

EMPATIA (Enabling Multichannel Participation Through ICT Adaptations)

What is EMPATIA?

Participatory budgeting (PB) represents one of the most successful democratic innovations of the last quarter-century. EMPATIA seeks to strengthen citizen participation by designing, evaluating and making publicly available an advanced ICT platform for PB. For this aim, EMPATIA will embrace the ICT participatory innovations tools coming from public sector (e-government and e-democracy tools) and from the private and social sector (civic media, social collaborative networks, social entrepreneurship, etc.) to enclose the life cycle of PB (both, decision-making and implementation cycles). The EMPATIA platform will advance in comparison with existing platforms and address a more transparent and trustworthy participatory process between citizens and public institutions.

The EMPATIA project seeks to radically enhance the inclusiveness and impact of PB processes, increasing the participation of citizens by designing, evaluating and making publicly available an advanced ICT platform for participatory budgeting, which could be adaptable to different social and institutional contexts.

EMPATIA's Framework

The EMPATIA project is composed of a multidisciplinary consortium of partners with deep expertise in adjacent fields: experts on PB research (CES), experts on ICT integration (OneSource), experts on ICT tools for PB processes (UNIMI), experts on traditional and ICT-based participatory and voting processes (D21), experts on evaluating technological and societal impact (UBRUN) and implementers of PB processes in diverse communities of users (ZebraLog, InLoco and D21).

The partners in the EMPATIA consortium will:

- Conduct a targeted analysis of leading ICT interventions in European PB processes;
- Create a prototype digital platform applying our methodological framework to meet the local challenges identified by key partners (see below);
- Conduct rigorous testing of the platform, in the context of Pilot runs involving three diverse PB communities – Lisbon (Portugal), Říčany (Czech Republic), and Bonn (Germany);
- Complete a thorough evaluation of results, distilling key lessons and making needed technological and methodological corrections.
- Disseminate both key findings and the technology itself to key European partners, and worldwide, including emerging PB leaders in North America, the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa.

The EMPATIA platform will be released as open source and all extensions and improvements to previously existing open-source software will be returned to the community as contributions of the EMPATIA project.



Goals/Gaps	EMPATIA's expected innovation
<p>Inclusion: using ICT to reduce barriers to citizen participation, targeting the weakest social groups and providing multiple venues for active engagement.</p>	<p>Development of research methods to analyse multi-channel participation and transferring multi-channel approach to reference. Tailoring the implementation of EMPATIA Platform in Pilots in such a way that online and in-person processes fit seamlessly together and that PB activities conducted in either sphere complement one another, as opposed to displace or compete. Test multi-channel PB processes in Bonn, Lisbon and Říčany Pilots: analyse and evaluate the inclusiveness capacity of Pilots. Develop ICT solutions able to integrate and guarantee inter-operability between the EMPATIA Platform and existing channels of participation and civic activism (E.g. Civic Media, Social Networks, etc.).</p>
<p>Deliberative Quality: using ICT to enhance the quality of PB deliberation, focusing on new mechanisms for development of proposals by citizens and diversification of voting methods.</p>	<p>Development of ICT components aimed to manage and aggregate content based on affinity and geo-referencing criteria to support the development of proposals. Development of processes for clear and transparent analysis of data, providing self-explanatory visualisation mechanisms and infographics. Development of advanced voting algorithms based on Voting Theory (e.g. Multiple-winner, Single-winner, Evaluating voting)</p>
<p>Transparency: using ICT to increase transparency over the implementation of PB decisions</p>	<p>Development of a model of PB including a double cycle (Decision Making and Implementation) as a general framework. Development of automated processes for monitoring PB decisions in implementation stages, providing self-explanatory visualisation mechanisms and infographics. Evaluate transparency increase in project Pilots.</p>
<p>Efficiency: using ICT to streamline and optimize the investment of time and resources by facilitators and technical staff</p>	<p>Research the organizational changes induced by ICT integration on PB staff and definition of organizational models in reference scenarios. Development of tools that manage and aggregate content, resorting to sophisticated data-analysis algorithms aimed to support the management of information in PB processes by technical staff. Engagement of technical staff of the Pilots in Evaluation tasks.</p>
<p>E-Governance: improving the integration of PB processes with other governance innovations, including open datasets and existing e-government tools</p>	<p>Research and development of a possible common framework between PB and Open Government strategies. Development of ICT solutions able to integrate and guarantee inter-operability between existing services and frameworks at public, private and societal sectors (e.g. e-government platforms and standards, social networks, among others). These solutions include, for instance, the already mentioned tools for linking with open data sources and the already mentioned integration with mainstream social networks.</p>
<p>Replication & Adaptation: creating enabling conditions for replication and scale-up of PB practices through the dissemination of the EMPATIA platform and tools.</p>	<p>Development and distribution of a complete open-source adaptable EMPATIA Platform to support diffusion of Participatory Budgeting processes, with a wide degree of flexibility in the adaption to heterogeneous PB processes and with a high degree of modularity and expandability . Dissemination throughout a broad institutional network composed of national and international networks of stakeholders in order to pave the way for further replication.</p>
<p>Marketability: enabling market opportunities for collaborative platforms and develop business models to accelerate and amplify innovations.</p>	<p>Analysis of the PB ecosystem, for better understanding the value chains between involved stakeholders and how tools such as EMPATIA can add value to the process. Identify and refine potential business models ethically consistent with the objectives of PB, in order to foster the adoption and progress of the EMPATIA platform and concepts.</p>