

**#01** IOPD  
Peer-Learning Note

# Participatory Budgeting

Lessons from the 2024 IOPD Peer-learning Sessions



## Acknowledgments

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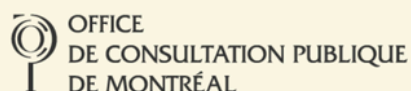
### About the IOPD

The **International Observatory on Participatory Democracy (IOPD)** is an international network open to all cities, organisations and research centres interested in learning about, exchanging and applying experiences of participatory democracy at the local level. It was founded in 2001 within the framework of the European Commission's URB-AL program for decentralised cooperation and its official constitution was in November 2001 in Barcelona, during the 1st IOPD Conference. Since 2006 it has been part of the world organisation of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG).

### About UCLG

**United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)** is an umbrella international organisation for cities, LRGs, and municipal associations throughout the world that is concerned with representing and defending the interests of local governments on the world stage.

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## » Introduction

The International Observatory on Participatory Democracy (IOPD) with the support of the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) Learning team has organised in March 2024 the **IOPD Peer Learning Sessions, a series of online encounters between local and regional governments with the objective to deepen the practice of participatory budgeting (PB).**

Born in Porto Alegre in the late 1980s, PB has become one of the benchmark practices for citizen engagement in the co-creation of cities. In this brief note we will explore, from the municipalist experiences presented by local and regional governments, key elements, lessons and recommendations for the implementation of the PB practice.

## » Methodology

The methodology consisted of the introduction of the city or local or regional territory, deepening in the context of the number of inhabitants, administrative division, and all the information to build the case and justify the relevance of the implementation of the practice of democratic participation. Then, the participants presented the implementation of the participatory budget in their context, in most cases, it was a chronological development of the experience. Finally, they shared lessons learned and policy recommendations that resulted from the experience.

The sessions we analysed in this analytical note were held on:

- 5 March: with the cities of Cuenca and Esplugues de Llobregat in Spanish;
- 13 March: with the cities of Colombes and Grez-Doiceau in French;
- 14 March: with the city of Oeiras in Portuguese.



# Participatory Budgeting: Empowering Communities Through Democratic Decision-Making

Participatory budgeting (PB) is a beacon of democratic governance, embodying the principles of inclusivity, transparency, and community empowerment within the realm of fiscal decision-making. Originating in Brazil in the late 1980s, PB has since burgeoned into a global phenomenon, championed by communities seeking to bridge the divide between the population and the government, and to foster a more equitable distribution of resources. In this exploration, we delve into the origins, definitions, characteristics, and essential elements of participatory budgeting as a transformative governance tool.

## Origins of PB

The origin of participatory budgeting can be traced back to Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 1989. Amidst a backdrop of rampant inequality and disenfranchisement, the Worker's Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores - PT*) sought to revolutionise municipal governance by directly involving the population in the allocation of public funds. This groundbreaking initiative aimed to empower marginalised communities, granting them agency in determining how resources were used to address their pressing needs.

The success of PB in Porto Alegre catalysed its adoption across Brazil; subsequently spreading to over 3,000 cities worldwide, spanning diverse socio-political contexts. Local and regional governments and their associations and networks, such as the IOPD, have been great catalysts and disseminators of this practice. Although PB must reflect and be adapted to the realities of each context, it remains a great opportunity to improve the implementation of policies and to achieve a better dynamic of trust and sustainability in the community in cities and territories.

## Definitions of PB

PB is a democratic process that enables the population to deliberate, decide, and prioritise public spending projects within a defined budget framework. Unlike traditional top-down budgeting approaches, PB prioritises bottom-up community engagement, ensuring that the voices of commonly neglected groups are heard and their needs addressed, including all women, migrants, children and young people. Through PB, communities are empowered to co-create policies and programs that reflect their unique aspirations and challenges, fostering a sense of ownership and accountability among both the population and local government officials.



