directly on policies, decisions or actions of the City government (“Votaciones”) and participate in Madrid’s annual participatory budgeting program (“Presupuestos Participativos”), to which the City allocates €50 - 100 million annually.

Now, seven years on, the City wants to enhance opportunities for democratic engagement by deepening its understanding of who is engaged through the DM platform, who is not, and how to create more opportunities for underrepresented groups to engage with the City.

This report includes a data-driven analysis of who participates on the platform and how they participate. We provide recommendations and examples of how Madrid could: 1) make improvements to the Decide Madrid platform, and 2) create new opportunities for engagement to reach underrepresented groups, including younger people, older people, businesses and organizations by learning from what has worked in other cities.

The recommendations in this report are informed by analysis of data provided by the City about the Decide Madrid platform and original case studies about impactful resident engagement initiatives from comparable cities, including York, United Kingdom, Athens, Greece and an open innovation competition involving multiple cities in Mexico.

The recommendations are also informed by the learnings from conversations with civil servants from multiple units across the City government during a series of training workshops on resident engagement led by The GovLab in 2021 and 2022.¹

The Challenges: Analysis of Participation on Decide Madrid

How does it work?

The Decide Madrid platform is composed of five key participatory democracy features: Proposals, Debates, Processes, Citizen Voting, (and Participatory Budgeting, which we will not cover in this report). Residents of Madrid are also able to undertake these forms of engagement in-person at one of the 26 Madrid Citizen Service Offices with the help of trained personnel.

In order to use most features of the site, a resident must register. Registration – which is open to anyone, not just residents of Madrid – involves providing a username, email address, and password. Residents of Madrid can optionally verify their account online by entering their street address and mobile phone number. In order to fully participate in voting on proposals, an individual must additionally “fully verify” their account by providing an identification document number (using their passport, national ID, or residence card), which can be done online or in person at a Citizen Service Office.²

¹ The training program involved 16 individuals representing the General Directorate of Citizen Participation, General Subdirectorato of Citizen Participation and Innovation, Polytechnic University of Madrid, General Directorate of Families, Children, Education and Youth, and the Professional Association of Computer Engineers of the Community of Madrid.

² “Soluciones a problemas técnicos (FAQ),” Decide Madrid, accessed January 25, 2022. <https://decide.madrid.es/mas-informacion/faq>

The platform was originally built on top of the CONSUL open source software framework. Previously operated by the semi-autonomous MediaLab Prado and its ParticipaLab project, today CONSUL Democracy Foundation maintains and manages CONSUL. In 2015 computer programmer turned City Council member Pablo Soto Bravo developed CONSUL. CONSUL is free software that can be used by institutions to gather citizens' input via voting, debates, proposals, participatory budgeting, and collaborative lawmaking. As CONSUL is an open source project, companies, governments and organizations can adapt and remix the software according to their needs. The software has been used by 35 countries and 135 institutions to engage 90 million citizens around the world.³ Today, Decide Madrid is built on a separate branch of CONSUL, which allows the City's development team to make modifications to the platform at a faster speed than the standard CONSUL branch.⁴

1. Proposals

The Proposals (“Propuestas”) section is designed to create a direct democratic mechanism for people to propose policies for consideration and voting by the City Council. Through the Proposals section, any logged in and registered individual (verification is not required) can propose an idea for legislation by clicking the "Create a Proposal" button and submitting a title and description.

³ “CONSUL: Free software for citizen participation,” accessed January 25, 2022. <https://consulproject.org/en/>

⁴ Information provided by the General Directorate of Citizen Participation of the City Council

Crear una propuesta

[¿Cómo funcionan las propuestas ciudadanas?](#)

Título de la propuesta

Título de la propuesta

Resumen de la propuesta

(máximo 200 caracteres)

Resumen de la propuesta

Texto desarrollado de la propuesta

Estilo Formato Fuente Tamaño B I U S

Enlace a vídeo externo

Puedes añadir un enlace a YouTube o Vimeo

Enlace a vídeo externo

Imagen descriptiva

Puedes subir una imagen en los formatos: jpg, png, gif, mp4, y de hasta 1 MB por archivo.

Añadir imagen

Recomendaciones para crear una propuesta

✓ No escribas el título de la propuesta o frases enteras en mayúsculas. En internet eso se considera gritar. Y a nadie le gusta que le griten.

✓ Cualquier propuesta o comentario que implique una acción ilegal será eliminada, también las que tengan la intención de sabotear los espacios de propuesta, todo lo demás está permitido.

✓ Disfruta de este espacio, de las voces que lo llenan, también es tuyo.

FIGURE 1. Screenshot of Decide Madrid’s proposal creation page, which guides users through the process of submitting their proposal.

Once the proposal is submitted, anyone with a verified account can press a button to “support” the proposal.

Each proposal then has twelve months to gather the necessary support to move forward in the process. To move on to the next phase of consideration, a proposal must receive support from 1% of Madrid citizens over 16 years of age (28,564 people, according to the website as of 2022).

Some examples of proposals that were active at the time of writing include ideas to plant more trees on the streets of Madrid, crack down on graffiti in public spaces, and to create a greenway for cycling. Proposals to reduce dog waste have frequently featured on the site, which provides a useful pulsecheck of problems facing residents of Madrid.

[Volver](#)

Sancionar la publicidad no permitida en la vía pública

Aupaedu • 19/05/2021 • 8 Comentarios



IMG_20210420_145728.jpg

Código de la propuesta: **MAD-2021-05-29132**

Que se sancione a aquellos anunciantes que aprovechan elementos de la vía pública como farolas, marquesinas de autobús, semáforos y demás mobiliario urbano así como vehículos privados.



APOYOS

2,7% / 100%

763 apoyos
28.564 apoyos necesarios

Apoyar

COMPARTIR



COMUNIDAD

Participa en la comunidad de usuarios de esta propuesta.

Acceder a la comunidad

FIGURE 2. Screenshot of a May 2021 proposal calling for a ban on advertising on public infrastructure. Source: <https://decide.madrid.es/proposals/29132-sancionar-la-publicidad-no-permitida-en-la-via-publica>

Proposals that receive the necessary 1% support move on to the next phase, which is a 45-day period of debate and discussion by the public on the website, which gives citizens time to learn about the issue or issues that they will later vote on.

Citizens who create a proposal are responsible for conducting their own research and scanning the site for discussion and feedback on the proposal. The City Council does not and may not be permitted to provide any feedback, such as explaining how the City is already responding to the problem, pointing out whether the proposal is legal or practical or offering advice for how to make the proposal more relevant and useful.

Finally, a seven-day period begins in which any person over 16 years of age and fully verified in the City of Madrid can vote to accept or reject the proposal. If the majority is in

favor of the proposal, the Madrid City Council may then elect to debate and vote on the proposal.⁵

The platform includes a resource kit with guidelines and tips to guide people in developing sound proposals.

The Proposals feature has attracted a great deal of attention, with users submitting more than 28,000 proposals since the platform's launch in 2015.⁶ However, during this period only two proposals have garnered the 1% support threshold to advance to the debate and voting phase, both of which were proposed in the platform's first year of existence. One of these proposals, which called for Madrid to adopt a 14-point sustainability plan, resulted in the City creating a new climate monitoring commission in 2017. The other, a proposal to create a single, consolidated ticket for public transit, was rejected by the City government in 2017. As described in further detail in the "Who Participates" section, this lack of outcomes from citizens' proposals may act as a deterrent that is discouraging individuals from continuing to participate on the Proposals section of the website.

2. Debates

The Debates section is intended for deliberation and public discussion. Any registered user can "start a discussion" with the click of a button, filling in a few fields with the option to add tags and categories before posting.

⁵ It is important to note that proposals that receive a majority vote are not automatically applied, as the Spanish Constitution does not allow for binding referendums. Instead, the Madrid City Council undertakes to study any proposal of this type for 30 days, during which it will determine if it is applied. During this review, the proposal is evaluated based on its legality, feasibility, competition and economic cost, all of which are revealed in a subsequent report that is published openly. If the report is positive, an action plan is drawn up and published to carry out the proposal. If the report is negative, the City Council may propose an alternative action or publish the reasons that prevent the execution of the proposal.

⁶ "Registro apoyos prop" data set

Another user can "like" or "dislike" a post, leave a comment or share the post on social networks. Debates are similar in topic to Proposals, with users largely focusing on quality of life issues, for example, littering, better streetlights, and bike lanes. Some of the more active Debates threads attract hundreds of comments and thousands of likes and dislikes, while less active threads receive little to no engagement. There is also a subsection of the Debates feature called “Lazotea” debates, where users can filter for discussion threads focused on their neighborhood.

Users have created more than 4,000 debates since 2015. However, as the city is not compelled to respond or take any action based on Debates, it is difficult to measure the impact of the Debates feature beyond providing a place for the public to express its opinion.



FIGURE 3. Screenshot showing the landing page of the Debates section. Source: <https://decide.madrid.es/debates>

3. Processes

Unlike Proposals, where residents propose policies, regulations, and actions, the 'Processes' feature invites the public to comment on policies proposed by the City Council or the Administration.

A Process begins when the City Council creates a post on the web with a description of the consultation and any needed documentation. There are then several possible ways citizens can participate, depending on the type of consultation. For example, the City may invite participants to respond to a questionnaire, leave comments, propose and vote on policy or project ideas, or annotate proposed ordinances.

The City has used the Processes feature to facilitate more than 70 consultations since 2016. Various plans, ordinances, regulations and guidelines have been discussed through this process, such as the [Taxi Regulatory Ordinance](#) (2019), the [Air Quality and Climate Change Plan](#) (2016), which received more than 6,000 comments, and the city's [Social and Solidarity Economy Strategy](#) (2017).

Consulta pública previa sobre la modificación de la Ordenanza Reguladora del Taxi de la ciudad de Madrid

EN QUÉ CONSISTE

El Ayuntamiento de Madrid inicia, a través de la consulta pública previa, la modificación de la vigente Ordenanza Reguladora del Taxi con dos objetivos:

- de un lado, adaptar su contenido al Decreto 35/2019, de 9 de abril, del Consejo de Gobierno, por el que se modifica el Reglamento de los Servicios de Transporte Público Urbano en Automóviles de Turismo de la Comunidad de Madrid, aprobado mediante Decreto 74/2005, de 28 de julio, en cumplimiento de su Disposición Final Primera;
- de otro lado, plantear a la ciudadanía el debate sobre cómo mejorar, en el ejercicio de las competencias municipales, la regulación del servicio del taxi para incrementar su calidad y sostenibilidad y adaptarlo a las necesidades de las personas usuarias.

A tal efecto se abre un espacio de debate con el objeto de identificar y recoger ideas que permitan mejorar la regulación municipal del servicio del taxi para potenciar su sostenibilidad, su relevancia y utilidad social en el municipio de Madrid.

Información adicional

Documentación adicional

- Informe de resultados (PDF | 674 KB)
- Acuerdo de la Junta de Gobierno en el BOAM (PDF | 48,3 KB)
- Trámite de la consulta pública (PDF | 115 KB)

Fases de participación

Debate previo 23 sep 2019 - 22 oct 2019	Seguimiento 10 ene 2022
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DEBATE

¿Qué aspectos de los exámenes para obtener el permiso municipal para conducir un taxi podrían mejorarse?

Realiza tus aportaciones al debate previo participando en los siguientes temas.

FIGURE 4. Screenshot of the 2017 consultation around the regulation of taxis. Source: <https://decide.madrid.es/legislation/processes/105/debate>

4. Voting

In the Citizen Voting section, individuals vote on proposed policies, decisions, and actions of the City government. These include proposals that have reached the 1% support threshold as well as other issues that the City Council decides to put to a public consultation. For example, in February of 2017, the City combined the opportunity to vote on two citizen proposals with an additional series of questions about how to remodel various public spaces

across the city. Registered individuals age 16 or older can vote online, by mail, or at in-person polling stations.

Who Participates: An empirical analysis

Decide Madrid exhibited very high engagement in its early years. Data from May of 2018 shows that the platform attracted nearly 400,000 registered users who submitted more than 21,000 proposals in just the first three years of the site’s existence.⁷

However, in the years that followed, engagement has dropped significantly on the Proposals feature, likely due to the difficulty of achieving the 1% support threshold that is needed for proposals to advance in the process. At the same, engagement has grown in recent years on the Processes section of the platform.

Our analysis also shows that there is room for improvement in increasing the diversity of who participates. In particular, the City should focus on engaging more people under age 30, people over age 65, people who identify as female, and more organizations and businesses. This analysis is based on data from the City of Madrid about who participates on the Decide Madrid platform with regard to age, sex, and district. The dataset also included data about the volume of participation on each section of the platform. Demographic data and data about the volume of participation was provided on specific sections of the website (Proposals, Debates, Processes, Comments, Polls), and for the website as a whole, for each year from 2015 to 2021.

