

Final evaluation of the City of Helsinki's participatory budgeting OmaStadi 2018–2020

Mikko Rask | Titiana Ertiö | Pekka Tuominen
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UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

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1 Participatory budgeting globally and in Helsinki	8
2 Stages and contents of OmaStadi	9
2.1 Plans	10
2.2 Cost estimation	10
2.3 Voting	12
2.4 Implementation and follow-up	12
3 The Co-Creation Radar	14
3.1 Methods and data of this final evaluation	14
3.2 OmaStadi Radar chart	16
4 Evaluation of the objectives	18
4.1 Democracy	20
4.2 Sustainability	25
4.3 Topicality	26
5 Evaluation of the implementation	28
5.1 Planning and foresight	29
5.2 Quality and efficiency	32
5.3 Evaluation	38
6 Evaluation of actor participation	42
6.1 Representativeness	42
6.2 Motivation	46
6.3 Learning and empowerment	48
7 Evaluation of the results of OmaStadi	50
7.1 Skills and expertise	51
7.2 Decision-making and accountability	52
7.3 Institutional impacts	53
8 Conclusions and recommendations	56
References	59
Documents related to OmaStadi	59
Literature	59
Hyperlinks	62
Acknowledgements	63

Executive Summary

Participatory budgeting is a democratic innovation for urban development, whereby citizens propose projects and vote on their implementation. Between 2018–2020, the City of Helsinki piloted a participatory budgeting process known as OmaStadi, with an allocated budget of EUR 4.4 million. This operational model emphasises direct democracy and online democracy as well as co-creation.

We evaluated the OmaStadi project by analysing participant voting data and responses to feedback surveys. We conducted participant observation in events organised throughout the project and interviewed political decision-makers, association and NGO actors as well as City experts. We used the Co-Creation Radar as our evaluation method as it reflects the myriad dimensions of societal values through its twelve evaluation criteria.

Our overall evaluation of the OmaStadi pilot is cautiously positive. Many lessons have already been learned for the second round. However, there is also plenty of room for improvement and development should continue based on the accrued experiences.

On the basis of the results of our evaluation, we present seven recommendations to improve OmaStadi:

- 1. Develop OmaStadi** in coherence with the concept of proximity democracy to ensure that the long-term connections to urban area development will be strengthened. Possible ways of providing support for participatory budgeting include the establishment of citizen forums to encourage better cooperation with local stakeholders in the development and cost estimation phases of a proposal.
- 2. Maintain equity as a central tenet.** Minority groups were underrepresented in both the planning and implementation stages of the project. Reaching the groups requires efforts in multilingual and accessible language practices, as well as in long-term cooperation with NGOs and community groups.
- 3. Shift attention from voting to deliberation.** The voting system used in the pilot led to fierce competition in some areas and perceptions of tactical voting. In the future it is important to create more space for debate on the contents of the proposals.
- 4. Delineate OmaStadi objectives.** The scale of funds allocated through participatory budgeting, links to various democracy models, and the role of sustainability revealed contradictory expectations. Shared goals would support OmaStadi's long-term development.
- 5. Support OmaStadi's future development through research and evaluation.** International examples have shown that unbiased evaluation provides considerable support for learning through experimentation. Evaluation should remain an integral part of process development.
- 6. Make the results and impact of OmaStadi more visible.** Based on the feedback, residents were unaware of what happens to the proposals they voted for. Alongside communication channels already in use, OmaStadi-branded logos could be considered to identify winning proposals.
- 7. Heightened participation by NGOs, businesses, and research organisations in OmaStadi.** This could be implemented by organising co-creation events, hackathons, and other similar events.

1 Participatory budgeting globally and in Helsinki

Participatory budgeting is a democratic innovation that has generated a lot of interest globally over the last few years. It involves dialogue between various groups, such as residents, the public sector, NGOs (non-governmental organisations) and companies in order to establish a consensus regarding the use of funds and other resources (Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities – Suomen Kuntaliitto, 2017; Ahonen & Rask, 2019). Typically, residents of a city propose urban development projects and then vote on which proposals will be implemented.

In 30 years, this way of working has spread from Porto Alegre in Brazil to more than 3,000 cities (Cabannes & Lipietz, 2018). Especially in the recent years, participatory budgeting has become an established democratic innovation and has spread at an increasingly fast pace (Dias, 2018; Cabannes, 2020).

There are many ways to approach participatory budgeting. Ideas can be collected either without imposing any limitations or by utilising a specific theme, such as ecology, fostering well-being or reducing marginalisation. Resources can also be targeted, such as focusing on young people or areas that have been left behind in development. Participatory budgeting can also be used to identify targets for investment or cutting costs. The funds can also be directly linked to the city's budget, the city can establish a separate fund for the purpose or a hybrid approach can be taken, involving both the city and other actors. In addition to cities, participatory budgeting has been applied to neighbourhoods, parks and schools – even to the entire country of Portugal (Falanga, 2018).

Participatory budgeting was introduced to Finland in the 2011 New Democracy forum hosted by The Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra (Salminen et al., 2016). The forum was aimed at gathering ideas for projects that promote the democratic nature of governance and participatory budgeting was one of the four ideas chosen for implementation.

The City of Helsinki has actively developed participatory budgeting. The approach was used for the first time in 2012 when EUR 100,000 of funding was allocated for development ideas related to the Oodi Central Library. Participatory budgeting became a permanent part of the City of Helsinki's budget in 2013, when it was introduced as part of the Youth Department's Ruuti budget. Ideation of the Maunulatalo

community centre also began that same year, with funds available for allocation to its development.

The Helsinki City Board established participatory budgeting principles in 2017 (City Board – Kaupunginhallitus, 40/2017). The budget proposals must increase the functionality, attractiveness, liveliness, safety and community spirit of a neighbourhood. Participatory budgeting is also specifically aimed at supporting the participation of marginalised groups by developing digital means as well as accessible language and multilingual content (City Board – Kaupunginhallitus 37/2018).

The basic idea was that we wanted something in the system depending clearly on the initiative of the residents and this interaction to be more than just an abstract process, allowing residents to propose ideas and have their say in a rather straightforward way.

– ANNI SINNEMÄKI, DEPUTY MAYOR FOR URBAN ENVIRONMENT

The City of Helsinki participatory budgeting is called OmaStadi. In 2020, a total of EUR 4.4 million was allocated for the projects to be selected for implementation. The projects were either specific to one of the seven major districts or concerned the entire City. The minimum budget for a project was EUR 35,000 and the maximum was between EUR 288,390 and 653,250, depending upon the number of residents of the major district.

The funding could not be used for employing permanent personnel or establishing permanent activities. The goal was that all proposals that meet the criteria would advance to the voting stage, in which each Helsinki resident 12 years of age or older was eligible to vote.

It was also decided that an evaluation of the project would be conducted. The evaluation was carried out by the BIBU research project funded by the Strategic Research Council of the Academy of Finland. We evaluated the quality of the process and its impacts in 2018–2020 and piloted The Co-Creation Radar, a new model for evaluating participation (Rask & Ertiö, 2019a, 2019b; see also chapter 3). Our data is both quantitative and qualitative and comprises statistics, feedback surveys, in-depth interviews and participant observation throughout the entire project. In addition to the final evaluation you are now reading, an intermediary evaluation (Rask et al., 2019) was conducted in November 2019.

2 Stages and contents of OmaStadi

Figure 2.1 presents the stages of OmaStadi along with their schedules. In this chapter, we describe the planning, cost estimation, voting and implementation stages as they were perceived by the residents in public events and

related discussion. The descriptions are based on participant observation, interviews and social media analysis. Chapters 4–7 include a more in-depth evaluation of each stage.

FIGURE 2.1 OmaStadi stages

	RESIDENTS	CITY EXECUTIVE OFFICE	DIVISION
Ideas 1 October–14 November 2018	Participate in an ideation event or organise one.	OmaStadi marketing and communications. Fosters resident participation and cooperation with the divisions.	Supports resident participation via local services and uses own communication channels for communicating about OmaStadi. Provides information on the division’s plans, related policies and costs.
Proposals 15 November 2018–30 January 2019	Post proposals in the OmaStadi service.	Conducts a preliminary examination of the ideas and groups them based on their target or related service. Interacts with and communicates to the residents.	Contact person records in the Excel sheet the expert that will evaluate the project and notifies the expert about the received proposal.
Plans 7–30 January 2019	Ideas are combined into proposals together with the residents and then entered on the platform.	Prepares local co-creation events and invites residents.	Contact persons direct the proposals to the correct experts. Service personnel support resident participation in co-creation.
(OmaStadi Raksa workshops) 11–28 February 2019	Residents and experts elaborate the plans and draw up initial cost estimates.	Organises the Aueraksa workshops, communicates with the residents and directs the workshops. Forwards the proposals to the divisions.	Division experts participate in the Raksa workshops and produce data and an initial cost estimate as a basis for discussion.
Cost estimates 15 April–14 June 2019		Provides necessary support for residents in drawing up proposals and cost estimates.	Is responsible for drawing up the cost estimates and their grounds as well as any necessary interaction with the residents.
Voting 1–31 October 2019	Market their plans and motivate local residents to vote.	Marketing and communications related to voting, supports resident participation and cooperation with the divisions.	Marketing and communications related to voting. Provides services to support resident voting and participation.
Implementation and follow-up 2020->	Participate in detailed planning and possibly also in implementation.	Coordinates project implementation and communications on the city-level. Supports interaction with residents.	Ensures project implementation and follow-up are up to date in the OmaStadi service. Communicates about the stages of project implementation.

Stages reviewed in the intermediary evaluation are marked blue and those reviewed in this final evaluation are marked orange. We have included the planning stage in both evaluations.

2.1 Plans

In the planning stage, carried out between February and April 2019, the proposals were elaborated using co-creation methods. The most important methods include the OmaStadi Raksa co-creation workshops that brought experts and local residents together to combine proposals into larger cohesive projects. During the workshops, similar proposals were combined and a few of the organisers withdrew, resulting in the 1,273 proposals being transformed into 352 plans that were then posted on the OmaStadi website. Most proposals (59%) were not combined, 20% were directly combined and 21% indirectly. Combining directly refers to the proposals being thematically and content-wise equivalent or very similar to each other (such as two proposed dog parks close by). Indirect combination refers to situations with greater differences between the projects. In such cases the basis for combining the projects were factors such as identical target group, implementation method or target area (for example, a proposition that combined a shared-use resident premises with a multi-cultural meeting point and a project for fostering participation of the elderly population).

The plans were divided into themes. The most popular theme was sports and outdoor recreation which comprised 36% of the proposals. Other popular themes included art, handicrafts and culture (15%) and local flavour (12%). There was a fairly even division (6–8%) between development of services and communications, equity, equality and marginalisation, environmental issues and health, safety and accessibility. Only 2% of the plans were related to transport.

Environmental issues were highlighted in plans concerning the entire City (17%) with art, handicrafts and culture, services as well as sports and outdoor recreation



The most popular theme was sports and outdoor recreation which comprised 36% of the proposals. Other popular themes included art, handicrafts and culture (15%) and local flavour (12%).



Many of the participants were quite surprised because they had estimated the costs to be considerably lower compared with the estimates provided by the divisions.

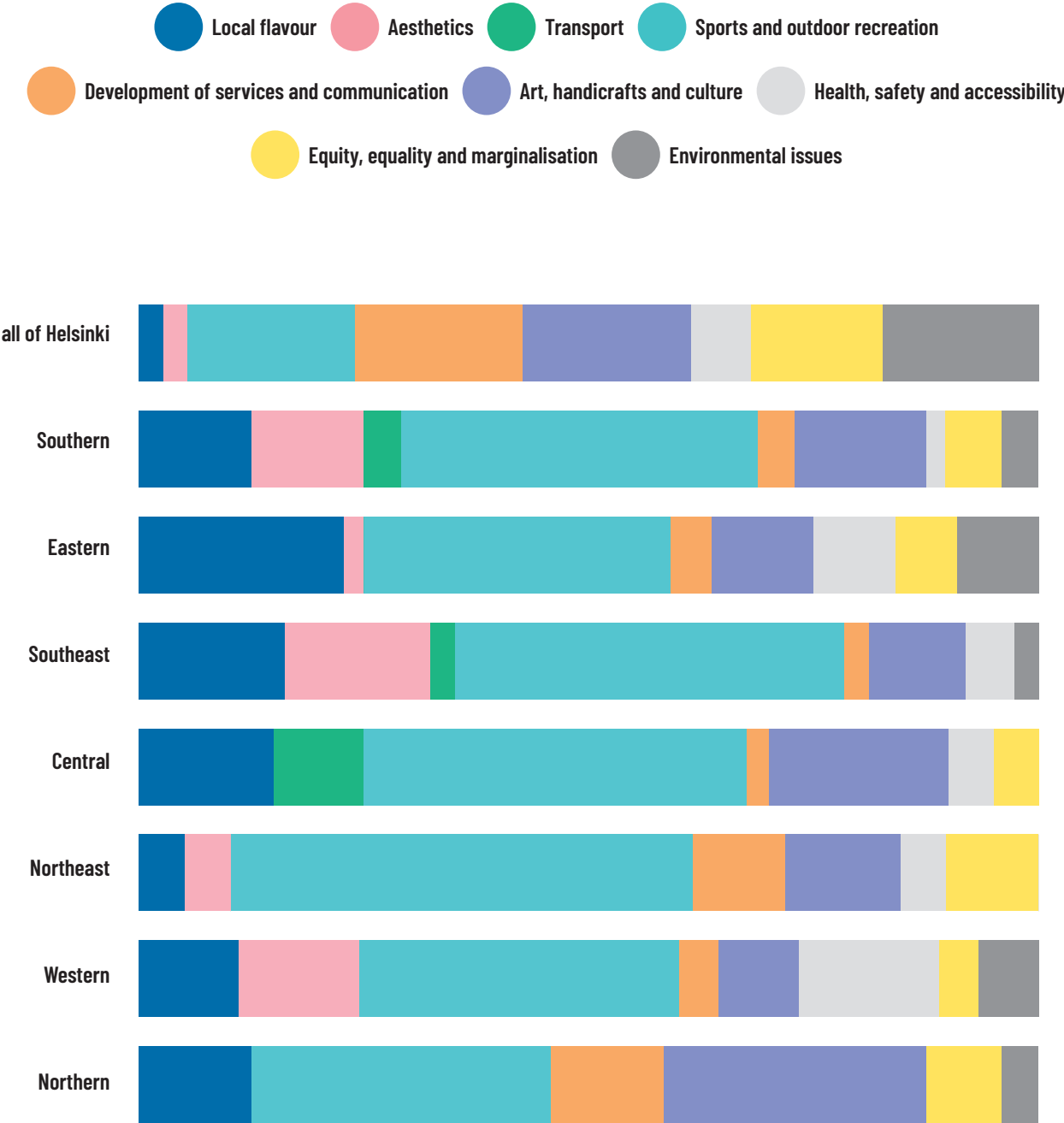
(nearly 19%) also highlighted (Figure 2.2). The emphasis varied between major districts. In Eastern Helsinki, environmental issues came in at 9% and art, handicrafts and culture at 11%. In Northern Helsinki the emphasis was on sports and outdoor recreation (33%); art, handicrafts and culture (29%) and local flavour (12.5%). Southern, Western and Southeastern Helsinki had the relatively highest share of proposals classified as related to aesthetics (12.5%, 13% and 16%, respectively). Another focus for Western Helsinki was health, safety and accessibility (16%). In the Northeastern and Central districts proposals were more evenly distributed among the themes. Sports and outdoor recreation was the most popular theme overall but specifically in Northeastern Helsinki, where it comprised 51% of all proposals.

2.2 Cost estimation

The cost estimation stage began after holding the Raksa co-creation workshops in the spring and summer of 2019. There was a clear drop in intensity related to participatory budgeting during this stage. The Mayor approved the plans on 19 August and 296 proposals continued on to the voting stage.

There was a great deal of discussion related to the cost estimates of the projects that continued to the voting stage. Many of the participants were quite surprised because they had estimated the costs to be considerably lower compared with the estimates provided by the divisions. Considerable doubt was expressed both on social media and in public events regarding the cost estimates drawn up for the projects. In many discussions, the suspicion was expressed that the City had misunderstood a project. It was also common for the projects combined in the Raksa workshops to grow

FIGURE 2.2 **Distribution of the themes per major district**



2 Stages and contents of OmaStadi

to a much larger size than originally planned during the cost estimation stage. Workshops to promote developing the OmaStadi process were also conducted during the cost estimation stage, with discussions regarding issues such as the defined limits and preconditions.

2.3 Voting

The voter turnout for OmaStadi was 8.6% meaning a total of 49,705 Helsinki residents voted. The OmaStadi team produced guidance to facilitate voting and events to showcase the upcoming vote and discuss the projects were held in various neighbourhoods. The largest of these was OmaStadi Expo, held in the Oodi Central Library on 5 October. The event reached a considerable attendance, but immigrants and the Swedish-speaking population were underrepresented among the project proposals. In addition, very few young people attended and they presented only a single plan on the Expo stage.

A variety of methods was used to promote awareness about the start of voting. The start of the actual voting period (1–31 October) was highlighted in events, welcome videos by the Mayor and Deputy Mayors posted on social media and outdoor advertisements. In addition, the Borough Liaison support staff visited various events and a comprehensive information package was included in the Helsinki magazine, delivered to all the households in Helsinki. The largest media outlets also provided extensive and varied coverage of the start of the voting.

The start was delayed slightly due to technical issues. Voter turnout increased considerably during the very last days of October with nearly half of the votes cast during the last three days (see Ahola, 2020).

It was possible to track the number votes cast on the platform in real time and people could alter the choices they had already made. In some of the major districts, this led to a situation where the votes were concentrated to a few projects which impacted the voting tactically. On the other hand, being able to track the votes being cast motivated residents to pay more attention to the platform and increased the amount of attention garnered by participatory budgeting.

Sports and outdoor recreation remained the most popular theme (29.5%) among projects selected for implementation (Figure 2.3) throughout the process. Projects related to the environmental theme were the second-most voted for (27.3%). This reflects a fourfold increase in the relative share of the environmental theme between the planning and voting stages. Other popular themes included art, handicrafts



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and culture (16%) and local flavour (9%). Themes related to development of services and communication decreased to 6.8%. In the implementation stage, themes related to aesthetic appeal remained about as popular as in the proposal stage (4.6%). One project of each of the remaining themes was implemented.

2.4 Implementation and follow-up

Once the voting had concluded, the Mayor confirmed the projects to be implemented. A total of 44 plans were selected for implementation and the implementation work started in early 2020. The implementation was coordinated by the divisions in cooperation with the proposers. In the Starttiraksa workshops, the people who had submitted proposals met with experts and considered the required preparations and practical work phases. The Starttiraksa workshops were free-form events where the Borough Liaisons gave a short presentation on the goals along with group work on the projects.

The implementation stage is currently (November 2020) ongoing: approximately 38 of the plans will be completed during 2020 and the rest in 2021. The COVID-19 pandemic has made the implementation of some projects more challenging than expected. The OmaStadi platform (<https://omastadi.hel.fi/results>) can be used to track project implementation.