## Characteristics of PB

Several key characteristics distinguish PB as a unique governance tool:



- **Inclusion:** PB strives to engage a diverse range of stakeholders, including marginalised communities and vulnerable populations traditionally excluded from decision-making processes. Through inclusive mechanisms such as town hall meetings, deliberative forums, face-to-face activities, and online platforms, PB is a space to and amplify the voices that are often marginalised or ignored.
- **Transparency:** Central to PB is the principle of transparency, whereby all aspects of the budgeting process, from the allocation of funds to project implementation, are open to public scrutiny. By demystifying the budgeting process and providing open and transparent information, PB enhances trust between the population and government institutions; fostering greater accountability and legitimacy.
- **Deliberation:** PB prioritises informed deliberation and dialogue, enabling the population to critically assess competing priorities and make informed decisions about resource allocation. Through facilitated discussions, deliberative assemblies, and participatory workshops, PB cultivates a culture of reasoned debate and consensus-building, ensuring that decisions reflect the collective will of the community.
- **Empowerment:** At its core, PB seeks to empower communities by granting them agency in shaping the policies and programs that directly impact their lives.

By devolving decision-making authority from centralised institutions to the local population, PB nurtures a sense of civic pride and ownership, instilling confidence in the communities' ability to effect positive change.

- **Accountability:** PB holds government officials accountable to the communities they serve, providing mechanisms for the population to monitor the implementation of budgetary decisions and hold officials accountable for their actions. Through participatory oversight committees, independent audits, and public reporting mechanisms, PB safeguards against corruption and ensures that public funds are used effectively and equitably.

## Elements of PB

The successful implementation of participatory budgeting hinges on several key elements:

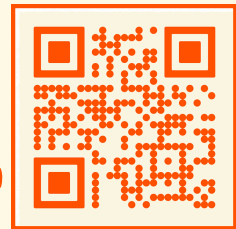
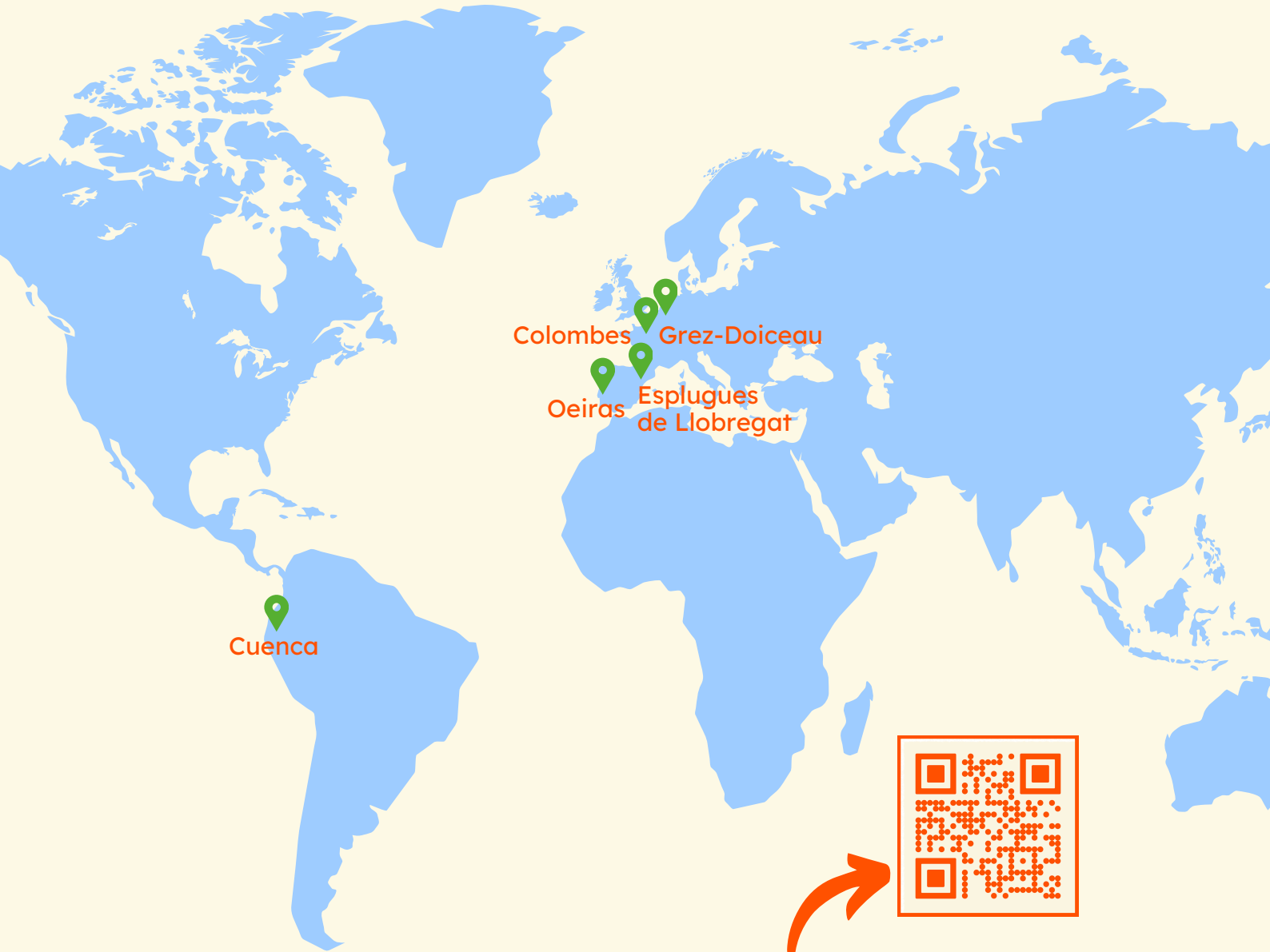
- **Clear Objectives and expectations:** PB initiatives must articulate clear objectives and goals, aligned with broader principles of equity, social justice, and sustainable development. By defining the scope and purpose of the process, stakeholders can effectively prioritise projects that address pressing social needs and advance collective well-being. It is also important to set realistic expectations for participants so as not to generate possible frustrations.
- **Robust Infrastructure:** Establishing a robust infrastructure is essential for facilitating meaningful citizen engagement and deliberation. This may include establishing participatory budgeting offices, hiring trained facilitators, and providing technical assistance to ensure that all stakeholders are equipped with the necessary tools and resources to participate effectively. Digital tools are an opportunity to support PB processes, but their limitations and difficulties should be acknowledged.
- **Open & Transparent Information:** Access to timely, accurate, and accessible information is critical for enabling informed decision-making within the PB process. Governments must proactively disseminate budgetary information, project proposals, and evaluation criteria through diverse channels, including digital platforms, community meetings, and educational workshops.
- **Community Outreach:** Effective community outreach and engagement are vital for ensuring the inclusivity and diversity of PB processes. Governments must actively reach out to marginalised groups, non-profit organisations, and grassroots movements, soliciting their input and ensuring that their voices are heard in decision-making forums.
- **Evaluation and Monitoring:** Regular evaluation and monitoring are essential for assessing the impact and effectiveness of PB initiatives. Governments must establish mechanisms for collecting feedback, measuring outcomes, and adjusting strategies in response to changing needs and priorities, ensuring that PB processes remain adaptive and responsive to community feedback. The feedback to the community and the participants is clear explaining what is or is not being done and why, otherwise there is again the risk of generating disappointment and frustration.