N.B. It should be noted that this data is self-reported by users of the website, and in some cases is incomplete. Of the 668,244 registered users on the platform, roughly one-third did not report either their sex or their age; these users are excluded from our demographic analysis.⁸

Participation Challenges

⁷ The GovLab, “Decide Madrid,” Crowdlaw for Congress, February 2020. <https://congress.crowd.law/case-decide-madrid.html>

⁸ “Edad usuarios DM” data set

1. Lack of youth engagement

The DM platform exhibits low engagement by individuals who report their age as under 30. Among registered users, fewer than 1% report that they are below 19 years of age and fewer than 6% report that they are below age 30.⁹ Younger users appear to be most active on the Proposals section; among users under 30 who have commented on any section of the website, approximately 41% of these users have left comments on the Proposals section (compared to 29% on the Processes section and 17% on the Debates section).¹⁰ Yet, only 6.2% of users who have submitted proposals are age 30 or younger.¹¹

Analysis: As civil servants who participated in the December/January 2021-22 training workshops noted, one possible reason for low participation among youth is that the platform is primarily aimed at people over age 16. Unlike initiatives in other cities that focus, especially, on engaging school age children, individuals under age 16 cannot vote on proposals nor can they propose or vote on ideas in the participatory budgeting process on DM.

Another possible reason for low youth engagement is that the City's communication and outreach strategies have not focused on creating language and modes of communication targeted at children and adolescents. During the workshops, civil servants noted that younger people may perceive the DM portal itself as excessively bureaucratic, with aesthetics and language that are not adapted to a younger audience.

As a result, younger people who are eligible to participate on DM may be unaware of the opportunity, or may not know how to engage. A survey of young people ages 13 through 31 (n=75), conducted by civil servants as part of the training program, found 67% of

⁹ "Edad usuarios DM" data set.

¹⁰ "Edad Usr comentarios" data set.

¹¹ "Edad Usr crean propuestas" data set.

respondents had not heard of the DM portal and 63% did not know of any space for youth participation in the City.

Young people may feel that they lack the time needed to participate, due to school, homework, extracurricular activities, and other obligations. The survey of youth found that, among the 62% of the respondents who are not interested in participating believe they do not have the time to do so.

Youth who do want to make a difference in their neighborhoods and their city may feel that it is easier or more impactful to do so through other means, such as online activism through social media that they already use like Facebook, WhatsApp or Instagram.

Given the complex process and the lack of outcomes from Proposals, young people might be put off from participating if they feel that there are no adequate channels to take their input from idea to implementation. The research literature shows that people participate when they believe their participation to be relevant, and as such, the absence of outcomes from the Proposal feature may discourage participation by younger people.¹²

¹² Julia Weiss, “What Is Youth Political Participation? Literature Review on Youth Political Participation and Political Attitudes,” Institute of Political Science, University of Heidelberg, Heidelberg, Germany, May 15, 2020. <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpos.2020.00001/full> https://www.unicef.org/media/72436/file/Digital-civic-engagement-by-young-people-2020_4.pdf

Age of Decide Madrid Users

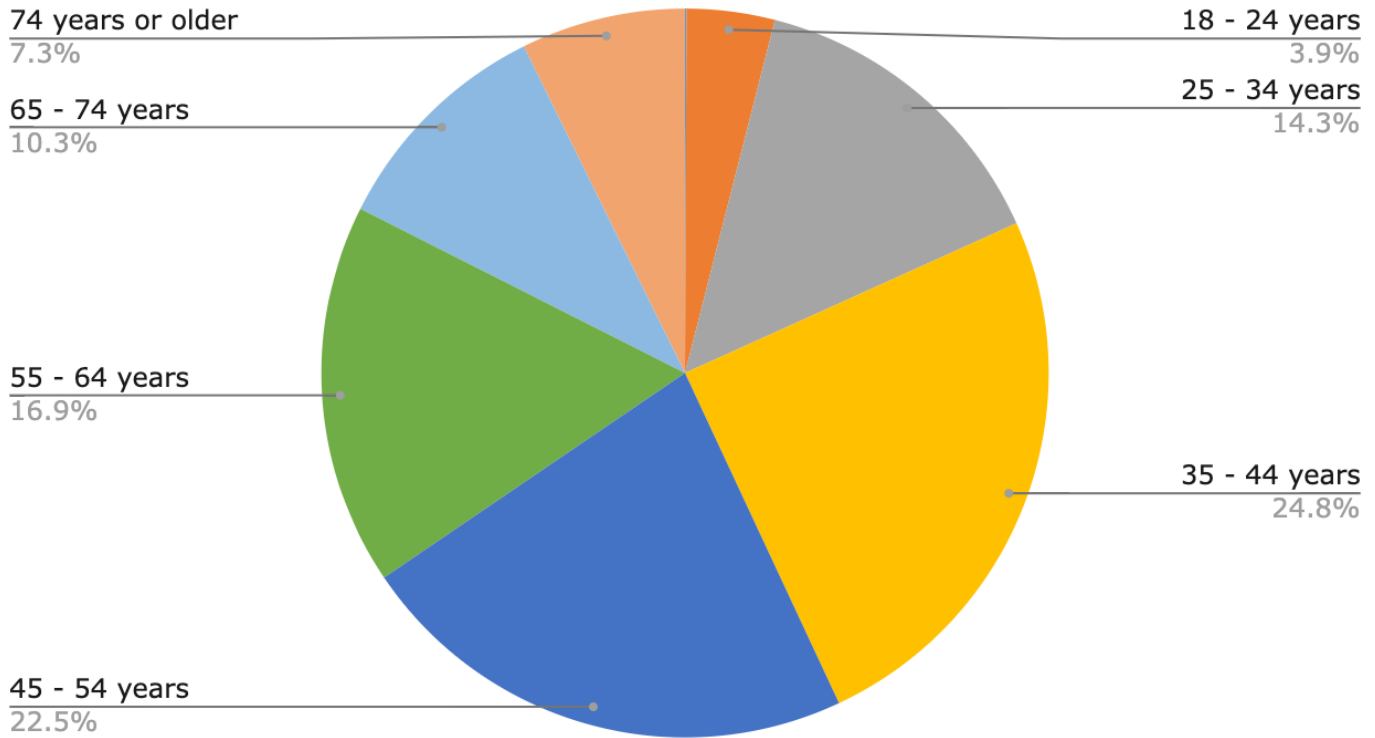


FIGURE 5. Age distribution of registered users. n=442,216. Values below 1% not shown. Users who did not declare their age are not shown.

2. Lack of engagement among older people

The DM platform also exhibits noticeably low participation by older individuals compared to other age groups.¹³ Approximately 17% of registered users report their age as 65 years or older.¹⁴ By comparison, 23% of Madrid’s population is over the age of 65.¹⁵ Among users who

¹³ It should be noted that the data about age includes several individuals who reported their age as 16 years or younger. Likewise, there are a handful of users who reported that they are over age 100. Some of these users likely entered their ages incorrectly.

¹⁴ “Edad usuarios DM” data set.

¹⁵ CENIE (International Centre on Aging), “ESTIMACIONES DE LA POBLACIÓN DE LA PROVINCIA DE MADRID,” <https://cenie.eu/en/node/131>

have submitted proposals, only 12.2% are age 65 or older.¹⁶ Older users appear to be most active on the Proposals section of the platform; among users age 65 or older who commented on any section of the platform, 33.4% commented on the Proposals section (compared to 28.2% who commented on the Processes section and 11.7% who commented on the Debates section).¹⁷

Civil servants who participated in the training workshops pointed to a number of reasons why older people are not more engaged, including “digital divide” (meaning that older people may lack the digital skills or access to technology need to participate online), a lack of motivation to partake in participatory processes, lack of opportunities to participate in face-to-face participation spaces that are designed for older people, and a lack a usability in the portal’s design. Similarly, the literature shows that lower levels of digital literacy and overall internet use, as well as ageist messaging and media that stereotypes older people as internet-incompetent, can act as barrier to internet usage among older adults in general.¹⁸

3. Lack of engagement among organizations

Notably, the DM platform is designed as a way for individuals to participate (i.e. rather than groups and organizations). The city primarily collects input from businesses, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other groups through other means, such as stakeholder meetings and via DM’s participatory budgeting program. The website lacks features, for example, for members of a community or organization to share information within their organization, co-create a proposal together or codesign an outreach campaign. Such group organization has to take place off the website using other tools. There are also no communications materials or other content on the site designed to help proposers or

¹⁶ “Edad Usr crean propuestas” data set.

¹⁷ “Edad Usr comentarios” data set, n=6,170

¹⁸ Carol C. McDonough, “The Effect of Ageism on the Digital Divide Among Older Adults,” *Journal of Gerontology & Geriatric Medicine*, September 16, 2015. <https://www.heraldopenaccess.us/openaccess/the-effect-of-ageism-on-the-digital-divide-among-older-adults>

debaters engage with community groups, businesses or other organizations. Therefore, this report could not include an analysis of group participation on the DM platform.

4. Underrepresentation of women and girls

While individuals who describe their sex as female make up a larger percentage of registered users, individuals who describe their sex as male are overrepresented in participation on every section of the DM platform. Some sections of the platform are more unequal than others; for example more than twice as many male users have participated in Debates compared to female users.¹⁹ Participation on other sections of the platform is less unequal; for example 42% of participants in the Proposals section of the platform identified their sex as female compared to 57% who identified their sex as male (1% of participants did not declare their sex).²⁰

Analysis: The lower levels of engagement among women has many possible causes. For example, studies have shown that women and girls report negative experiences, such as harassment and discrimination online, at higher rates than boys and men, which may act as an incentive against participating in online spaces.²¹ Though, as participation on DM is largely anonymous or pseudonymous, it is unclear how relevant these concerns around privacy are to users of the platform.

It is also worth noting that the overrepresentation of men is a challenge that is not unique to DM. Other digital democracy platforms exhibit similar participation trends. For example,

¹⁹ “Participantes Debates” data set. 2015–2020. Among users who participated in Debates, 580 identified their sex as female and 1300 identified their sex as male. An additional 750 users did not declare their sex.

²⁰ n=22,263. Among users who participated in Processes, 9,332 identified their sex as female and 12,651 identified their sex as male. An additional 280 users did not declare their sex.

²¹ U-Report, “Internet Safety Day – Online harassment,” February 8, 2020. <https://ureport.in/opinion/3983/>; Dane Gambrell and Beth Simone Noveck, “The Power of Virtual Communities: Literature Review,” The GovLab, February 23, 2021. <https://virtual-communities.thegovlab.org/literature-review/index.html>

the usership of Brazil’s citizens’ initiative platform, called Mudamos, is nearly 75% male.²² Similarly, Rahvakogu, a one-off reform to crowdsource policy proposals for improving the state of democracy and in Estonia in 2013, engaged an audience that was 74% male.²³

Further research is required to better understand why the higher percentage of female users on DM does not translate to higher levels of female participation. The lower levels of real world outcomes for the Proposals and Debates features of the website might be a further disincentive to women, in particular, for reasons that may not be well understood.

²² The GovLab, “Mudamos,” Crowdlaw for Congress, February 2020. <https://congress.crowd.law/case-mudamos.html>

²³ The GovLab, “Rahvakogu,” Crowdlaw for Congress, February 2020. <https://congress.crowd.law/case-rahvakogu.html>

Participation in Debates by Sex

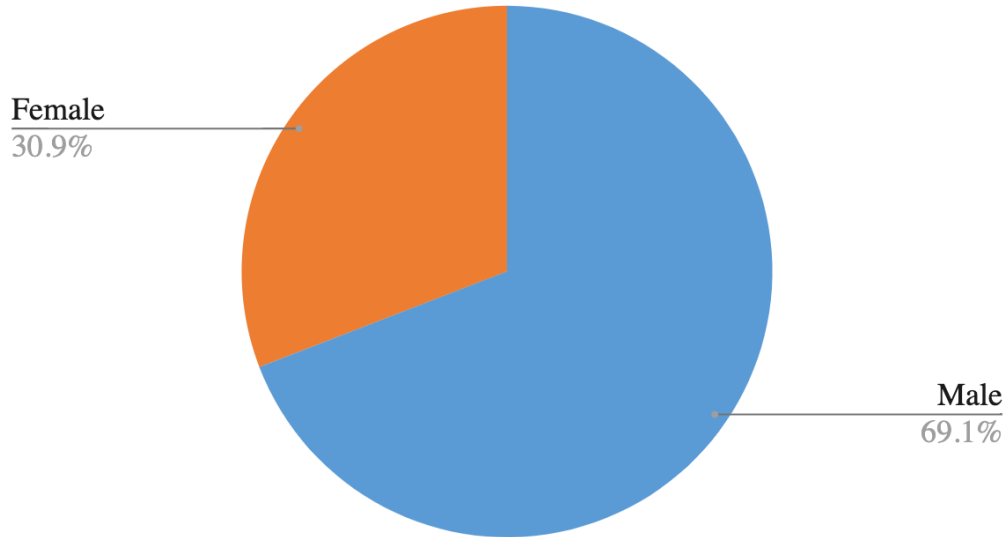


FIGURE 6. Percentage of female and male users who participated in debates. n=1,880. Users who did not declare their sex not shown.