FIGURE 2.3 Distribution of the themes in the proposal, planning and implementation stages

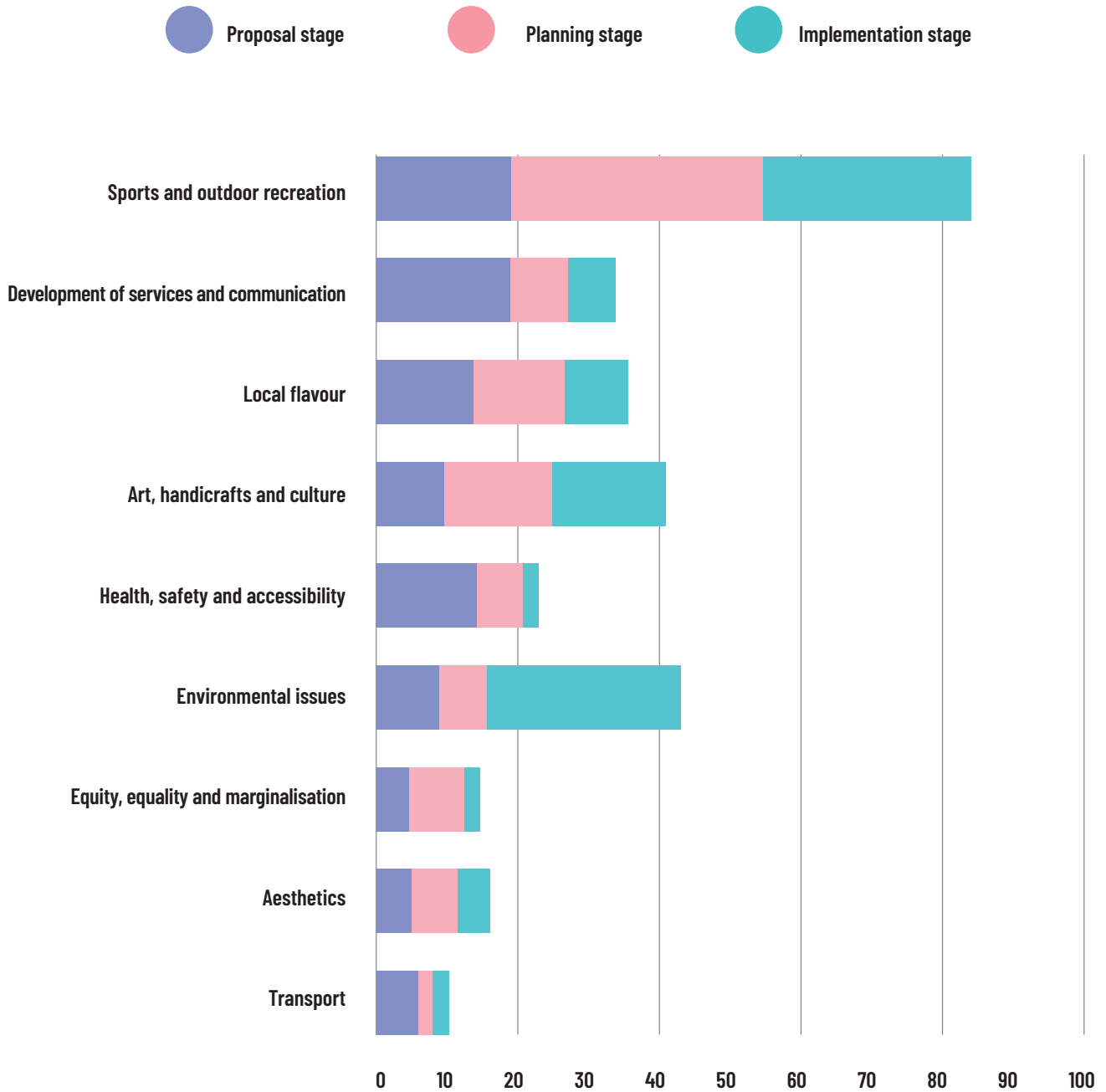
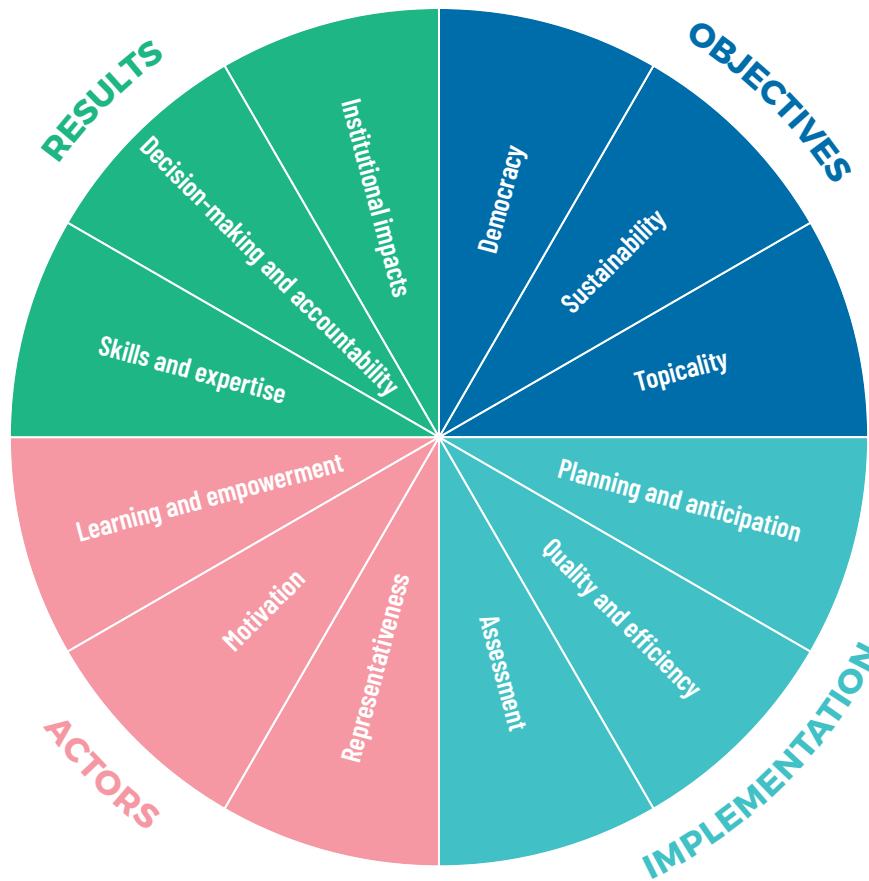


FIGURE 3.1 The Co-Creation Radar



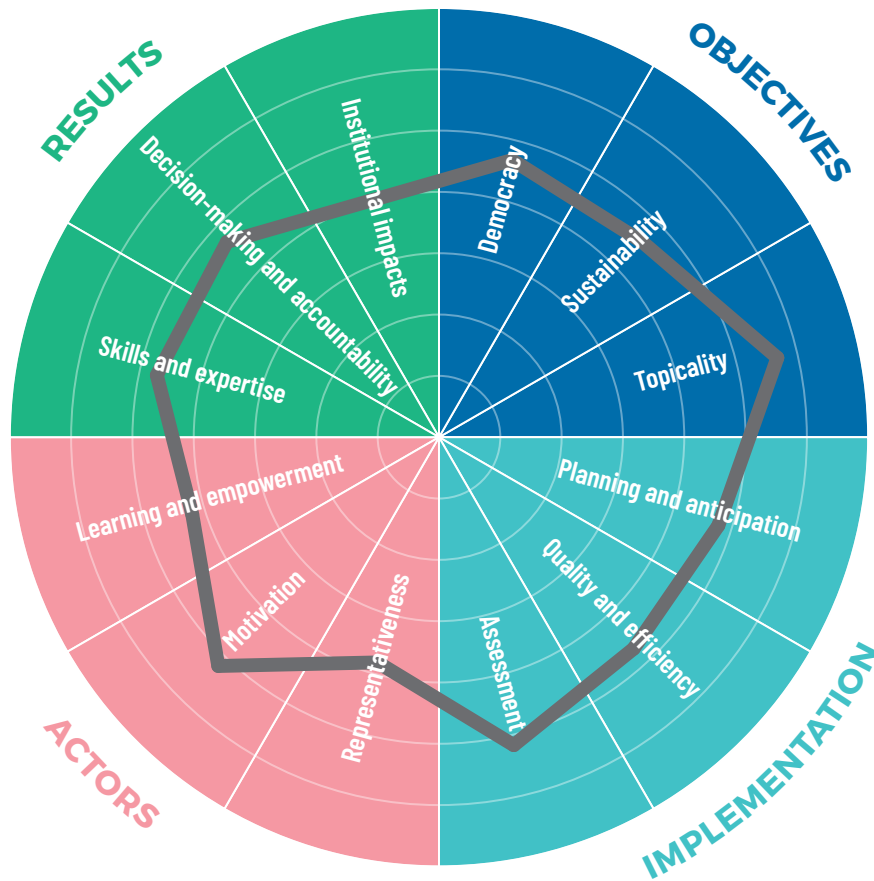
3 The Co-Creation Radar

This final evaluation is structured around The Co-Creation Radar (Figure 3.1). The Radar includes 12 main indicators that enable comprehensive evaluation of the implementation and impacts of a co-creation project.

The indicators were chosen on the basis of a meta-analysis. The analysis included nearly 300 sub-indicators that have been used in previous participation evaluations (Rask & Ertiö, 2019a). They were divided into four areas: objectives, implementation, actors and results.

3.1 Methods and data of this final evaluation

The Co-Creation Radar was applied to a dataset that is both quantitatively and qualitatively varied and extensive. Using interviews with decision-makers, stakeholders and experts (N=12); a survey based on the Co-Creation Radar (N=15) as well as a feedback survey conducted during the voting stage (N=390), we managed to comprehensively obtain information regarding all stages of the project. The entire research team

FIGURE 3.2 **OmaStadi Radar chart**

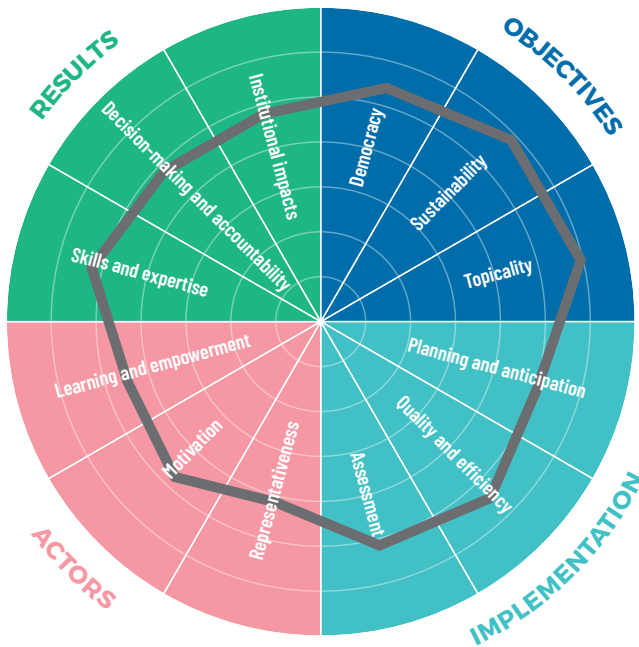
The closer the graph corresponding to the evaluation is to the outer circle, the more successful the activity was assessed to be. "Cannot say" responses are not included.

has carried out participant observation in the OmaStadi events throughout the project and participated in discussions, recording their observations. The qualitative evaluation made use of the in-depth interviews, participant observation and open-ended feedback provided by the residents in the voting stage feedback survey (N=749 comments). The provided examples are descriptive of the most important themes highlighted in a systematic review of the data. Direct citations from interviews were selected to exemplify themes, questions, concerns and praise that were salient in the entire dataset (e.g. Duneier, 2011).

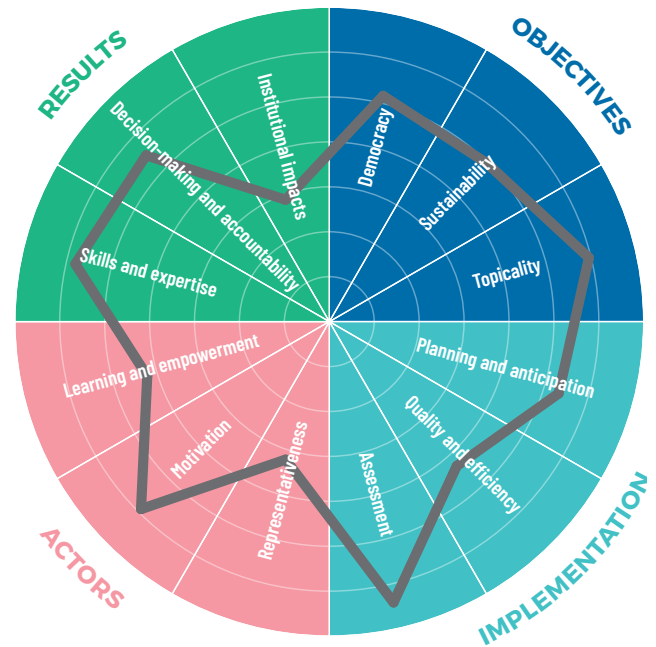
Official documents, such as City Board decisions, played an important role in assessing the objectives of the entire project. The implementation was facilitated by the divisions' internal evaluations and analysing the voting data was important in examining the actors (Ahola, 2019). Finally, analysis conducted by the research team on the contents of the plans (N=352) was key to evaluating the results. In regard to evaluating the results it must be noted that the implementation of the selected projects is ongoing. The OmaStadi group has also remedied certain issues in connection with organising the second round of participatory budgeting.

3 The Co-Creation Radar

City experts



Political decision-makers



3.2 OmaStadi Radar chart

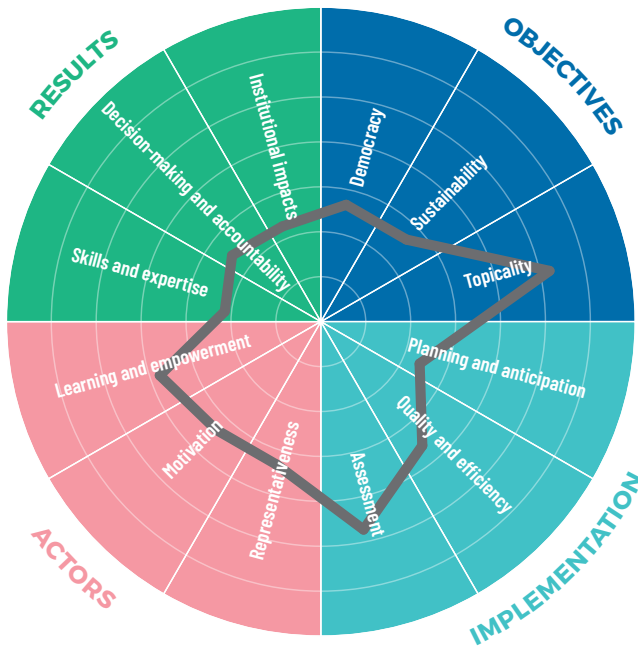
During the spring of 2020, we conducted a survey, based on the Co-Creation Radar, of participatory budgeting stakeholders (Rask & Ertiö, 2019a). Responses (N=15) were received from the OmaStadi working group of the City Executive Office (5), political decision-makers (5), experts of the City's divisions (3) and association and NGO actors (2). We approached all of the political parties in the City Board and received responses from the Greens, the National Coalition Party and the Swedish People's Party of Finland. Figure 3.2 presents the OmaStadi Radar chart for response averages. The average score was 4.6/7.

The *topicality* of OmaStadi received the highest score (average 5.8/7) among all respondents. Participatory budget-

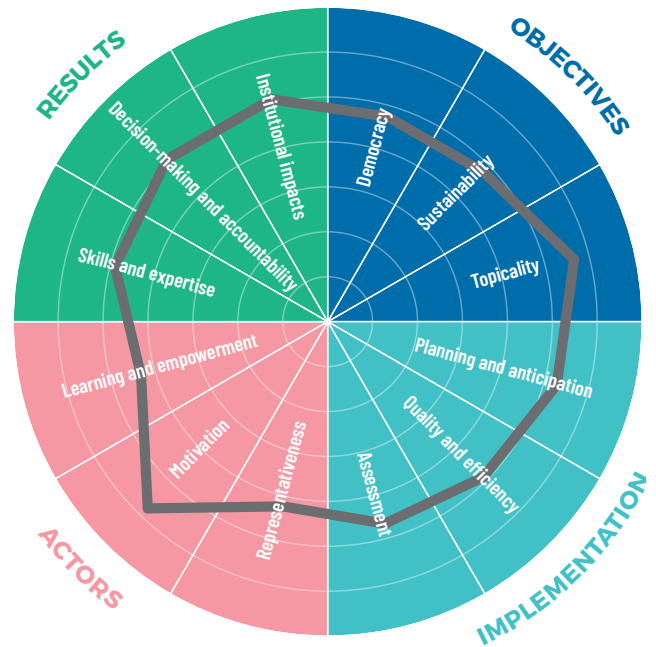
ing was considered an important tool for fostering resident participation. The most negative assessment (3.6/7) concerned the *representativeness* of OmaStadi. The process was considered insufficiently representative of the City's residents. Most of the other scores were slightly above average (4–5/7), demonstrating that OmaStadi was fairly successful.

Association and NGO actors were more critical than others in the Radar survey as well as during discussions throughout the project. Experts and members of the OmaStadi working group were again slightly more positive in regard to participatory budgeting compared with others. Doubts expressed by political decision-makers in regard to the institutional impact of OmaStadi were also highlighted in the survey (3/7), almost matching the criti-

Association and NGO actors



OmaStadi working group



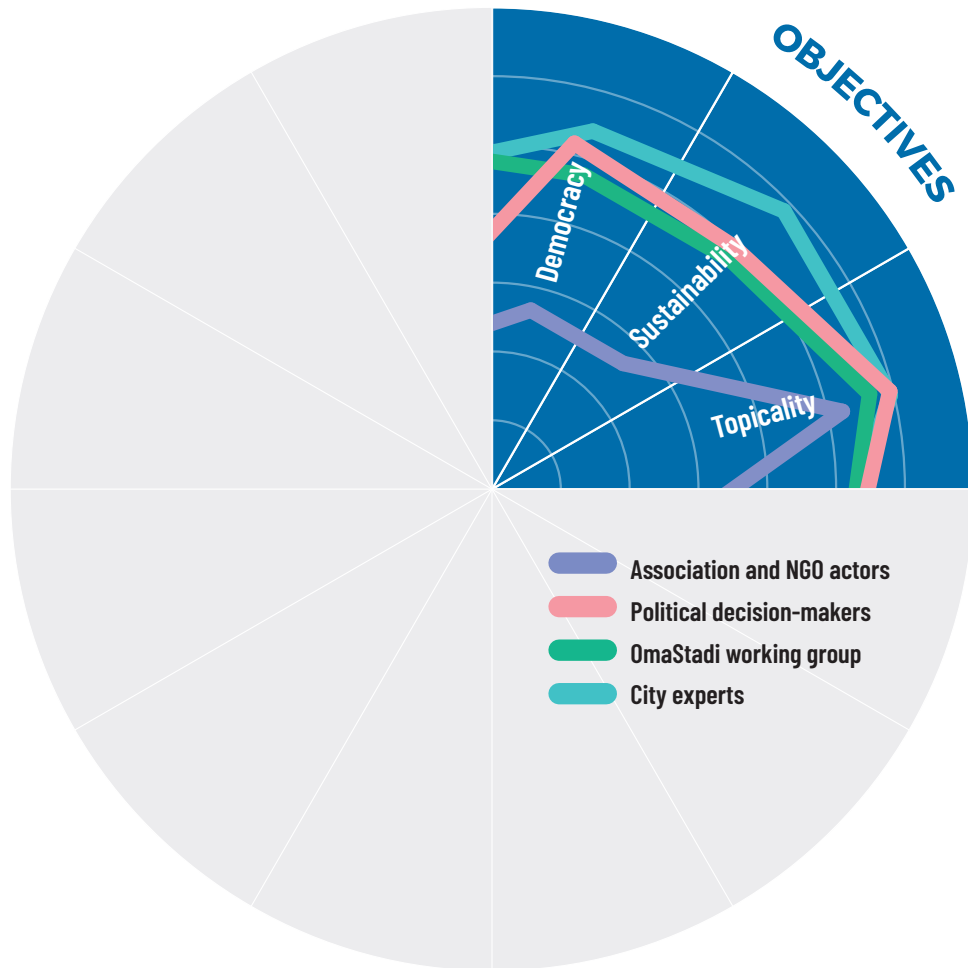
cal view of association and NGO actors. Nonetheless, decision-makers were clearly more positive about the OmaStadi evaluation compared with others.

The evaluation work is aimed at promoting learning and knowledge-based development. Important learning perspectives (Mulgan, 2018) include learning from mistakes, measures for making the process more effective and identifying alternative models of action and thinking. It is also important to consider how knowledge and ideas accumulated in the project can be used to foster diverse urban development – especially as participatory budgeting will continue in Helsinki for several years.

We used the Co-Creation Radar to ensure that the evaluation included a sufficient number of key criteria and perspec-

tives for critically appraising and developing participatory projects. This is also reflective of the pluralism in our society. For example, administration representatives will typically emphasise the significance of the implementation quality and efficiency (Co-Creation Radar criteria 5) whereas the parties critical of the government projects will often emphasise democracy (criteria 1) and base their assessment of the city’s operations on a specific democratic ideal (such as proximity democracy, participatory democracy, deliberative democracy).

Chapters 4–7 are dedicated to reviewing OmaStadi based on the four main aspects of the Radar: objectives, implementation, actors and results. In chapter 8, we summarise key findings and provide recommendations for future development of activities.



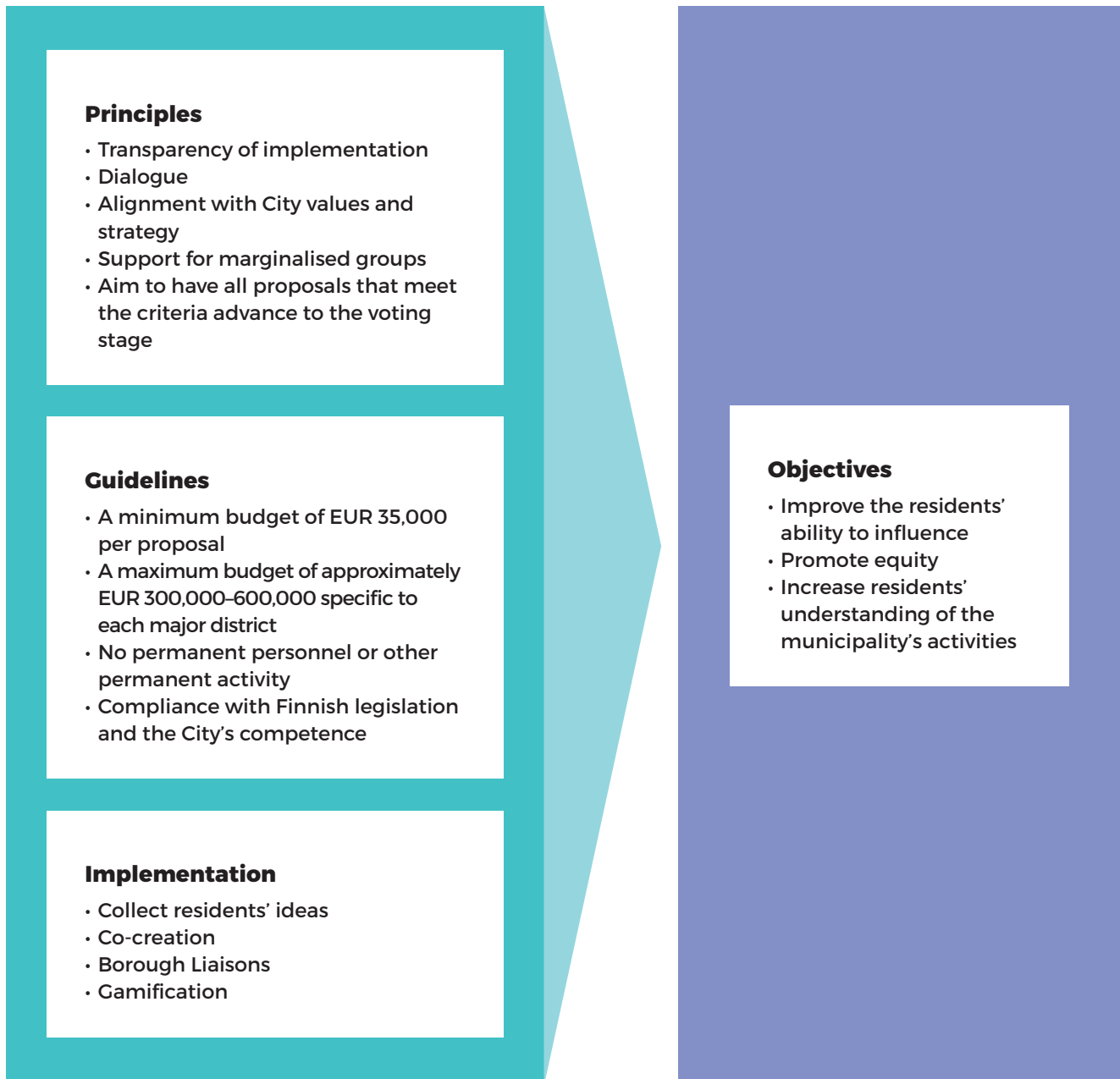
4 Evaluation of the objectives

OmaStadi 2018–2019 was conducted as part of the City of Helsinki’s new participation model. The aim of the model is to utilise the skills and expertise of the municipality’s residents in service development as well as facilitate voluntary activities and foster equal participation opportunities (City Board, 37/2018). The goals of OmaStadi are to 1) strengthen the residents’ ability to influence, 2) promote equity and 3) increase residents’ understanding of the municipality’s activities (City Executive Office, 2018). The project’s website (Participatory budgeting

2018–2019) describes the general aim as “draw up proposals and make plans that are equal for all and benefit everyone.”