In conclusion, participatory budgeting represents a paradigm shift in governance, challenging traditional power structures and fostering a more inclusive, transparent, and accountable approach to public finance. **By empowering citizens to actively participate in decision-making processes, PB holds the promise of building stronger, more resilient communities where the voices of the marginalised are not only heard but actively shape the future.** As PB continues to evolve and expand globally, its transformative potential to democratise governance and advance social justice remains as relevant and inspiring as ever.



# Cases presented in the IOPD Peer Learning Sessions



Scan or click on this QR code to access the video recordings of the sessions in the IOPD YouTube Channel





## Esplugues de Llobregat (Spain)

Esplugues de Llobregat is a municipality located within the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona, with a population of 48,046 inhabitants distributed in 10 neighbourhoods. This municipality implements **participatory processes for all ages**, involving more than 150 associations and adopting this approach in international projects.



By 2023, **Esplugues de Llobregat has implemented the Participatory Budgeting for the 10th time**. This mechanism has evolved through time, starting from representative groups and reduced participation process, to consolidating a direct, multichannel and inclusive participation. In its tenth edition, the Participatory Budgeting of 2023 allocated an investment of 227,870 euros. Citizens must be over 16 years old and registered in Esplugues de Llobregat to participate. In addition, a commission is set up to monitor the process.

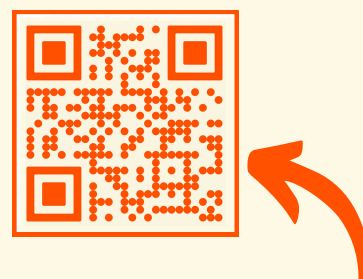
The consolidated process is divided into several phases: the first phase focuses on **information and dissemination**, followed by the **selection of the theme** in the second phase, and the **elaboration of proposals** in the third phase. Subsequently, in the fourth phase, the **proposals are studied and evaluated**, followed by **clarifications** in the fifth phase, **prioritisation** in the sixth phase, voting in the seventh phase, and finally, **implementation and accountability** in the final phase.