Sex of Decide Madrid Users

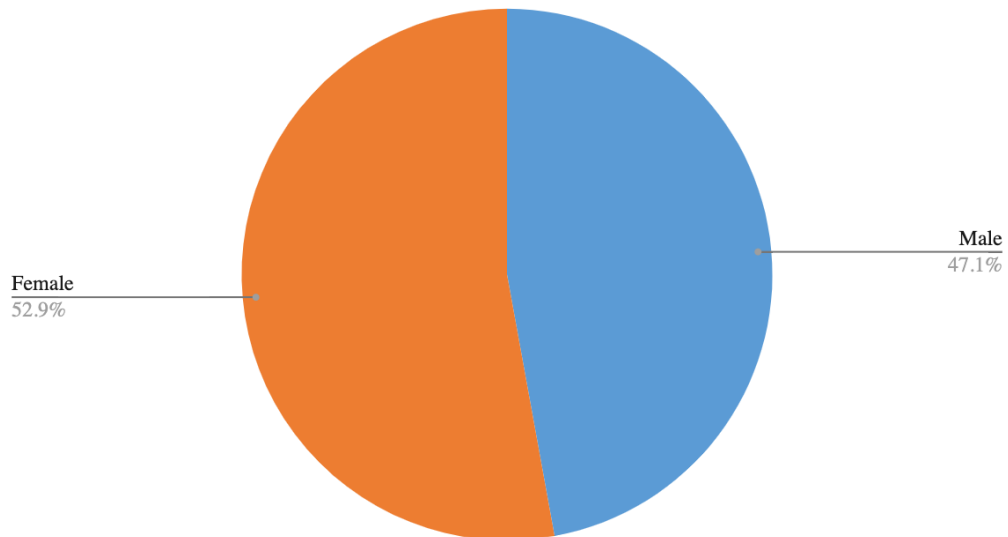


FIGURE 7. Percentage of female and male registered users. n=441,358. Users who did not declare their sex not shown.

5. Declining Proposals, Increasing Processes

Notably, participation has declined over time on the Proposals section of the platform, while it has increased on the Processes section. Engagement on the Debates section initially declined but has recovered in recent years.

The number of individuals who participated in the Proposals section dramatically decreased from more than 5,200 in 2016 to just under 600 in 2020 and the overall number of proposals declined from an average of 6,190 proposals per year in the years 2016 to 2018 to 1,190 proposals per year between 2019 and 2021. Voting on proposals has also declined from 1,111,469 supports (i.e. signatures in support of proposals) in 2015 to just 32,226 supports in 2020.²⁴

²⁴ “Total apoyos propuestas” data set.

Decline in Supports over Time

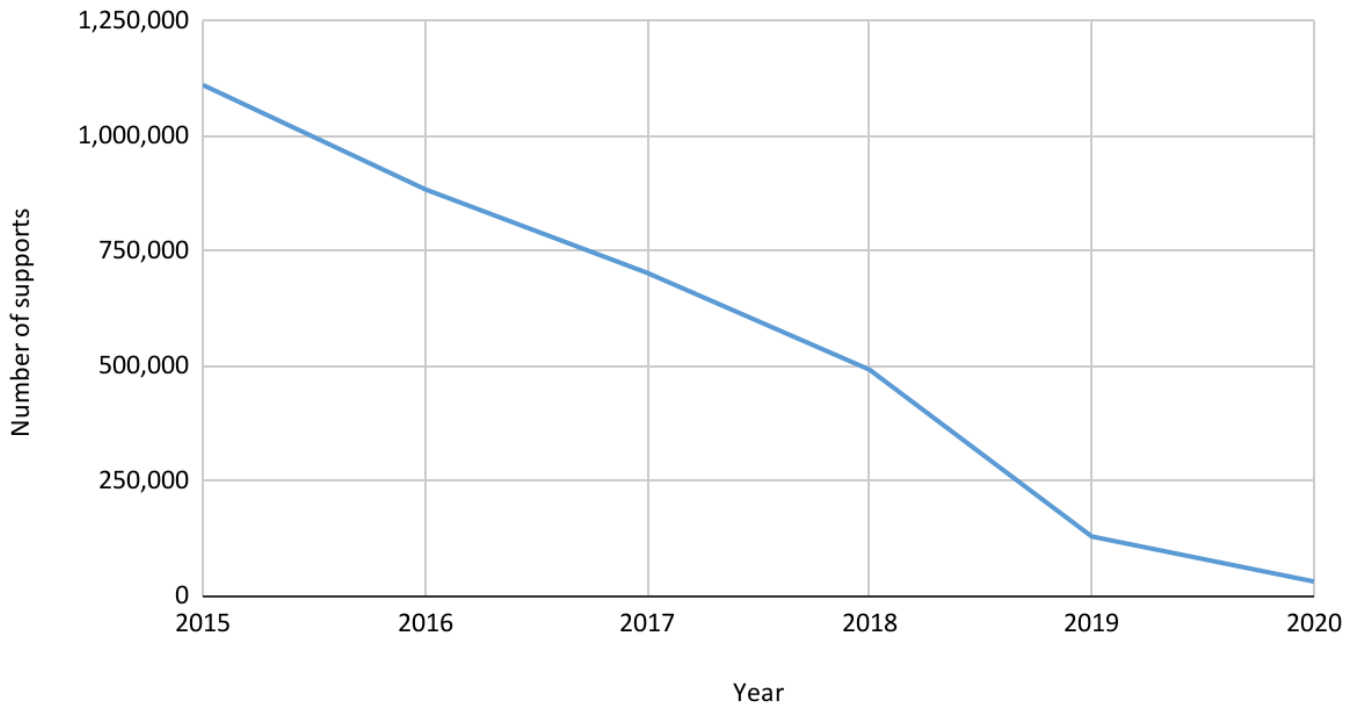


FIGURE 8. Number of supports, 2015 - 2020.

Decline in participation on Proposals over time

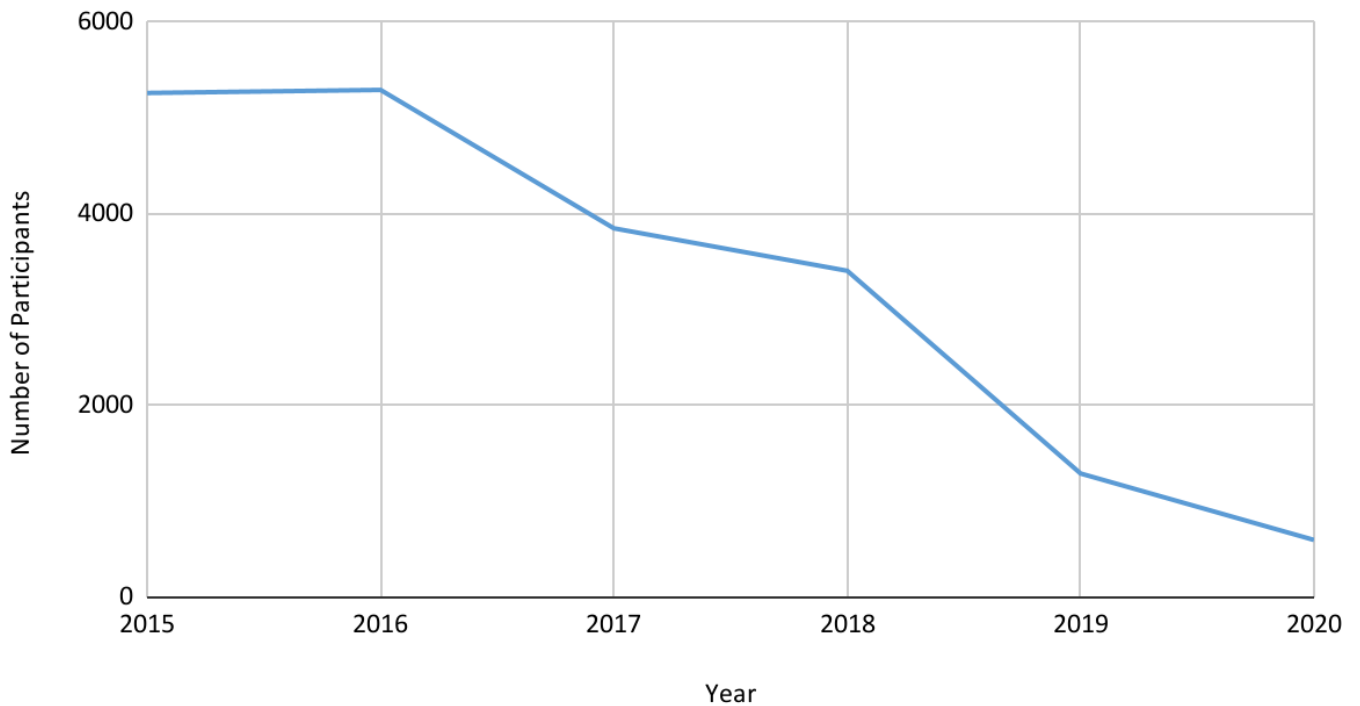


FIGURE 9. Number of participants on Proposals section, 2015 - 2020.

We posit a number of possible explanations for this drop in engagement on the once-popular Proposals feature:

1. **High support threshold** – The multi-step, complex process for advancement combined with the legal requirement that 1% of citizens support a proposal to advance to consideration by the City Council results in the vast majority of proposals languishing. Between 2015–2021, only two citizen proposals have moved forward from suggestion to consideration by the Council. People may become discouraged from participating if they believe that the support threshold is too high to achieve and lose interest given the long and drawn out nature of the process.
2. **Lack of outcomes** – Because the process has not resulted in new policies and services, people may lack incentives to continue participating. The City reports that the participatory budgeting process has encountered some similar challenges; for example, in 2019 only around 15% of winnings PB projects were implemented.²⁵ Taken together, the lack of outcomes from the City’s participatory democracy platforms may discourage residents from participating in the future.
3. **Lack of feedback** – Because the City is not permitted to provide feedback on proposals, many proposals duplicate existing laws or are outside of the city’s jurisdiction, are poorly informed, or are otherwise designed in such a way that prevents their implementation.²⁶
4. **Duplicate proposals** – Another design challenge with the Proposals feature is that support may be split between multiple, similar proposals. For example, in 2021, two separate users created proposals calling for stricter enforcement of fines for people

²⁵ Information provided by the General Directorate of Citizen Participation of the City Council

²⁶ The GovLab, “Decide Madrid,” *Crowdlaw for Congress*, February 2020. <https://congress.crowd.law/case-decide-madrid.html>

who do not clean up their pets' droppings.²⁷ Per the mechanics of the Proposals feature, each proposal generated a separate comment thread and support page, each with just over 1,000 supports. Others have also posted numerous discussion threads about the same problem on the Debates section. While it is unclear how many proposals are duplicates, the presence of multiple similar proposals may make it more difficult for any one proposal to reach the 1% signature threshold.

By contrast, the Processes section is one area where participation is substantially increasing in recent years. The number of users participating in Processes has increased from fewer than 400 in 2019 to more than 21,000 in 2021, even while the number of Processes per year remained about the same.

²⁷ PatriciaDelMar (Decide Madrid username), "Multas a los dueños que no recojan los excrementos de sus mascotas," Decide Madrid proposal, September 23, 2021, <https://decide.madrid.es/proposals/29498-multas-a-los-duenos-que-no-recojan-los-excrementos-de-sus-mascotas>
Sanruca (Decide Madrid username), "Vigilancia para detectar a personas que NO RECOGEN EXCREMENTOS DE SU PERRO," Decide Madrid proposal, June 23, 2021, <https://decide.madrid.es/proposals/29195-vigilancia-para-detectar-a-personas-que-no-recogen-excrementos-de-su-perro>

Number of participants on Processes over time

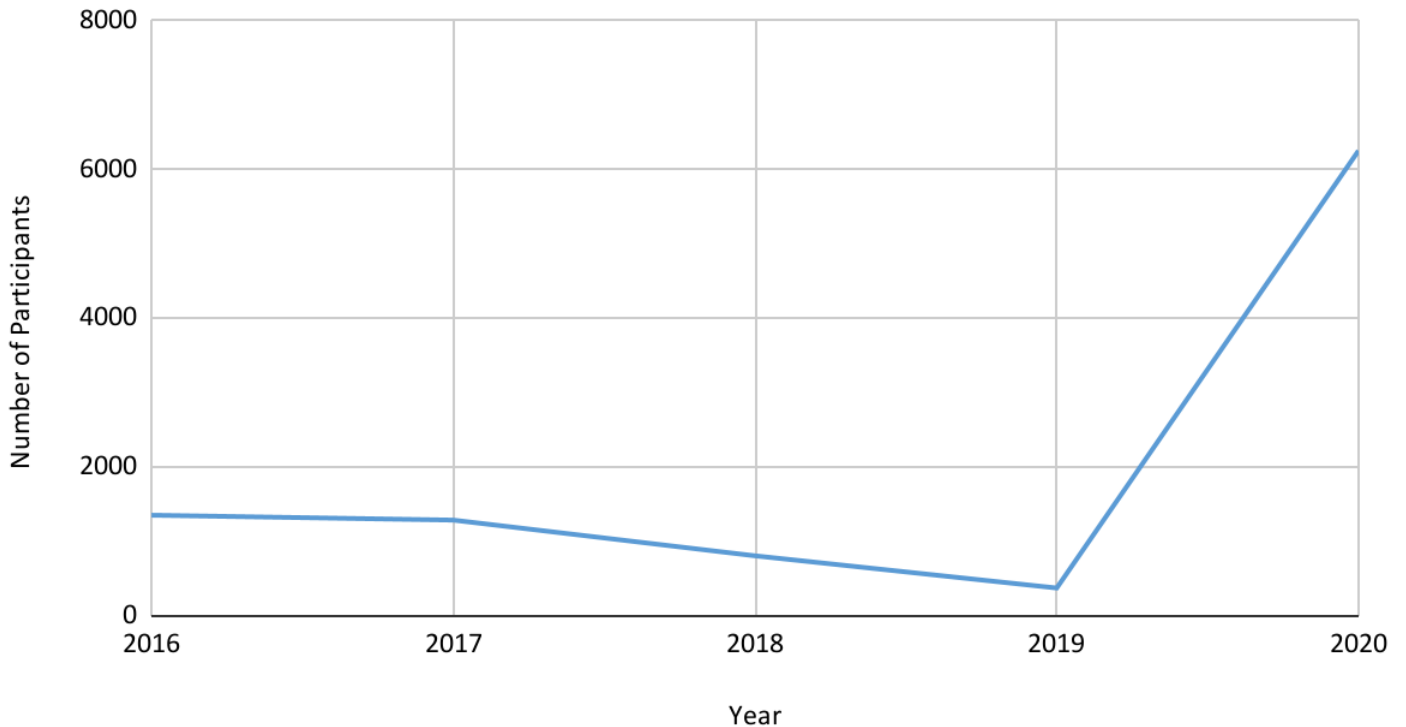


FIGURE 10. Number of participants on Processes section, 2016 – 2020.

