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By [adham](#) / Updated: 13 Aug 2020

## [Participative budgeting in Tartu: Citizens influencing mobility investments](#)



**Contact:**

[sini.lamoureux](mailto:sini.lamoureux)

**Author:**

[adham](#)

**City:**

Tartu

**Region:**

Eastern Europe

**Country:**

Estonia

**Topic:**

Mobility management

Public and stakeholder involvement

Urban mobility planning

Walking and cycling

Other

**In brief**

Tartu was the first city in Estonia that opened its budget designing process to residents and the city began experimenting with participative budgeting in 2013.

Citizens of Tartu can decide how their city should spend €200,000, which equates to around 1% of the subsequent year's investment budget. The measure is thought to be a large part of Tartu's democratic and liberal identity.

This case study has been created as a part of the [cities.multimodal](#) project.

## **Context**

Tartu was the first city in Estonia to open its budget designing process to city residents. Known as 'participative budgeting' the initiative was first approved by the elected Tartu City Council in 2013 and the initiative has been taking place annually since then.

The budgeting process is managed by the Public Relations department. The actual investments after approval of the budget are done by the departments of Tartu City Government. They are usually the department of municipal property or communal services as those two parts of the municipality responsible for most of the investments. The initiatives gather lot of local and national media attention and the call and ideas are also promoted in social media, internet and public spaces.

## **In action**

Tartu has set three goals for participative budgeting:

1. To improve understanding of the city budget and its shaping process;
2. to boost cooperation between communities;
3. to find solutions to practical problems within the city by implementing residents' ideas.

The call for proposals usually starts in April. The selection and voting take place over a period of 6-months, with implementation usually completed in 12 months. The ideas can be presented in the [Estonian System for Local Democracy Procedures \(more about portal\)](#). Each year, at least two ideas are developed into projects, totaling the overall budget of €200,000. The ideas must be connected to Tartu, for public use and of benefit to ordinary people. Implementation of the ideas must not generate unreasonable costs in future budgets for the city. In May and June, the ideas are analysed by experts in their respective fields. The expert group is compiled of a wide range of stakeholders from university representatives to private and third sector organisations. Experts consider the feasibility of the ideas from various aspects, including financial, temporal, and technical viability. In-depth discussions of the ideas and their impact are held between the experts and the people behind the ideas. These discussions will determine which ideas go forward to the final vote.

The presentation of ideas takes place after the experts have finished the evaluation and last throughout the summer to September. The city government will present all the selected ideas on the city's homepage, in public city spaces, via social media, etc. The individuals who proposed the ideas will then seek support for them. Public voting then takes place over 7-14 days in October. Residents all have the opportunity to vote for all of the ideas (which are in accordance with the budget and received positive expert evaluation) using both traditional and electronic means. Every resident of Tartu, aged 16 years or more, is eligible to vote (3 votes per person). The idea with most votes wins and will be approved by the City Council. Implementing ideas takes place during the next budget year. The two ideas which gather the most public support will be implemented.

## **Results**

The measures often result in activities aimed at mobility, active transportation and public transportation measures. This indicates that multimodality and active mobility are near and dear to Tartuvians.

Below are three examples of how participative budgeting has been applied to mobility investments in Tartu:

### **2014: “Comfortable sidewalks and crossroads”**

The problem was that all sidewalks have curbs that were not on the same level as the road. It is a problem on crossings and crossroads, meaning places where people have to cross the road. The small step of 10-20 cm can be an obstacle for parents with trolleys, people with injuries or disabilities, and to people using any active mode of transportation. Thanks to the people's budgeting proposal the steppingstones on more than 70 crossroads were removed making road crossings more comfortable and smoother. The activity also added embossed tiles into the crossings for the visually disabled. Since 2014 the process of redesigning has continued, and the standard has found a place in Tartu's street design. By 2020 there were no street crossings in Tartu with a steppingstone.

### **2017: [M.Reiniks School Active Movement Court Yard](#)**

Tartuvians voted for M.Reinik School to have a brand new courtyard. The yard was redesigned to promote active leisure for the students and nearby residents. As a result of the suggestion, the school courtyard was equipped with sports facilities, everything from basketball to table tennis, swings, climbing and hanging bars, and a trampoline. Private car parking spaces were removed to make room for cycling, skating, and skateboarding. Extra facilities for storing over 100 bikes were also installed alongside new lighting was installed and renovation of cycle paths.

### **2019: “Ideas cycling roads”**

An independent group of cycling activists wanted to design and implement a perfect street that is friendly towards pedestrians, cyclists, and motorised transportation. They wanted to redesign a stretch of Kroonuaia street between Jakobi street and Kroonuaia bridge going past Kesklinna School. The project received an overwhelming amount of 1840 votes from the public. The project will be implemented in 2020. The creator of the original idea describes the project: "Tartu is a smaller city, perfect for bicycle traffic. Many road users still perceive the quality of bikeways as poor and their marking as a 'bottleneck'. Cyclists don't feel safe and they switch between sideways and roads depending on the situation. Bikeways need to be properly marked and also physically separated from the road where possible. Building safe intersections that would be comprehensible for everyone is also extremely important. Critical places such as areas near schools and bike-share stations need special attention. The exact choice of objects to be financed from the participatory budget (bikeway markings, lowering curbs etc.) can be made in cooperation with bike users."

### **In Depth**

This case study was created as a part of the [cities.multimodal](#) project and based on a report by [Kaspar Alev](#) Analyst & Project Manager Department of Land Resources, Tartu City Administration.

### **Keywords**

[cities.multimodal](#)

Citizens involvement; Mobility management; Multimodality

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