

Participatory Climate Action

A Case from Vienna

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Abstract

Since the late 1960s, progressive scholars and grassroots movements argued in favor of more open and participatory urban policymaking, encouraging the state bureaucracy to directly engage with citizens and, thus, facilitate new governance mechanisms to accommodate emerging social needs (Ahn et. al. 2023: 399).

As a means of achieving this, Participatory Budgets (PBs) involve citizens directly in decision-making about the allocation of public funds, fostering community development and a sense of ownership. Originating in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 1989, PBs addressed dissatisfaction with traditional top-down budgeting approaches, which often marginalized citizen voices and perpetuated inequalities.

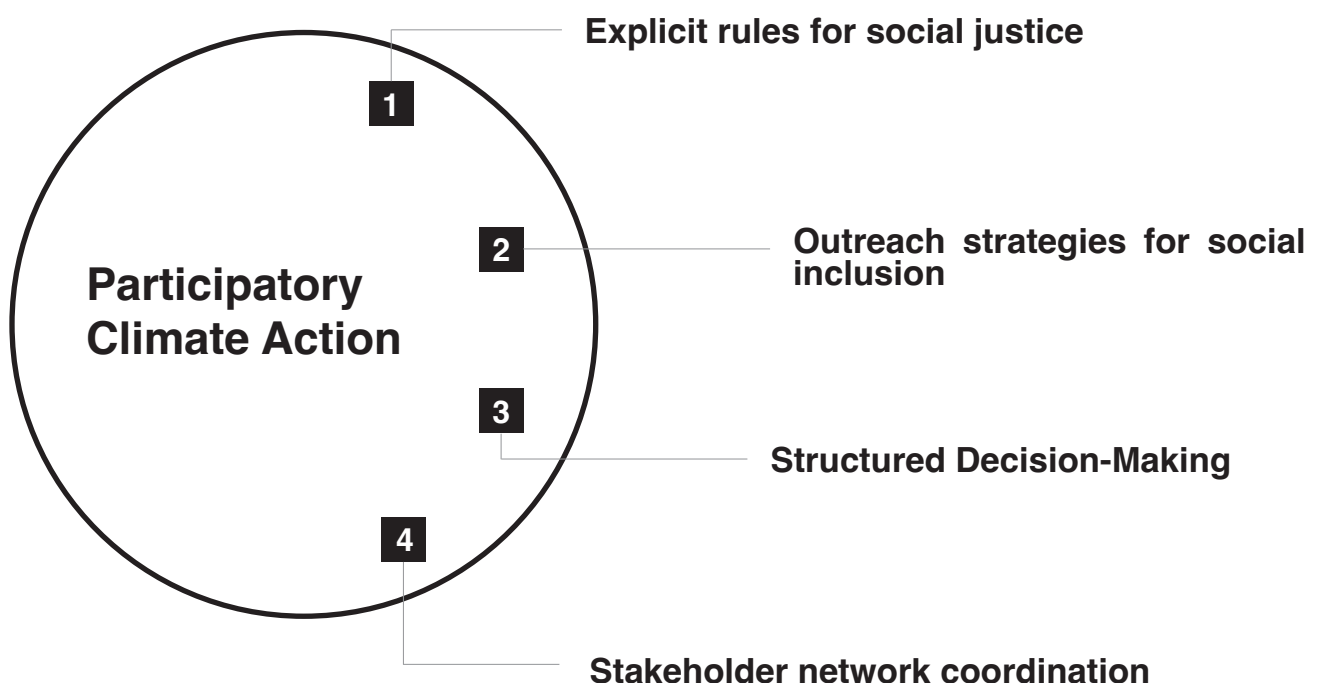
This policy brief presents a synthesis of research conducted by the Sociological Department of the University of Vienna on the Viennese PB, Wiener Klimateam, and offers valuable insights for public administration with respect to the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of future PB projects.



