

Decide Madrid



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PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE NEW GOVERNANCE FOR URBAN, SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT



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de Córdoba

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Introduction



01. Introduction

Within the framework of the pilot project Participatory Democracy, the cities of **Córdoba (Argentina), Montreal (Canada), Madrid and Barcelona (Spain)** exchanged insights about their participatory experiences in order to contribute to the increase of institutional capacities of the metropolises for the construction of governance and the decentralized cooperation. This project was developed at the request of the World Association of Major **Metropolises** and with the support of the International Observatory on Participatory Democracy (**OIPD**).

Since this initiative was planned and undertaken before the pandemic, it had to be adapted to a new context for it to be viable. Between September 2020 and December 2021, representatives¹ of diverse cities participated in online workshops where they could present their different trajectories along their experiences and reflect on the strengths and points of improvement of the participatory tools of each city. In

addition, interviews and workshops were held with representatives from the public administration and citizens of Córdoba, Montreal, Madrid and Barcelona. These allowed us to analyze different aspects and perspectives of the participatory practices that made up this project, namely, **Córdoba Participatory Budget**, **Montreal's Office of Public Consultations**, and platforms **Decide Madrid** and **Decidim Barcelona**, from each city.

Such actions led to the systematization of participatory democracy experiences in each city, which involves generating knowledge that can enhance the strengthening and improvement of these practices in each of the four metropolises. Similarly, spreading knowledge arising from the analyzed experiences and tools has the potential of promoting more active citizen participation.

The present document shares the systematization of the tool Decide Madrid from the City of Madrid, Spain.

¹ The extensive use of the masculine grammatical gender is avoided. This choice is made without detriment to the search for gender equality and with no intention of rendering the difference invisible, but just to facilitate fluent reading. This is why inclusive expressions are used and articles are omitted occasionally.



Decide_Madrid

02



02. Decide Madrid

In 2015, the Municipality of Madrid created the digital platform for citizen participation known as Decide Madrid. The city already had places for citizen participation such as the District Councils, Sectoral Council of Associations and Other Citizen Participation Entities, other sectoral councils, the Social Council of the City and the Local Centers. The possibility of individual and virtual participation was added through the new Open Governance Platform.

Decide Madrid, which is also known as the Open Governance Platform, has the aim to promote citizen participation in the government of Madrid, involving them in the production of new and attainable ideas and proposals to improve life quality. Thus, the idea is to create a channel for direct participation, which increases the number of people involved in the process of public decision-making and thus, diversity and different points of view. Moreover, it is expected that it facilitates communication between the government and the citizens so that the decisions are made in consideration of everyone's interest.

To make this possible, the Municipality got to the creation of a software of its own that would enable the virtual conditions for citizen participation.

This led to important challenges concerning programming, leading to the design of a safe software that could adapt to the needs of citizen participation. Therefore, a technical team of the Municipality dedicated to its development in open source, which resulted in the creation of CONSUL,

an open-source software for citizen participation. The program is available for all organizations and governments that wish to adopt it and modify it to their own needs, or for experienced people in programming around the world that would like to contribute to its improvement. As regards the features of technology itself, the platform has a log-in system, so it ensures a private and neutral participation, and it is integrated with the city electoral register.

Nowadays, Decide Madrid is independent of **CONSUL**. The program has turned into a 100% municipal platform, it is more secure and has more accessibility and utility, which allows the city development team to quickly modify it and adapt it to the specific needs of the city.

Currently, the number of verified users is equivalent to the 11% of Madrid voters, who can participate in debates about the city's issues and needs, make proposals, support them and vote for them, answer questions asked by the Municipality and be a part of the annual participatory budgeting.

Si participas, decides



"If you participate, you decide"; Decide_Madrid

One element of the regulatory framework of Decide Madrid experience is based on Madrid's Regulation on Citizen Participation (ROPC) (Reglamento Orgánico de Participación Ciudadana del Ayuntamiento de Madrid) of May 31, 2004, which establishes the citizen means, manners, procedures and entities for neighbor's engagement in the municipal management of Madrid.

The Act 19/2013 on Transparency and Access to Public Information and Good Governance (Ley 19/2013 de Transparencia, Acceso a la Información Pública y Buen Gobierno) constitutes a central piece for social structure since its objective is to strengthen the transparency of public activity, as well as to ensure the right to access to public information by establishing duties of good governance and accountability for those in office. It applies to all Spanish institutions.

When developing the digital platform Decide Madrid, the International Open Data Charter (2015) was an important prior resource. This Charter was an international initiative with roots in the ambit of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) with the objective of contributing to the sustainable development through the openness, use and reuse of public data, understanding that its availability can help improve the public decision-making process for governments and societies. Besides, it is expected to improve efficiency and efficacy of public services, to encourage transparency and accountability, and to foster the development of knowledge economy by involving the use of new technologies.

The Madrid Transparency Ordinance (Ordenanza de Transparencia de la Ciudad de Madrid) was passed on July 27, 2016, and constitutes the direct regulatory framework of Madrid's Open Governance Platform. Apart from following the premises of the above-mentioned Open Data Charter, the formulation of this ordinance implied debates and agreements between citizens, civil society organizations, social network professionals, municipal representatives with a technical profile and the political groups of the city.