Official documents also defined principles and guidelines that form a framework for working towards the goals (Figure 4.1). Key principles are transparency and the dialogic nature of implementation, promoting the City’s values and strategic goals (functionality, attractiveness, liveliness, safety and community spirit) and fostering participation of marginalised groups (City Board, 37/2018). In principle, all proposals that met the criteria were included in the vote.

FIGURE 4.1 **OmaStadi objectives and methods**



4 Evaluation of the objectives

4.1 Democracy

There is a strong will to further develop OmaStadi and all of the interviewees thought that promoting participatory budgeting was an important goal. In the voting-stage feedback survey (N=390) the overall evaluation was positive (Figure 4.2): 86% of respondents were willing to participate in the future and 88% felt that participatory budgeting was a welcome new tool to participate and have a say.

4.1.1 Participatory budgeting supports democracy education

It is important for participatory budgeting to promote active citizenship and participation in shared issues. I feel it does have its place as long as it is developed, kept visible in media outlets and adapted according to positive and negative results.

– NGO ACTOR

Participatory budgeting is a significant departure from the traditional model in which elected officials draw up political proposals and make decisions and City experts take care of their implementation. As with adapting any new way of working, there is learning involved with influencing via participatory budgeting. But who needs to learn and what?

One idea that is quite salient in the interviews is that OmaStadi can teach democratic influencing to residents, City experts and decision-makers alike by allowing them to experience a new kind of process of political negotiation and voting, and that this opportunity is especially valuable to those with little experience of such processes. For many residents developing their own ideas in cooperation with the City experts was an eye-opening experience in regard to how complex and expensive projects designed for public spaces can be. Based on the voting-stage feedback, participation in OmaStadi promoted a feeling of political efficacy, a common indicator for the strengths of participatory democracy: Of all respondents, 72% felt that OmaStadi provided them a way to have a say in the City's activities and 68% reported being more interested than before in City decision-making and participating in activities of their local area (Figure 4.2).

School children participated actively in OmaStadi, although there were considerable differences per area and age group. Nearly one in five (9,290) OmaStadi votes were cast by pupils of basic and upper secondary education (Ahola, 2019) which is statistically on par with the share of young people among Helsinki residents. Since 2013, young

people have also had the Ruutibudjetti (Ruutibudjetti, 2020) at their disposal, which is based on participatory budgeting. However, the participatory budgeting concerning all Helsinki residents that we evaluated is much larger both in terms of the budget and the objects of funding compared with Ruutibudjetti. OmaStadi offers young people a significant channel for participating in the City's decision-making. According to the Youth Barometer, young people are increasingly interested in the design and services of the area they live in and wish they had more opportunities to influence (Myllyniemi, 2013). Participation is part of the curriculum at all educational levels and OmaStadi fits naturally as part of the curricula. Schools could include influencing via OmaStadi into their teaching even more extensively and in order to further increase the significance of participatory budgeting as a way for young people to get their voices heard.

For the City experts OmaStadi offered a new form of interaction. Long-term city councillor (SKP) and current citizen activist Yrjö Hakanen aptly sums up a contradiction that was pointed out by many in their feedback:

“Representative democracy in the sense of ‘elections’ is often recognised, but self-governing democracy is clearly a completely strange idea to some public servants, even though it is also based on the Local Government Act.”

City experts interacted directly with residents especially in the OmaStadi Raksa workshops. Previous evaluations of participatory budgeting (Hurme, 2018) have found that such meeting places are especially valuable because, at best, they increase dialogue and shared understanding between residents, decision-makers and City experts. According to Deputy Mayor Anni Sinnemäki, as the City experts interacted directly with residents in the Raksa workshops, they ran into “occasional tensions between planning and the residents’ proposals but also, perhaps, a heightened mutual understanding between these two perspectives.”

4.1.2 Equity is not realised

Participatory budgeting is tinkering of the well-off.

– CITIZEN FEEDBACK

According to the non-discrimination plan (2020–2021) drawn up by the City of Helsinki (2020) possible obstacles to equality include factors such as origin and nationality, language, religion and beliefs, opinions and political activity, family relations, health and disability, sexual orientation as well as other reasons, such as financial and regional inequality. Promoting equity is one of the key objectives of OmaStadi.

FIGURE 4.2 Voting-stage feedback survey (N390) regarding OmaStadi as a whole



4 Evaluation of the objectives

Based on our evaluation, the goal of equity remained far from being achieved and that caused conflicts.

It was the topic that caused the most discussion and worry in the voting-stage survey (N=390). Nearly 24% of the open-ended answers concerned equity (Figure 4.3).

The feedback clearly highlighted four target groups in relation to which equity and participation was a concern: *children and youth* (17%), *marginalised people* (11%), *the elderly and people with health-issues* (9%) and *immigrants, foreigners and foreign-language speakers* (5%). In addition, *inequality within and between different areas* was also highlighted (See also chapter 6.1 Representativeness). In regard to children and youth the feedback was mostly positive, although some wished that children under the age of 12 would also be eligible to vote. When it came to marginalisation, the concern was if marginalised people, including those with debt, were excluded from the process due to their limited ability to vote online. (Votes could also be cast with an ID in libraries, shared-use resident premises and service centres on specific announced dates, but this information had not reached everyone.) Difficulty of using the online platform and lack of communication was highlighted in feedback regarding the elderly: “*Were these things advertised in schools, elder care homes, bars and local news?*” Another concern was the inclusion of immigrants, foreigners and speakers of foreign languages: most of the proposals of the first round were in Finnish.

Some also expressed their concern in the open-ended answers that the current way of conducting the process will favour those already well-off and does not take marginalised groups sufficiently into consideration. The message was that the proposals should increase the well-being of an entire area and all of its residents as evenly as possible and not be “some project of a small clique”:

This has been my opinion since the beginning: making the decisions by voting causes the greatest benefit to be reaped by areas with active residents and a lot of social capital. The winners here are those who know how to campaign, advocate and who have the knowledge, skills and networks to get people all over the City to vote for their project.

– CITIZEN FEEDBACK

On the other hand, an analysis of the proposals included in our intermediary report (Rask et al., 2019) showed that most of them (c. 73%) were targeted to everyone: residents proposed services that were equally accessible to all.

A tension related to promoting equity and preventing marginalisation was highlighted in the interviews. This is exemplified well by thoughts on the Neighbourhood Proj-

ect and Fund, founded in 1996 and closed down in 2017, with the freed-up funds transferred to implementing participatory budgeting (City Board – Kaupunginhallitus, 40/2017). The Neighbourhood Fund was aimed at preventing marginalisation locally by comprehensive improvements and renovations. Targets included, for example, the

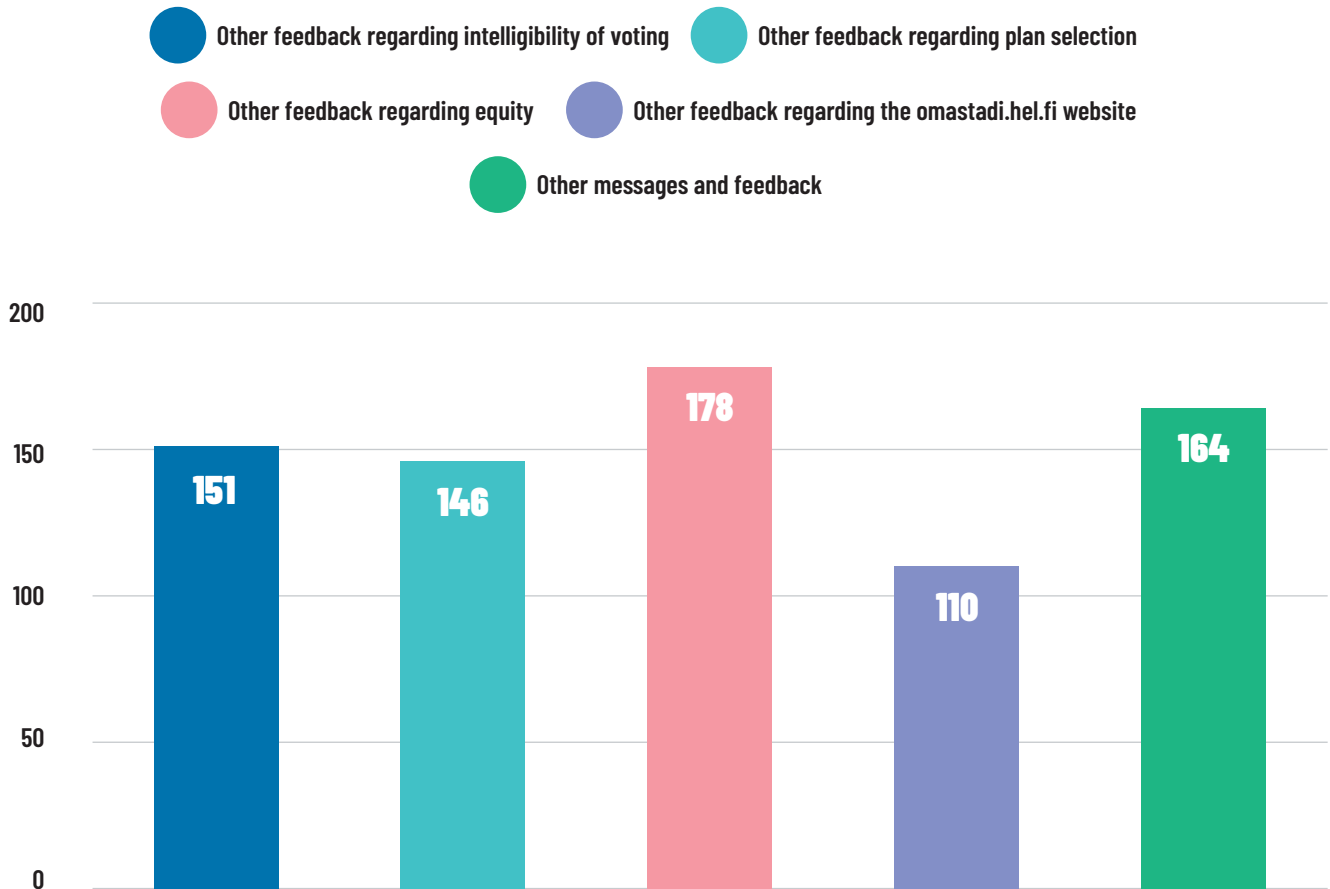
Info box 4.1

Competing logical approaches and democratic models related to participatory budgeting

According to Cabannes and Lipietz (2018) there are various competing logical approaches related to participatory budgeting. Originally participatory budgeting was a political reform strategy that allowed developing a radically new kind of democracy in countries such as Brazil. Since then, participatory budgeting has become increasingly popular as a form of good governance, used for fostering new relationships between citizens and officeholders and defining new political priorities to be implemented. These features are highlighted in the models employed in Paris and New York, for example. Participatory budgeting can also be used as a technocratic management tool. One example are the budget cuts carried out in Solingen, Germany where citizens voted on how to target the cuts.

Participatory budgeting is often also seen as a part of various democratic models such as direct, participatory, proximity, online and deliberative democracy. According to Sintomer et al. (2012) participatory budgeting processes implemented within different models differ from each other in their goals, power relationships, rules and principles.

FIGURE 4.3 Distribution of open-ended feedback (N=749) into classes



districts of Myllypuro and Kontula. According to the interviewed decision-makers, closing down the Neighbourhood Fund was well founded because “*the results were not all that great*” and the programme felt stiff and revolved around public servants. However, Eeva-Liisa Broman, who made a long career in the areas in question has a different opinion:

The Neighbourhood Fund should never have been transferred to participatory budgeting. Helsinki is the wealthiest municipality in all of Finland so there was no need to end the Neighbourhood Fund. To me it was a clear loss for anti-segregation work. The fund was exactly the kind of investments that are needed specifically in the suburbs.

The participatory budgeting rules forbid hiring permanent personnel and limit the activities to be short term. This excludes influencing many basic municipal services such as schools, health care, day care and housing. At worst, the current rules are seen to steer the proposals towards “planting flowers” under the jurisdiction of the Urban Environment Division. Deputy Mayor for Social Services and Health Care, Sanna Vesikansa comments on the impact:

Defining at the very start that participatory budgeting could not be used for hiring permanent employees is challenging from the perspective of services. It did clearly exclude some projects and steer towards infrastructure investments. In the future, we should

4 Evaluation of the objectives

consider whether we only want investments. They are important but focusing only on them can exclude other service development.

Although avoiding permanent expenses is typical to participatory budgeting globally, in practice they cannot be avoided. The first six months of maintenance of the projects that were selected for implementation in the first round of OmaStadi cost an estimated EUR 200,000–300,000 (City Executive Office – Kaupunginkanslia, 2020).

Participatory budgeting touches upon many dividing lines in the equity discussion. As such, the project should better articulate the ways in which it aims to promote equity. Is it enough to promote equity by fostering participation in the OmaStadi process while handling issues related to marginalisation with other political instruments? Or should the amount of funds allocated be boldly increased and rules of the process changed in a way that would allow intervening with structural issues that uphold marginalisation?

4.1.3 Proximity democracy requires time and patience

Without a long-term perspective, limited representativeness and lack of an organ or forum to bring the process close to people it is easy for the proposals to remain separate. [...] Participation requires a combination of direct influence of individuals and groups without requiring permanent or long-term commitment. Some forum is needed – not necessarily an elected one – that is in line with an area that residents recognise and consider meaningful. It is not enough that the City Board designates a few city councillors for a neighbourhood and leaves it at that.

– YRJÖ HAKANEN, CITIZEN ACTIVIST, COMMUNIST PARTY OF FINLAND

In other parts of the world there are projects that are very close to direct democracy – or maybe not democracy but direct influencing. I feel the overall policy should be strengthening our Nordic democracy. But how do resident activities fit together with that idea? I feel one of the best examples is the Veto ja Voimaa Mellunkylään citizen network that includes elements which the City could well create in a more systematic fashion, bringing together decision-makers and residents. That is real cooperation instead of polarisation. One related challenge, which has completely surprised me, is that decision-makers are not very interested in this matter.

– RISTO RAUTAVA, CITY COUNCILLOR, NATIONAL COALITION PARTY

A strong need to develop participatory budgeting as part of proximity democracy was highlighted in the interviews.

Across party lines the justifications ranged from including local and regional expertise and knowledge in the proposals to ensuring continuing development instead of individual projects.

Participatory budgeting has been developed based on competing logical approaches and democratic models in different parts of the world (info box 4.1). Strong support for solidifying proximity democracy can be considered a characteristic specific to Helsinki. This could be called a step in the “Brazilian” direction with participatory budgeting becoming a more comprehensive part of local political processes. The interviewees also made a connection between strengthening the local level and getting people more engaged in implementing ideas.

Info box 4.2

International examples of the scale of participatory budgeting

The sums allocated via participatory budgeting vary greatly. In Helsinki the available sum is EUR 6.78 per resident. That is somewhat higher than the approximately EUR 4.2 per resident available in New York. In Paris (EUR 45) and Madrid (EUR 36) the sums per resident are considerably higher. Paris has reserved EUR 500 million for participatory budgeting during 2014–2020. Globally the largest sums are allocated in Brazil. In Porto Alegre, the home of participatory budgeting, a total of 21% of the entire city budget was allocated via participatory budgeting in 1999 and during the same period in Belo Horizonte the share of the city’s budget was 50% (World Bank, p. 3). However, many participants feel that more important than the actual sum is that the projects meet the participants’ needs that would otherwise not be considered (Cabannes, 2015).

4.2 Sustainability

At this scale, this is certainly tinkering. If we talk about proximity democracy, it comprises entirely different kinds of processes, different kinds of influencing, budgeting and funds at a completely different scale. At this scale, all of this is nothing but lemonade stands and tinkering.

– MIKKO AHO, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, URBAN ENVIRONMENT DIVISION

We will now evaluate the financial, ecological and social sustainability of OmaStadi. OmaStadi is not directly connected to the City’s sustainable development programme although it is mentioned in a follow-up report regarding the UN sustainable development goals (Helsinki, 2020) as a measure that promotes peace, justice and good governance. The connections between sustainability work and participatory budgeting could perhaps be made more transparent in the future.

4.2.1 Economic sustainability: is 4.4 million enough?

I was presenting this project to the City management team and one of the mayors noted that these funds are within the margin of error for the social and health services...

– JOHANNA SEPPÄLÄ, HEAD OF UNIT PARTICIPATION AND CITIZEN INFORMATION, CITY EXECUTIVE OFFICE

The EUR 4.4 million allocated via OmaStadi is an unprecedented sum among Finnish municipalities. For example, the EUR 15,000 allocated in the entire Meidän Korso participatory budgeting project conducted by the City of Vantaa is less than the minimum budget for individual OmaStadi projects. However, urban activist Jaakko Blomberg pointed out in our interview that the sums allocated in OmaStadi are simply astronomical to many actors: *“People don’t understand that these urban activists are doing things completely free-of-charge or maybe with a few thousand euros and compared with that this 4.4 million is a ridiculously large sum of money.”* However, in global comparison, this sum, equivalent to about one thousandth of the City budget, is small considering that cities such as Paris and Madrid allocated approximately one per cent of the City budget via participatory budgeting (info box 4.2). On the other hand, most interviewees felt the current budget was too small: *“You go vote for this zero point something thousandth part of the budget. Meanwhile, the rest of the budget and all the important things are somewhere else.”*

Info box 4.3

Examples of thematic focus areas of participatory budgeting

Countries have defined different focus areas for participatory budgeting aimed at promoting varied and sustainable development. In Lisbon, the focus has been to promote ecological ideas (Southpole, 2019), New York and Paris have promoted social sustainability by investing in youth participation and democratic education in schools and Portugal began participatory budgeting by focusing on nationally important political themes (Centre for Public Impact, 2018) such as culture, agriculture, science, education and adult education. Cabannes (2020) studied 15 participatory budgeting projects aimed at combatting climate change. These were carried out in large metropolises such as Taipei (Taiwan) and Semarang (Indonesia), in large cities such as Yaoundé (Cameroon), Bordeaux (France), San Pedro Garza García (Mexico) and Pemba (Mozambique) as well as in numerous smaller cities all around the world.

Based on our evaluation there are many reasons to moderately grow OmaStadi:

- Participatory budgeting promotes voluntary activities by residents.
- Increasing the budget allows implementing more significant projects.
- Increasing the budget could also reduce competition between different areas with more funds available.
- The process is so heavy and expensive that it does not seem meaningful to use it for distributing “pocket money”.

4 Evaluation of the objectives

However, none of the interviewed experts and decision-makers proposed the budget to be increased rapidly. They considered increases viable only once the operating methods and the process reach sufficient maturity. Johanna Seppälä, Head of Participation and Citizen Information Unit for the City Executive Office had the following vision: “*Within a ten-year cycle we should definitely get to a point where there is no more OmaStadi but rather a percentage-based model with a certain share of the divisions’ budgets being spent directly via participatory budgeting.*” On the other hand, Risto Rautava, city councillor for the National Coalition Party, felt the current scale was sufficient because there is no overall political consideration related to participatory budgeting and the funds are mostly directed to parties who already get their voices heard.

Info box 4.4

Examples of innovative plans that were selected for implementation

One project that we classified as innovative that ended up being funded is “Solar-powered ferry for Vartiosaari across Reposalmi” in the Southeastern major district. The budget for the project was EUR 110,000 and it was selected for implementation with a total of 1,626 votes. Summary of the project:

Test summertime traffic across Reposalmi with a small ferry powered by solar energy and a capacity for approximately 12 people. Hire a ferryman with the appropriate training. Draw up an implementable plan for continuing the activity together with companies of the sector and volunteers.