There are a number of possible reasons why individuals are shifting their attention to the Processes feature:

- **Priority issues** – Some specific Processes have attracted a high level of engagement. For example, one Process called Madrid sale al balcón (“Madrid goes out to the balcony” referring to the camaraderie between neighbors interacting via terraces during the pandemic), which ran from March 2020 – July 2021, collected more than 500 proposals for how the City could improve citizen solidarity and residents’ quality of life during the COVID-19 pandemic. The City’s focus on issues that residents see as priorities may thus be driving participants to the Processes feature.

- **Active listening** – The direct involvement of the City’s government in soliciting resident’s input fosters a two-way conversation between government and governed.
- **Relevance** – Processes are consultations driven by the City. This suggests the City is willing to listen and take action based on resident input, which may act as an incentive to participate.

Finally, participation on the Debates section initially declined but has recovered in recent years. The number of Debates plummeted after DM’s first year, dropping from 2,665 Debates in 2015 to just 447 Debates in 2016. The number of Debates continued to decline steadily after 2016, until 2020, when the number of Debates increased to 362 from 85 in the previous year. This recovery is likely due to the City’s introduction of the “Lazotea” Debate feature in 2020, which allows residents to participate in Debates at the neighborhood level.

Number of Debates since 2016

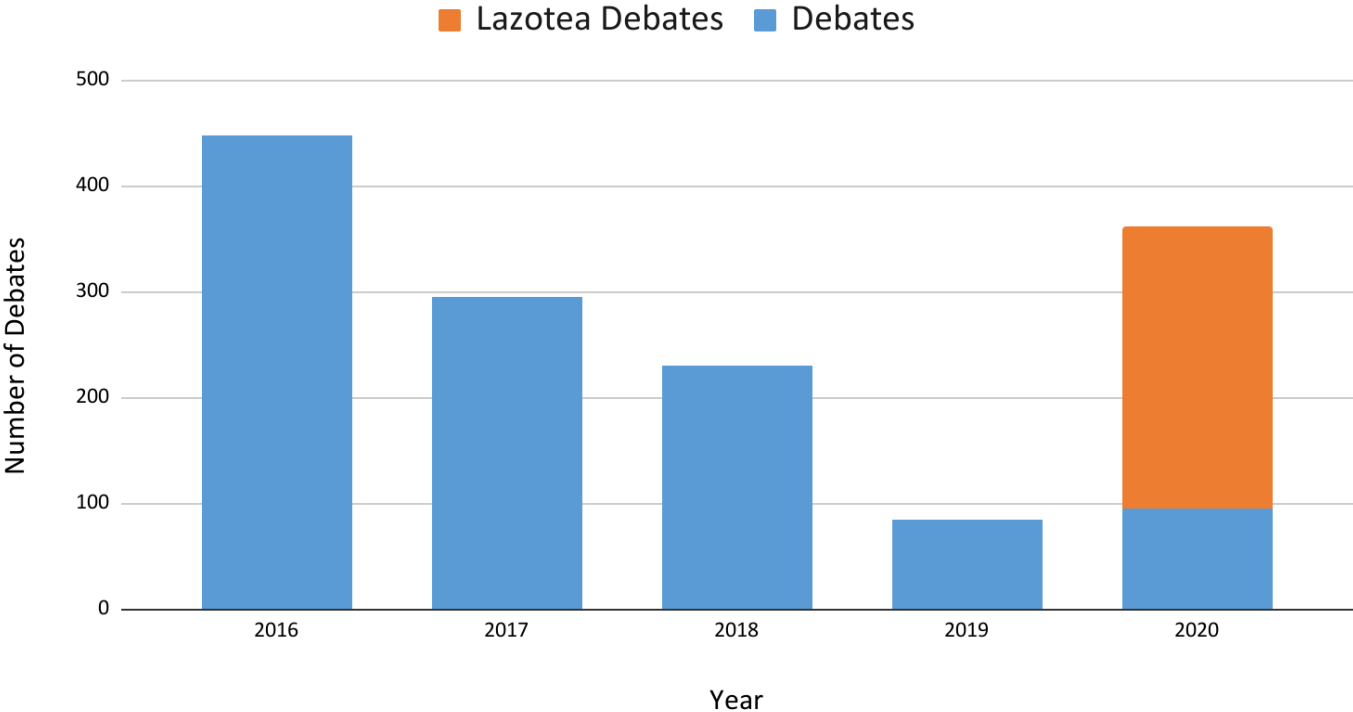


FIGURE 11. Number of Debates, 2016 - 2020.

Given that Debates are no more likely to lead to outcomes than Proposals, why are debates increasing in popularity? We posit that because the threshold to participation is so much lower and the process so much less complex with more gratification to be had from the community deliberation fostered by the platform. However, it is worth noting that while participation is increasing, such participation is still unevenly distributed.

Recommendations and Insights

Considering these challenges, below are recommendations for how the City of Madrid can achieve higher and impactful engagement on the Decide Madrid platform. Drawing upon examples of impactful engagement from other jurisdictions, we suggest design changes to existing platform as well as ideas for new projects that could expand upon the platform's existing infrastructure to engage residents in new and innovative ways.

Recommendation 1: Collect additional data and run experiments to deepen the City's understanding of differences in participation (not only registration) among groups of people.

What? The City Council should collect additional data — both quantitative and qualitative — about individuals' motivations for participating on the Decide Platform. Where it is not already collected, the City should collect and analyze additional data about individuals' socioeconomic status, work status, education level, etc. (or make this data available in formats that could be shared with researchers) in order to better understand differences in who participates.

Why? While the available data shows a clear gap in participation among young people, older people, and people who identify as female, more research is needed to understand why these disparities exist. Further, as the City did not provide data about the socioeconomic status, work status, or education, we cannot evaluate whether there are differences in who

participates among these groups in this analysis. It would be very interesting to know if there is a wealth or class gap in who uses the site or the off-line processes of engagement.

How? Conduct additional surveys and conduct interviews with individuals who are registered on the platform as well as with people who do not participate to understand the disincentives. Conduct research among those who register but do not actively use the site to understand the drop off. Finally, conduct and share data about the City Council and other officials and their use (or not) of the platform. It is important to understand both the institutional as well as the individual users of the platform to understand whether the platform and the underlying processes it reflects are having their needs met. Far too often, cities focus on creating user-friendly websites to make it easier for residents to sign up without, at the same time, evaluating the needs of public servants, who have to read, analyze and evaluate what residents submit.

In addition, run experiments to segment participants into different groups in order to test the impact of different features. For example, determining whether notifying people about a proposal that is relevant to their neighborhood or profession can be accomplished by asking participants to provide additional information about their background and to opt-in to notifications.²⁸ Furthermore, the City should test whether residents are more likely to support proposals and get involved if they receive an email from an important public figure, such as the Mayor or a pop or sports star.

Which challenges does this respond to? Declines in participation; lack of youth engagement; Lack of engagement among older people; Underrepresentation of women and girls.

²⁸ Ipeirotis, P. G., & Gabrilovich, E. (2014, April). Quiz: targeted crowdsourcing with a billion (potential) users. In *Proceedings of the 23rd international conference on World wide web* (pp. 143-154). ACM.

Recommendation 2: Experiment with machine learning to process comments more efficiently, reduce the number of duplicative proposals and improve the quality of proposals.

What? The City should use machine learning software to analyze, group and consolidate duplicative proposals. For example, when a resident tries to submit a proposal that uses similar language to another active proposal, the platform could prompt the user to support the existing proposal rather than submitting a new one.

Why? Consolidating similar proposals would reduce the number of submissions and focus participants on a smaller number of submissions. This could guide users to rally their support around a single proposal, in turn increasing the likelihood that any one proposal reaches the 1% signature threshold. Further, machine learning could make it more feasible for the City to digest the large volume of comments submitted across the Proposals, Debates, and Processes sections of the website, and in turn, better understand how residents understand and prioritize problems.

How? There are a number of existing examples of machine learning tools to process citizens' inputs that Madrid could adopt or copy.

For instance, the Belgian company [CitizenLab](#) has created a tool which governments and organizations that use its online engagement platform can use to cluster comments and proposals submitted by citizens into common topic areas. The tool uses a text analysis technique known as topic modeling to group and visualize comments and proposals that contain similar word forms and meanings. This grouping and visualization makes it easier

for officials to quickly understand the public’s ideas and priorities.²⁹ While previously CitizenLab was closed source, the company has recently open sourced its platform.³⁰

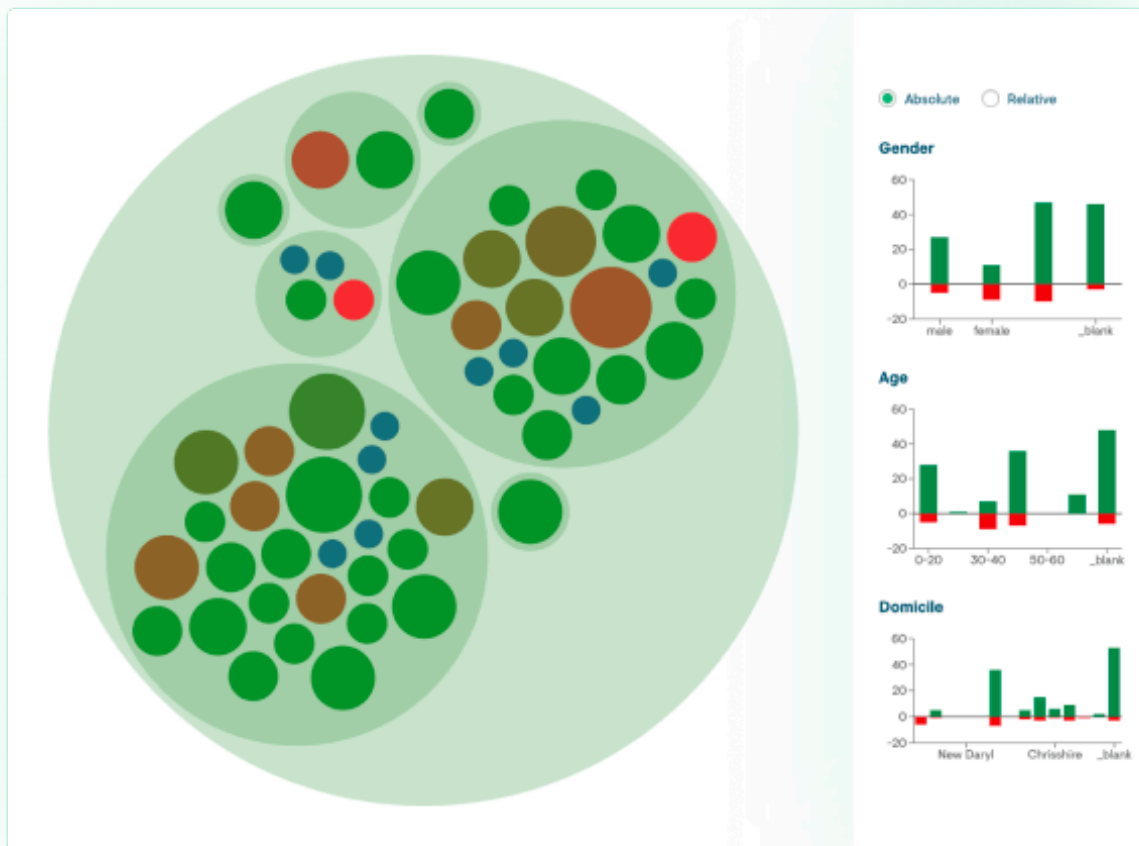


FIGURE 12. Example of data visualization for topic clustering on CitizenLab’s natural language processing tool. Source: <https://www.nesta.org.uk/feature/ai-and-collective-intelligence-case-studies/citizenlab/>

Other companies sell software that is specifically for de-duplication. The American software company Texifer has created a tool called DiscoverText, which has been used by multiple

²⁹ Aleks Berditchevskaia and Peter Baeck, “CitizenLab: Natural language processing to categorise, prioritise and summarise active citizen inputs,” Nesta, February 10, 2020. <https://www.nesta.org.uk/feature/ai-and-collective-intelligence-case-studies/citizenlab/>

³⁰ Please note that Beth Simone Noveck is an unpaid member of Citizen Lab’s Board of Directors.

federal agencies in the United States to analyze duplicate comments submitted by the public during regulatory rulemaking processes.³¹

New machine learning tools are being developed to make it easier to summarize voluminous quantities of content, which might make it easier for the City Council to make sense of what residents submit and, in turn, make use of it, enhancing the relevance and usefulness of the platform.