Article 4. Main principles:

The following basic principles will rule in the interpretation and application of this ordinance:

a) Principle of transparency: Public information in the hands of those within the scope of application shall be accessible, except in cases in which the limits of a superior law are applicable, which interpretation will be specific.

b) Principle of easy access: Information published in the Open Governance Platform will be easy to access and user-friendly.

c) Principle of non-discriminatory technologies: Subjects within the scope of application shall make effective the access to public information independently of the means of access. The adoption of open and neutral technological standards will be encouraged.

d) Principle of truthfulness: Public information shall be true and reliable.

e) Principle of simplicity: Information shall be published in a plain and simple language to facilitate people's understanding.

f) Principle of cost: Exercising the right to public information access is free, without prejudice to the charges that may apply for the issuance of copies or the transfer of information from the original format to a different one.

g) Principle of reuse: Information shall be published and provided in formats that allow its recycling, except that it cannot be provided in a format of this nature since it exceeds the available means. Those subject to this principle shall progressively adapt their working systems to produce information in these formats.

h) Principle of security: Those subjects under article 2 and 3 shall look after the security of specially protected data that is stored in the database by adopting the necessary controlling measures, including the periodic assessment of their electronic services.

Madrid Transparency Ordinance/2016

Decide Madrid offers different instances to encourage communication between the government and the citizens, and their participation: debates, proposals, citizen voting, procedures and participatory budgeting.

One option is to create and engage in **debates** in which the citizens can discuss between them and with the Municipality issues concerning the city. A debate can lead to other initiatives within the same platform.

La plataforma facilita diferentes herramientas para fomentar la participación, entre ellas se puede consultar el manual Kit Decide para la incidencia ciudadana, con pasos e ideas para difundir y posicionar una determinada propuesta.

Secondly, there is the opportunity to pose **proposals** for the Municipality to put into action. If a proposal achieves the support of at least 1% of the electorate (27,064 voters), it moves on to the second phase for a period of 90 to 150 consecutive days. During this term, other proposals that have reached the support needed can be incorporated, with the objective of letting the citizens of Madrid participate in a debate about these proposals and finally accepting or rejecting them. After a proposal is accepted by the above-mentioned procedure, the Municipality of Madrid analyzes it and issues a technical report concerning its lawfulness, viability, competence and economic costs, considering the affected areas and the person who promotes the initiative. The citizens' proposals with a favorable report are sent to the appropriate local entity, district or institution for its implementation. Then, this entity puts the project into action and communicates the measures that have to be adopted for the execution of the proposal.



"There is a space for your project" Participatory budgeting

Processes or collaborative legislation

function allows citizen participation in the creation and modification of regulations that affect Madrid by expressing their opinion before the execution of such regulation. This mechanism is also used for policies and programs during their design phase. The Municipality invites people to participate in these processes.

Fifth, Decide Madrid is a space in which **participatory budgeting** is put into practice. The Municipality leaves a percentage of the budget for the citizens to decide its use in a direct way. In this case, the budget can be allocated to projects involving the whole city or just some of the 21 districts that are part of it. Projects are presented by the citizens to be supported and then, those which gain the most support are technically assessed. After the Municipality assesses them in relation to their lawfulness, viability and expenses, the projects can be voted. The projects with the majority of votes are the winners, within the assigned budget limits. The available budget is divided between the most voted projects, accordingly to the amount assigned to each district and to the projects of the whole city.

Lastly, the citizens can also do a follow-up of the approved projects and their implementation. To do so, they have to enable this function in the projects of their interest so as to receive the notifications about their progress. However, a citizen can check a project status, information



about its landmarks, expenses, and more, through Decide Madrid platform without the need of enabling the follow-up function.

As regards the guarantee for participation and legitimacy in the use of this space, each person who wishes to participate needs to create a personal profile. In turn, different verification levels allow different participation levels. Even though every user can take part in the debates and make proposals, only those who certify to be registered as a citizen of Madrid and are older than

16 years old may express their support and participate in polls. Additionally, it has been established that a registered person can present projects in the calls for participatory budgeting, no matter their address. However, only those that have verified themselves and are older than 16 years old can vote projects concerning all the city or projects related to one district of their choice. Even though they can choose to vote projects either for the district of their address or of their workplace or any other, they can only vote the one they have chosen to do so.



Resources

The Municipality of Madrid has assumed all the expenses of the creation and maintenance of the platform, as well as its updates and innovations.

As regards participatory budgeting, the annual calls allocated 60 million euros in 2016 and 100 million euros in 2017, 2018 and 2019. However, the budget implementation has been affected by a time lag between the moment of approval of a project and its implementation, which leads to the collapse of the operating centers. From a total of 1,214 winning projects pertaining to the period 2016-2019, only 191 of those were executed and 25 were declared unattainable up to July 1, 2019. Therefore, in 2019, there were 998 non-executed projects (82%). Currently, the execution of the pending projects has been initiated and new guidelines have been approved to solve the issues mentioned. As regards the distribution of resources, the latest provision states that 70% of the resources has to go to the district projects and 30% to projects of general

interest of the city. In turn, the percentage granted to each district is established according to its number of inhabitants. The participatory budgeting established during 2021 and 2022, for projects that will be executed between 2023 and 2024, convey an investment of 50 million euros. Similarly, the new government assuming in 2023 has the chance of making a new call for proposals, which could be discussed at the same time as the execution already mentioned.