Other proposals we classified as innovative that ended up being funded (Participatory budgeting tracking, 2019–2020) include a movable event stage with required technical equipment, a safe school route and “Best places in the City: discover, fall in love and recommend to a friend!”

4.2.2 Ecological sustainability is visible in the plans

No ecological goals were established for OmaStadi. Nonetheless, in the first round, environmental issues were a very popular theme for plans concerning the entire City (17%, Figure 2.2). However, on the local level only 6–8% of the plans were related to the environment with other themes, such as sports and outdoor recreation, being more popular. One way of promoting an environmental focus is using thematic guidance as many other cities have done (info box 4.3).

4.2.3 Social sustainability: OmaStadi is not a tool for preventing marginalisation

Parties that participated in the evaluation do not consider participatory budgeting to be a tool for preventing marginalisation (see chapter 4.1.2). The best way to improve the social sustainability of the project is to ensure that the OmaStadi process is seen as more equal in the future. Questions related to minorities and regional equality are treated in chapter 6.

4.3 Topicality

I would have hoped for something completely new and big that would maybe not fit any existing compartment of the City’s activities.

– SILJA BORGARSÓTTIR, CITY COUNCILLOR, SWEDISH PEOPLE’S PARTY OF FINLAND

All actors considered OmaStadi a very topical project (Figure 3.2), reaching the highest score in the Radar evaluation (5.8/7) across party lines. Topicality can be evaluated both in the sense of *content* (Can participatory budgeting produce something new and innovative?) as well as *timing* (Does the schedule of the project take other projects and events into consideration?).

4.3.1 Successful innovations mixed in with daily solutions

One key question is whether participatory budgeting is aimed at producing innovative solutions or rather just improvements to daily infrastructure. According to the analysis we conducted in the intermediary report, approximately 2–6% of the proposals were innovative in nature. This coincides with the observation, often proposed in theories regarding the spread of innovations, that approxi-

mately 2.5% of the population are innovators, while the great majority favour known and safe solutions (Rogers, 1971). Although the number of projects classified as innovative was very low, it is interesting to note that four of these (9%) ended up being funded (info box 4.4).

The interviews relate people being somewhat let down by most proposals being very mundane: “benches, dog refuse bags, trees and flowers”. On the other hand, many felt it was of key importance to get to hear which factors residents consider important in urban development. Especially association and NGO actors felt that participatory budgeting should be focused even more on basic services and zoning which comprise the most important urban planning decisions. Although participatory budgeting is a heavy, slow and expensive way of allocating money for basic services it is important to consider how it could be used to improve allocation of the City budget. There are many options. One interesting thought is that ideas that get repeated often in participatory budgeting, such as artificial turfs, could be noted and made more prominent in the City budget. Another option is that even ideas that are not funded would be processed further in some other context. This could be applied especially in regard to bold and innovative ideas. A third option is to utilise the ideas produced by the residents at the aggregate level by transforming them into indicators of changing urban development needs.

4.3.2 Participatory budgeting planning cycle

Implementation of the first round of OmaStadi was characterised by hurry. Feedback the City gathered internally from the divisions expresses a consensus that the following round of participatory budgeting should be a two-year period in order to have sufficient time for the preparation and co-creation of the projects. It was expressed in very strong terms in one interview that the results of participatory budgeting should be published at the turn of August to September so that projects that were left without funding could be included in the City of Helsinki budget negotiation immediately during the autumn. The decision by the City Board (16/2020) to transition to a two-year cycle allows this.

In addition to the usual City budgeting, other projects also provide a relevant context for OmaStadi. During the first round of OmaStadi, a planning workshop was held during Helsinki Design Week, which is a great example of seeking synergies.

On the international level, participatory budgeting has also been used as a crisis tool to respond to sudden challenges. This could also be done in Helsinki as soon as the practices and online platform are well enough established and stable (see

Info box 4.5

Participatory budgeting as a tool for recovering from crises

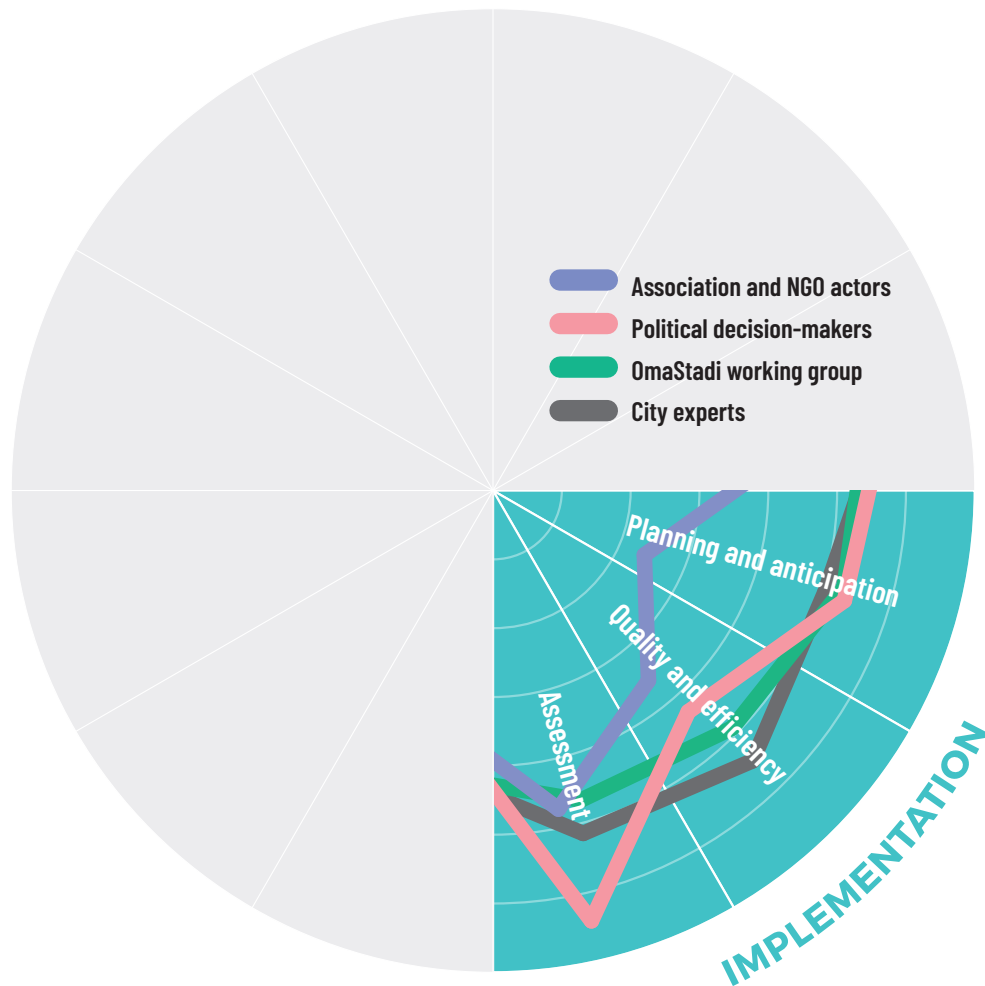
Recent global events have demonstrated that the core idea behind participatory budgeting – citizens submitting ideas together with direct decision-making authority for allocating public funding – are seen as a way to democratise political decision-making also in times of crisis. As of late, Scotland (PB Scotland, 2020) has emphasised the significance of participatory budgeting in combatting the COVID-19 pandemic especially on the local level. Influenced by the Black Lives Matter movement, there has also been an active discussion in the United States regarding the allocation of police resources and a people’s budget (Bloomberg, 2020) has been proposed to allocate funds for housing, services for the homeless, public health and providing resources for rescue personnel.

info box 4.5). According to information we have received, the City of Helsinki COVID-19 recovery strategy also highlights opportunities provided by participatory budgeting.



The interviews relate people being somewhat let down by most proposals being very mundane: “benches, dog refuse bags, trees and flowers”.

5 Evaluation of the implementation



5 Evaluation of the implementation

Developing participatory budgeting has both routine and complex characteristics. Routine tasks include drawing up proposals and plans with a consistent structure and using the Decidim platform for voting. During the first round of OmaStadi, all of this was new, and surprises were unavoidable. For example, the City of Helsinki had to have dozens of software bugs fixed that were discovered while testing the international version of the Decidim platform (City Executive Office – Kaupunginkanslia, 2020). At

the same time, the broad group of participants caused complexity due to differences in their goals and working methods. In addition, it was difficult to foresee the impacts of the number and content of proposals, real-time vote tracking and schools' participation. The implementation of processes such as participatory budgeting require navigating between efficient operative management and complexity management adaptable to surprises (see, e.g. Vartiainen et al. 2020).

In this chapter, we evaluate the implementation of the project from the perspectives of planning and foresight,

quality and efficiency as well as evaluation. Internal evaluations by the City are collected in the documents “Selvitys osallistuvan budjetoinnin toimeenpanosta 2018–2019” (City Executive Office – Kaupunginkanslia, 2020) and “Yhteenveto osallistuvan budjetoinnin arviointi- ja palautetiedosta” (Participation and Citizen Information – Osallisuus ja neuvonta, City of Helsinki, 2020).

5.1 Planning and foresight

Key questions in regard to planning and foresight were the resources reserved for the project, available expertise, process scheduling and adapting to surprising situations.

5.1.1 How many resources are needed for allocating EUR 4.4 million?

I don't think any of our other activities have such good resources, the events had an exceptional amount of personnel. Overall, we had an enormous number of personnel at our disposal for this work.

– PIA PAKARINEN, DEPUTY MAYOR, EDUCATION

The City's strong commitment to carrying out the project and the resources allocated for it are evident in the way OmaStadi was implemented. The personnel resources are considerable: in addition to the seven Borough Liaisons, the project has employed people working in participation and communications as well as various expert and supervisory tasks to a significant extent. In addition, the divisions founded internal groups to coordinate the preparation and implementation of participatory budgeting. Third-party expertise was procured for service and software design, information security and media monitoring.

Despite these notable investments, the resources reserved for OmaStadi were not sufficient (cf. Jäntti & Haveri, 2020). For example, the Borough Liaisons spent approximately 90% of their work time in the OmaStadi project although their job description is connected with the entire new participation model. The amount of work required for evaluating the projects and the co-creation process seems to have been a complete surprise for the divisions. Many of the interviewees estimated that cost of allocating the EUR 4.4 million was higher than the allocated sum.

The Urban Environment and Education divisions of the City of Helsinki provided us with their internal estimates of resource use for conducting our evaluation. The Urban

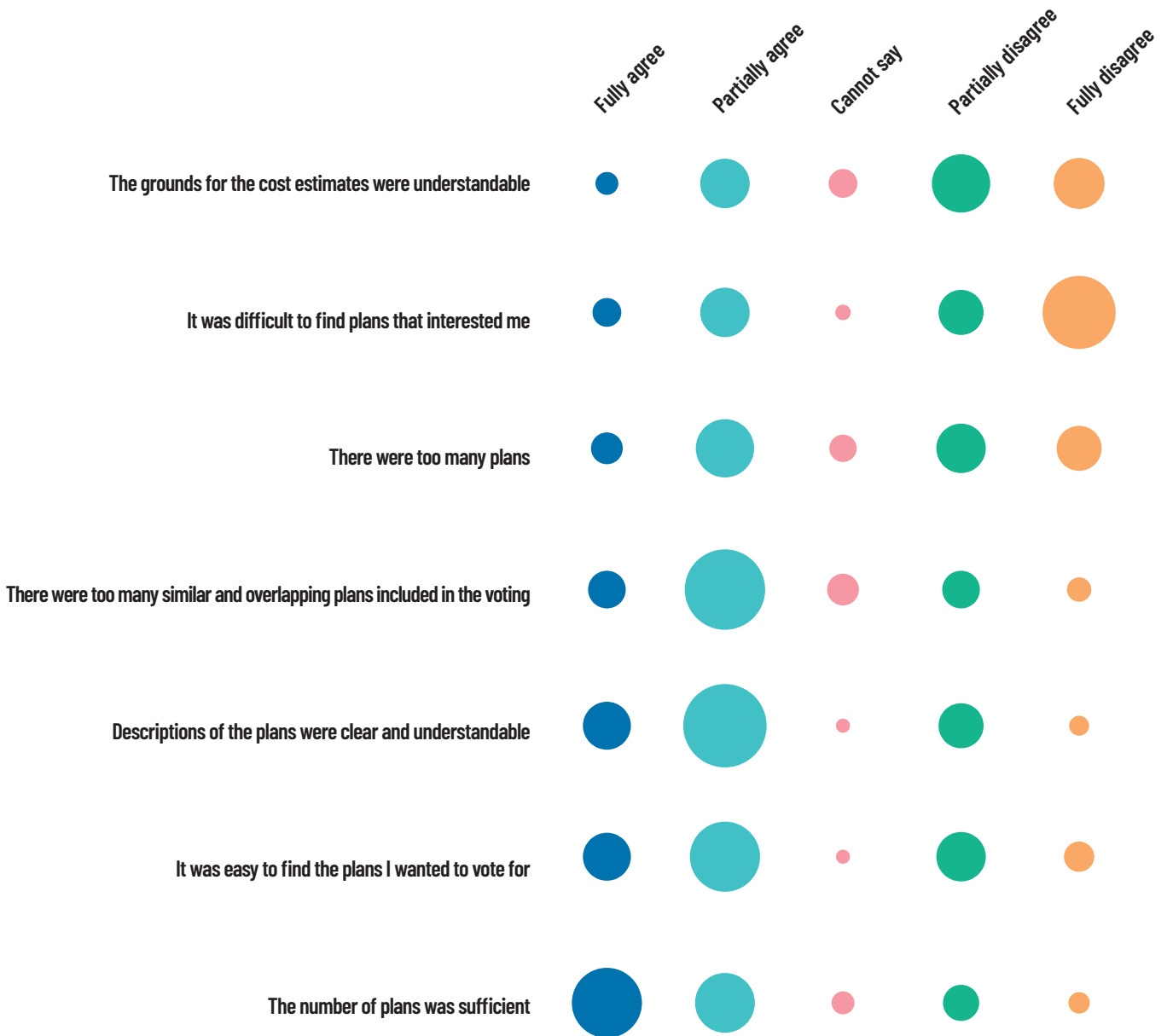
Environment Division, responsible for most (59%) of the projects selected for implementation, estimated that, from the beginning of 2018 until the end of September 2020, they had used more than 6,000 hours of working time, which equals approximately four person-years. This includes the salaries of the full-time coordinators hired specifically for the project. The evaluation stage was the most work intensive. The Education Division, responsible for 11% of the projects selected for implementation, estimated to have spent more than 800 hours, equal to half of one person-year, between the beginning of 2018 and May 2020 – before the voting stage had even begun. The two other divisions did not provide estimates, but if getting 70% of the proposals processed required approximately 7,000 hours it can be estimated that the divisions spent a total of approximately 10,000 hours, or 6 person-years, to process the proposals and plans. The implementation stage is still ongoing. When you add to this the two years of work put in by approximately eight people of the OmaStadi working group, the total amount of work time invested is 22 years. One must also add to this number the continuously increasing costs of implementing the plans as well as the work hours the four Deputy Mayors used for the project. The budget has also grown considerably due to organising events, required third-party expertise and procuring marketing, digital tools and their maintenance.

Based on calculations conducted by the divisions, the current resources seem insufficient. At least the following areas will require more work time in the future: a) familiarisation as some of the projects are hard to conceptualise and comments must be provided justly and equally, b) estimating costs which requires time due to the extensive and demanding nature of implementing the projects as well as c) the implementation stage due to the added workload that participatory budgeting causes for the divisions.

Comparing globally, the deployment costs for participatory innovations tend to be high and OmaStadi is not an exception. Rask et al. (2019) studied 19 international citizen deliberation projects with implementation costs between EUR 25 and EUR 260 per participant. Assuming that the overall management costs of OmaStadi match the allocated EUR 4.4 million, then dividing that sum by the 50,000 voters, the cost would be EUR 88 per participant. However, comparative studies show that, for the following rounds, the learning curve is quite steep, and the implementation costs drop accordingly.

Democracy will always have its price. In the future, it is important to aim to better estimate the required resources and develop routines for their more efficient use. Existing routines must also be questioned: for example, detailed

FIGURE 5.1 Feedback survey (N=390) questions regarding selection of OmaStadi plans



cost estimates could only be carried out in the implementation stage and with the participation of the residents.

5.1.2 Compromises made in combining the proposals

Possibly the greatest individual challenge related to implementing OmaStadi was its tight schedule. This was apparent in the feedback provided by the divisions, highlighting the need for increased foresight in regard to the implementation and division of labour (Participation and Citizen Information – Osallisuus ja neuvonta, 2020). Hurry also caused workload for the City Executive Office that had the final responsibility of most operative solutions.

The greatest challenge in the planning stage was transforming the 1,300 proposals into a manageable number of votable plans. The stipulation “aim to have all proposals that meet the criteria advance to the voting stage”, included in the rules would have made the total number too high in practice. That is why a compromise based on combining the plans was utilised instead and finally 41% of the plans were made up of combined proposals (see chapter 2.2.1).

Based on the feedback survey (N=390) the combination was considered a fairly good solution (Figure 5.1). The 352 plans posted for voting were many enough according to 71% of respondents. Nonetheless, the statement “There were too many plans” divided people’s opinions, with 44% agreeing and 47% disagreeing. Most (62%) felt that the plans were easy to find, but many were overlapping and similar to each other (62%). The City Board issued a policy (16/2020) regarding the second round of OmaStadi that justifies combining proposals related to the same object or service. Experience of the first round indicates an appropriate scale for the number of plans: based on the survey, it is not possible to establish any definite minimum or maximum but a considerable increase in the number of proposals would make it hard to have an overview while a considerably lower number would cause people to wish they had more options. Regardless, more important than the number of proposals is that they are clear and understandable (72%), which must also be ensured in future rounds.

5.1.3 Involve residents in drawing up cost estimates

The cost estimation stage included one of the most unpleasant surprises in the entire process as the City’s estimates of project prices were too large to fathom for many

participants. Drawing up the cost estimates, which was originally designated as the responsibility of the divisions, was also considerably more difficult and slower than expected:

When it came to the cost estimates, the divisions kept just systematically telling me ‘I don’t know, not my responsibility’. They got one extension after another, but finally they hadn’t finished even after the summer vacations. All this arguing with the divisions is evident in the quality of the cost estimates.

– JOHANNA SEPPÄLÄ, HEAD OF UNIT PARTICIPATION AND CITIZEN INFORMATION, CITY EXECUTIVE OFFICE

According to the directors, the divisions intended well but the workload was considerably higher than estimated:

We had not reserved enough resources for processing them and when we tried to make the process more efficient, we were criticised for not respecting the residents and were told to provide more detailed grounds which created further pressure and required more time. Despite all this, we now have all of the projects organised with responsible persons designated to monitor the implementation and react in case there are any glitches. Our employees might complain occasionally, but they always get the work done in the end.

– MIKKO AHO, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, URBAN ENVIRONMENT DIVISION

In connection with the open-ended feedback of the voting-stage survey (N=749 comments) the residents criticised the cost estimates for a lack of transparency (43% of comments on the topic) and unrealistically high cost estimates (15%). The grounds provided for the cost estimates were also considered difficult to understand (57%, see Figure 5.1). The same criticism was even more salient in our interviews. The proposed solution was to have more interaction in drawing up the cost estimates turning it into “a training and learning process of what things really cost”. We strongly recommend that the participants be involved in drawing up the cost estimates.

5.1.4 “Democracy becomes a competition”

Is democracy a negotiation or a competition? Both of these perspectives were very much present in regard to OmaStadi. Competition was the closest in the Southeastern and Central major districts, lasting until the very last moments before voting closed. In the Southeastern major district, the opposing proposals involved the renovation of Villa Aino Ackté and, on the other hand, plans related to a new artificial

5 Evaluation of the implementation

turf for the Herttoniemi sports park. A total of 2,727 residents voted for renovating the villa and 2,710 wanted to get the artificial turf making for an incredibly close competition. In the Central major district, a proposal for an artificial turf for Arabianranta won by 2,870 votes while the proposal for invigorating the Konepaja cultural centre in Vallila received a total of 2,784 votes.

This competitiveness led to intense campaigning, growing until the very last few hours of voting. The competitive setting was further exacerbated by the way in which the *omastadi.hel.fi* portal displayed votes in real time. According to the urban activist Jaakko Blomberg, whom we interviewed, false information was spread regarding the Konepaja cultural centre. Claims included suggesting that the area would receive its funding regardless of the results and the project being stigmatised as “a place for adults to go drinking” in contrast with promoting children’s sport and exercise.

As a consequence of the competitiveness, voter turnout in the Southeastern and Central major districts was considerably higher compared with other major districts (Figure 5.2). The Southeastern major district voter turnout percentage was triple that of the Eastern major district.

Other surprises during the voting stage were caused by real-time display of vote counts, which certainly increased people’s interest in the vote. Nonetheless, it did also lead to polarisation and a tactical approach of people changing their choices up to the very last minute. This put the people who had voted in person in an unequal position because only those who had voted online could change their vote. This was also highlighted in citizen feedback:

“The voting was not fair and equal because those with access to computers and e-banking credentials or mobile authentication could participate more comprehensively than those without such access. Unlike those who voted in libraries and other public facilities, the people who voted with their own devices could also go back and change their vote afterwards. So, the current model puts people without Internet connections and smart devices in a different position compared with people who have the connectivity and devices.”