Which challenges does this respond to? Lack of feedback; Duplicate proposals; declining participation on parts of the site.

Recommendation 3: Provide individuals with personalized feedback to help them create higher-quality, more implementable proposals.

What? The City should create a feedback mechanism by which civil servants and/or volunteers can respond to individuals with suggestions for how their proposal could be improved or edited to have a greater chance of implementation.

Why? As the City government is not permitted to provide feedback on proposals, many of the ideas submitted are poorly formulated, not thought through or otherwise unimplementable. Some identify a problem or complaint without providing an idea for a solution (e.g. damaged sidewalks). Others suggest ideas that are beyond the jurisdiction or scope of what the City Council of Madrid could implement, such as constructing a new airport in the municipality of Torrejón de Ardoz. To be sure, many individuals clearly put a great deal of thought and effort into creating well-crafted proposals. However, the need to

³¹ Beth Simone Noveck, “Hearing – “Fake It till They Make It: How Bad Actors Use Astroturfing to Manipulate Regulators, Disenfranchise Consumers, and Subvert the Rulemaking Process,” Testimony for the U.S. House Committee on Financial Services, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, February 6, 2020. <https://www.congress.gov/116/meeting/house/110461/witnesses/HHRG-116-BA09-Wstate-NoveckB-20200206.pdf>

sort through a large volume of proposals that have little chance of being implemented may discourage individuals from supporting the proposals of others.

How? The City should create a program to crowdsource legal and public administration advice by which lawyers and paralegals can lend their time to provide legal analysis and feedback of proposals.

For example, in Brazil, residents use a platform called Mudamos to propose and support laws and policies under the citizens initiative process created by Brazil's constitution.³² In 2017–2018, over 700,000 people signed up and drafted 800 new bills.³³ The process is advised by a volunteer legal team who provides users with feedback about whether their proposed law meets the constitutional requirements to be framed as a citizens' initiative bill. If the legal team finds that the bill lacks these constitutional requirements, it cannot be published on the platform.³⁴

To make the process more manageable for Madrid's case, the City could limit legal reviews to proposals that achieve some intermediate threshold of support (for example, any proposal that reaches 5,000 supports could automatically trigger a legal review). In addition, the City could provide users with a checklist and directions (including changing the required submission fields for creating more implementable and realistic proposals will lead to more signatures) and create an interactive expert system to guide people in authoring proposals in order to automate the improvement of quality prior to review by the legal volunteers. Providing this legal analysis could help to weed out legally impossible proposals and to strengthen the quality of legally feasible proposals.

³² Marco Konopacki, Debora Albu, and Fabro Steibel, "MUDAMOS: a civil society initiative on collaborative lawmaking in Brazil." In Proceedings of the 12th International Conference on Theory and Practice of Electronic Governance, ACM, 2019.

³³ Beth Simone Noveck, "CrowdLaw," The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Interest Groups, Lobbying and Public Affairs, April 2, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-13895-0_77-1

³⁴ The GovLab, "Mudamos," *Crowdlaw for Congress*, February 2020. <https://congress.crowd.law/case-mudamos.html>

Which challenge does this respond to? Lack of feedback.

Recommendation 4: Create a Groups feature that would allow individuals to find and join existing groups around common interests.

What? The City should create a Groups feature that would allow individuals to find and join affinity groups around common interests.

Why? Creating a section of the platform dedicated to group action could help individuals who have similar interests and priorities to collaborate with one another, for example, to co-create proposals. Connecting individuals to one another on the platform could also catalyze offline action and collaboration. For example, the individuals who have created separate proposals calling for more parking along Calle de Argumosa and in the Puerta del Angel area might decide to team up to create and promote a single proposal calling for more public parking across the city, or to advocate for such action offline. A Groups feature would also create an incentive for more organizations to participate, as the platform could provide them with an opportunity to connect with individuals who are interested in participating in actions they care about.

How? The Groups feature would allow individuals to create a group or join groups created by others. Similar to Facebook Groups or the “Groups” feature on Athen’s citizen engagement platform called the synAthina platform, teams could create a page with a description of their purpose and work and optional links to their website and social media pages. Individuals could search for teams by keyword and filter teams by topic area and district. Teams could be organized by neighborhood or district or by topic. Using text mining tools, the Decide team could identify individuals posting on Debates, Proposals, Processes or elsewhere about a given topic (i.e. parking) and invite them to join a relevant group, helping to match people with common interests.

What challenge does this respond to? Lack of collaboration with organizations.

Recommendation 5: Replicate the City Challenge model to co-create solutions to challenges with residents

What? The City Council of Madrid should run a City Challenge using the existing Decide Madrid infrastructure to offer an alternative way for residents to participate in a process that is designed to result in the implementation of projects. In a City Challenge, cities work with their residents to codesign and then collaboratively implement solutions to urban challenges, such as climate change and sustainability, public health and equity, congestion and pollution, structural racism and civic engagement.

Why? The waning engagement in the Proposals section, and growing participation in the Processes section, may indicate that Madrileños value more active engagement on the part of the City government in soliciting and acting on residents' input. A City Challenge would provide the City government with the opportunity to more rapidly develop and implement solutions to priority problems identified by residents, while also building capacity among civil servants to support and sustain those projects.

The GovLab has organized past City Challenges in partnership with the City of San Pedro Garza García, Mexico; City of Barcelona, Spain; Oakland, California; and in multiple cities simultaneously across Mexico and Africa. Across those projects, residents have generated more than 600 proposals for new programs, projects, and policies – 30 of which have been implemented by cities in collaboration with residents – and we have trained more than 150 civil servants on methods of public engagement and public problem solving.

How? City Challenge is a one-year, four stage model that involves: 1) Training public servants in defining problems with data and evidence 2) Facilitating an open innovation competition to source solutions from residents, 3) Organizing a coaching program for

residents and public servants to develop those solutions collaboratively, and 4) Providing support for public servants to implement the innovative new policy or service.

What challenge does this respond to? Lack of outcomes and depressed participation.

Recommendation 6: Create a youth-focused participatory budgeting initiative, similar to those in Helsinki and Vienna

What? Madrid should create a participatory budgeting program aimed at children and adolescents.

Why? Participatory budgeting is an area that is ripe for more youth engagement. Notably, individuals under age 16 are not eligible to participate in Decide Madrid's annual participatory budgeting initiative, which in 2021 allocated a total of €50 million for city-wide and district-specific projects. Providing a portion of this annual funding to projects proposed and voted on by youth could provide children and adolescents with the opportunity to participate in the budgeting process, which in turn could also drive more overall youth participation overall on the DM platform.

How? Madrid can look to a number of existing examples of youth PB initiatives as models for setting up its own program. For example, from October 2021 – fall of 2022, the City of Vienna is piloting a participatory budgeting initiative called Dein Wien for Future (“Your Vienna for the Future”) that allocates €1 million for projects that are proposed and voted on by people ages 5 through 20. Individuals below age 13 propose ideas and vote through their schools with the help of classroom teachers, while older individuals participate online using the open source Your Priorities platform.³⁵

³⁵ “Jetzt Ideen für dein Wien von morgen einreiche,” City of Vienna, accessed January 25, 2022. <https://www.wien.gv.at/menschen-gesellschaft/wien-for-future.html>

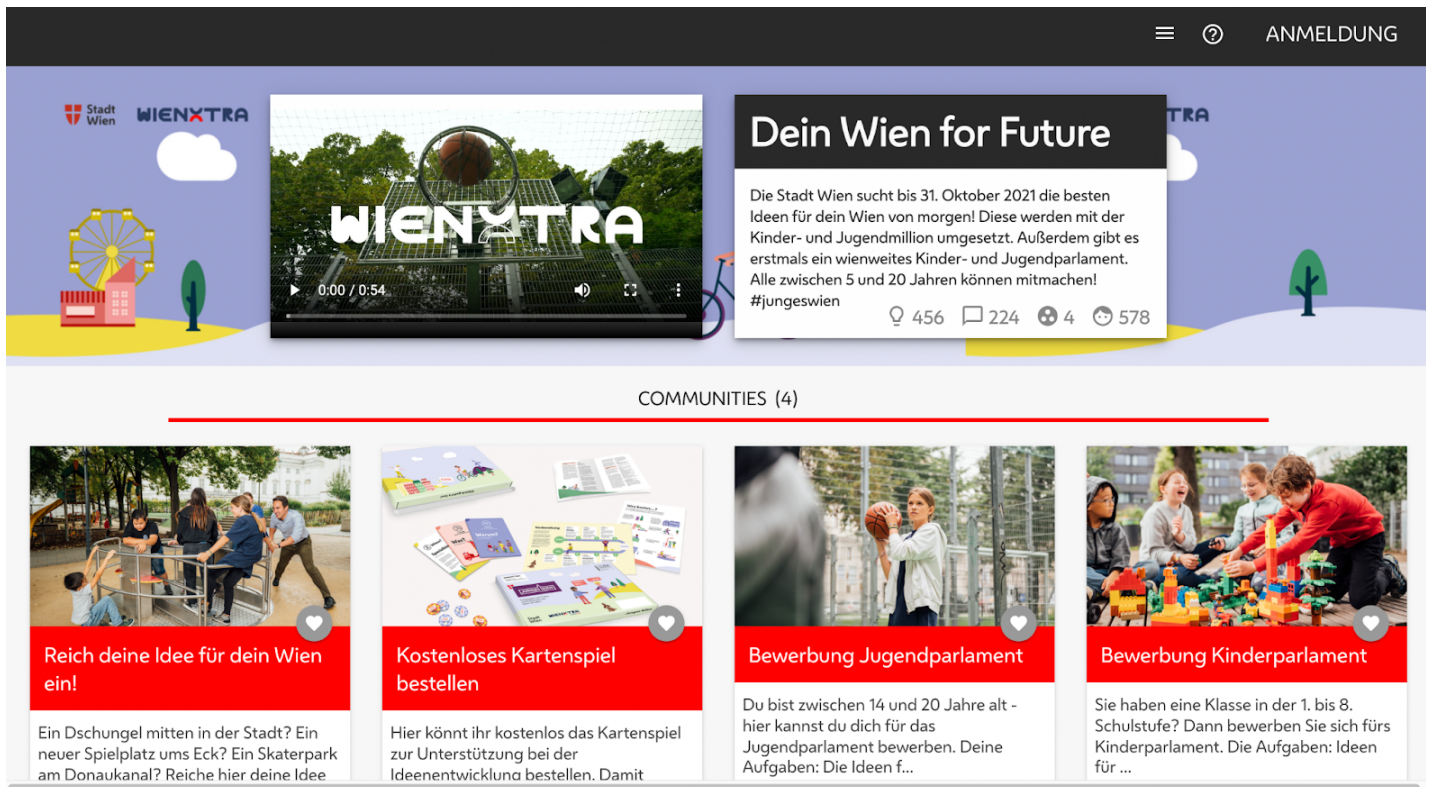


FIGURE 13. Screenshot of the online platform for Vienna’s youth participatory budgeting initiative. Source: <https://www.junges.wien/domain/1338>

In Helsinki, people ages 12 through 17 can propose and vote on ideas for how to spend €150,000 through the annual Nuorten Budjetti (“Youth Budget”) initiative. Individuals participate online through a City-run platform built upon the Decidim framework. Nuorten Budjetti is facilitated by the City’s youth services unit and runs in parallel to Helsinki’s all-ages participatory budgeting program, which is also open to people over age twelve.

Creating a PB initiative for youth could also lay the groundwork for additional projects that engage youth in new ways. For example, in Chile, the national Youth Ministry has created a platform called Creamos (“We Create”) for people ages 15 – 29 to share proposals to the national parliament, participate in debates, and partake in a training program to start their own social innovation project. According to the platform’s website, more than 9,000 young

people participated in the 2021 iteration of the program and 24 projects were selected for implementation by the Youth Ministry.³⁶

What challenge does this respond to? Lack of youth engagement.

Recommendation 7: Build on the Observatory of the City and Social Council experiences to create a “citizens’ assembly” as an alternative participatory policymaking method, like those examples in Paris and Belgium. Explore connecting these alternatives to Decide Madrid.