IV Landmarks in Decide Madrid history

The initiative is characterized by the continuous innovation related to incorporating new participatory processes and improving the existing ones. In this section, the main events of the journey are stated to make evident its consolidation.

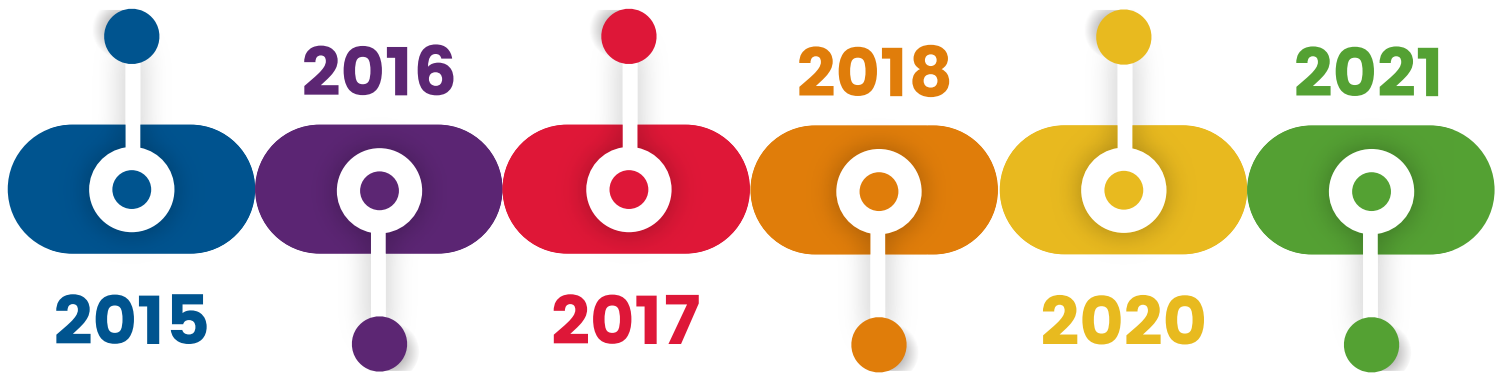
Campaign carried out for the first voting in 2017



Voting called by the Municipality for the refurbishment of Plaza de España in which 10% of the electorate took part. Two citizen's proposals reached 1% support of the electorate; consequently, they were voted and approved: "Madrid 100% sustainable" y "One pass for public transport".

Using functions of the platform to give solutions to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The use of GIS (Geographical Information Systems) and an online design was encouraged to support and enrich citizen participation.

Launching of the platform with the Proposals and Debates features.



2016
First edition of Participatory Budgeting. The citizens presented over 5,000 projects.

2018
UN Award for Best Public Service. In 2018, the UN gave the award for best public service of the year to Decide Madrid, due to its contribution to making institutions more inclusive and ensuring citizen participation in the decision-making process, creating the necessary conditions for an open and transparent governance model in which citizens are active participants.

2021
New edition of Participatory Budgeting, based on a process redesign characterized by a biennial invitation and a focus on the technical execution and implementation of projects. Apart from this, legal security measures and transparency are maximized and new tools are incorporated: query inbox, search engine, automatic moderation, chatbot, among others. Publication of reports about the results of public consultations to reflect as faithfully as possible what the citizens have expressed in their participation.



Learning

OB



I ▶ Enabling Factors

During its journey, Decide Madrid has identified some elements that help facilitate the participatory processes and consolidate the tool as a valid option in the participatory field.

- ▶ The **digital support as an inclusive mechanism** of citizens' contributions to public policies. The most popular models of participation are those based on in-person interaction, which often demands more time than the majority of citizens are willing to dedicate. Decide Madrid was a breakthrough in the habitual dynamic, allowing participation from new audiences.
- ▶ The **favorable reaction of society**, can be seen in the high number of registered individuals on the platform. The majority have verified their accounts and are active on the platform.
- ▶ The **permanent innovations** allow the review and improvement of the tool in accordance with the different identifiable needs, with the ultimate aim of promoting participation. The new changes and implementations seek to keep the level of engagement by proposing topics of public interest, asking questions to the citizens to keep on collecting suggestions and opinions that can enrich the decisions made by the Municipality, and, simultaneously, widening citizen's access to information, for example, by using the GIS. The use of this tool enables the access to a lot of mapping information such as streets, parcels, administrative divisions and other maps and drawings, and, based on this information, citizens

can participate in related public consultations.

- ▶ **Simple language** favors participation. This has been considered an essential aspect mainly in consultations related to legislation.
- ▶ **Topics that are connected to everyday life**, are more attractive, and, normally, citizens have a formed opinion and feel motivated to express it. For example, there was a major reaction to a previous consultation on a public ordinance about rooftops in pubs and restaurants (in a post-pandemic context) than to other consultations concerning technical issues.
- ▶ The **use of social networks, newsletters and email reminders**, as a complement to the website works as a good mechanism to ensure participation in key moments, such as when a process is initiated or when voting is about to happen. In fact, peaks in participation and joining the platform are registered in connection to the newsletters. In this sense, the conduction of advertising campaigns that exceed virtuality and bring the proposal to public spaces is of paramount importance to widen the number of people involved.