In the open-ended feedback of the voting stage (N=749), a slight majority of residents (56%) opposed displaying the vote counts. The most important reason was the way it steered people’s voting and enabled tactical approaches (45%). The feedback also highlighted that people, especially towards the end of the voting period, did not choose the project they would vote for from among all of the plans, but only voted for plans that already had a considerable number of votes.

However, the City Board (16/2020) decided to continue the practice for the second round of OmaStadi with the alteration that a vote once cast could no longer be changed. This solution upholds the competitive logic. International discussion regarding participatory budgeting has emphasised institutional design that promotes solutions for enabling deliberative democracy (see e.g. Ganuza & Francés, 2012; Godwin, 2018). On an international level, displaying the vote counts in real time is a rarely employed method (Participation and Citizen Information – Osallisuus ja neuvonta, 2020).

Real-time display of the vote counts is a risky choice, and its use should be considered carefully in the future.

Although it has the key strength of increasing people’s interest in voting, it can lead to the following problems:

- making choices based on tactical reasons instead of content-based ones
- increased competition and polarisation within areas
- choices focusing on two major candidates
- increased inequality with professional campaigns capturing visibility
- campaigning becoming inappropriate and focusing on contradictions

It is important to consider the far-reaching consequences of technical solutions when developing participatory budgeting. Displaying the vote counts steers the process towards competition instead of deliberation. This image of polarisation will live on in the participants’ views, working against the idea of functional proximity democracy.

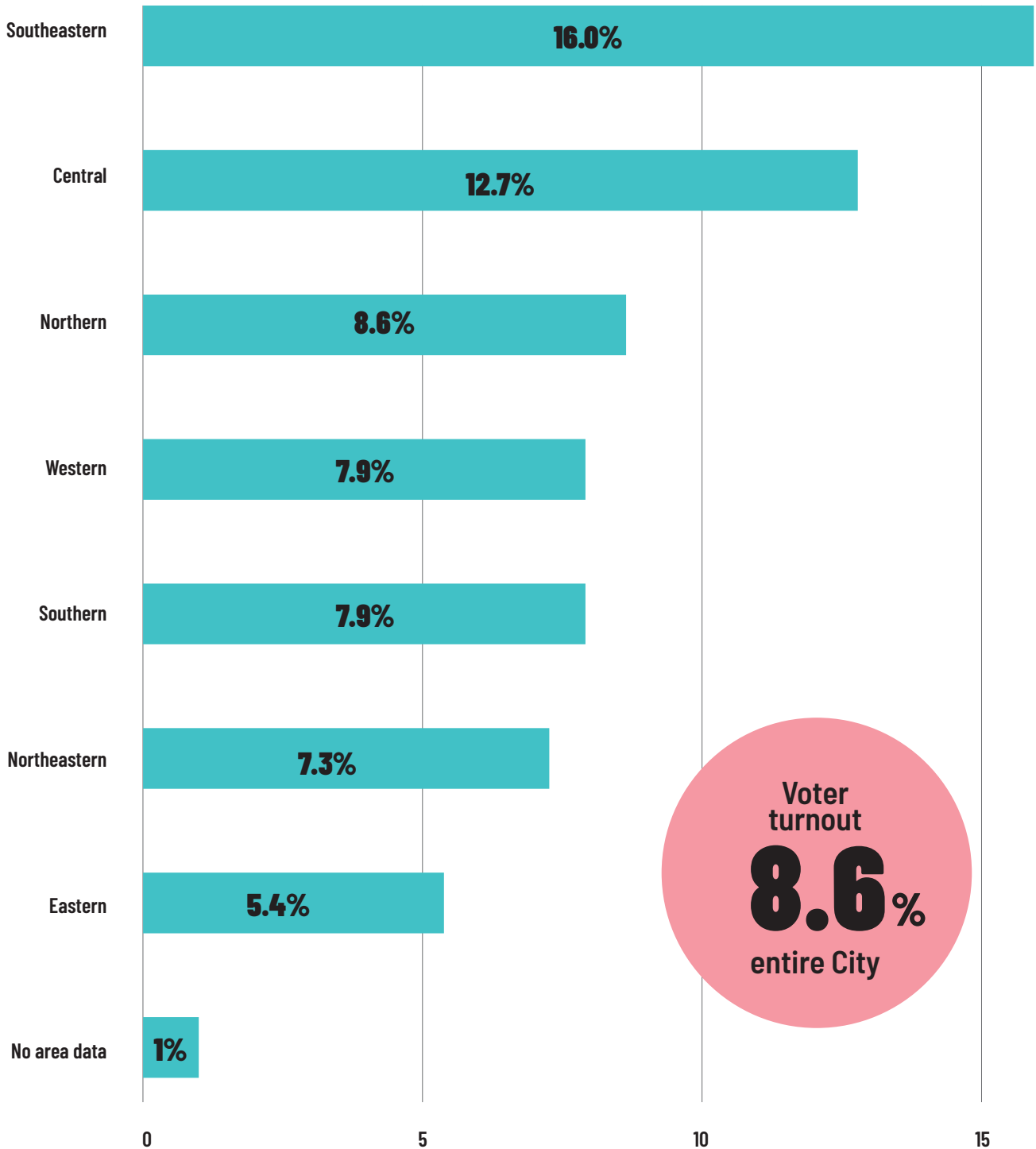
5.2 Quality and efficiency

Quality and efficiency are classical criteria in process evaluation. The idea is that the evaluated process can be split into parts to see which parts work well and which ones poorly. Key parts of OmaStadi and related questions are:

- Management: vision and strategy, sustainability, management style, coordination, scheduling and instruction, fostering commitment within the divisions
- Resources, skills and cooperation: adequacy of resources, utilising experts, cooperation with NGOs and associations, participation by the residents of the municipality
- Methodology: Borough Liaisons, service design, participation game, innovative methods, open data
- Events: workshops, co-creation events, press briefings
- Communications: the OmaStadi.fi website, the Decidim platform, media communications, translations, reaching special groups, accessible language content, social media

FIGURE 5.2 **OmaStadi voter turnout per major district**

(source: Ahola, 2020)



5 Evaluation of the implementation

We emphasise key points of this comprehensive overall evaluation (see also Piippola and Kurikka, 2020). Some of the above questions have also been treated in the evaluation of the City of Helsinki management system conducted by Jäntti and Haveri (2020).

5.2.1 Conflicted co-creation

Co-creation has become an important approach in public administration (Torfing et al., 2019). The key concept is that the challenges faced are often so complex that an entire ministry, let alone an individual expert, does not have sufficient resources to tackle them. Instead, what is needed is comprehensive, inter-disciplinary cooperation and problem solving (Vartiainen & Raisio, 2020). The OmaStadi process is in many ways representative of the co-creation way of thinking: both the design and implementation of the project involve a very large group of experts and influencers. The aim is to promote participation and consider the needs and views of various actors in designing the process.

The implementation contains characteristics from human-centred design, service design and knowledge-based management. The OmaStadi working group has solid competence for participatory projects and project management. The participation, communications, ICT and research skills of the City's organisation were extensively utilised. The division experts participated according to a division of labour between the divisions based on a classification of the projects. The municipal democracy contact network has provided information and opportunities to discuss the development of participatory budgeting. International contacts, such as visits to and messaging with Madrid and New York provided a feel for the international leading edge of development. Third-party expertise was procured to support communications research (media visibility) and service design (resident participation profiles, facilitation, promoting equity), information security and software development. Academic surveys and thesis papers were utilised in designing the process. There has been continuous cooperation between the City and the evaluation team from the University of Helsinki.

An approach that emphasises co-creation is suitable for managing an extensive and complex entity such as OmaStadi. On the other hand, the approach has received criticism for potentially modifying and watering down the original ideas during the cooperative process between residents and officeholders (Luhtakallio & Palonen, 2018; Luhtakallio & Mustranta, 2017). Another criticism levelled by our inter-

viewees was that the skills of residents and association and NGO actors should have been utilised more thoroughly especially during the planning stage – in other words increasing the amount of co-creation even further! Based on our evaluation, co-creation and the Raksa workshops were considered to be very successful both among officeholders and residents.

The OmaStadi management structure is unnecessarily complex. In accordance with the City's participation model, the Mayor is the highest authority. The Deputy Mayors are responsible for the divisions' work related to participation and each division has its own participation plan. In addition there, is a *participation advisory committee* composed of City and third-party experts, a *participation steering group* comprising only City experts as well as a *project group* made up of experts from the various divisions. The operative responsibility is concentrated to the City Executive Office with an operative core group that, in this report, we call the *OmaStadi working group*.

The complex management structure can potentially cause conflicts between the units. Some divisions seem to view OmaStadi mainly as an extra burden added on top of other work while others see it more as an additional resource. The OmaStadi Development Manager is “*between a rock and a hard place*” as one long-term association actor put it. Could it be beneficial to further clarify the objectives? What will the City desire from participatory budgeting after its fifth round?

The greatest challenges posed to operative management are that this is an entirely new type of project with a tight schedule. The City's internal assessment recognises that there is room for improvement in getting the divisions committed (Participation and Citizen Information – Osallisuus ja neuvonta, 2020). Indeed, dialogue between the City Executive Office and the divisions should be improved.

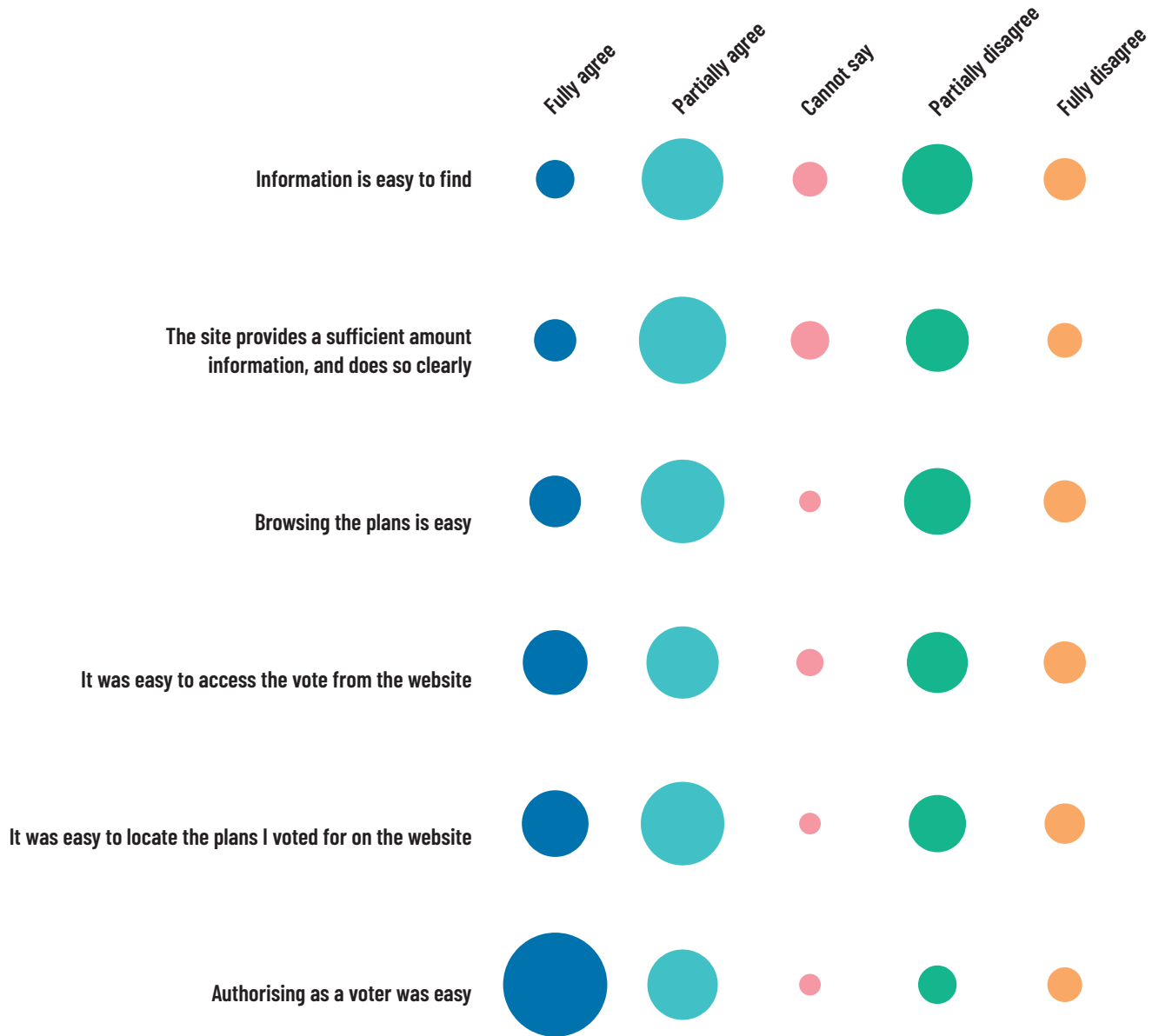
5.2.2 Borough Liaisons in high demand!

“The Borough Liaisons took on enormous areas of responsibility. It takes many years to gain an understanding of the dynamics of even a smaller area.”

– EEVA-LIISA BROMAN, PROJECT MANAGER, CITY OF HELSINKI, RETIRED

One of the most prominent successes of OmaStadi is the designation of Borough Liaisons for the seven major districts. Although the participatory budgeting process is mostly conducted in the online environment, it is of key importance that residents also have the opportunity to

FIGURE 5.3 Usability of the omastadi.hel.fi website



5 Evaluation of the implementation

receive personal support and guidance, where needed. The Borough Liaisons played a key role in promoting equity by doing grassroots level work in their areas. The Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Justice and Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities awarded the Borough Liaisons the Democracy Award in 2019 in recognition of their work. As OmaStadi continues to grow, it is important to ensure that the expectations set for the Borough Liaisons remain reasonable. Despite the high praise their participation received “it is important to involve all of the 38,000 City employees much more”, as the Deputy Mayor Sanna Vesikansa aptly put it.

5.2.3 “Does modern democracy have to be a game?”

Over the last few years, service design has been a source of new tools for service development. Since 2017, the City has utilised a Participation Game developed by the service design company Hellon (City of Helsinki Participation Game – Helsingin kaupungin osallisuuspeli, 2020) to help City experts promote resident participation (Bloomberg Cities, 2019a).

For OmaStadi, the City, in cooperation with Hellon, also developed a card game (OmaStadi Material Bank – OmaStadin materiaalipankki, 2018) aimed at encouraging residents to process their proposals into ready plans. The game was translated into Swedish, English and accessible Finnish in order to foster equal participation (Bloomberg Cities, 2019b). The card game is globally the first of its kind, and it was played in more than a hundred events during the OmaStadi proposal stage.



Gamification has been a growing trend in recent years, spreading from entertainment use to education and even political influencing.

According to a thesis that studied the OmaStadi game (Sode, 2020) it increased inclusivity, equality and creativity while also improving the quality of the submitted plans. However, the game was not considered to improve the deliberative nature of the discussion as the most enthusiastic players focused on advocating for their own ideas regardless of others (Sode, 2020). One of our interviewees said they felt estranged by the game due to it appearing focused around the perspective of public servants. Some quite sharp criticism regarding “making adults play children’s games” was also voiced during breaks of the game events.

Gamification has been a growing trend in recent years, spreading from entertainment use to education and even political influencing. It seems likely that gamification will continue to play role in developing participatory budgeting. An interesting pilot is being conducted in Taiwan, where avatars along with crowdsourced surveys and responses are used to develop ways of conceptualising differences in the way individuals and groups think within the participatory budgeting process. The way gamification is used to support the evaluation and decision-making stages is particularly interesting (see Simon et al., 2017).

5.2.4 The message got through, but equality of communication is questionable

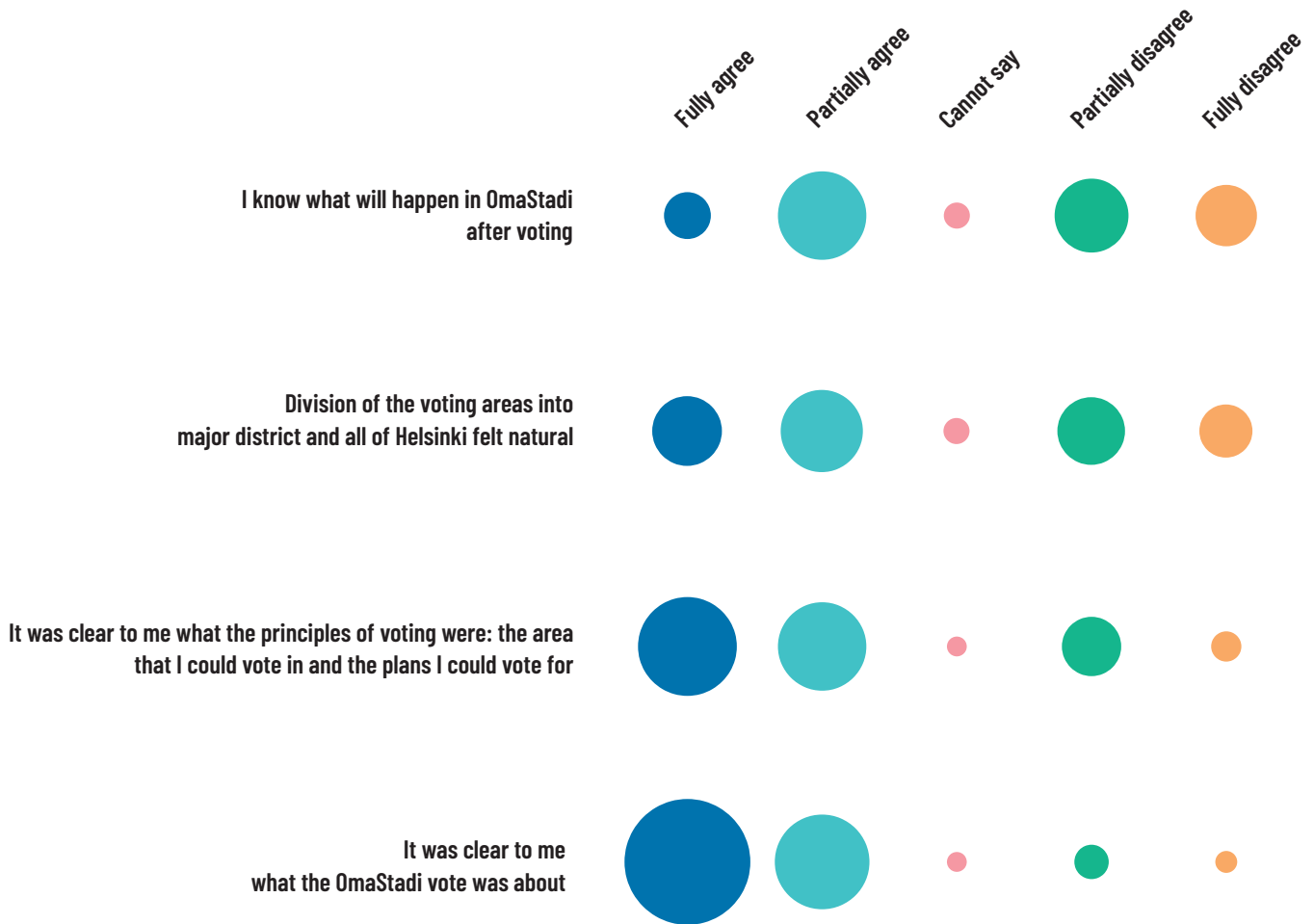
I think this showed exactly how we normal people CANNOT influence things. The rich fill social media with bought advertising and get even large sports teams and other organisations to lobby for their projects. Poor taste.

– CITIZEN FEEDBACK

Based on the voting-stage feedback survey (N=390) most felt the voting process was understandable and had clear principles. Regardless, approximately half of the respondents felt it was unclear as to what would happen after voting (Figure 5.4) which indicates there is clearly room for improvement in presenting basic information.

OmaStadi messaging was conducted using various media. Information was provided on the omastadi.hel.fi website, in various social media channels, digital displays and bulletin boards of the City’s service points as well as in the Helsinki magazine sent to all households. Advertising space was also purchased from public transport stops and the Borough Liaisons supported local communications. Special communicative efforts were targeted to speakers of foreign languages, people with immigrant backgrounds, the elderly and young people. Communication was also

FIGURE 5.4 Feedback-survey questions regarding understandability of OmaStadi voting.



5 Evaluation of the implementation

conducted in cooperation with organisations, exemplified by OmaStadi voting events held on five University of Helsinki campuses and workshops organised in collaboration with Nicehearts ry. (Participation and Citizen Information – Osallisuus ja neuvonta, 2020).

According to media monitoring procured from Retriever (1 August 2019 – 30 November 2019) the messaging reached residents widely and 93% of the communication was positive in tone. According to the City's own assessment the message was taken to where people are: schools, libraries, youth centres, health centres, bus stops and local social media forums (Participation and Citizen Information – Osallisuus ja neuvonta, 2020). Still, one interviewee felt that grassroots communication had been misplaced: instead of libraries the communication should focus on places where people move the most, such as subway stations and shopping centres.

The usability of the omastadi.hel.fi website divided opinions (Figure 5.3). Of all respondents, 47% felt that the information was easy to access whereas 43% felt the opposite was true (N=390). Most felt that using the website was easy, including authentication, browsing the plans and voting. The assessments were fairly positive considering that there were some teething issues: some users were given the wrong voting area and it is possible some people were not able to vote due to the servers slowing down during the last day of voting. It is clear that there is still much room for improvement in the usability of the omastadi.hel.fi website.