**Communication is a key pillar in the implementation of this democratic mechanism**. One of the pillars of this strategy is the digital platform "**Esplugues Participa**." However, the municipality reinforces digital communication tools with traditional communication channels and face-to-face tools. As the participants underscored, "**it is vital to leverage those spaces where people already go at strategic times, such as parks when school is over, street markets and local festivities.**"

Another important pillar of PB in Esplugues de Llobregat is **paying special attention to specific groups by carrying out sessions with them**. For example, they hold conversation groups with the migrant population, they go directly to high schools to engage young people from 16 years old, they also take care of people with functional diversity (term used in Spain to refer to "people with disabilities") and women. An important component of this strategy is the **promotion of intergenerational activities**, the municipality organises digital literacy activities, in which the young people teach older people how to use the digital participation tools.

## Lessons learnt:

- PB is an evolving process with room for improvement throughout its implementation. In Esplugues de Llobregat PB has a biannual periodicity to allow time for the implementation of the projects.
- Public participation requires political will and the involvement of the various municipal services and departments implicated in participatory budget projects such as finance, urban planning and public roads, youth, parks and gardens, social services, among others.
- Emphasis needs to be placed on the hybrid format, which indeed works. Having a digital platform is not enough to guarantee the success of a process, it is necessary to go to those places that people already frequent.



Scan or click on this QR code to access the website of Esplugues de Llobregat

## Cuenca (Ecuador)

Cuenca, capital of the Province of Azuay, is the third largest city in Ecuador and was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1999. **It is a mainly rural territory, with 21 Rural Parishes and 15 Urban Parishes**, covering 376 neighbourhoods and a population of 596,101 inhabitants.



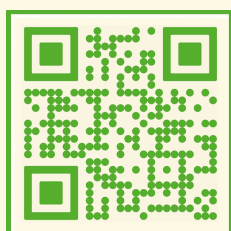
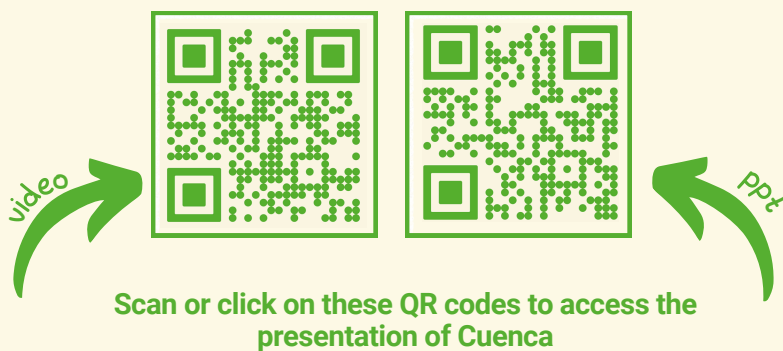
**The recognition and autonomy of the parishes, both rural and urban, has been a gradual process, considered as a major achievement for the local governance.** The decentralised parish governments receive funds through Ordinances, while in urban parishes, the Autonomous Decentralised Government (GAD) of the Municipality of Cuenca directly manages the works and projects, with citizen participation in assemblies to validate proposals.

**Participation in Cuenca is meant to reduce the rural-urban gap, by considering social inclusion and environmental protection.** For instance, they take care of including specific population, such as young people, and also to transfer the budget considering the basic needs index. To achieve this, Participatory Budgetings are based on the five axes of the Development and Land Use Plan, both at cantonal and rural parish level: human settlements, physical environment, socio-cultural, economic-productive, political-institutional.

In the implementation of PB, project approval is a pillar phase, as the municipality needs to validate the feasibility of the proposals. Evaluation with a report of conclusions is also deemed as vital, complemented with **communication strategies to effectively inform the entire community.**

## Lessons learnt:

- Implement legal and democratic instruments for the management of Participatory Budgeting resources.
- Consider the social, environmental and planning approach in the Parish Autonomous Decentralised Governments.
- Responsible management of financial resources given to the Parish Autonomous Decentralised Governments.