La ciudad
que quieres
será la ciudad
que quieras

Participa en
decide.madrid.es



"The city you want is the city you love"

Some aspects are still a challenge and require attention to prevent them from becoming obstacles to this tool.

► **Analysis and classification of citizens' contributions.** In the first approach to the platform, the idea was to create a space for citizens to express their ideas that, simultaneously, could be self-managed. With the passing of time, some issues or needs were prioritized over others. The last idea was not achieved since many proposals and comments were left without a response, which provokes frustration in those who participated. To solve this problem, some pilot strategies were put into action so as to allow the analysis of all the available data flow. One of the strategies proposes a classification by topic so that the Municipality can channel all the proposed issues. In this case, the development involves the use of machine learning and artificial intelligence aiming to organize the issues described by the citizens in accordance with the competencies of the appropriate government divisions for their analysis and reply. This will imply more involvement of different areas of the municipality since the citizens will depend on the Municipality's participation to have access to updated information so as to do a follow-up of the actions resulting from the different proposals made through the platform. At a technical level, it is a great challenge because the same word can be used in different ways and thus, be directed to a different division.

► **The delay in the execution of approved projects and proposals** is another potential obstacle and source of citizen demotivation. One of the main reasons is the complexity of the Municipality's procedures. The interaction needed between the areas to carry out decisions is not always understood by the citizens, especially if it is not explained and informed. This generates frustrations and therefore, a loss of interest and involvement. Once again, this leads to recognizing not only the importance of improving follow-up mechanisms and the delivery of results to the citizens through the platform, but also the challenge of government

transversal efficacy and coordination.

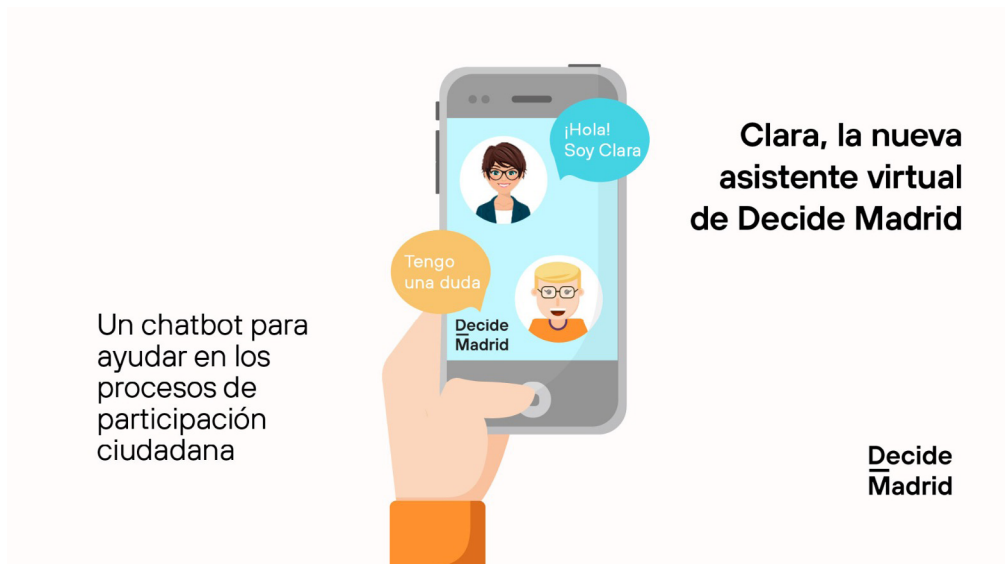
► **Low participation levels and lack of participant diversity may affect the legitimacy and efficacy of the tool.**

Therefore, it is important to foster citizen participation as much as possible and to promote diversity among the participants. It is also important to use testing mechanisms that enable a quicker identification of aspects with the best results, and thus, contributing to the improvement of the citizens' experience, as well as to use other strategies to avoid or reduce frustration in participants. Among the incorporated practices, the experience **Madrid, a Colorful Island** can be mentioned. For this proposal, a guided graphic editor was incorporated to allow people's contributions to be captured in the design of city sites. This tool encourages the participation of other types of groups. Likewise, as regards the youth, new alternatives are being explored in relation to gamification techniques.



► In line with transparency and accountability, another challenge is the need for an appropriate monitoring system, which allows its periodic assessment.

► Considering **technical difficulties** that may arise and demotivate participation or for FAQs that have a simple solution, a chatbot has been recently added to the online assistance.



A chatbot to seek help during citizen participatory processes.