Voting caused the most discussion among residents. Of the 2,000 media and social media mentions analysed by Retriever 59% concerned voting (Participation and Citizen Information – Osallisuus ja neuvonta, 2020). The residents

were concerned about uneven distribution of communications resources which was also noted by our interviewees. Of the open-ended feedback of the voting stage concerning the role of urban civic activism, 48% criticised the commercial nature of the current voting process: advertisements and thus votes could be bought. It is true that there was a very considerable difference between modest projects, that were mostly present on the OmaStadi platform, and ones spread and advertised with high visibility. For this reason, it is of key importance to consider if support provided to residents could be focused on developing communications and marketing in the future.

5.3 Evaluation

OmaStadi is the flagship project of the new City of Helsinki participation model which has drawn widespread interest both within and outside the city. Based on the interviews (N=12), the evaluation of the process was considered quite comprehensive (Radar chart average 5/7, see Figure 3.2). Political decision-makers were especially keen to highlight the exceptionally varied nature (6.3/7) of evaluations conducted both internally by the City as well as by third parties.

5.3.1 Previous evaluation and thesis papers on the topic

A summary drawn up by Participation and Citizen Information Unit (2020) lists key evaluation data. These include, in addition to this BIBU evaluation, the various feedback surveys conducted in the OmaStadi events, a research review on voting behaviour by the Statistics and research unit of the City of Helsinki (Ahola, 2019) as well as the internal assessments by the divisions and the City Executive Office. Meeting the residents in events and on social media was an important source of information. The received feedback had a considerable impact throughout the project due to the open, participatory and solution-oriented manner in which the project was conducted. This is clearly a strength. Collecting and utilising evaluation data enables knowledge-based management, something that was remarked as lacking in recent evaluation on the City's management system (Jäntti & Haveri, 2020).

Another notable factor are the various theses and other research projects that have studied OmaStadi. These include "Osallistuva budjetointi demokratiainnovaationa" by Johanna Sinkkonen (2018, University of Tampere, Administrative Sciences), "OmaStadista MeidänStadiin" by



Of the open-ended feedback of the voting stage concerning the role of urban civic activism, 48% criticised the commercial nature of the current voting process: advertisements and thus votes could be bought.

Pia Laulainen (2019, Aalto University, Design), “OmaStadi Budgeting Game” by Andreas Sode (2020, Aalto University, Communications) as well as “Osallisuutta parhaimmillaan? Helsingin osallistuvan budjetoinnin tapahtumat osallisuuden kokemuksen vahvistajana” by Belinda Barbato and Antti Sarpo (2020, HUMAK). In addition, there are several research projects underway at the University of Helsinki. These include Master’s theses regarding participation of school children within OmaStadi, the ecological contents of the project and on the project’s solution model in a context of international comparison as well as a doctoral thesis regarding topic modeling and network analysis of the contents of OmaStadi’s first round and a post-graduate research paper that utilises algorithms to study power in connection with OmaStadi and other similar processes. The COLDIGIT research project (Nordforsk, 2020), starting in November 2020 will study the role of co-creation and digital tools in future rounds of OmaStadi. OmaStadi can and should be utilised as an open study platform that produces useful evaluation data for the City and an interesting case study of a democratic innovation for researchers.

We have tracked the development of OmaStadi as part of our evaluation. Table 5.3 describes the developments made to the project in preparation for its second round.

Nearly all of the development targets listed in the recommendation have been engaged with, which demonstrates that evaluation definitely does play a role in knowledge-based development.

5.3.2 What and how should be evaluated in the future?

Our intermediary report recommended that evaluation be made a permanent part of the implementation and development of OmaStadi, and that 1–5% of overall costs would be allocated for third-party evaluations. However, at least thus far the City Board (16/2020) did not find this necessary. For as long as the evaluation work receives funding from other sources, direct investments may not be necessary. The BIBU research project used approximately EUR 100,000 in the evaluation study conducted over a two-year period, equivalent to more than two per cent of the OmaStadi budget. The City should ensure that sufficient, systematic and unbiased evaluation data is also available in the future.

On a global level, participatory budgeting evaluations have been carried out in a variety of ways and on different scales. A meta-analysis by Campbell et al. (2018) compares 37 recent participatory budgeting evaluations. The Practical Handbook for Ongoing Evaluation guidelines (Interact), on



Nearly all of the development targets listed in the recommendation have been engaged with, which demonstrates that evaluation definitely does play a role in knowledge-based development.

the other hand, concern the typical scale for programme evaluation budgets. In routine projects, the evaluation budget is usually under 1% of the total budget and for innovative projects with a great learning potential the scale tends to be 5–10%.

In order to get the most out of the experiences, it is important to ensure that OmaStadi continues to be documented and its data published as open data (OmaStadi Terms of Service, 2020). As Campbell et al. (2018) point out, it is also important to track long-term impacts. In Brazil, the budgets are so large that impacts of participatory budgeting can be tracked in relation to citizen health, child mortality, taxation and education. Focusing on large structural questions is unlikely to be productive in Helsinki, at least within the current framework. On the other hand, one interesting perspective is provided by Gilman (2016) in looking into changes to the City of Chicago budget allocation after the introduction of participatory budgeting in 2009. Money was transferred from paving roads to more varied uses, such as bicycle lanes, dog parks and planting plants in parks – the kind of uses that OmaStadi also encompasses.

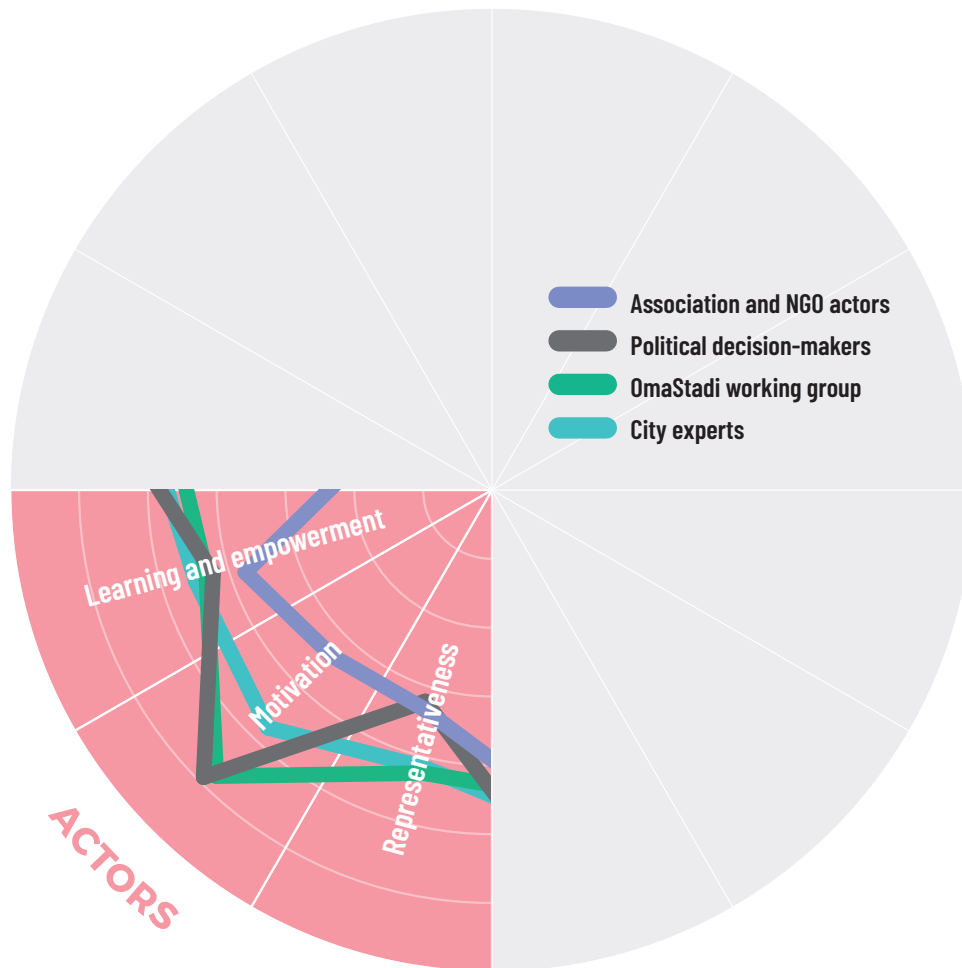
Often, the evaluations are divided into themes, such as participant experience (included in nearly all evaluations), voting behaviour, democratic impacts, service development etc. This evaluation aims to achieve a comprehensive overall perspective. Evaluated factors that are clearly new include the opportunities related to digitalisation, comprehensive utilisation of participation data and development of indicators.

TABLE 5.3 Intermediary evaluation recommendations and development measures

(Partially implemented and unimplemented recommendation have been marked with italics.)

Recommendation	Development measures
<p>Recommendation 1: Transparency and dialogue in implementation can be developed through annual planning as well as improving the OmaStadi platform. The best parts could be further processed into participation “hit products”.</p>	<p>OmaStadi will transition to a two-year preparation cycle in order to foster high-quality preparation and provide sufficient time for co-creation and interaction with residents. Sufficient time should also be reserved for implementing projects in the period of time between concluding one round of voting and the beginning of a new round.</p> <p>Availability of the omastadi.hel.fi service will be improved by removing the ability to change the vote during the very last hours. A page where residents can track the implementation of projects will be launched in the service.</p> <p><i>The co-creation events held in connection with OmaStadi were pointed out as a new way of increasing cooperation between the City and the residents and communicating about the City’s activities. However, it remained unclear if the mentioned practice is intended to be used on a larger scale in the City’s activities.</i></p>
<p>Recommendation 2: A separate survey should be conducted regarding the participation of marginalised groups.</p>	<p>As part of Sitra’s democratic experiments, the City will implement a project aimed at getting the voice of the Russian-speaking community heard in developing services and decision-making. The project will pilot new methods for improving participation of marginalised groups within OmaStadi.</p>
<p>Recommendation 3: The OmaStadi process should be improved and streamlined so that as many ideas as possible advance to the voting stage.</p>	<p>A significant alteration of the implementation principles was a policy that the 2020-2021 budget proposals will be composed into projects combining proposals related to the same area or service and further processing is done within the plan.</p>

<p>Recommendation 4: The participation ecosystem should be developed dynamically and interactively both within and outside the City's organisation.</p>	<p>In the future, the project group, which acted as the cooperation party of OmaStadi operative preparation and implementation, will create inter-division policies for implementing participatory budgeting, where necessary, as well as track implementation of the selected projects on the level of the entire City. The composition of the project group will be revised to ensure its members are Division and Executive Office employees working in supervisory and expert roles connected closely to participatory budgeting policy and implementation management.</p> <p>The aim is to activate a wide group of residents and introduce the idea of cooperating with associations, companies and free-form groups of residents.</p> <p><i>The opportunities participatory budgeting allows for cross-boundary cooperation between institutions (such as school curricula, museums, companies and parties that conduct or utilise research such as urban planners) remain opaque.</i></p>
<p>Recommendation 5: Ground rules for proposals should be communicated more clearly and focusing the budget on annually changing themes should be considered.</p>	<p>The rules for budget proposals will be further specified during the following round. In the future, evaluation of the budget proposals and the feasibility of the plans will take into account, in addition to the City plans and local detailed plans, the service policies and design principles as approved by the municipal authorities as well as the existing network of services and premises. Participatory budgeting projects cannot target the activities of businesses or their subsidiaries. In addition, such areas within the scope of a division that already have funds allocated for them in the City budget will be out of bounds. The goal is to target participatory budgeting funds to projects that are not yet funded or to areas with no existing plans. The funds cannot be targeted directly to third parties in the form of aid or financial support.</p> <p><i>A strongly thematic option was not considered relevant. Instead, the general guidelines are intended to ensure that the threshold for producing ideas for activities remains sufficiently low, enabling implementation of diverse projects with the participatory budget funding.</i></p>
<p>Recommendation 6: Evaluation should become a permanent component of the OmaStadi implementation and development.</p>	<p>The OmaStadi follow-up and evaluation remain a part of City Strategy follow-up. In addition to voter turnout, reported per area and age group, the budget proposals and implementation of the plans is tracked per division.</p> <p><i>There is no proposal for making unbiased third-party evaluation and research a permanent part of the process, in addition to the City's own tracking.</i></p>
<p>Recommendation 7: The ideas provided by the residents should be used in diverse and innovative ways.</p>	<p>The City is looking into the possibility of including projects that are not selected for implementation as part of the City's normal operations (proposal by Matias Pajula, City Board – Kaupunginhallitus, 20/2019).</p>



6 Evaluation of actor participation

In this chapter, we evaluate OmaStadi from the actors' perspective and review their representativeness, changes in their motivation, learning and empowerment. Special attention is paid to groups such as young people, immigrants and the elderly.

6.1 Representativeness

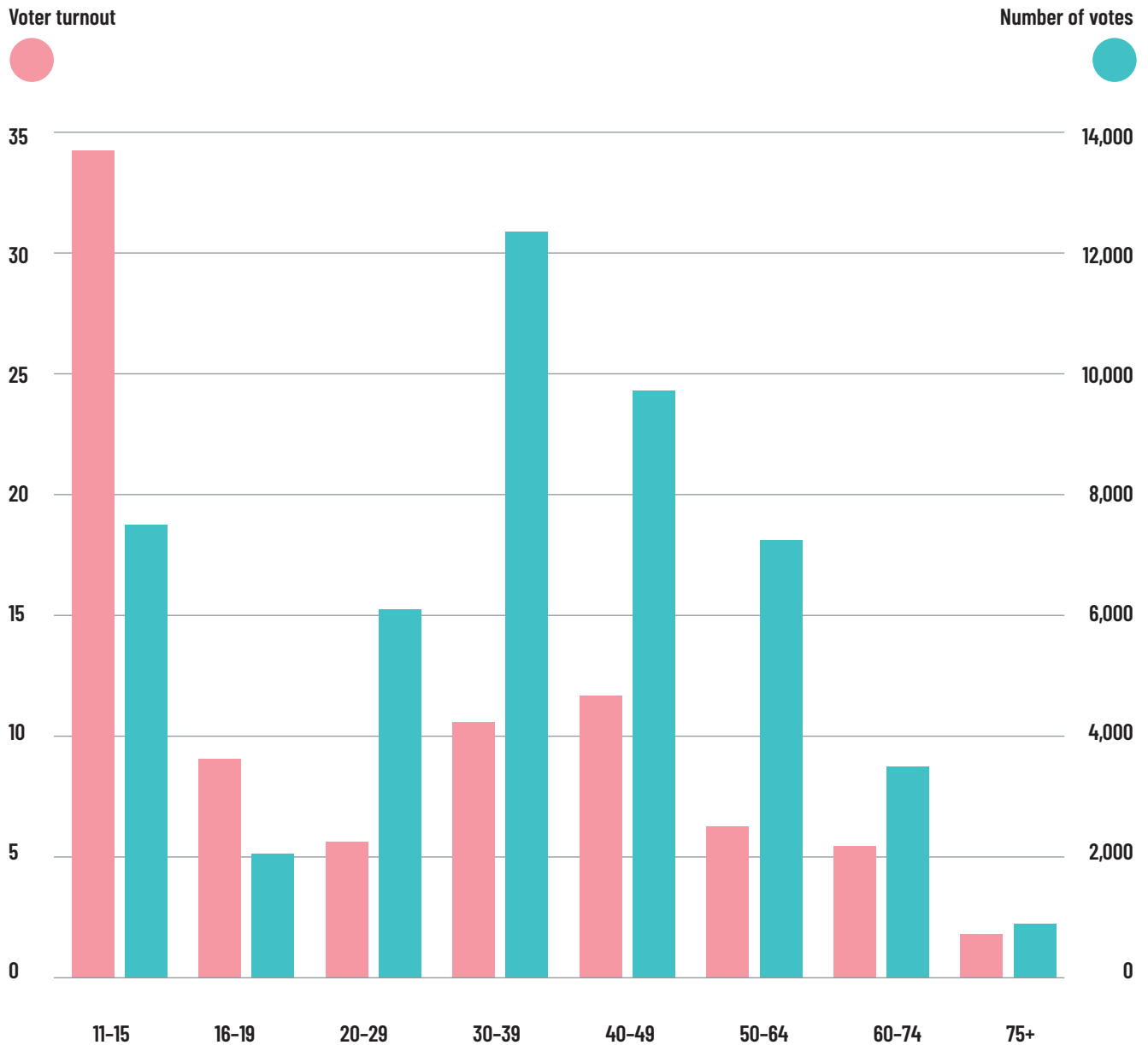
OmaStadi managed to achieve a fairly high voter turnout already during the first round. One of the key goals for

OmaStadi is strengthening the residents' capacity to influence and involving them equally in all stages of the project. Regardless, representativeness of the process has received the most negative (3.6/7) assessment in the Co-Creation Radar evaluation.

Based on our intermediary report, during the early phases the most active OmaStadi participants were, on average, over 40 years of age, highly educated Finnish-speaking women. Voter turnout in the actual vote was also higher for women compared with many: for over 20-year-olds the split was 8.8%/6.2%. The report on voter

FIGURE 6.1 Voter turnout and number of votes cast by age-group

(Ahola, 2020)



6 Actors

behaviour by Ahola (2020) also describes the voter age-groups (Figure 6.1) as well as turnout per major district (Figure 5.2) and zip code.

Representativeness can also be approached from the perspective of the groups the proposals submitted by the residents target. In our intermediary report, we noted that nearly three out of four proposals targeted services that were equally accessible to all.

6.1.1 Voter turnout high in international comparison

The voter turnout for OmaStadi was 8.6% meaning a total of 49,705 Helsinki residents voted. When voting, 80% utilised Suomi.fi authentication and 1.3% voted at a service point, authenticating with an ID, driving licence or passport. The voter turnout for school children and secondary education pupils was 18.7%. Women were more active in voting than men, attaining a 61.7% share (excluding school children who authenticated via the Wilma web interface and whose gender was not recorded). (Ahola, 2020)

Figure 6.1 shows that voter turnout was the highest among 11–15-year-olds and was over ten per cent even among 30–50-year-olds. Most votes were cast in the Southeastern and Central major district, most likely due to the intense campaigning and close competition between popular projects described in chapter 5.1.4. The temporal distribution of the votes was also quite interesting: school children and the elderly cast votes throughout the process whereas working age people mostly voted during the last week and especially during the last three days. Nearly one in four (24%) of all votes were cast on the last day of voting. (Ahola, 2020.)

6.1.2 Minority participation must be fostered

Providing support for the participation of marginalised groups is highlighted in the Helsinki City Board meeting minutes 37/2018. More than 240 events to reach various population groups and encourage them to vote were organised during different phases of OmaStadi and an estimated total of 3,300 residents were reached in this way. During the proposal stage, 25 events were organised to foster immigrant participation and a total of approximately 150 people participated. During the co-creation and voting stage, a total of 9 events were organised in cooperation with multicultural organisations. Approximately 200 people participated in these. (City Executive Office – Kaupunginkanslia, 2020.)

During the voting stage, support was focused on providing instructions and guidance with digital technologies.

Info box 6.1

Participatory budgeting voter turnout internationally

The highest participatory budgeting voter turnout in Europe was recorded in Cascais, Portugal where, in 2019, nearly 70,000 residents or 32% voted. In Paris, approximately 40,000 residents voted in the first round of participatory budgeting in 2014 with the same Figure reaching 120,000 residents in 2018, equalling approximately 5.4% of the number of residents in Paris. In Madrid, approximately one per cent of residents voted in 2019. In 2016–2017 approximately 102,800 residents voted in New York which equals 1.2% of the total 8.3 million. In German municipalities, approximately 1.3% of the residents have participated in voting, most being 35–65 years of age, highly educated and socially integrated in their communities (Schneider & Busse, 2019).

The instructions were made available in Finnish, Swedish and English, and the Borough Liaisons helped voters both online and in person. Despite these efforts, there remains a lot of room for improvement. The share of minority groups in the proposal and planning stages was low (for example, of all participants that submitted feedback in the co-creation events, only 3.5% were native speakers of any other language than Finnish). In addition, the share of content in languages other than Finnish remained low (2.7% of the proposals were in English). In a handful of cases City employees responded in Finnish to English-language proposals on the platform.

Based on our intermediary report, during the proposal stage, immigrants, foreigners, speakers of foreign languages and marginalised groups were better represented in ideas that concerned all of Helsinki compared with those specific to a certain major district. However, the needs of the elderly and those with health issues were more often

taken into consideration at the major district level. Deputy Mayor Sanna Vesikansa put this shared image of immigrant participation in OmaStadi quite aptly:

“The multicultural population of Helsinki is definitely under-represented in the selected projects. The voting stage included many multilingual projects and ones targeted at immigrants but almost none were selected in the end. The projects selected for implementation do reflect more traditional white and middle-class ideas. But the results can certainly benefit all.”

This critique was also raised by residents. In the voting-stage feedback survey (N=390), 15.8% agreed fully that the voting was equal for all residents of the City and 17.1% agreed partially. Nearly 60% disagreed: 33.3% disagreed fully and 26.6% partially. Of the open-ended feedback in the same survey (N=749) 24% concerned lack of equity. The critique was mostly levelled at accessibility for non-Finnish-speakers, lack of support for various groups or other prerequisites – a right to vote for children under 12 was also mentioned. Another highlight in the interviewees was the concern for equality of resources:

The residents of well-off neighbourhoods are better positioned – they are able, they receive information and have the mental capacity and understanding of influencing. They understand that participatory budgeting allows you to have a much greater influence than parliamentary elections, that this concerns us, is practical and allows you personally to submit a proposal – if you can be bothered to tinker with the pesky digital platform.