What? A citizens’ assembly (sometimes called a “mini-public” or “citizen jury”) is a body of citizens convened to deliberate and make recommendations on a specific issue. Members of these assemblies are usually chosen via random and representative selection (commonly known as “sortition”). Citizens’ assemblies have been used by local, state, and national governments around the world, as well as by nonprofits and advocacy groups, to convene deliberations around climate change, corruption, abortion, and road safety, among examples. Madrid, too, experimented with a citizen assembly known as the Observatory of the City in 2019 (abrogated after one meeting).³⁷ In 2020, Madrid created a new participatory body known as the Consejo Social (“Social Council”) to afford key interest groups, such as business and trade union organizations, citizen entities, and universities and professional associations and opportunity to participate with “voice but without vote.” However, the Social Council is a convening of stakeholders, rather than a representative sample of citizens.

³⁶ Chilean Ministry for Youth (INJUV), “Creamos 2021,” accessed January 25, 2022. <https://creamos.injuv.cl/es-CL/projects/creamos-2021/2>

³⁷ Lynn Carson and [Arantxa Mendiharat](#), Learnings from Madrid through its Observatorio de la Ciudad, May 5, 2020. <https://www.newdemocracy.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/RD-Note-Learnings-from-Madrid.pdf>

Why? Citizens’ assemblies have a number of benefits over “open call” or stakeholder lawmaking practices, which tend to engage a pool of participants that is disproportionately male and highly educated. Especially stakeholder processes tend to draw from elites. As cities select who participates, they can design citizens’ assemblies to oversample for underrepresented groups. By virtue of random representative sampling, decisions made by the assembly are more representative of community sentiment, and the diversity of viewpoints, and thus are more legitimate. Additionally, assemblies usually involve some guidance from subject matter experts (e.g. participants may be asked to read a set of briefing materials or to watch a presentation to inform them about the topic at hand) which promotes more informed deliberation and decision making. A well-designed assembly accords real power to participants.

How? Madrid should replicate and improve upon existing citizen assembly models used throughout Europe at the city, regional, and national levels by reconstituting a representative citizen assembly and designing a process that leverages DM in the assembly’s work. For example, members could use the software to make proposals transparently that residents can then help to improve, comment on and support.

In Belgium, the Parliament of the Brussels–Capital Region and the parliament of the French-speaking community have implemented a citizens’ assembly of 45 randomly selected members of the public who work with members of parliament to design new policies. The assembly works alongside the relevant standing committee for the topic at hand to deliberate, develop, and vote on policy recommendations.³⁸ The first assembly, which convened in May 2021 on the topic of 5G cellular infrastructure in Brussels, approved 43 recommendations regarding the health and environmental implications of implementing 5G technology, which are now under debate by the Environment and Health Committee. A similar citizens’ assembly experiment is also underway in the German-speaking Ostbelgien region.

³⁸ The GovLab, “Belgian Sortition Models,” *Crowdlaw for Congress*, February 2020. <https://congress.crowd.law/case-belgian-sortition-models.html>

The City of Paris inaugurated its permanent citizens' assembly in November of 2021. The assembly is composed of 100 Parisian citizens, selected randomly from a representative sample of the City's population. The assembly can deliberate and issue recommendations to the City Council and draft laws, among other powers.³⁹

What challenges does this respond to? Lack of outcomes; Underrepresentation of women and girls; Lack of youth engagement; Lack of participation among older people.

Recommendation 8: Redesign Decide Madrid by learning from other best practices to make participation more streamlined or eliminate the Proposals feature

What? While features like participatory budgeting and public consultations are generally working, the Proposals feature of DM are not. Participation is inequitable and declining. Thus, the City Council should radically rethink the design of the process or eliminate it, allowing the City to focus on improvements to other features and creating new approaches.

Why? A number of countries – including Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Brazil – have successfully implemented online platforms at the national level that enable citizens to submit legislative proposals (often called “citizens’ initiatives”) and sign-on to proposals submitted by others, similar to the Proposals feature of the Decide Madrid platform.⁴⁰ Studying these existing examples could provide additional lessons for how the Proposals feature of DM could be improved in order to expand engagement and impact.

How? The City should convene colleagues across cities who are conducting online resident engagement in policymaking (“CrowdLaw”) to discuss with other public servants what is working well in other cities. Such convening, combined with extensive existing research,

³⁹ “Standing citizens' assembly in Paris,” Bürgerrat.de, October 17, 2021. <https://www.buergerrat.de/en/news/standing-citizens-assembly-in-paris/>

⁴⁰ Beth Simone Noveck et al. *CrowdLaw for Congress: Strategies for 21st Century Lawmaking*, The GovLab, October 2020. https://congress.crowd.law/files/crowdlaw_playbook_Oct2020.pdf

will help the City to identify the “positive deviants,” those who are similarly situated but having more success and give the City a detailed blueprint for reforms.

For example, Finland’s Ministry of Justice maintains an online platform (kansalaisaloite.fi) where citizens can initiate and sign petitions under the country’s citizens’ initiative law. The country’s parliament must consider any initiative which receives at least 50,000 signatures (equivalent to roughly 0.9% of Finland’s population).⁴¹ Since the citizens’ initiative law went into effect in 2012, more than 1,000 petitions have been proposed, 56 of which have collected at least 50,000 signatures, including a proposal to legalize same-sex marriage, which parliament passed into law in 2017.

Estonia’s government runs a similar platform for its residents to propose and support policy ideas at the national or city level. More than 50 proposals have reached the signature threshold necessary for consideration (1,000 signatures at the national level or 1% of the population for city-level proposals) in just the last two years.

Iceland’s Better Reykjavik platform has consistently attracted 20–25% of the population actively participating over time because of the fact that the Mayor’s Office has committed to review the top five proposals on the site each month.⁴²

What challenges does this respond to? Lack of outcomes.

⁴¹ The GovLab, “Finnish Citizen’ Initiative,” *Using Collective Intelligence to Solve Public Problems*, October 2020. <http://collective-intelligence.thegovlab.org/case/finnish-citizens-initiative>

⁴² “Better Reykjavik: Municipal Open Innovation,” *CrowdLaw for Congress*, February 2020. <https://congress.crowd.law/case-better-reykjavik.html>

Case Studies: Alternative Approaches – How other governments are engaging the public?

York Neighborhood Approach

Location: City of York, United Kingdom

Implementation level: City

Owner: City of York Council

Years in operation: 2011–present

Topic: Engaging older residents

Introduction

Neighbourhood Approaches to Loneliness was a highly successful three-year action research initiative conducted by the City of York in partnership with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation that explored how neighborhood activity could affect loneliness. The City chose loneliness as the challenge to focus on due to its negative health impacts (loneliness can increase the risk of developing comorbidities such as hypertension, heart disease, and stroke) and the high prevalence of loneliness among York's older residents.

The action research initiative resulted in the creation of a number of volunteer and mutual aid programs that address the root causes of loneliness by creating points of connection for socially isolated people, many of which are still active and supported by the City today. The project demonstrates how, by choosing compelling problems and tapping the interests and passions of residents to tackle them, cities can reach even the most isolated residents in co-creating solutions.

How does it work?

The Neighbourhood Approaches to Loneliness (NAL) program lasted from 2011 – 2014.

Through the program, the City trained local residents to become “community researchers” who spoke with nearly 2,000 residents to understand the possible causes of loneliness (such as bereavement, family break down, being older, moving house, sole parenting, social isolation, and bad weather) and to collect ideas for how to solve them. Small groups of residents formed neighborhood teams and used the findings from these conversations to develop responses with the City, partnering NGOs and community groups.

This work was conducted through eight phases:⁴³

1. **Building awareness** – NAL team spoke with residents to build awareness about the program and to build relationships with the community
2. **Recruiting community researchers** – NAL team recruited researchers through channels such as on-street recruitment and awareness-raising events
3. **Training community researchers** to develop their confidence and peer research skills
4. **Collecting comments from residents** – Trained community researchers collected comments from residents about loneliness through interviews and conversations
5. **Analysis of data** – Community researchers analyzed the data that they collected from residents
6. **Presenting the issues and collecting solutions** – Community researchers undertook additional field work to gather ideas for solutions from residents.
7. **Prioritizing** among the possible solutions, according to each neighborhood’s vision and goals
8. **Implementation** – Community researchers worked with partners in their neighborhoods to implement solutions

Community groups immediately implemented two projects as a result of the program. In the New Earswick area, a group of older residents formed the New Earswick Less Lonely Initiative (NELLI) in order to host social events such as book exchanges at a local

⁴³ Angela B Collins and Julie Wrigley, “Can a neighbourhood approach to loneliness contribute to people's well-being?” Joseph Rowntree Foundation, July 8, 2014. <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/can-neighbourhood-approach-loneliness-contribute-peoples-well-being>

community center. In Tang Hall, residents created a community cafe at a church where neighbors could have a safer place to connect.⁴⁴

The City's involvement in the Neighborhood Approaches to Loneliness program sparked residents and community groups to create a number of additional volunteer-led programs that tackle the challenge of loneliness in new ways. Some that are still active today include:

- Community Health Champions who help people in their neighborhoods to get involved in healthy social activities.
- GoodGym York, which offers regular runners the opportunity to make a social visit to an isolated older person - their "coach" - a part of a weekly run.
- A 12-week Connecting Communities program where volunteers work alongside trained staff to provide practical and emotional support to lonely people, helping them to re-establish social networks.
- Monthly film screenings at a community center in New Earswick.

The City of York has also continued to build upon the enthusiasm created by the research program around the challenge of loneliness.

- In 2017, the City launched a "People Helping People" strategy in partnership with local universities, health services, and NGOs. The partnership includes more than 6,000 volunteers and focuses on service opportunities that advance the City's goals around loneliness and social isolation, health, and wellbeing.
- Since 2017, York has employed a team of Local Area Coordinators whose role is to have conversations with residents in their neighborhood in order to understand their goals and priorities. These individuals also help to coordinate responses to loneliness that draw on local strengths and assets, such as the skills and experiences of residents, existing volunteer group activities, free community meeting places and other services provided by NGOs and the City.

⁴⁴ "Loneliness: a modern epidemic and the search for a cure," Healthwatch York, September 2014. <https://democracy.york.gov.uk/documents/s92462/Healthwatch%20York%20Loneliness%20report.pdf>

- Through the Ways to Wellbeing program, the City works with local doctors to reduce appointments for social problems such as loneliness by meeting with the patient at the point of care and helping them to plan ways to improve their wellbeing (what is sometimes called “social prescribing.”)

Who participates?

Neighbourhood Approaches to Loneliness engaged nearly 2,000 residents who contributed roughly 6,000 comments about loneliness. A team of 40 community researchers collected these comments via “active fieldwork” (i.e. interviews) with community members. In addition to researchers’ altruistic motivations to make a difference, local stakeholder groups also provided tangible incentives to make volunteering less burdensome, such as training, use of venues, and access to childcare.

The program leaders chose to focus on four areas (Bradford Moor, Carr, Denholme, and New Earswick) that represented a diversity of demographic characteristics such as home ownership/tenure, socioeconomic status, and health status. According to survey data published in an 2014 evaluation of the program, residents of these four areas are disproportionately older and more likely to identify as female compared to York’s residents as a whole.⁴⁵

The City’s current programs are generally an open call for individuals of all ages. These programs engage a large number of older and female residents.

⁴⁵ Office for National Statistics, “Age Structure,” 2011 Census data. Accessed January 20 2022. https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/sources/census_2011_ks

In a 2011 baseline survey (n=250, 95% CI), 21.4% of residents across the four neighborhoods reported their age as 65 or older. By comparison, according to 2011 Census data, only 16.9% of York’s population is age 65 or older. In the same 2011 baseline survey, 59.9% of residents of the four neighborhoods reported their gender as female. By comparison, according to 2011 Census data, only 51.4% of York’s population reports their sex as female.

Source: Angela B Collins and Julie Wrigley, “Can a neighbourhood approach to loneliness contribute to people's well-being?” Joseph Rowntree Foundation, July 8, 2014. <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/can-neighbourhood-approach-loneliness-contribute-peoples-well-being>

- The Local Area Coordination network is comprised of a dozen coordinators who are employed by the City. The network has engaged 3,000 individuals, 23% of whom are over the age of 65. The gender split of participants is 66% female and 33% male.⁴⁶
- The average age of the Ways to Wellbeing program is 54 years; by comparison, York's population as a whole is an average age of 39.5 years. Among the program's participants, 69% identify as female and 31% identify as male.⁴⁷

Outcomes and Impacts

While it is difficult to quantify the impact of Neighbourhood Approaches to Loneliness – and the programs it helped to catalyze – on York as a whole, the City of York Council has monitored data from individuals self-reporting their loneliness through ‘outcome stars’ (a method widely used in the UK). **This analysis found an 85 percent reduction in levels of loneliness over an 18-month period spanning 2017–18.**

The City also measures the outcomes and impacts of specific programs:

- The Local Area Coordination Network has worked with over 3,000 people over its 4.5-year existence and its team has grown from three to twelve. The City reports that 75–96% of those people are no longer in contact with social care services, indicating that they no longer require these services.⁴⁸
- According to an evaluation of the program conducted by its leadership, among individuals who accessed Ways to Wellbeing services, 93% reported improved wellbeing, 69% experienced increased confidence, and 54% experienced decreased loneliness.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Joe Micheli, Email to the author, January 21, 2022.