III Achievements

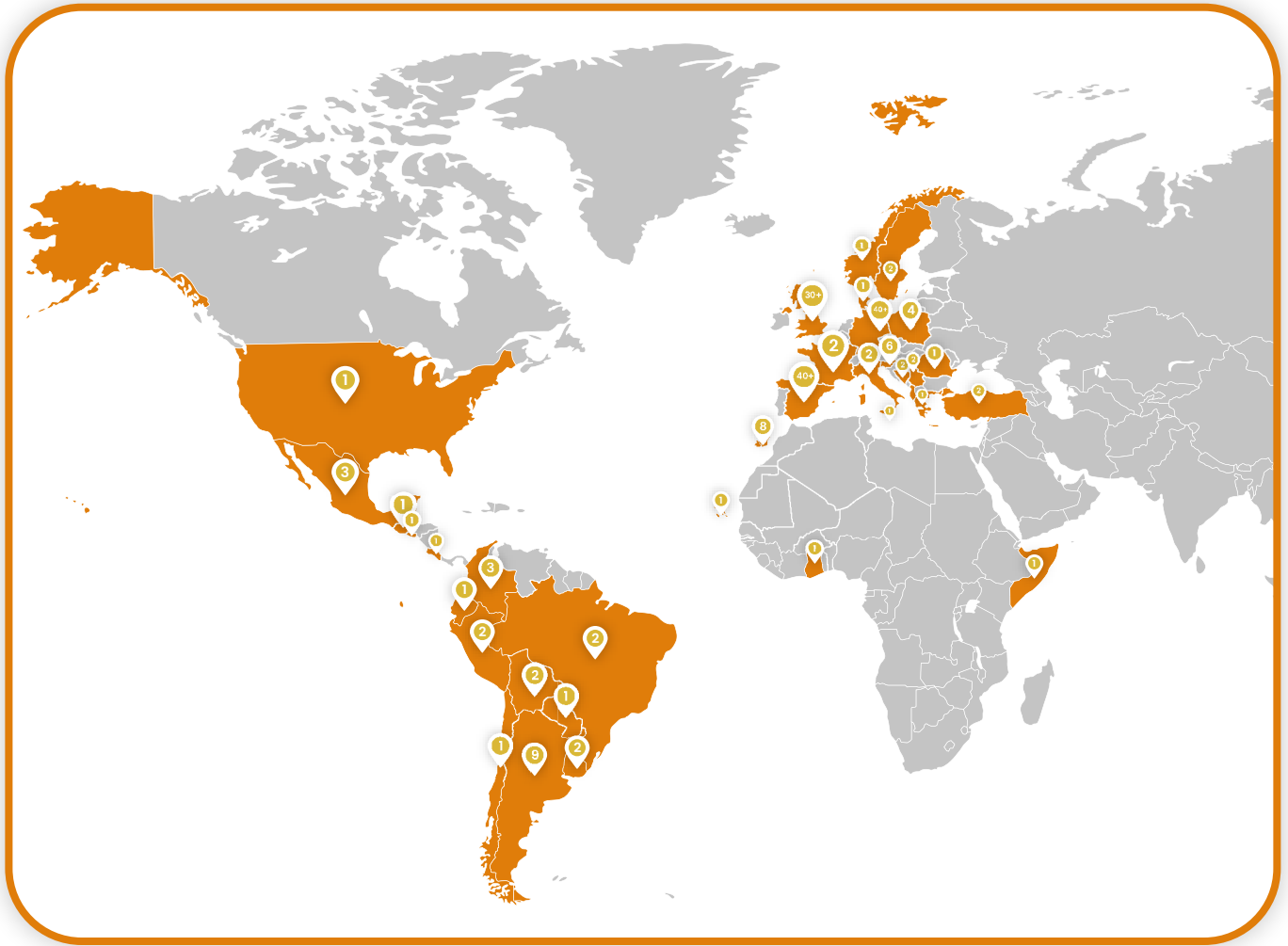
In this section, the objective is to reflect upon some numbers related to the trajectory of the platform to estimate its importance.

Decide Madrid has 490,000 users, 55% of which have verified their accounts (260,318 individuals). This number is equivalent to 11% of the city electorate, i.e., approximately 16% of actual voters in an election of representatives (using as a reference 2019 elections).

At the same time, 57% of the verified users are on the second level of participation (basic verification) and the remaining 43% are on the third level (advanced verification that allows voting). 68% of the users with advanced verification have participated in voting procedures. 29,143 proposals were presented so far and 2 of them have drawn support equivalent to 1% of the electoral register. Both proposals were voted in 2017.

At the local level, a distinct feature of Decide Madrid is its continuity over time through different management. This brings to light its consolidation and positive value shown by the public administration as well as the citizenship. As it can be seen, there are some areas to be improved, but there is no doubt about the validity, the strengths and the

potential of the platform as another tool to foster participation and governance. At the international level, the good reception the CONSUL software tool has had is an achievement, with a large number of downloads and adjustments made by public and social organizations. Numerous organizations have been able to take advantage of this development and create new tools according to their own requirements.



Source: *Consul Project*

IV ▶ Decide Madrid in Times of COVID-19

During the pandemic, the platform use was not as usual in relation to the citizen's proposals. Participation not only remained at the same level, but even increased at debates and processes called by the Municipality.

In this period, new possibilities were found, which helped to face such an unprecedented and hostile context. Below, there appear five specific initiatives undertaken during the pandemic through the open governance platform Decide Madrid.

▶ **Madrid Goes out to the Balcony** (*Madrid sale al balcón*). A space that offers the possibility to pose solidarity proposals that could be beneficial at that moment or it can be used to ask for help of any kind. In this way, the interactions among different people and associations that needed each

▶ **Being Connected** (*Conectados*). It consisted of indirect meetings via YouTube, in which Municipality specialists of any service related to an aspect of the situation triggered by the pandemic presented information of

interest to the citizens and described the response given by the Municipality to tackle that issue. Also, many concerns that were previously received by e-mail were answered. The event was announced through notifications on the platform and the registered people were invited to send questions. In total, 9 sessions were organized and had about 15,000 views. Also, 1,500 emails with questions for the specialists were received.