Scan or click on this QR code to access the website of Cuenca

## Colombes (France)

The city of Colombes, located in the inner suburbs of Paris in the Hauts-de-Seine department, has a population of 89,000 inhabitants, **divided into 9 neighbourhoods, including 3 Priority City Neighbourhoods**, with a density of 11,380 inhabitants per square kilometre according to INSEE in 2021. This territory stands out for its social mix, evident in the diversity of the inhabitants' needs.

**BUDGET  
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Colombes



**Priority city neighbourhoods are defined as targets for priority city policy actions, based on local considerations relating to the difficulties experienced by the residents of these areas.** They benefit from specific aid and support schemes.

Participatory Budgeting is one of the pillars of the current administration. It was introduced for the first time in 2020, representing a major political challenge for the city, as it seeks to **promote social ties and gradually encourage public participation. A municipal infrastructure is dedicated to this participatory mechanism**, underpinned by two dedicated elected representatives and a liaison officer, who oversee the process, of which 2% of the municipality's total budget of €1 million is allocated.

The Participatory Budgeting runs for one year, and is divided into four stages: submission of projects, evaluation, voting and implementation. To take part, citizens must be at least 18 years old. **The process is overseen by a number of citizens' bodies set up by the municipality**, including a steering committee, a technical committee and a monitoring committee, made up of members of civil society and representatives of other citizens' bodies (such as the Council of Elders, the Communal Youth Council and neighbourhood councils). The latter committee is responsible for communicating with residents and coordinating the process.

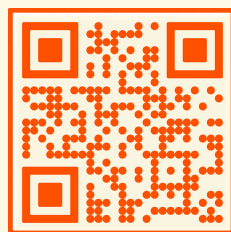
Residents put forward design ideas and campaign with the support of the city to promote their proposals, which are then put to the vote of residents aged 18 and over. Projects are selected within the allocated budget.

The general criteria for the Participatory Budgeting require projects to be **located within the municipality, to fall within the city's remit, to be of collective interest and to be open and/or free to all**. Criteria specific to Colombes include feasibility within two budget years, no recurring running costs and consistency with current projects and the municipal vision.

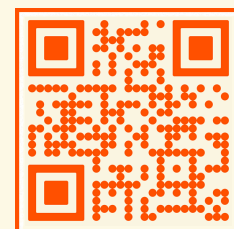
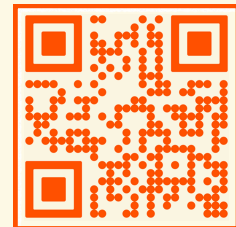
Each year, the Thematic Participatory Budgeting chooses one or more themes, and **residents' proposals must fit into this framework**. Previously, the process was sector-based and the budget envelopes allocated varied.

## Lessons learnt:

- The requirement of support from citizens' bodies and a clear framework to ensure the success of the participatory budgeting process.
- The importance of opening up civic participation processes to people who are often marginalised, taking account of their diversity.
- Supporting citizens throughout the process is essential to its success.



Scan or click on these QR codes to access the presentation of Colombes



Scan or click on this QR code to access the website of Colombes

## Grez-Doiceau (Belgium)

Grez-Doiceau is a French-speaking commune in Belgium, located in the Walloon Region in the province of Brabant Wallon. With a population of 14,084 inhabitants (as at 1 January 2023) spread over an area of 55 km<sup>2</sup>, it is predominantly rural.

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Commune de Grez-Doiceau



The town has been awarded the "Ville citoyenne" label, making it the first municipality in Belgium to be so distinguished. **The Participatory Budget is one of the citizen participation tools of the commune**, among citizens' consultations, citizens' committees and councils, and the collective rural development plan.

The municipality pursues several objectives through the implementation of the PB, such as strengthening the decision-making process, consolidating informed and empowered communities by improving the understanding of the functioning of public administration, promoting social ties through consultation and collaboration, and encouraging the co-construction of collective projects to improve the quality of life of the inhabitants.

Each year, the Participatory Budgeting is launched as a call for projects open to all citizens aged 18 and over and to local associations. For 2024, a budget of €45,000 has been earmarked to fund projects promoting initiatives of municipal interest. **The municipality supports the Participatory Budget process by providing a [digital platform](#)**. On this platform, participants can submit their projects, exchange ideas and follow the selection and voting process.

After submitting their proposals on the digital platform, participants present them to a **citizens' advisory committee made up of 10 members from the community and observers from the administration**. This committee is responsible for validating the admissibility of projects according to pre-established criteria. The authorities then check the technical, legal and financial compliance of the projects before they are pre-selected for the citizens' vote.