⁴⁷ Jasmine Howard and Alison Semmence, “Way to Wellbeing: The Impact of Social Prescribing in York,” York CVS, January 2019. https://www.yorkcvs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/WTW_Evaluation_A4_FinalPDF-Electronic.pdf

⁴⁸ Dane Gambrell, “City of York Council (with Joe Micheli)” *The GovLab Collective Intelligence Podcast*, November 15, 2021. <https://anchor.fm/thegovlab/episodes/City-of-York-Council-with-Joe-Micheli-e1aasnd>

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Collaboration between the City and community groups has also proved valuable during the COVID-19 pandemic. Joe Micheli, Head of Communities for City of York Council, recounts how, during one weekend in March of 2020, 10,000 York residents formed 22 mutual aid groups to support their neighbors throughout lockdown. The City of York in turn put out open calls for these groups to carry out actions such as delivering medicine and prescriptions or distributing food to individuals who were isolating at home, directing help to those areas where it was most needed. “The mutual aid groups that popped up at the neighborhood and even street level were a massive asset for the City,” Micheli said.⁵⁰

Joe Micheli notes that the most illustrative evidence of impact for social care projects tends to be qualitative – the stories that residents tell – rather than quantitative. “At a very human level, people now have more friends,” Micheli explains. “You are genuinely seeing a more inclusive discourse at the neighborhood level ... The city is more cognizant of what loneliness and poverty means for people. As a result of the approach, public services are more inclusive and person-centered.”⁵¹

Lessons Learned

- **Focus on deeply-felt problems** – York chose to tackle a clear and compelling problem – loneliness and social isolation – that was deeply felt by the city’s older residents. Loneliness and social isolation are not just a public health problem, but are also political and social problems that prevent people from accessing public services and meaningful opportunities to participate in democracy. As such, older residents had incentives to participate in co-creating solutions that aimed to improve their wellbeing and quality of life.
- **Tap existing interests and passions** – Through its People Helping People strategy, the City takes a role as a convener or facilitator of volunteer-led service programs rather than delivering those programs directly. As a result, people are empowered to

⁵⁰ Dane Gambrell, “City of York Council (with Joe Micheli)” *The GovLab Collective Intelligence Podcast*, November 15, 2021. <https://anchor.fm/thegovlab/episodes/City-of-York-Council-with-Joe-Micheli-e1aasnd>

⁵¹ Ibid.

contribute their skills and interests to solve problems that they care about. As Joe Micheli says, “When people choose to act around issues and priorities that are close to their heart, where they live, often in their own neighborhoods, you can tap into the agency and action of individuals more deliberately.” At the same time, the City’s continued focus on issues related to wellbeing signals to the community that these are priority issues.

synAthina

Location: City of Athens, Greece

Implementation level: City

Owner: Vice Mayor’s Office

Years in operation: 2013–present

Topic: Group engagement

Introduction

synAthina is a hybrid online–offline platform where the City of Athens supports residents in developing and implementing collaborative projects, events, and activities that improve the quality of life in the city. Since its inception in 2013, a network of more than 450 citizens’ groups have organized 4,250 activities through the online platform.⁵² Together, these group actions empower and encourage residents to contribute to a collaborative ecosystem that engages civil society and Athens’s municipal government to address challenges from the integration of immigrants and refugees to the revitalization of public spaces.

How does it work?

synAthina serves as a central portal for Athens residents who want to get involved in citizen participation projects, or create their own. The platform’s hallmark feature is an interactive

⁵² “Statistics,” synAthina, accessed January 20, 2022. <https://www.synathina.gr/en/synathina/statistics.html>

web map that allows individuals to find information about citizens' initiatives in their neighborhood.

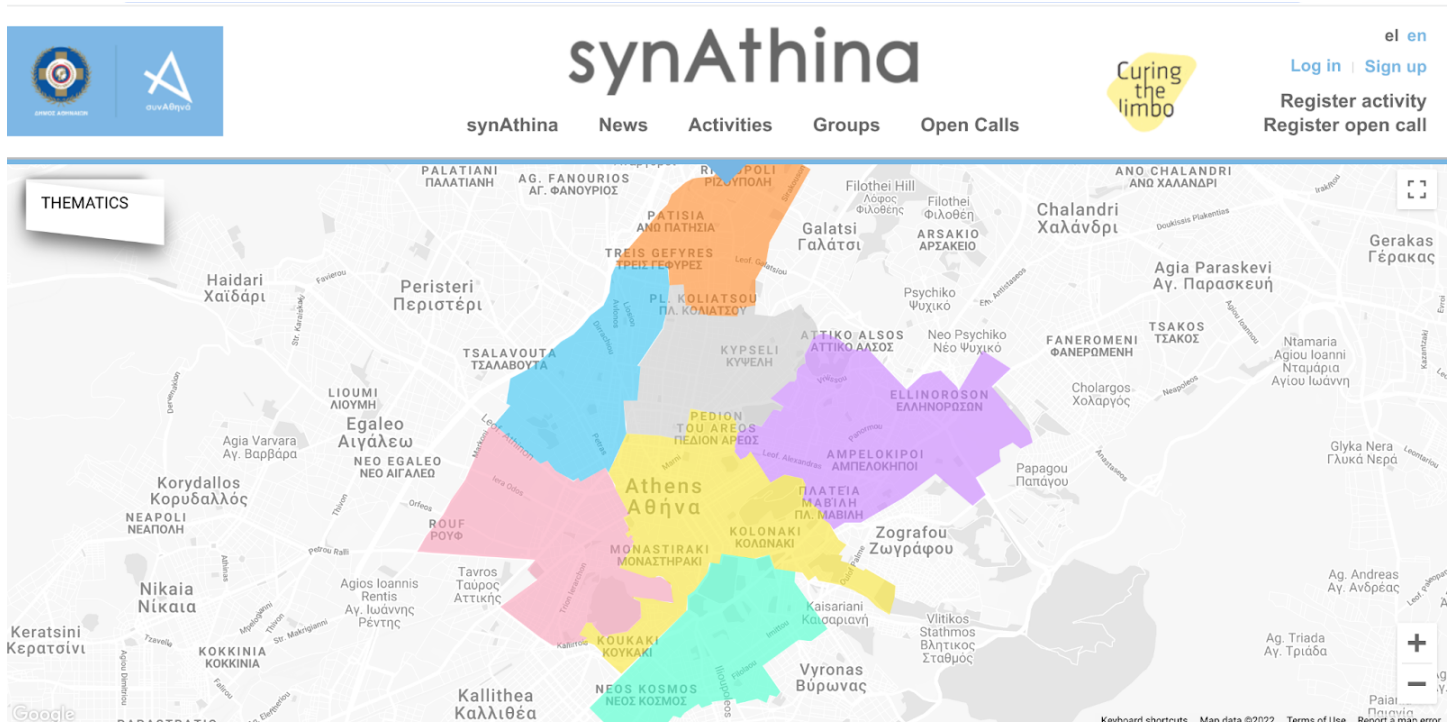


FIGURE 14. synAthina’s interactive web map. Source: <https://www.synathina.gr/en/>

In addition to the map, organizers can also post opportunities to get involved through different sections of the website:

- The “Activities” section serves as an events board where users can post their actions that aim to improve quality of life in the city, such as art installations, classes, community cooking events, and composting workshops. These events are searchable by district, topic, and date.
- The “Groups” section is the network-building section of synAthina. Individuals can find groups by searching by keyword or filtering by topics such as “technology,” “tourism” or “health.”

- The “Open Calls” allows groups, as well as the city government, to post calls-to-action for collaborative initiatives. For example, in 2021 a local foundation used the Open Calls page to promote the opportunity for civil society organizations to apply for funding for projects that aim to combat gender-based violence in Greece, as part of the Active Citizens Fund program.⁵³

The purpose of the online platform is to connect residents with opportunities to participate in collective action and collaborative problem-solving offline.

For example, in 2015, synAthina launched a public consultation to engage the community in redesigning the Kypseli Market space, which had sat abandoned for a decade. They used the synAthina platform to collect 470 ideas for the future use of the building from 200 individuals. The team then issued an open call for proposals from local organizations to determine the market’s operator. In advance of the market’s opening, synAthina launched a six-week program in the market to organize community events and workshops to showcase the groups who had been involved in the co-design process. Today, Kypseli Market is a community space that hosts festivals, exhibitions, workshops. It is also home to social organizations that provide educational and social services (such as food recycling) alongside businesses.⁵⁴

synAthina is managed by a team of five people working full time, and one person working part-time, within the Vice Mayor’s Office for Civil Society and Innovation. Two of these team members are designated Public Engagement Officers whose mandate is to build relationships with community groups, mainly by attending events and meetings within the community.

⁵³ Bodossaki Foundation (synAthina username), “Active citizens fund: New grant invitations of the Civil Society in Greece, amounting to € 1.5 million [translated by Google].” synAthina post. Accessed January 20, 2022. <https://tinyurl.com/y9raz9kr>

⁵⁴ “Lessons Learned from synAthina,” synAthina, June 27, 2018. https://issuu.com/synathina/docs/synathina_lessons_learned_2_spreads

Who participates?

synAthina is generally open to anyone who wishes to create or join a project. The only restrictions are that projects cannot have profit as their primary motivation or promote discrimination. Anyone can register online by providing their name and email address as well as optional information such as links to social media pages. Any non-profit, business, or unincorporated group of people can create a team profile to showcase their community-oriented work, including a written description, list of actions and events the group has been involved in, and an optional photo gallery.

Participation on synAthina was high from the outset and has continued to grow in the years since. According to statistics published on the synAthina website, in 2013 (the year synAthina launched), 42 groups shared 208 activities on the City’s digital map. As of 2022, 450 groups have posted 4,250 activities on synAthina in collaboration with 153 sponsors. In 2021, the largest number of activities fell within the “immigrants and refugees” and “education and information” topic areas.⁵⁵

While in some cases the City of Athens allocates funding for specific projects (such as the Curing the Limbo initiative described below), the primary incentive to participate is an individual’s intrinsic motivation to make a difference in their community.

Outcomes and Impacts

synAthina’s primary impact is the creation of a network of 450 groups who collaborate to improve the quality of life in Athens. As the city does not collect data about all groups that use the platform, it is difficult to quantify the number of people who have been engaged or to measure the overall impact of the synAthina project.

However, a number of stories demonstrate that the project has had a positive impact on peoples’ lives. One such example is Curing the Limbo, an action research pilot program from 2018 – 2021 which modeled and tested new strategies for integrating refugees and immigrants into Greek society.

⁵⁵ ⁵⁵ “Lessons Learned from synAthina,” synAthina, June 27, 2018. https://issuu.com/synathina/docs/synathina_lessons_learned_2_spreads

Through the program, the city worked with the International Rescue Committee, a local university and a number of other partners to provide participants in the program with:

- Psychosocial services
- Access to housing and rent assistance
- Job counseling and coaching services
- Courses on language, information and communication technologies, and cultural mediation
- Legal counseling

Refugees also worked with locals in teams to organize collaborative community-building projects around topics they cared about. For example, the “Foodies” team organized online and in-person cooking meetups in collaboration with a local nonprofit.⁵⁶ Another team organized events for young people to learn skills such as painting, football techniques, and how to ride a bicycle. Other actions focused on tackling specific problems such as food waste and isolation during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Curing the Limbo engaged a cohort of 376 refugees who participated in activities and services according to their need. The majority of participants came from Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, Cameroon, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. An additional 103 landlords, 33 employers, and 180 citizen groups supported the program’s services and activities.⁵⁷

According to the project’s leadership, synAthina’s greatest impact has been its contribution to the contributed to the rebuilding of trust between citizens and the city’s government – a trust that had been shaken by years of austerity, chronic unemployment and poverty following the 2008 financial recession – by virtue of engaging residents whose voices are typically not heard through formal mechanisms in collaborative projects. “This mentality of

⁵⁶ “The Foodies team completes its co-Athens activities with online and live cooking meetings.” synAthina post. Accessed January 20, 2020. <https://www.synathina.gr/el/component/actions/action/9972-%CF%83%CF%85%CE%BD%CE%B1%CE%BD%CF%84%CE%AE%CF%83%CE%B5%CE%B9%CF%82-%CE%BC%CE%B1%CE%B3%CE%B5%CE%B9%CF%81%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%AE%CF%82.html?Itemid=196>

⁵⁷ Antigone Kotanidis et al. “Curing the Limbo: Athens’ Lessons Shared,” 2021. <https://curingthelimbo.gr/playbook>

co-creation is a mentality that is now embroidered into the administration of Athens,” Harris Bisksos, synAthina’s project manager, said. “Now it’s part of how the administration runs the city.”