► **We Share Neighborhood** (*Compartimos barrio*). This initiative was aimed at creating an ecosystem of intimacy, through which agents of each sector of the city could be in contact with citizens to solve daily needs. In this way, citizens received information about what stores and services were working and their schedule according to the restrictions of that moment. Also, information was given about logistics and delivery companies that could be of help to those people who were isolated or who were part of a risk group. Lastly, citizens were informed about the social organizations that were available to render assistance services, for example, to tackle gender or domestic violence. The organizations could register indicating their location, and they could present an informative note about which course of action they could take in that period.

► **Supportive Madrid** (*Madrid solidaria*). In the last phase of 2020, Decide Madrid incorporated a brand new space in order to highlight those entities that had prompted supportive actions, so as to grant them well-deserved recognition.

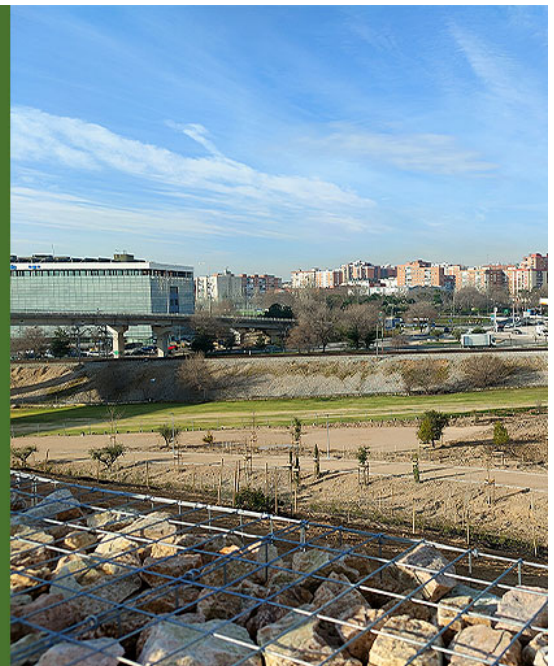
► **LAZOTEA.** This initiative created an environment of debate in neighborhoods, so that people could face lockdown by devoting their energy to the discussion about the problems and needs of their closest surroundings.

Decide_Madrid

Bosque Metropolitano

Bosque de los Abrazos Perdidos

Memorial en homenaje a las
víctimas de la COVID-19



The “Woods of the Lost Hugs” was the name given to this tribute by the citizens of Madrid in a public consultation. Each tree is named after a deceased person due to the pandemic.

The technology transfer potential of Decide Madrid is closely related to the fact that it is an open, free and easily adaptable software and it has been made available to several organizations around the world. This is so due to a decision taken by the Municipality in this regard. In fact, in the first period, its technical team advised public or social organizations that needed it. Afterward, it was decided to devote efforts to the innovations and developments that were necessary to encourage participation in the city itself. Thus, it was chosen to channel questions and management of the software through the **Consul Democracy Foundation**.

From its beginnings, two objectives coexisted. On one hand, one objective was to develop the software using the Municipality technical team in order to permanently adapt it to identified needs. On the other hand, the intention was to develop a software with a global view, so that it could be used by all those organizations that would like to encourage participation by resorting to new technologies. This involved fostering the creation of individuals with critical thinking regarding digital participation, which could be enriched by sharing all experiences. In some way, this has been brought to life through **Consul Democracy Foundation** and the **Consul Project**.

It is important to emphasize that many of the features of CONSUL software are optional, and if new organizations decide to use this software, they can select those features that best suit their reality, characteristics and possibilities. This broadens the opportunities for the software usage. Another strength is that the software encompasses several languages. Summarizing, the tool is highly applicable to other realities and institutions, with the only exception of the access to the technologies and to the technological abilities of the population, an aspect which is important to consider as well.

As pointed out before, currently Decide Madrid is independent of CONSUL. It has become a 100% municipal platform.

At the same time, Madrid collaborates with other related initiatives. This is the case of the agreement with **RED.ES**, a public entity at the national level that promotes

the inclusion of new technologies in public administrations. Madrid together with Zaragoza, La Coruña, and Santiago de Compostela is developing a project supported by European funds in order to boost open government in those four cities. Among other actions, this project has involved the collaboration among cities for the transfer and adaptation of Decide Madrid experience.

Moreover, in February 2021, **The Participatory Group** was formed. It is a community of practices that is open to local and regional governments, institutions or universities from around the world, whose mission is to foster collaboration among its members for the exchanging of good practices and joint work in order to design new and better participation techniques and make participatory processes more accessible, attractive and efficient. Currently, it consists of 62 member cities and regions, and 6 collaborative institutions: The Citizen Foundation (Argentina), the Kaleidos.red Foundation (Spain), the Presidency of the Republic of Uruguay, the Universities of Buenos Aires (Argentina), of Guadalajara (Mexico), and the National University of Distance Education (Spain).