– NGO ACTOR

Youth participation raised a lot of discussion in regard to learning democratic skills (see also 5.1.1) and opportunities to have a say. Considering these, it can be said that youth participation was an excellent success (disregarding some schools where 0% of the pupils voted), whereas among other minority groups participation must be promoted further.

6.1.3 Regional inequality runs deep

Inequality can also be viewed from a regional perspective. The most active postal code areas were Kaitalahti (23.4%) and Suomenlinna (21.1%) whereas in Kontula and Vesala 2.6% of those eligible to vote did so. The differences between major districts are great but the picture is somewhat distorted because, as mentioned above, four projects in the Southeastern and Central major districts gathered such a great number of votes (Figure 5.2). (Ahola, 2020.)

Dividing the voting areas per major district was criticised in the interviews:



The most active postal code areas were Kaitalahti (23.4%) and Suomenlinna (21.1%) whereas in Kontula and Vesala 2.6% of those eligible to vote did so. The differences between major districts are great but the picture is somewhat distorted.

A local approach is the right direction to take because it motivates people. This round demonstrated that major districts are way too large – it is difficult for people to identify with them and they don't even actually align with the current structure of the City... 10–12 areas could be a reasonable number, roughly 60,000 residents in each voting area.

– NGO ACTOR

In its current form, participatory budgeting polarises different residential areas even further. The goal to achieve a more equal Helsinki – this is not the way to do it. This provides more services and nice things for the well-off residents...

– JAAKKO BLOMBERG

Open-ended feedback in the voting stage (N=749 comments) highlights that many proposals focused on neighbourhoods instead of major districts, which increased polarisation between areas and favours active and densely populated areas.

Small residential areas will never get enough votes in this system. Residents in various areas are at different starting points regarding their level of activity and participation. Proposals concerning large and densely populated areas, such as Arabianranta, do well because people who live there are active, highly educated and motivated to develop the area.

– CITIZEN FEEDBACK

Feedback concerning the division into major districts highlighted how the current division of major districts is unclear for the residents. Recurring points include the current major districts being too large (21%) and a desire to vote in several major districts (11%). Many residents pointed out that the current division into major districts does not serve their life situation in the best possible way. Allowing people to choose between two of their nearest major districts to vote in could be a more functional approach, especially for people living near district borders, in areas such as Katajanokka and Vanhankaupunginlahti. One way to implement this could be to limit the voting area to a fixed diameter around where the resident lives. However, Johanna Seppälä, Head of Unit Participation and Citizen Information for the City Executive Office noted: *“The people who submitted the feedback will never find a consensus among them on what the appropriate area is.”*

Jäntti & Haveri (2020, p. 15) propose focusing participatory budgeting to areas that are socioeconomically the worst off and for supporting marginalised groups. On-going examples of positive discrimination and taking local inequality into consideration include the citizens’ budget in Turku (Turku City Board – Turun kaupunginhallitus, 2020) and the Oma Tesoma project in Tampere (City of Tampere).



Many residents pointed out that the current division into major districts does not serve their life situation in the best possible way. Allowing people to choose between two of their nearest major districts to vote in could be a more functional approach, especially for people living near district borders, in areas such as Katajanokka and Vanhankaupunginlahti.

6.2 Motivation

It is easy for motivation to wane in long-term projects and maintaining it is susceptible to even the smallest changes. Complex processes that aim for smooth co-creation will occasionally strain the motivation of both City employees and residents. During the first round of participatory budgeting, motivation was most prone to drop when the participants felt that they were not heard or their skills were belittled.

The atmosphere in the OmaStadi working group is quite enthusiastic. The early days of the project put the atmosphere to a test with tight schedules and confusion. The baseline evaluation we conducted during autumn 2018 and the final evaluation in spring 2020 (Figure 6.2) show an improvement in the atmosphere. The working group has become highly motivated and the members now feel, more than before, that the work is well planned and foreseeable. In addition, their ideas on the project’s impact have changed positively from not knowing in the early days (Figure 6.2).

6.2.1 Hype and complaints

The OmaStadi working group has been seen as highly motivated throughout the project and reception among decision-makers was good. OmaStadi is representative of current trends in cities’ participatory work.

Most residents have also shown enthusiasm regarding this new democratic project and their motivation has lasted throughout the process, despite occasional confusion. The next round of participatory budgeting is much anticipated. Feedback by residents also showed patience even when things did not go as expected initially: *“I hope they will stand behind the messaging of doing a trial run and things going better in the future. I think it’s great that we had this experiment and can now continue onward! This is just what we need :)”*

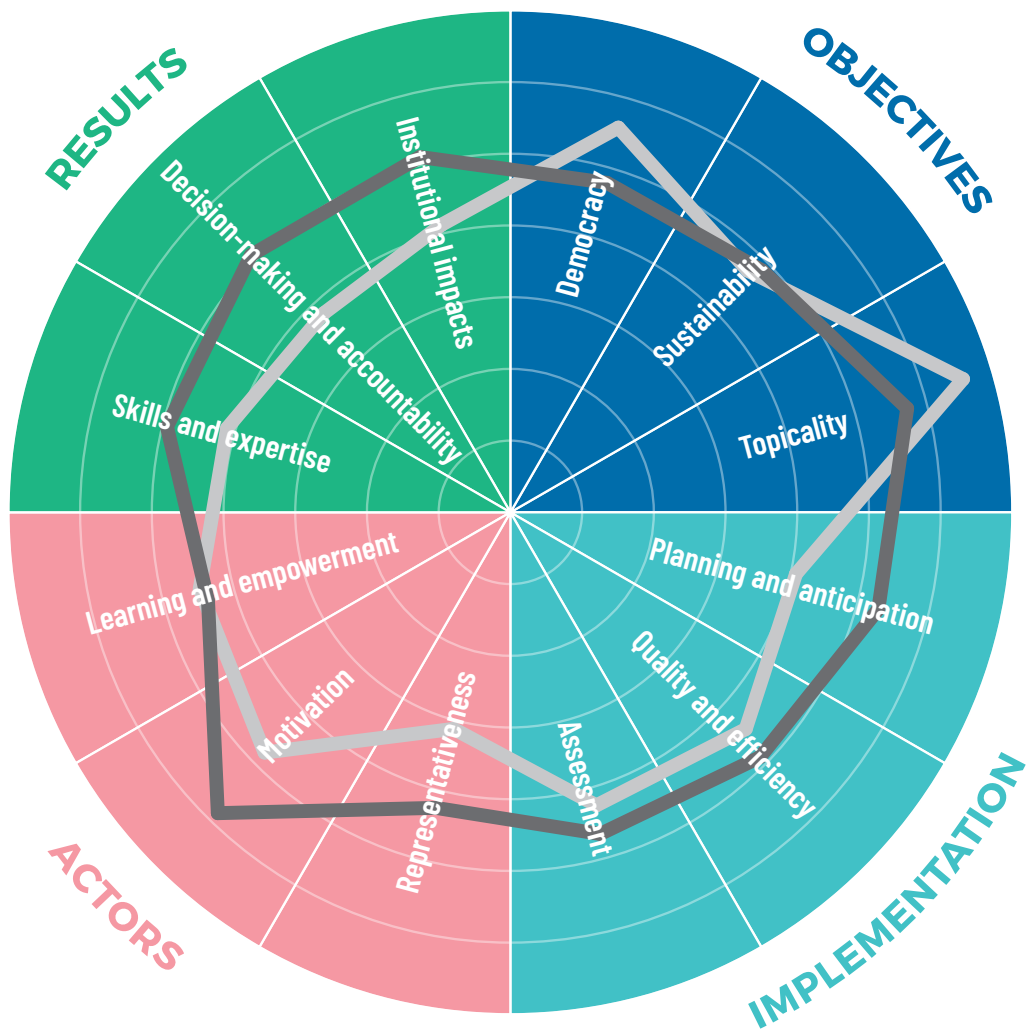
According to our research, employees responsible for the implementation are the least motivated. They experienced third parties telling them what to do, disregarding their competence and requiring an unreasonably amount of their work time. Something that was worthy of support in and of itself was sabotaged by confusing work organisation and struggling over resources:

The authorities are responsible for ensuring legal compliance and safety – which is important work. Participatory budgeting forces public servants’ lesser priorities to overtake the most important ones. That is not very encouraging.

– CITY EMPLOYEE

FIGURE 6.2 Evaluating the baseline and final status of the working group using the Co-creation Radar model

— Baseline
— Final level



Many long-term urban activists are also quite critical of OmaStadi. They made it repeatedly known in public events of the project that they felt sidelined during the planning stage and that they felt the project was “tokenistic democracy” creating competition over “pocket money”. Nonetheless, in more in-depth conversations they admitted to seeing the many opportunities the project provides, despite a fear that it would take up space from actually influencing on the structural level.

It is clearly highlighted in the participant feedback and discussions had during project events that well-organised events like the OmaStadi Raksa workshops motivate the participants and foster a feeling that their thoughts and proposals are valuable for the City (Ertiö et al., 2019). The enthusiasm created this way would wane during times when the focus was in the online environment and the process seemed to stand still. This was especially salient in the cost estimation stage when very little information was provided.

It is noteworthy that a relatively modest investment within the City’s budget has raised so much discussion and kept the participants so motivated to develop a new type of urban democracy. A great number of residents and decision-makers are enthusiastically promoting OmaStadi as



Although OmaStadi reached a considerable number of Helsinki residents, 91.4% of residents did not vote. There are numerous reasons for this: insufficient communications, difficulties in understanding the process, being busy and having other priorities, lack of belief or trust in the significance of the project as well as not knowing about the opportunity to participate in person.

new way of developing participation in Helsinki. However, the criticism should not be overlooked or brushed aside as inability to adapt to new ways of working, which seemed to happen in some discussions. City employees and NGO actors have valuable long-term experience of a variety of operating methods for fostering participation. Ways that take their perspective into consideration will motivate them to participate and keep developing participatory budgeting.

6.2.2 Non-participant motivation

Although OmaStadi reached a considerable number of Helsinki residents, 91.4% of residents did not vote. There are numerous reasons for this: insufficient communications, difficulties in understanding the process, being busy and having other priorities, lack of belief or trust in the significance of the project as well as not knowing about the opportunity to participate in person. That is why it would be valuable to gather information on the motivations of those who did not participate. This could be done in connection with another resident survey or by conducting short interviews, inquiring randomly chosen residents for their reasons not to participate and perhaps also gather improvement suggestions.

6.3 Learning and empowerment

In the radar survey (N=15), learning and empowerment related to the project were assessed to be near the average (4.1/7) and opinions of different groups of respondents varied notably little (min. 3.5–4.5/7). This seems to indicate that there is considerable room for improvement.

6.3.1 Learning participation is supportive of the curriculum

As we have emphasised in our evaluation, various parties connect OmaStadi with democratic education and promoting residents’ active role and initiative. Most interviewees emphasised these characteristics and considered, at least for now, the practical outcomes of the projects as less important.

OmaStadi managed to persuade residents who had previously not participated in any such projects, to get involved in the City’s decision-making. In the events reserved for presenting the plans, many told the audience that this was their first time being involved in “such things” and that they were quite enthusiastic about the process.



OmaStadi managed to persuade residents who had previously not participated in any such projects, to get involved in the City's decision-making.

It was pointed out in a survey conducted at schools by the Education Division that OmaStadi “is a perfect fit for the current curriculum, which has participation as an overarching theme”.

6.3.2 Empowerment and powerlessness

There are both positive and negative examples of empowerment – some of which have received considerable media attention. At best, the process has created entirely new opportunities for influencing (info box 6.2). Nonetheless, many who were already involved in local influencing felt frustrated by OmaStadi. They felt sidelined both in planning and implementation of the project. These same ideas were also expressed by City experts with extensive experience of resident participation work. This caused them to feel powerless, which was sometimes expressed in sarcastic or judgemental comments during the events, regarding the OmaStadi game, the official bureaucracy or tokenistic participation. It was hard to find genuine discussion about participation and influence that expressed views critical of the structure. The citizen activist and former city councillor Yrjö Hakanen repeatedly highlighted critiques many had voiced regarding structures that prevent empowerment:

I feel it is problematic that there are employees – the Borough Liaisons and others – and units related to the participatory activities which actually stand in the way of the residents and the division or the City Executive Office. It is my understanding that quite normal human work relationships and other norms create for them an agenda, which is actually the agenda of the City Executive Office and the managers and supervisors of the division. They will then take this agenda to the participation events instead of relating the residents' message for the City machinery, stating to the residents rules and limits on what can and cannot be inter-

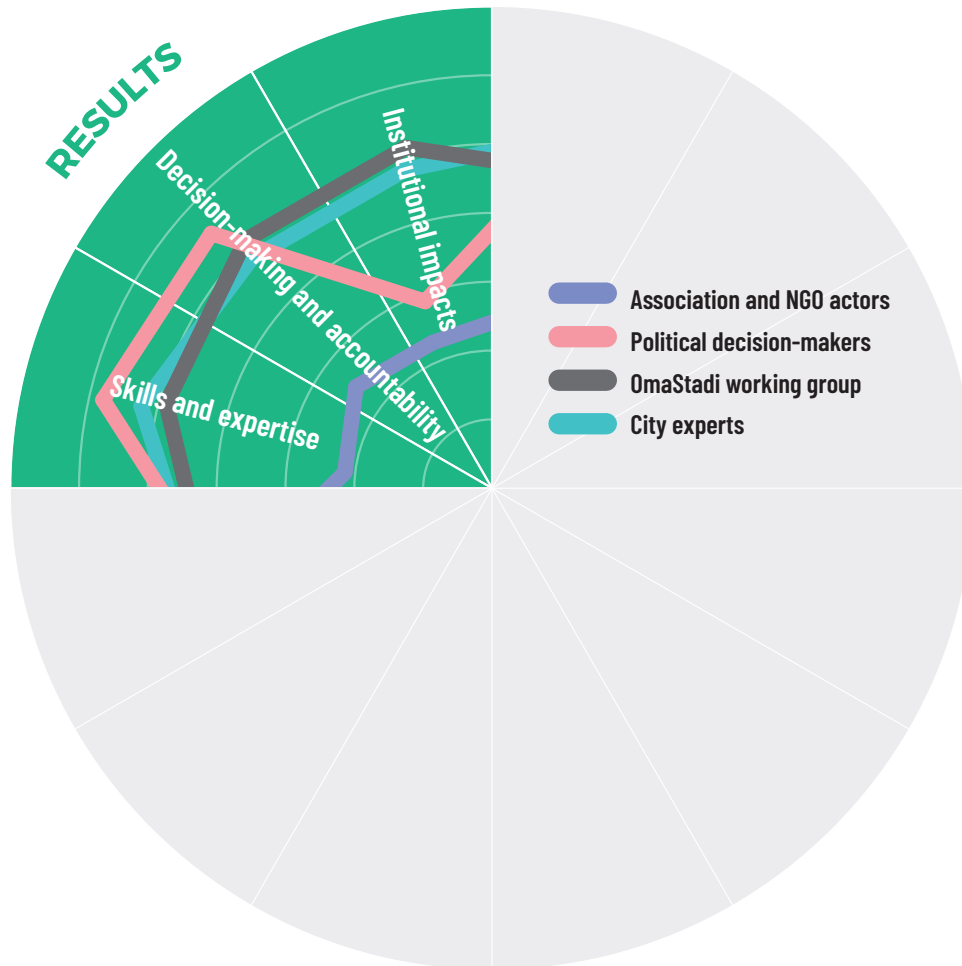
Info box 6.2

Help for depression from an OmaStadi proposal

Minna Salonen came by her proposal *Peace of Mind – a mental health meeting place in Oodi* due to burnout and depression. She found participation in OmaStadi to be an environment that she felt empowering (WGH, 2019). The project proposal combined providing low-threshold mental health services with a meeting place that had not been used for this purpose before. The plan reached the voting stage but did not get enough votes to continue to implementation. Regardless, the project managed to bring up this important issue in media (Helsingin Uutiset, 2019) gaining visibility also among decision-makers and City experts.

ferred with. To some extent they are between a rock and a hard place. They are not given the opportunity to be the voice of the residents towards the City but instead they are expected to produce results in implementing a project.

The greatest challenges in regard to learning and empowerment are related to creating trust-based interactions. There is a lot of long-term competence and silent knowledge available in Helsinki that could offer a considerable advantage in developing the participation process. It is important that the participants feel like they are building a shared process in all stages of the project instead of being bystanders in a script that goes on with or without them. Interacting provides the City experts and residents an opportunity to learn to respect each other and create discussion environments based on mutual respect. Even in the cost estimation stage, despite issues related to its communication, the residents have learned how the City plans and implements projects and how much things cost. These are things that some participants will surely understand better in the second round.



7 Evaluation of the results of OmaStadi

The evaluation approaches the results of OmaStadi via three key themes: competence and expertise, decision-making and accountability as well as improving institutional impacts.

Such an extensive project has a variety of results. In the research literature results are classically divided into three categories: epistemic, practical and democratic (see e.g. Fiorino, 1990; Decker & Ladikas, 2010; Rask et al., 2018). *Intellectual results* include data, ideas and information. *Practical results* include new products, services, innovations,

skills, expertise and increased social acceptance. *Democratic results* can include democratisation of decision-making and the empowerment of residents as political actors, for example. Often, projects will also cause notable results outside the goals set for them (cf. Antikainen et al., 2019; Rask et al., 2018).

The *temporal perspective* is also important when evaluating the results. It has an immediate impact on budget decision, among other things. Over a longer timespan indirect impacts can also emerge, such as increasingly close cooperation between the divisions. Over the years, it is also possible

that structural changes, for example in the urban environment, become apparent as the investments funded via participatory budgeting start to change the landscape of the City. The perspective of our evaluation of OmaStadi covers approximately two years and most impacts are bound to remain unnoticed because implementation is still ongoing.

7.1 Skills and expertise

Expertise can also be viewed at three different levels. On the *strategic level* OmaStadi is a significant pilot project in which it is just as important to understand the experiment as it is to ensure continued learning. Is the idea to only serve Helsinki or are other municipalities also taken into consideration? How is it ensured that the developed work methods, such as the Raksa workshops, are not forgotten but rather spread further? How will the new operating model be integrated with all of the City's activities? On the *operative level* it is important that competence related to managing and implementing the project is fostered and developed even as the personnel changes. What kind of training do experts of the divisions receive related to the new work method? On the level of *individual methods* it might be important to develop specific skills for tasks such as tailoring the Decidim platform, analysing large datasets and facilitating discussions.

7.1.1 Learning by doing

OmaStadi represents a culture of experimentation that is quite lively in Finland and which aims to renew the society and work methods of various sectors using bold experiments (Antikainen et al., 2019). What makes OmaStadi exceptional is its long timespan, as the EUR 40 million of the participation fund will last far into the future. Unlike most other pilots, OmaStadi was designed to last several rounds. This is an essential improvement in regard to the opportunities to learn by altering the process and building OmaStadi into a learning platform (see also chapter 7.1.2).

The political will behind the project, dedicated public servants and enthusiasm of the residents create a solid base for learning and systematic development (cf. info box 7.1). The project has already been developed in close cooperation with international and domestic actors which has enabled cross-pollination of ideas and skill transfer. Finnish municipalities' interest in experimenting and adapting the participatory budgeting operating model to their context offers an excellent opportunity for joining forces. That is why it is important to ensure that there are sufficient resources for reviewing and relating the lessons learned to various actors

Info box 7.1

Learning by doing in participatory budgeting in Paris

The Paris participatory budgeting with its EUR 100 million annual budget is one of the largest of its kind in the world. The project started in 2014 as an experiment with a EUR 20 million budget. Two years later the budget was increased fivefold. Studying the factors behind the success of Paris participatory budgeting, professor Yves Cabannes (2017, p. 201) has strongly emphasised a culture of learning by doing, contrasting this with the very stiff bureaucratic culture traditional to Paris. Cabannes sums up learning by doing in the following principles: "A) Be bold. Start quickly. It won't be perfect right away, but strong forward momentum will contribute to collaboration and meaningful progress. B) Dynamic evolution. Be ready to be flexible and open to change. Structure and administration might be modified through trial-and-error. C) Collaborative input: innovation can't happen in a vacuum. Provide tools for a dialogue between administrative teams and citizens to achieve an effective final product together."

The researcher Jake Carlson (2017) has boiled down the success of participatory budgeting in Paris to three key factors: 1) Political will guaranteed by a strong will expressed by the mayor and the resources allocated for the project. 2) Enthusiasm by the residents, as demonstrated by the annually increasing number of several thousand proposals. 3) Professional and committed experts.

as well as for getting the cooperation between the cities started. The Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities and The Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra would both be a natural fit for this role.

Development of skills and expertise is demonstrated by the fact that two out of the seven Borough Liaisons have already written thesis papers on OmaStadi and one more is currently in the process of doing so. The thesis paper by Belinda Barbato and Antti Sarpo (2020, p. 62) vividly describes how the OmaStadi process has been developed on the fly, learning from previous stages:

“In 2019, having learning from the Raksa workshops we had already organised, we decided to abandon excessively methodical approaches, such as externally facilitated discussions. Our aim was to get the experts take on the responsibility for the discussions. Our approach for reaching this goal was to review the events thoroughly and involve the experts in planning the events... This is a considerable departure from the events held in 2019 where the experts did not participate in planning the events and where their role was more like that of a participant than an organiser.”