Once the projects have been selected, they can be **implemented either by the local authority or directly by the population**, depending on the nature of the initiatives.

### Lessons learnt:

- Participatory Budgeting has shed light on the real needs of the population and to allocate resources to address them.
- This is an evolving process, which highlights the importance of co-construction with the communities.
- The need of implementing a clear legal framework for the implementation of participatory budgeting.





## Oeiras (Portugal)

Located in the district of Lisbon, Oeiras is one of the 18 municipalities that make up the Lisbon Metropolitan Area (LMA). It stretches nine kilometres along the north bank of the Tagus river, covering 45.88 km<sup>2</sup> and divided into five parishes. According to the 2021 census, it has a population of 171,802 inhabitants. As a major centre of the LMA, **Oeiras is home to a significant proportion of the country's scientific capacity, as well as multinational companies and research & development activities in various business, science and technology parks.**

In response to the priorities of the current administration, notably investment in municipal housing, the municipality of Oeiras has opted for a distinctive Participatory Budgeting approach. **Based on community development and adapted to municipal districts to strengthen social cohesion and citizenship**, the fifth edition inaugurated the Participatory Budgeting in the Municipal District, with a pilot experiment in the Laveiras-Caxias district, testing an innovative methodology.

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BAIRRO DE LAVERAS - CAXIAS  
2023



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de Oeiras

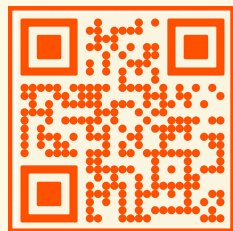
There are a number of features to this methodology: **it targets a micro-territory by prioritising socio-economic needs in order to leverage public investment.** A specific budget is allocated to the neighbourhood, where only residents can propose, debate and vote on projects. The emphasis is on **promoting dialogue and social relations** within the community and with the municipality, supporting material investments to **strengthen the sense of community.** Two local ambassadors are recruited to mobilise residents, and **the implementation of selected projects is coordinated between the residents and municipal services to ensure transparency.**

**This approach has been well received**, with an enthusiastic turnout at the three participatory meetings. Of the 32 proposals submitted, only nine were deemed feasible from a technical and financial point of view, and were transformed into finalist projects put to the community vote.

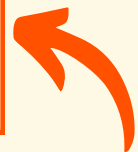
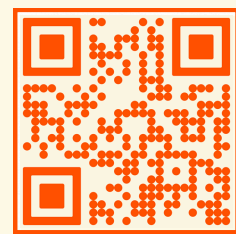
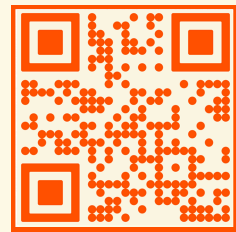
In an innovative move, **paper ballot papers were replaced by tablets during the vote, facilitating the process and reducing paper consumption.** Six winning projects were identified, which will be included in the operational management plan for implementation in 2024.

## Lessons learnt:

- Working with different social groups means that accessibility is essential, especially to include the youngest populations.
- Participatory Budgeting allows for proximity between municipal services and the population.
- PB can easily be replicated in other territories.



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Scan or click on this QR code to access the website "Oeiras Participatory Budgeting"

# Key lessons and recommendations

## 1. Design a clear process with defined goals

It is important to be clear about the objectives to be achieved in the process, to establish the whole process, with its phases and methodology, and to create clear regulations or rules for the participatory budgeting process.

## 2. Allocate adequate resources

It is important to devote a significant amount to participatory budgeting, so that inhabitants see the importance and the projects can have real impacts. In addition to the budget allocated to the process, sufficient human and technical resources must be designated to make the process successful.

## 3. Transversal approach

In addition to the facilitation team, it is very important to involve the different departments that may be involved in the project. This is a great opportunity to make an impact internally within the administration.

## 4. Inclusion

In the design and implementation of the project, the inclusion of different groups and collectives in the community must be considered, especially youth or groups traditionally excluded from institutional political arena.



## 5. Social innovation and link with the local democracy ecosystem

Participatory budgeting projects must promote social innovation by empowering citizens to take ownership of the project, building on existing community links and promoting discussions such as encouraging intergenerational dialogues.