CONSUL

- Free software with AGPLV3.0 license available in GitHub.
- Based on Ruby and Rails.
- The database uses SQL language.
- It uses the Apache HTTP server.
- 135 institutions in 35 countries have created participation spaces based on CONSUL, adapting it to their needs.
- 90 million users around the world are part of citizen participation platforms that were developed from CONSUL.

VI

Notes on Participation

Decide Madrid only registers participants' information related to age, sex and district. When a process finishes, for example, a statistics report is made which gathers the main information about the participation in such process. From that information, it can be confirmed that the current model of digital participation has a greater acceptance and importance among people between 36 and 47 years old, and it shows lower participation among elders over 65 years old and among individuals between 16 and 30 years old. People under the age of 30 barely represent 6% of the registered users in Decide Madrid. People over 65 represent 17% of the registered users in Decide Madrid. Thus, it is revealed that efforts must be made to diversify participation.

Another interesting insight is that all the registered users have stated their

gender in Decide Madrid: 52.9% identify themselves as women and 47.1% as men. In relation to the number of users, the general tendency is to steady growth.

Among the strategies implemented to increase and diversify participation, campaigns and meetings are held at collective spaces, such as cultural institutions, adult care centers, organizations and district boards, just to mention some.

Moreover, pilot projects linked to the participation of children and teenagers in the city are being designed and developed. The aim is to interconnect them to schools of different districts in order to explore possibilities to establish participation channels for these groups.

Year/Semester	Registered users without verification	Registered users with verification	Total users
December 2015	35.251	28.070	63.321
June 2016	90.749	78.495	169.244
December 2016	100.499	86.113	186.612
June 2017	166.506	162.416	328.922
December 2017	180.557	180.456	361.013
June 2018	202.052	200.933	402.985
December 2018	219.305	208.527	427.832
June 2019	241.897	221.185	463.082
December 2019	244.068	221.936	466.004
June 2020	245.887	222.574	468.461
December 2020	246.480	223.094	469.574
June 2021	247.267	224.609	471.876
December 2021	251.831	231.037	482.868
June 2022	260.227	236.508	496.735

Source: Decide Madrid



Opinions on Decide Madrid

04





As is the case with changes and institutions, Decide Madrid was the subject of discussion in the new public organization. Over time, the software has been finally kept but it was integrated into the municipal computer systems, in order to transform it from the municipal computing equipment, and not externally. Therefore, as the time when by, the software consolidated and was accepted as a tool in the municipal administration.

Awareness actions undertaken by the Participation Office, and the sharing by word of mouth (from division to division) of the learning experience and the advantages found when the tool was included have contributed to this consolidation and acceptance. Generally, these actions have consisted of either training or solutions offered in response to a need of a certain municipal area. Another interesting situation has arisen due to consultations that have been defined as compulsory by the Municipality. In these cases, the area under consideration is accompanied by

"Decide Madrid is a support; it brings that unity in participation that the areas don't."

Interview with municipal representatives

the Citizen Participation Office to prepare and launch the consultation on Decide Madrid website. The experiences turn out to be pedagogical to both parties, since the municipal agencies discover the pros of the platform, and they also suggest adjustments that would be beneficial for the sector or topic in question. It has also happened that once an agency has completed a process through the platform, not only requires its use again, but also recommends the tool to other municipal areas.

From the representatives from the public administration viewpoint, this is a powerful tool, and it is positively valued by the different opportunities that it offers. Among the benefits, it stands out the possibility of enabling meetings, debates and coordination with agents related to the topic in question, creating mutual knowledge among different perspectives.

The creation of a space for participation at an individual level, something that did not exist before, is highly appreciated.

Also, opinions collected indicate that it has contributed to simplifying the language, making information more accessible for the citizens in general. The platform requires ideas to be expressed in a simple way, and, if necessary, visual elements may be added so as to ensure a full understanding. The information must be concise and complete at the same time. This implies learning. It requires training not only on the part of the public administration, but also on citizenship.

Little by little, it can be seen that it is becoming something transversal, contributing positively to the public

"The people who are in the General Participation Office, they are quite active people. There are moments in which instead of us going to them, they go looking, and they go telling you "Here we are. What can we do?" and that sometimes is more personal than a technological platform. So (...) I think that the most important thing it has is the support of a General Office and some human resources that are looking out for that and that are promoting it. If it only were a platform and just that, with one person in the maintenance service, I think it wouldn't work."

Interview with municipal representatives

“One interesting change was the way of presenting the ideas. The documents that were being prepared in our office (...) we had to use plain language, accurate images, so you were no longer making those technical and obscure documents. We had to make a great effort because those documents (...) are not that rough, they are documents with images, with many photos, because when the public information arrives, I want people to know, to give me their opinion on what we are doing; therefore, the form has also changed.”

Interview with municipal representatives

service, which can legitimate it since the government and the citizens are brought closer. Maybe, in the future, provided there are more binding consultations, it could affect the relationship among the areas of the Municipality.

Regarding the areas of improvement, it is of great importance to expand the participation spectrum so that it can really reach all sectors. What is alarming is the absence of those who do not have access to technology or have not yet developed the ability to manage virtual spaces. Moreover, it is of paramount importance to find methods for children and teenagers' inclusion in the space.