Although OmaStadi has been developed in the spirit of co-creation (e.g. in connection with a multi-day event during the 2018 Helsinki Design Week), there are considerably more opportunities for opening the process to be developed by the residents themselves. In the future, a slightly looser schedule could, for example, allow inviting residents to plan future rounds of OmaStadi in “mega workshops”.

7.1.2 OmaStadi as a learning platform

In the Radar survey (N=15) skills and competence development was rated fairly positively (5/7). Nonetheless, it is obvious that competence related to participatory budgeting will be in high demand in the future. As a democratic innovation, there are many interesting questions related to its further development.

One way of fostering competence in the sector is perceiving OmaStadi as a long-term learning platform that allows drawing up action plans or having them made. This concept of a learning platform contains the idea that OmaStadi is developed as a continuous process of learning, research, development and evaluation. The Urban Academy and the Helsinki Institute of Urban and Regional Studies of the University of Helsinki could find maintaining such a platform interesting from a research perspective and the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities would be natural representatives of educational activities. Questions to consider in the action plan could include the following:



Participatory budgeting is often seen as an antidote to ostensible participation because it allows the residents themselves to come up with the options and choose the best of those for implementation.

- Continuous and varied utilisation of the evaluation work and research project cooperation
- Providing support for and coordinating thesis papers
- Domestic and international “sponsor organisations”
- Trainings tailored for the divisions’ experts (internal and third party trainings, organised by experts from the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities or consults)
- Utilising co-creation and crowdsourcing in planning the process to a greater extent
- Developing facilitation competencies and deliberation

7.2 Decision-making and accountability

“We must learn that residents really do put time and energy into their ideas, even when sometimes they propose that a restaurant is needed 30 metres underground. We must still examine the proposal, respond accordingly and use sufficient time in doing so.”

– MIKKO AHO, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, URBAN ENVIRONMENT DIVISION

Decision-making and accountability are key questions for participation and getting them right is essential. A participatory project that does not impact decision-making is only ostensibly participatory, which is a possible end result also if a participatory project focuses on inconsequential questions and the actual decisions are made elsewhere. For those who know about participatory projects, tokenistic participation is a far too familiar problem. Accountability,

then, refers to how a participatory project impacts the authorities' activities and the way this is communicated. Accountability measures a city's ability to respect, listen and interact with its residents.

Participatory budgeting is often seen as an antidote to tokenistic participation because it allows the residents themselves to come up with the options and choose the best of those for implementation. However, direct democracy is tested by rules and practices that can, at worst, water down good intentions. For example, in Germany the declining interest in participatory budgeting has been explained by its consultative nature due to the legislative system. The final decisions on project funding are made by the city councils, which leads to lacking transparency and solutions that contradict the residents' proposals which causes issues with the perceived legitimacy of the activities (Schneider & Busse, 2018).

The score given to decision-making and accountability by association and NGO actors in the Co-Creation Radar was quite negative (2.5/7). The likely cause for this assessment are unpleasant experiences related mostly to the cost estimation stage.

7.2.1 A strong commitment by the City

The City management is clearly committed to organising OmaStadi. One indication of this is that plenty of work hours and competence of the City's experts have been used for the project. A total of 240 events were organised to allow residents to meet the City's experts (Participation and Citizen Information, 2020). Eight OmaStadi Raksa workshops were organised and 160 City experts and 800 residents participated, meaning one expert was present for every eight residents (Barbato & Sarpo, 2020).

The Mayor's decision to implement the selected projects did not alter the voting results in any way. A key issue related to decision-making is drawing up the cost estimates. Many felt that the estimates drawn up by the experts and the residents did not match. That is why one of the key ways of strengthening the legitimacy of the entire OmaStadi process is to make the cost estimate stage be even more transparent than before (see chapter 5.1.3). The cost estimate stage will, of course, bring up issues that the residents do not fully know: for example, the cost for a proposed swimming pier increased due to the responsibility for provided premises and services, as noted by the Head of the Participation and Citizen Information Unit. The City is responsible for ensuring that responsibilities related to transforming the environment, such as those related to emergency rescue roads, are taken into account.



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7.2.2 Real-time implementation tracking

In the voting-stage feedback survey (N=390) nearly half of the respondents (48%, see Figure 5.4) did not know what would happen after the vote. A tracking service (Participatory budgeting tracking 2019–2020) for OmaStadi projects was deployed to increase awareness. The site allows tracking the implementation of the projects in real time. In September 2020, 54.2% of all work was completed. For example, the artificial turf in Arabianranta was 100% ready but completion of the proposal for a movable event stage with required technical equipment was only at five per cent. In this case the implementation was slowed down by the COVID-19 pandemic. This is open governance practices at their best.

7.3 Institutional impacts

We will evaluate the institutional impacts from two perspectives. First, we evaluate the role OmaStadi has in altering the City's established work methods and operational culture. According to Ganuza and Baiocchi (2012), on the global level, participatory budgeting has been used both as a policy device for improving efficiency of administration and as a policy instrument for renewing it. The philosophy of improving administration efficiency can be combined with the idea of participation in the sense of activating citizens to solve problems with a starting point defined by the

administration's needs. The renewing philosophy, on the other hand, concerns participation that aims to democratise the decision-making system. Many studies have shown participatory budgeting to be an ideologically flexible tool because it allows promoting either of these goals (see e.g. Gilman, 2016; Ganuza & Francés, 2012; info box 4.1). In addition, we evaluate the impact OmaStadi has on the creation of new cooperations and cooperative networks. We feel that the wider social and structural impacts cannot be meaningfully evaluated due to the short timespan and small scale of the project.

Respondents of the Radar survey did not consider the institutional impact of OmaStadi to be considerable (4.2/7). The impacts were estimated to be the greatest by the interviewed members of the OmaStadi working group (5.2/7) and other City experts (5/7). On the other hand, political decision-makers (3/7) and association and NGO actors (2.5/7) estimated the impact would remain small.

7.3.1 Participatory budgeting has increased cooperation between divisions

“So, we have this silo or pipe organisation, a top-down pipe organisation. The City is like many pipes that come into the area. And not all of the pipes will even reach the area. That is something that always takes people by surprise: do people within the organisation really not know what others are doing. They really do not, because there is no such knowledge on the grassroots level.”

– EEVA-LIISA BROMAN, PROJECT MANAGER, CITY OF HELSINKI, RETIRED

At first, cooperation between the divisions ran into issues because of what was seen as shortcomings of the instructions provided by the City Executive Office and other the additional workload caused by the process (Participation and Citizen Information, 2020). Since then, the cooperation was improved by better planning, communications and new cooperation practices. The elderly were reached especially in cooperation with Social Services and Health Care and the Urban Environment Division hired two project managers to coordinate the projects. According to Barbato and Sarpo (2020) these project managers became important partners for the OmaStadi working group in planning and implementing the Starttiraksa workshops.

The OmaStadi project has increased cooperation between the divisions but there are varying opinions as to the extent of this impact. According to report by the Participation and Citizen Information Unit (2020), participatory

budgeting has strengthened especially an operational culture of open government, increased transparency of planning practices and provided new experiences on how the City's processes are managed and put to practice. The Deputy Mayors and Division Executive Directors remained fairly reserved in their assessment of this aspect. One example of a positive assessment is by Deputy Mayor for Urban Environment, Anni Sinnemäki, who said that OmaStadi had caused changes but *“there have been other stronger factors and drivers of change in the operational culture”*. On the other hand, Liisa Pohjalainen, Executive Director of the Education Department was doubtful, stating that OmaStadi has not impacted the City's internal processes but rather it was *“attempted to be added on top of existing processes which was quite difficult”*. Mikko Aho, Executive Director for the Urban Environment Division was also quite skeptical, saying that the current scale of OmaStadi was too small scale to have any considerable impact on the City's operational culture.

There were considerable differences in the level of activity between the different divisions due to the number of projects they were responsible for. Of the 44 plans selected for implementation, 29 (66%) belonged to the Urban Environment, 10 (23%) to Culture and Leisure and 5 (11%) to Education divisions (City Executive Office – Kaupunginkanslia, 2020). Social Services and Health Care received no plans to implement. This caused Deputy Mayor Sanna Vesikansa to consider if the way the rules excluded services was sensible.

7.3.2 Increased interaction between the City and the residents

A key part of the OmaStadi process was the co-creation between the residents and City experts. This was promoted by events organised in cooperation with the divisions and organisations that represent many different groups of residents. Both the residents and the experts felt the dialogue to be significant. Sanna Vesikansa, Deputy Mayor for Social Services and Health Care highlighted the issue:

“This has forced and allowed a direct dialogue with the residents about ideas and their impact, financial and otherwise. I believe this has been a positive impulse for the City's public servants to also renew their work methods...”

Appreciation for the experts of the various divisions coming together to work with the residents on their ideas was salient in the feedback data gathered from residents (N=390).

What, then, is then novelty value of the interaction within OmaStadi? In the interviewees, it was seen as a strength of OmaStadi that the project provided opportunities to reach residents who have previously not been

involved in the City’s decision-making. For example, Executive Director of Urban Environment Division, Mikko Aho pointed out that participation has been a normal part of their daily work ever since zoning laws were amended in the early 2000s, requiring resident participation to be a part of the zoning process. However, participation has usually focused on a fairly small group of people who will then define the opinion of all residents.

7.3.3 Networking and cooperation remained too timid

OmaStadi is based on the idea that proposals are selected by the residents and carried out by the City – there is fairly little space in the implementation left for cooperation between residents and local entities. In addition, the model reserves no space for “third parties”, such as other public sector actors, companies or co-funders, for example. Some schools have participated in OmaStadi by encouraging their pupils to vote via the Wilma system and research institutes had a role in conducting evaluations and writing research papers. With these exceptions, the focus of communications directed to associations, partnerships and networking have all concentrated on achieving involvement that is as comprehensive as possible. According to the City Executive Office (2020), the aim was to reach immigrants by contacting multicultural associations, such as Nicehearts ry, Monik ry, Strength in diversity Moni Heli ry, Irakin nais-ten ry, the Kotoutumisen sillat project, Monikulttuurinen nuorisoyhdistys Aurinko, Inkerikeskus ry, the JANE project by the Participation and Citizen Information Unit, Eira High School for Adults and Ohjaamo, Helsinki. It is, indeed, justified to try to reach easily marginalised groups.

Nonetheless, in order to develop OmaStadi to become a more significant democratic innovation it is important to consider if it would be possible for the included group to be more comprehensive. For example, Tuusula has used hybrid funding (City of Tuusula – Tuusulan kaupunki, 2020) as a way to involve other parties in funding projects. In Gothenburg, the largest housing company in the city was involved in carrying out participatory budgeting (Digidem Lab, 2019). Could Business Liaisons hired by the City have a role in developing OmaStadi?

7.3.4 Indirect impacts

According to the way of thinking linked to a culture of experimentation, the task of the public sector is to “orchestrate” experiments that foster identifying new kinds of



Some schools have participated in OmaStadi by encouraging their pupils to vote via the Wilma system and research institutes had a role in conducting evaluations and creating thesis papers.

solutions. Following this logic, the impacts should not be perceived only in a narrow sense, but impacts outside the actual goals of the projects should also be considered.

OmaStadi will continue for several years and the institutional footprint of the project can only be properly discerned in the future. However, some impacts have been observed already during the first round, that started with the OmaStadi process even though they were hardly expected. The electronic voting process was conducted on a large scale and, for researchers and developers in the field of online democracy, it offered an interesting point of departure for future experiments on adapting an electronic voting system to fit Finland. A similar surprise is related to the OmaStadi voter turnout that the City Board (2018) required to be tracked in a fashion similar to national and municipal elections. However, it was uncovered during the process that Helsinki’s digital voter register used for national and municipal elections included only the areas Maunula A and Maunula B, which prevents comparisons such as by age-group. Based on this observation, the City is now looking into a possibility of expanding the digital voter register in national and municipal elections.

These are examples of indirect impacts on developing administration. It is likely that much more significant impacts will be seen outside administration. For now, there are only hints of this: residents have found new ways of solving their issues such as recovering from depression (info box 6.2). OmaStadi has also provided a considerable new channel for young people to have a say. Such factors should also be monitored in the future – they allow the pilot to be adapted and achieve significance that may never have been expected of it.

8 Conclusions and recommendations

We have monitored the OmaStadi project for a period of quite exactly two years since planning the project started. The most important lesson has been that even small changes to the rules, implementation methods and interaction can have far-reaching consequences. This observation is also supported by an international comparison of participatory budgeting projects. Participatory budgeting is not a neutral tool for citizens to straightforwardly participate in decision-making, but rather it is closely connected to various forms of proximity democracy and resident participation. It must be kept open in relation to larger developments of our society. The first round of participatory budgeting conducted in Helsinki has both generally adopted and distinctive characteristics.

The following factors highlight the project's distinctive nature. Firstly, *this is a large-scale pilot*. A total of EUR 4.4 million is reserved for implementing the ideas and the administrative costs of the project exceed the allocated sum. This is a uniquely large investment among Finnish municipalities, even though in international comparison Helsinki remains in the mid-tier with cities like Paris and Madrid allocating more than EUR 100 million annually and several Latin America cities using even greater sums. Many Finnish municipalities have started participatory budgeting on a very modest scale, investing tens of thousands of euros. Secondly, *OmaStadi includes investments for promoting equity*. Instead of carrying out the budgeting solely on the online platform, OmaStadi has included a Borough Liaison for each of the seven major districts, who is in touch with the residents, helps them develop their ideas and participates in events and meetings. The third key characteristic is *the central role of co-creation*. This was promoted, for example, via the OmaStadi Raksa co-creation workshops where City experts and residents engaged in direct interaction throughout the stages of the process. Service design and gamification have also been employed to support co-creation. The fourth distinctive characteristic is *the loose and neutrally themed rules* that provide a lot of room for the residents' proposals, with the exception of excluding permanent staff or other permanent activity. The fifth distinctive solution is *real-time vote tracking* during the voting stage. This is a fairly rare feature in international comparison and

one that provided the project visibility but caused contradictions.

In our evaluation, we utilised the *Co-Creation Radar* model and created an overall chart of OmaStadi using 12 indicators instead of the common approach of basing an evaluation solely on the quality and efficiency of the process or user feedback. The criteria reflect various features of a pluralist society, approaching the process from the perspectives of objectives, implementation, actors and results. In addition to statistics and feedback surveys, the evaluation is also based on in-depth interviews and participatory observation.

Our overall evaluation of the implementation of the first round of OmaStadi is cautiously positive. This significant democratic innovation in developing the City emphasises direct participation, online democracy and deliberative democracy. However, there is also plenty of room for improvement within the project and the development should be continued based on the accrued experience.

Recommendation 1: Develop OmaStadi in coherence with the concept of proximity democracy. The relationship OmaStadi has with democracy, decision-making and influencing opportunities is understood in several contradictory ways. It is important that shared goals are identified using a process of open interaction. If the process is described as being flexible it must also be flexible. Anything else will lead to talk of tokenistic participation and handing out pocket money. In practical terms this could be implemented by establishing resident forums or cooperating with existing association actors during the stages where the proposals are combined into projects and cost estimates are drawn up. At the same time, it is important to ensure that OmaStadi remains a channel for the ideas and proposals of all residents of the City and other stakeholders and no concessions are made in regard to its democratic principles.

Evaluation:

- The cost estimates failed because the participants did not understand the grounds and criticised the high price tags. Residents could not participate in estimating, even though they might have a better understanding of their local area than the City experts.
- In many areas votes were split between similar projects

despite the combination process. This hampered individual projects' chances of being selected. It is important to reduce the overlap between projects.

- Neighbourhoods are constantly being developed in a variety of other ways by the City, associations and citizen activists. It is important to connect OmaStadi proposals with other development processes. Not doing so risks losing the skills and potential related to long-term development.
- Although OmaStadi brought in many new actors, it was criticised by City experts and resident activists who felt sidelined both in the planning and implementation stages. This criticism must be taken seriously and not considered whining or resistance to change. There is a lot of experience and tacit knowledge in Helsinki when it comes to questions of participation and best practices.

Recommendation 2: Maintain equity as a central tenet.

Practical ways of promoting equity include measures targeted to language minorities (translations, connecting and cooperating with local associations and contact persons). Equal opportunities must be ensured for people regardless of whether they participate online or in person. However, promoting equity must not be confused with the question of combatting the inequality present in our society. This requires considerably more resources and, at least in its current form, participatory budgeting is not a significant tool for reducing overall inequality.

Evaluation:

- Equity was not optimally carried out during the first round of OmaStadi. Marginalised groups were underrepresented in the proposals, project events as well as the implementation stage. Reaching these groups requires long-term work rather than individual scattered events.
- There was a considerable variance in the resources available for campaigning by the parties that came up with the plans. Support for communicating about the plans could be considered for those who need it.

Recommendation 3: Shift attention from voting to deliberation. The real-time display of vote counts during voting and the opportunity to alter a vote already cast led to fierce competition and perceptions of tactical voting.

Removing this feature would reduce the impression of this being a competition and provide space for evaluating the contents of projects, even though it might decrease voter turnout. Other methods for fostering deliberation include additional support for presenting the projects and organising facilitated discussion at local events and online.

Evaluation:

- On the international level participatory budgeting is often connected to the development of deliberative democracy aimed at improving the quality of discussion regarding urban development. A culture of competition and polarisation is not supportive of this aim.
- The discussions about the proposals and plans on the OmaStadi.hel.fi platform were not very active. More active discussions would be a great way of promoting development and evaluation of the proposals. The interaction features of the digital platform require considerable development and facilitation.

Recommendation 4: Delineate OmaStadi objectives.

OmaStadi requires a focus that is both sufficiently loose but more goal-oriented than currently. The development of the scale of participatory budgeting, its connection with sustainable development and the promotion of proximity democracy or other democratic models must be communicated in clear terms. The scope of project evaluation should also be expanded. Co-creation that brings together different parties was one of the key strengths of OmaStadi and there is good reason to emphasise that in defining its goals.

Evaluation:

- The goals set for OmaStadi, such as promoting influencing opportunities, equity and increased understanding of the City's activities by the municipal residents, are quite general in nature and do not sufficiently support the future development of the operations.
- Understanding shared objectives would help the group based on a complex management structure to better understand the process both in the short and the long term. Is participatory budgeting intended to promote innovation and more comprehensive changes in our society or will the focus be on funding small procurements and fixes? This question is closely related to the rules and

Conclusions and recommendations

guidelines that came under criticism during the first round. The imposed limitations leads to less innovative ideas focused on specific sectors.

- Growing the budget and thus the significance of OmaStadi could be justified from the perspective of democratisation of urban development and decision-making.
- As the significance of the project increases, its role in relation to the daily work of the divisions must be further clarified. This also applies to the way the project is connected with other development work by the City and related evaluation.
- The participatory budgeting process can be linked to various democratic models (e.g. online, proximity, direct, participatory and deliberative democracy). What the focus of OmaStadi is in relation to these will have far-reaching consequences. All models have their own strengths that can be utilised in further development of the project.

Recommendation 5: Support OmaStadi's future development through research and evaluation. OmaStadi has raised a lot of research interest. Research should be more closely connected with the process and made visible on the OmaStadi platform. Finnish municipalities have also demonstrated considerable interest in participatory budgeting. As a flagship project in its field, OmaStadi offers an excellent platform for development work in cooperation with various partners. Unbiased evaluation should be ensured by allocating funds for it.

Evaluation:

- OmaStadi should include considerations for long-term research cooperation in connection with developing and evaluating the activities.
- Currently, there is no separate budget or resources allocated for evaluation. Based on international examples, reserving 1–5% of the total budget for evaluation is a reasonable level. Evaluation allows highlighting all the benefits and costs of the project in an unbiased manner. Both research and evaluation support knowledge-based development of the process.

Recommendation 6: Make the results and impact of OmaStadi more visible. Transparent implementation and providing visibility to the implemented projects are key ways for fostering trust in OmaStadi.

Evaluation:

- Respondents of the feedback survey remained in the dark as to what would happen to the projects they had voted for

after the voting closed. It is important to create ways of making implementation visible. The OmaStadi website and social media accounts of the Borough Liaisons are not sufficiently large channels for doing this. In addition to the existing OmaStadi website, one measure that could be considered is attaching an OmaStadi label to the procurements.

- Participatory budgeting is an expensive, slow and heavy process. Despite this, the related communications are focused on practical results, perhaps because it is difficult to explain and provide grounds for democratic education and improved understanding of the City's operations. Communications should cover these different aspects of democracy.
- A more comprehensive and clear description and understanding of the overall goals of the OmaStadi project are needed in order to evaluate whether the resources provided for the project match its results. Many of the most important aspects of participatory budgeting remain hidden even from the most active of residents.
- Impacts should be tracked by conducting both long-term and short-term evaluations. Factors to track in the short term include funded projects and their themes. In the long term, it is justified to also track the project's impact on the City's work methods and new forms of cooperation.

Recommendation 7: Expand co-creation. There was successful co-creation between City experts and residents during the first round. In the future, involving other actors should also be considered. Research, business and NGO actors could well find their place in the co-creation process, with City Business Liaisons supporting the project. The process could be developed by organising hackathons or other similar events.

Evaluation:

- Co-creation was a key work method in the project and it worked very well during the Raksa workshops, for example. City experts and residents engaged in direct dialogue, information was exchanged efficiently and trust between the parties increased.
- Using co-creation for drawing up the cost estimates should be considered.
- A project at the scale of OmaStadi offers many opportunities for cooperation. Examples include development of curricula, creating new businesses based on the proposed projects and ideas as well as promoting cooperation between researchers and administration. That is why, in the future, it is important to consider ways for making use of the ecosystem built around OmaStadi in a variety of contexts.

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