Lessons Learned

synAthina demonstrates that community-led (rather than top-down) co-creation, co-design, and collaboration can be effective methods for solving public problems. City governments can learn several lessons from synAthina’s experience:

- **Create opportunities for participants to form teams** – One feature that makes synAthina distinct from many citizen engagement platforms is the Groups feature, which allows individuals to form and find groups according to their common interests. This function, while simple, is key to enable collective, real-world actions.
- **Play a facilitator’s role** – Like York, the City of Athens acts as a facilitator for project creation. Rather than being responsible for the planning and execution of every project, the City provides support and coordination for citizen-run volunteer efforts.
- **Create flexible opportunities to participate** – Rather than requiring project organizers to conform to a specific legal process to initiate and build support for projects (e.g. through legislation), synAthina takes (nearly) all comers. There are few barriers to participation and individuals can take part in organizing, supporting, and attending activities and events according to their level of interest, which likely has contributed to the continued interest in synAthina among residents over the years.

Multi-City Challenge Mexico

Location: Hermosillo, San Nicolás de los Garza, San Pedro Garza García, Torreón and Reynosa, all cities in Northern Mexico.

Implementation level: Municipal

Owner: The Governance Lab (The GovLab), Consejo Nuevo León

Introduction

The GovLab designed the Multi-City Challenge Mexico (MCC Mexico) as an initiative that builds the capacity of local civil servants to collaborate with city residents to understand urban problems and co-design potential solutions that improve the liveability of cities. This case study showcases the way cities are promoting new forms of public participation and problem-solving in policymaking at the local level. It serves as an example of how the City of Madrid could use the open innovation model to rapidly co-create solutions to priority problems in collaboration with residents, while also building capacity within the city government to implement these solutions.

How does it work?

In a City or Multi-Challenge, cities work together with their residents to identify and then collaboratively implement solutions to contemporary urban challenges, such as climate change and sustainability, public health and equity, congestion and pollution, structural racism and civic engagement. The GovLab developed the City Challenge framework through a one-year pilot with the City of San Pedro Garza Garcia, Mexico in 2016 – 2017.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ <http://collective-intelligence.thegovlab.org/case/revolucioncr-and-desafiossp>



FIGURE 15. Graphic showing process and timeline.

The MCC Mexico was a one year program that ran from September 2020 to October 2021. The project was a collaboration between The GovLab and the city governments of Reynosa, Hermosillo, San Nicolás de los Garza, San Pedro Garza García, and Torreón. It consisted of three phases: 1) Problem Definition: The GovLab provided public officials with training on human-centered design and open innovation to define two relevant problems that can be solved by the municipality; 2) Open challenge: cities called on residents to propose possible solutions and select winning proposals; and 3) Idea development: public officials and citizens received mentoring to co-design a prototype and a roadmap to implement the selected ideas.

Stage 1. Problem Definition

29 public officials participated in the four-week training that aimed to define two relevant problems for the community of each municipality. The program focused on problem definition methods, human-centered design, and the use of data to understand and define actionable problems, as well as the design of communication strategies to engage the community in their resolution.

Programa

Haz click en cada fase para ver los objetivos, recursos y actividades de cada semana.



FIGURE 16. Screenshot showing the phases of the training program.

Stage 2. Open Challenge

In October 2020, through an open challenge, the municipalities invited the community to present possible solutions, aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals. City residents entered their ideas on CONSUL, a free open source innovation platform. The community was also invited to vote for the ideas they considered most relevant or impactful. The response to the open challenge was a clear signal of the citizens' desire to solve the public problems of their cities. In three weeks, the municipalities received 237 citizen proposals and 8,500 votes. The two best proposals from each city were selected through a competitive process which evaluated the top 20 proposals with the most votes from community members via CONSUL. These proposals were then evaluated by a panel of municipal civil servants before being evaluated by a panel of experts which took into consideration the priorities of the municipalities, the technical and financial feasibility of the proposals, their potential for impact and the community perception. Afterwards, the municipality was able

to select the top proposal of each challenge or the top two proposals from one challenge. The proponents of the winning ideas were invited to collaborate with the municipality to develop these ideas. The cities received project proposals from various stakeholders including activists, university and high school students, entrepreneurs, architects and independent professionals. In November 2020, the winners were announced and presented their proposals to the public in a live ceremony⁵⁹ accompanied by the five municipal presidents.⁶⁰

Stage 3. Development of ideas (co-design)

At this stage, the ten teams, made up of city residents and public officials, developed the winning ideas through a thoughtful, collaborative, and experimental process. For four weeks the teams focused on testing the key assumptions and developing conceptual prototypes of the proposed solution. In December 2020, they presented the lessons learned and a first draft of a plan to implement a pilot. The teams were invited to apply for the second round of training and to obtain financing from Consejo Nuevo León, a non-partisan, advisory and propositional organization that supports strategic planning and evaluation in the State of Nuevo Leon, for the implementation of the pilots. Eight of the ten teams applied to the second phase in which, for four months, they developed the theory of change, consulted with thematic experts and detailed an implementation plan. As expected in an innovation process, not all collaborations were successful, not all ideas took shape and some require even more time to mature. By May 2020, four of the eight teams managed to get their pilot up and running. However, the three other projects were developed into prototypes and one was absorbed by an existing municipal program and was developed outside the MCC Mexico program.

Who participates?

⁵⁹ Multi-City Challenge Mexico 2020 Ceremonia de Premiación. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P25nWrjCwS4>

⁶⁰ Célida López Cárdenas, Mayor of Hermosillo; Dra. Maki Esther Ortiz Dominguez, Mayor of Reynosa; Dr. Zeferino Salgado Almaguer, Mayor of San Nicolás de los Garza; Miguel Treviño, Mayor of San Pedro Garza García y Jorge Zermeño, Mayor of Torreón.

The open innovation process was an open call for anyone who wanted to participate. The CONSUL platform registered more than 5,600 users during the engagement (including individuals who submitted proposals as well as those who voted). Participants came from a diverse set of backgrounds, including activists, university and high school students, entrepreneurs, architects and independent professionals.⁶¹ The open challenge served as a space for the participation of groups who had never before been involved in the public life of the municipality, including young people – 60% of participants were under age 35 and 22% were students. Half of the respondents had not previously participated in any type of citizen initiative. The main motivation of the participants was to have the opportunity to drive change in their communities.

Outcomes and Impacts

From September 2020 to May 2021, 38 residents and 47 civil servants from 5 cities in Mexico -- Hermosillo, Reynosa, San Pedro, San Nicolas, and Torreon -- worked together to pool potential solutions to specific problems affecting their communities and to develop and test those ideas. As a result, four citizen-led proposals are now being piloted in three of five participating municipalities with stewardship from the participating residents. The pilot projects are outlined below:

Hermosillo-Urbanismo Táctico (Tactical Urbanism): Launched in May 2021, this project created eight safe crossings and a stretch of bike path in the north-central neighborhood and the 5 de Mayo neighborhood. The project, financed by Consejo Nueva León Grupo “La Ruina”, and the municipality of Hermosillo promotes sustainable mobility by increasing the safety of the community while walking and biking through the streets. Hermosillo artist Andrés Castro designed each crossing to represent different aspects of Sonoran culture and the local community participated in painting the pedestrian crossings.

Torreón-Vive tu Acera (Live on your Sidewalk!): Launched in June 2021 the project seeks to improve access to public space in Torreon’s historic center by establishing recreational

⁶¹ The terms and conditions for participation required a minimum age of 18, so high school students were formally represented by their teachers.

areas, increasing pedestrian zones, and establishing new public infrastructure such as parklets that serve as sidewalk extensions that provide additional space for recreation and new amenities. They have added 3 road crossings in the city to promote road safety and four parklets are being installed in the city center. To make the city more attractive they also installed pots with trees, and roof modules for the parklets were installed at the intersection of Falcón and Juárez. In addition, the municipality of Torreon has implemented a citizen oversight council, where citizens are supervising its implementation. Various civil associations collaborated in the painting and the installation of the parklets at the intersection of Avenida Juárez and Calle Falcón.

Torreón-Establecimientos Sanitariamente Responsables (Sanitary and Responsible Establishments): The team recruited and trained volunteers who carried out inspections and certifications to certify that an establishment (restaurant and business) were meeting COVID-19 protocols and safety measures. They also collected baseline data from more than 300 retail businesses to measure the level of adherence to sanitary measures in the center of Torreón. 22 citizen certificates have already been given to establishments that meet the criteria. The project was financed by Consejo Nueva Leon and the Municipality of Torreon.

San Pedro-Super Recolección (Super Recycling): In September 2021 the city of San Pedro launched a recycling route with the goal of collecting 20 tons of recycling each week in 15 neighborhoods. A month after launching, a total of 9.2 tons of recycling had been collected. The team collected data to understand behaviors and attitudes towards recycling and test different communication messages that could contribute to changing recycling behaviors. A survey was conducted to 442 citizens and the findings were used to inform the communication campaign on recycling undertaken by the municipality. With the information collected from these surveys, seven focus groups were carried out in which more than 50 neighbors participated, the groups were divided by age ranges, as well as a special group for domestic workers. The team collaborated with another citizen project of the municipality working on the separation of waste during garbage collection. The communication campaign focuses on properly educating citizens on recycling habits to promote a culture of waste separation and conscious consumption and to support the

municipality's communication campaign and their recycling collection efforts. The project is financed by Consejo Nueva Leon and the Municipality of San Pedro.

The MCC Mexico equipped citizens and civil servants with the capacity to work together and improve the liveability of their cities. The MCC Mexico also changed mindsets allowing both civil servants and residents to recognize the value of collaborating together and highlighted the role that residents can play when actively integrated into the policy-making process.

From the observed short-term results the MCC Mexico succeeded in four fronts:

- Creating a temporary enabling environment to foster new ways of working and collaborating.
- Strengthening and increasing the capabilities of civil servants and citizens to work together and catalyze change while also uncovering new ways of working.
- Changing mindsets to recognize the value of collaborating with others and the role that citizens can play when actively integrated into the policy-making process
- Empowering citizens and civil servants to perceive themselves as agents of change

In addition, a survey conducted in early June 2021 found that both residents and civil servants felt more confident in their abilities to collaborate as a result of participating in the City Challenge. 94% of participating public officials surveyed expressed that the MCC Mexico challenge has increased their ability to solve public problems by collaborating with other actors. Likewise, more than 90% of residents surveyed indicated that the MCC has strengthened their confidence to be agents of change in their community. The MCC also created new opportunities for engagement and collaboration between residents and city government with 53% of public servants stating that the challenge had helped to uncover solutions that otherwise the municipality wouldn't have identified. Meanwhile before the MCC at least 50% residents had not been engaged in any citizen participation initiative and had now gained an interest in participating in the public life of the municipality.

Lessons Learned

The Multi-City Challenge in Mexico showed that, when given the opportunity, civil servants and residents can effectively collaborate to design and implement projects that improve the quality of life for urban residents. City governments can learn several lessons from this experience:

- **Focus on problem definition** - The City Challenge model focuses on identifying actionable problems that fall within each municipality's jurisdiction to address. As a result, the open innovation process produced specific solutions that the cities could reasonably implement within a year. As citizens can see how their input was used, they may be more likely to participate in additional engagements in the future.
- **Combine training with co-creation** - While civil servants and members of the public are eager to participate in solving public problems, they often lack the know-how to leverage digital technologies and the collective intelligence of institutions to this end. To address this challenge, the City Challenge model combines the open innovation challenge with a mandatory training program that prepares participants to overcome the challenges they may face in designing and implementing their projects. The various trainings which are received by both public servants and residents equip public servants with a broader range of skills and experiences, while also empowering citizens to be agents of change.
- **Enable the conditions for collaboration** - The City challenge model provides a platform that creates the condition for a or multiple cities to engage specific sectors of society in public initiatives. Thus, fostering a co-creation process that may be lacking or non-existent and allowing more broader sectors of society (youth, children, students) to engage in the city's public life. It also provides a structured and organized methodology and timeline that allows cities to have tangible measures and outcomes from all the different project stages.
- **Increase the trust in local governments** - Trust in local government is necessary to promote open governance initiatives. The city challenge model by reaching actors that would normally not engage in government activities and involving them in the co-creation and decision-making process increases the trust citizens and residents have in their local government.

Conclusion

Decide Madrid includes a number of powerful tools that have the potential to give citizens new and exciting opportunities to participate in creating new policies and projects. Likewise, the adoption of the CONSUL software by 70+ cities and 35 countries indicates that there is great demand for these types of tools among public institutions around the world.

However, limitations in the Proposals features, as well as the inability for the City to provide feedback on proposals, appear to significantly limit the number of proposals that achieve the level of support needed for consideration by the City Council.

Further, there are also great opportunities to improve the diversity of participation through strategies to improve engagement among young people, older people, women and girls, and organizations and businesses.

Finally, in addition to continuing to develop the existing Decide Madrid platform, the City should experiment with additional methods of collaboration and co-creation. As the case studies and examples described above show, many cities are collaborating with residents through innovative forms of engagement such as open innovation competitions, citizens' assemblies, youth participatory budgeting initiatives, mutual aid and volunteering. Experimenting with such new forms of engagement can provide the infrastructure needed for the City to continue to innovate and to solve emerging problems in new ways.



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