Another potential element that may open up opportunities for training is to supplement this idea with in-person instances and the existing collective spaces to achieve a greater effect. As it happens inside the administration, face-to-face meetings are more valued.

There exists concern about the citizens' capacity to learn from assessments and feedback. This may prevent raising awareness about the help that the platform has brought and the aspects that still involve the possibility of improvement.



The Viewpoint of Community Representatives

What if bad ideas are supported? Even if good ideas only move forward, is it fair that these ideas may be heard even though they may not be the most needed ones? What happens with other criteria such as equity when distributing resources? What if someone manipulates the space to benefit his/her own interest? If Decide Madrid is a tool, wouldn't it be necessary to establish some goals of citizen participation so as to contribute to the fulfillment of the platform's objective?

The previous questions summarize the main doubts, the concerns that arose at the inception of Decide Madrid. Some of them were dealt with in practice. For example, it was proven that it is not easy

“As a tool, its appearance meant a great progress compared to what existed previously (...) I positively praise it, but it seems to me that it is not enough.”

Workshop with community representatives

for a flawed proposal to gain support and move to the stage of voting. Other questions, however, remain unanswered and the challenges that users face on the platform are still present.

If the most active citizens are consulted, they express their great appreciation for the initiative, but, at the same time, they find multiple areas that need improvement. In most cases, these areas coincide with the ones that the Municipality itself and the representatives from the public administration point out. The main element is the need to coordinate and somehow supplement this with the existing collective participatory spaces. In Madrid, there exist 185 neighborhood associations that are federated. They are present in all 122 neighborhoods that form the 21 districts of the city. The creation of opportunities for individual participation is highly appreciated. Nevertheless, what is questioned is that there aren't methods to boost them along with other instances of participation. In short, there is a great concern about efforts being wasted when it is possible to combine them. Specifically, the fact that a profile for the entities inside the platform is not allowed is something questioned. It is imperative to find balance and coordination between what is individual and collective.

Regarding the participatory budgets, competition sparks among the neighborhoods of the same sector or district since city and district levels are established. In order to avoid false

expectations, questions regarding the moment when the viability study is conducted arise, considering that no impracticable proposal should be supported. This could be solved with a prior intervention on the part of the corresponding technical areas.

A suggestion under consideration would be to undergo tests for determining the possible duration of the processes so as to avoid demotivation. Regarding the delays in the execution of approved projects, it is clear that this is not a problem regarding Decide Madrid, but it is a problem related to the bureaucracy of the Municipality itself.

"Among the most interesting things that Decide Madrid offers is that it is an inner project from the Municipality, and it was designed in open code. This is quite unknown, and maybe it is one of its biggest advantage."

Workshop with community representatives

"Then, precisely another reason why people don't end up agreeing with this kind of projects is because of the difficulty at the moment of carrying them out. People participate and vote, but until all this process takes place, settles on and transforms into something people can see, it takes a lot of time; so people no longer feel like participating."

Workshop with community representatives

Another area of disagreement is related to the fact that the debates on the platform have unsuitable arguments, maybe as a consequence of Internet impunity. It cannot be called anonymity in its literal sense, but it can be a result of debates not being in person.

The bias of participation is also of concern, which tends to focus on a community that has a high level of education, has access to technology and is interested in public topics. Hence, affirmative actions are needed for the inclusion of other sectors, specifically the youth, considering that its lack of participation is due to not being aware of the existence of this space.

Summarizing, it can be said that this critical analysis has the only purpose of focusing on the importance of citizen participation, and the complexity it can imply, without diminishing Decide Madrid's achievements.

An aerial photograph of a city, likely Madrid, showing a dense urban landscape with many buildings and a prominent ornate building in the foreground. The image is overlaid with a large white '05' and the word 'Conclusion' in white text. The sky is filled with soft, golden clouds.

Conclusion

05



05. conclusion

Summarizing an experience implies learning from the revision of the whole process, rebuilding contexts and turning points, decisions, evolution, and problems that shape this experience and that offer multiple interpretations and explanations of the achievements.

There is no doubt that focusing on initiatives that foster citizen participation requires tools that open up the dialogue between different parties, each of them with an opinion based on their roles and at different time frames. It is an exercise that starts from the description to finally achieve a stage of criticism and reflection. When we reflect upon the journey made, the changes implemented and the expectations about the improvements needed, we promote new adjustments and decisions that shape the instrument to comply with its ultimate objective.

Additionally, being able to share experiences and doing so during the register process implies being open to hearing other voices and getting to know other journeys that may be valuable and may bring innovative ideas into this practice.

Lastly, socializing our register and shared information leads us to have an open dialogue with those that participated in some of these experiences but not in the systematization, and with those who are interested in the topics developed, either with a study objective or intervention objective in their own communities.

From this perspective, with these pages, we hope to provide information to discuss about and innovate in the tools cities use and to align them with this new model of governance. Mainly, the objective is to contribute to strengthening citizen participation and participatory democracy.



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06

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Municipality of Córdoba (Argentina): <https://www.cordoba.gob.ar/>

Municipality of Barcelona (Spain): <https://www.barcelona.cat/es/>

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Participatory Budget of the city of Córdoba: <https://cordoba.gob.ar/areas-de-gobierno/secretaria-de-participacion-ciudadana/>

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