Figure 1. Stakeholder Workshop 2: Co-Developing a Pathway

Recommendations

The objectives of participatory climate action should aim at elevating limited social and environmental conditions for vulnerable social groups in disadvantaged urban areas. Therefore, context-sensitive knowledge about specific target groups and areas should translate into forming tailored participant activation strategies that explicitly engage the members of the identified groups and areas in the participatory process. For this effort, the outreach capacity of place-based local institutions and civil society organizations can be considered. In the collaborative process, citizen participants should be properly equipped with relevant knowledge, skills and material support to make informed, independent and structured decision-making. Lastly, a steering mechanism to oversee the coordination and management process across different institutional levels should be built into the whole participatory cycle to ensure its sound operation toward anticipated objectives as well as to detect and resolve unforeseen challenges.



1**Explicit rules for social justice**

Explicit rules for social justice need to be considered. The participatory process and its outputs must identify and accommodate the needs of specific target groups and areas that are most affected by urban inequalities. This can be achieved by defining explicit investment priorities of how financial resources can be spent on poorer communities and neighborhoods that are underserved in existing policy programs. Efforts to enhance social justice may also benefit from separate PB streams that are dedicated to specific vulnerabilities.

2**Outreach strategies for social inclusion**

Outreach strategies for social inclusion need to be considered. The activation of citizens on- and offline must take existing structural conditions into account. In terms of local multipliers, their working areas and key activities should be relevant to the identified vulnerabilities as well as diverse to include different sections of society. An extensive stakeholder mapping of existing local organizations and their competences can be a useful tool to enhance diversity in the activation of citizens. The principle of social inclusion also needs to extend to digital platforms, ensuring broader online participation beyond well-to-do participants, which may benefit from a variety of instruments such as multilingual information campaigns.

3**Structured Decision-Making**

Structured Decision-Making needs to be considered for group deliberation and collaboration, ensuring that all participants have access to sufficient background information and resources thus enabling informed and effective discussions that reflect the specific needs and preferences of each citizen. Furthermore, participants should be given the opportunity to receive guidance from experts, ensuring access to a variety of viewpoints and information.

4

Stakeholder network coordination

Stakeholder network coordination that enables joint feedback mechanisms need to be considered. Coordination across different institutional scales must exist prior to the implementation process to ensure the exchange of information and the pooling of resources as well as gaining interdepartmental support to enhance the political and technical feasibility of the project. Regular communication and feedback exchange between the stakeholders can be used to mitigate potential confusion and conflict that may arise over their tasks and responsibilities once the implementation process is in place. Building such network capacity may benefit from creating an intermediary agency at a higher political level whose staffs are specifically assigned with the task of managing the stakeholder network and overseeing their interactions.

Introduction

The *Wiener Klimateam* is a PB project of the City of Vienna's energy planning department (MA20). It was developed through a collaboration between the city administration and an international non-profit organization, Democratic Society, as part of a climate innovation initiative of the European Union (Climate-KIC). Following a one-year multi-stakeholder planning process in 2021, the Wiener Klimateam first began as a pilot project in three districts (Margareten, Simmering and Ottakring) in April 2022. It aims to facilitate climate change mitigation, social justice and democratic awareness-building among others by encouraging citizens to deliberate and co-create sustainable and environmentally friendly ideas. The project comprises five stages: (a) idea submission; (b) expert screening; (c) co-creation; (d) citizens' jury; and (e) implementation. The responsibility for the implementation of the final PB projects is delegated to the participant districts, who are asked to coordinate their realization process with the city's other municipal departments that have an institutional role on the specific projects.

Methodology

UNIVIE analyzed the participatory process of the Wiener Klimateam in one of the pilot districts, Margareten, covering its four core stages:

1) problem-framing (planning), 2) idea submission, 3) co-creation and 4) implementation process.

1. As the first step, a contextual analysis was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the existing social and environmental issues in Margareten. A Neighborhood Heat Vulnerability Index (NHVI) was developed to identify the spatial patterns of urban inequalities within the district. The purpose was to compare the identified urban inequalities as well as specific vulnerable social groups and areas with the perceived urban challenges and policy priorities among the key Wiener Klimateam actors and experts that were obtained through a document review of preparatory materials, media advertisements, and expert interviews.