## 6. Communication and use of digital tools

It is important to familiarise with technology, which is a key element in strengthening citizen participation in Participatory Budgeting processes. However, the new communication tools must not overshadow the importance of face-to-face tools and the meeting between the administration and citizens in the public spaces used by the latter.

## 7. Monitoring, transparency of the project

Transparency is a central part of the participatory budgeting exercise, it involves giving high visibility to the process of thinking up ideas, turning them into concrete projects and implementing them. It is an opportunity for local and regional governments to show the public the difficulties of management but also to improve processes. Monitoring and accountability of implementation are necessary for citizens to gain confidence in institutions.

## 8. Evaluation and constant evolution of the process

Public authorities must constantly question their practices and the way they operate. As a cyclical project, evaluations should allow for modifications and improvements to be made to the process year after year. Collaboration between citizens and between cities are initiatives that should be emphasised.



## Resources

- CEPA strategy guidance note on Participatory budgeting <https://www.oidp.net/docs/repo/doc1198.pdf>
- The Participatory Budgeting Project: <https://www.participatorybudgeting.org/>
- People Powered: <https://www.peoplepowered.org/participatory-budgeting>
- Participedia: <https://participedia.net/method/146>
- OECD: Dispelling Myths about Participatory Budgeting across Levels of Government <https://www.oecd.org/tax/federalism/participatory-budgeting-note.pdf>

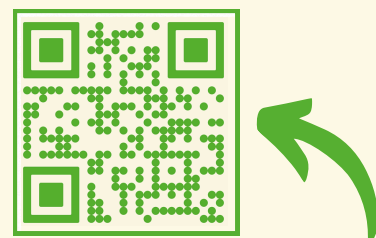
### Explore more

- Greening cities through Participatory Budgeting: Answers to climate change from Lisbon, Portugal and Molina de Segura, Spain. Yves Cabannes <https://www.oidp.net/docs/repo/doc1009.pdf>
- Contributions of Participatory Budgeting to climate change adaptation and mitigation. Yves Cabannes <https://oidp.net/en/publication.php?id=1716>
- Highlights on some Asian and Russian participatory budgeting pioneers. Yves Cabannes <https://oidp.net/en/publication.php?id=1418>
- Participatory Budgeting Charter for Scotland <https://pbscotland.scot/charter>
- Online course: How to Engage Immigrants and Refugees in Participatory Budgeting <https://oidp.net/en/publication.php?id=1782>

### Papers & publications

- "Participatory Budgeting: Core Principles and Key Impacts" by Brian Wampler and Michael Touchton. This paper provides a comprehensive overview of the core principles of participatory budgeting and its key impacts on governance, social inclusion, and public service delivery.
- "Participatory Budgeting: Seven Defining Characteristics" by Yves Cabannes. This publication identifies seven defining characteristics of participatory budgeting based on extensive research and case studies, offering valuable insights for practitioners and policymakers.

- "The Promise and Peril of Participatory Budgeting" by Joshua Cohen and Archon Fung. This article critically examines the promise and challenges of participatory budgeting, highlighting its potential to enhance democratic governance while cautioning against potential pitfalls and limitations.
- "Participatory Budgeting: From Porto Alegre to the USA" by Gianpaolo Baiocchi and Ernesto Ganuza. This comparative study traces the diffusion of participatory budgeting from Porto Alegre, Brazil, to the United States, exploring the factors shaping its adoption and adaptation in different contexts.
- "Participatory Budgeting and Civic Engagement in the United States" by Hollie Russon Gilman. This book offers an in-depth analysis of participatory budgeting initiatives in the United States, examining their impact on civic engagement, social capital, and democratic governance at the local level.
- "Democracy, Deliberation, and Design: The Case of Participatory Budgeting" by Carsten Herzberg and Yves Sintomer. This paper explores the design principles underpinning participatory budgeting processes, focusing on the role of deliberation, representation, and institutional design in fostering inclusive decision-making.
- "Participatory Budgeting and Local Governance: An Evidence-Based Evaluation" by Giovanni Allegretti et al. This empirical study evaluates the impact of participatory budgeting on local governance outcomes, drawing on evidence from a diverse range of case studies across different countries and regions.
- "Participatory Budgeting: The Impact of an Innovation in Democratic Governance" by Michael Touchton and Brian Wampler. This research article examines the impact of participatory budgeting on citizen empowerment, government responsiveness, and social outcomes, drawing on evidence from comparative case studies in Latin America.



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