2. As the second step, a content analysis of the idea submission phase was conducted. 290¹ citizen ideas were analyzed according to their spatial and thematic patterns as well as the participant dynamics on the online submission platform.

3. As the third step, participant observation was conducted at the co-creation workshop. The citizens, who were pre-selected by the city and the district, were invited to a 3-hour workshop to refine and further develop their ideas with experts into implementable projects. The workshop was divided into topic-based clusters.

4. As the fourth step and following the end of the official participatory phase, UNIVIE organized two interactive stakeholder workshops with institutional actors, civil society organizations and citizens.

· *The first Workshop (February 2023)* focused on discussing motivations, expectations, and experiences from the first *Wiener Klimateam*. Additionally, a SWOT Analysis was made collaboratively for the implementation of the projects.

· *The second Workshop (April 2023)* co-designed an analytical framework for the implementation of the five winning projects and co-developed indicators to access their progress. The participants complemented the preliminary model and identified necessary steps and requirements for the projects to achieve the anticipated Wiener Klimateam outcomes.

1 29 out of total 309 submissions were excluded from the analysis, due to content overlap or a lack of verifiable author information. Most of these inputs came from offline submission.

Additionally, further interviews with experts from the implementing administrative departments of the municipality and the district office were conducted to monitor the implementation process as well as to refine the analytical framework model.



Figure 2. Wiener Klimateam in Action: Idea Clusters from Co-Creation Workshop

Results

The findings of the sociodemographic and environmental data analyses indicate, that Margareten is one of the most vulnerable districts in the city and among other factors has relatively bad access to green infrastructure with relatively poor access to green infrastructure, low educational attainment and annual income. Furthermore, the NHVI reveals an uneven spatial distribution of greenspace and areas that are exposed to intense heat across the district.

The content analysis of the submitted ideas reveals an almost gradual increase in the number of submissions over the 49-day period, with its peak in the final week, with nearly 40 % (111) of the submissions received in the last nine days. Regarding the voting behavior, it became evident that ideas that were submitted at an early stage received more votes. The comparative analysis between the Wiener Klimateam and the previous PB projects in Margareten revealed significant differences in terms of submissions, with the Wiener Klimateam achieving an average of 14 submissions per 1,000 residents, thereby exceeding the three annual submissions per 1,000 residents achieved by the previous four-year district PB programme.

The co-creation workshop showed that sustained group participation was predominantly witnessed in larger clusters, where the involved experts were also more present. In contrast, smaller clusters demonstrated low engagement, frequently comprising a single participant who filled out the co-creation poster. Of the 76 initial submissions, 26 ideas were co-created, and five were selected for the subsequent phase by a citizen jury: 1) Façade greening 2) Repair café 3) Superblock 4) Car-Free Saturday 5) Shared zone.

In parallel with the planning of the implementation process, an impact pathway was developed for the five winning projects. This pathway identified the immediate and intermediate outcomes that are necessary to achieve Wiener Klimateam's four main objectives in Margareten. The situational analysis identified 45 structural issues, which were grouped into outcome clusters based on the target groups and underlying causes. These outcomes were subsequently refined in the ToC workshop with eight stakeholders, who expanded on the clusters and defined performance indicators to measure project impact.

In the period between June and December 2023, expert interviews with the implementing authorities (MAs and BV5) revealed a number of challenges. The projects were often perceived as vague and disconnected from the existing governance practices, the budget was deemed insufficient, and there was a lack of adequate coordination across the MAs. Furthermore, the involvement of the MA resulted

in only limited insights into local needs, and there was no effective mechanism in place to oversee the implementation process.

The implementation phase of the five winning projects was foreseen between 2023 and 2024. As of November 2024, three of these projects are fully implemented – however, after some delays and modifications, one is still in the replanning process. The implementation process showed substantial reinterpretations and negotiations among the implementing agencies of the final projects. Limited steering mechanisms were implemented, bringing to further delay this process.



Figure 3. Wiener Klimateam in Action: Car-Free Saturday

General references

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