

Strategic partnership funded by Interreg Baltic Sea Region
Programme
Project: “Empowering Participatory Budgeting in the Baltic Sea
Region – EmPaci”

Documentation of 1st PB pilot

Vidzeme (Latvia)

(for the full report of all pilot municipalities, see main document)

GoA 2.3 Output 2

December 2021



EUROPEAN
REGIONAL
DEVELOPMENT
FUND

EmPaci

Status: Final

Responsible for the content solely publisher/presenter; it does not reflect the views of the European Commission or any related financial body. Those institutions do not bear responsibility for the information set out in the material.

Content

Vidzeme/Latvia	3
1. Situation before the PB implementation	3
2. Development of the 1st PB pilot	4
3. Implementation of the 1st PB pilot	7
4. Results of 1st PB pilot	10
5. Assessment of 1st PB pilot and enhancement for 2nd PB pilot	15

Vidzeme/Latvia

1. Situation before the PB implementation

Municipality-related factors

1. The PB is implemented for

- ☐ District
 ☐ Municipality
 ☒ Planning region

2. The budget cycle of the public authority is

- ☒ Annual
 ☐ Bi-annual

3. The financial situation of the public authority characterised by

- ☐ Excess revenues
 ☒ Nearly balanced revenues and expenses
 ☐ Excess expenses

4. With respect to the repayment of incurred debt, the public authority is confronted with

- ☒ No difficulties
 ☐ Difficulties to repay debts over an extended period of time

5. In the public authority, the council always has the final decision right about the implementation of voted PB projects (by local/national) laws and regulations:

- ☒ Yes
 ☐ No

If yes,

It is prescribed by local/national laws.

- ☐ Yes
 ☐ No

It is prescribed by an own PB regulation.

- ☒ Yes
 ☐ No

The final decision on the projects supported in the Vidzeme Culture Program is made by the Council of the State Cultural Capital Fund.

Citizen-related factors

6. The citizenry is composed as follows:

6a. Number of citizens:	183 938
6b. Share of females (% of citizens):	54,3%
6c. Share of persons aged below 18 (% of citizens):	14%
6d. Share of persons aged 66 and above (% of citizens):	21,5%
6e. Share of unemployed persons (% of citizens):	7,8%

6f. Share of unemployed females (% of unemployed persons): 5,4%

6g. Particularities of the population are the following: -

PB process-related factors

7. PB is prescribed by law in the country / public authority:

☐ Yes ☒ No

7a. If yes, based on this law / regulation:

8. PB was implemented before the EmPaci PB pilot:

☐ Yes ☒ No

2. Development of the 1st PB pilot

Citizen- and PB process-related factors

9. PB is implemented to realize the following objectives:

1st PB Pilot activity is a step towards promoting public involvement in the decision-making of state and local government institutions, including the distribution of the budget for various initiatives.

1st PB in Vidzeme was introduced by implementing the Vidzeme cultural program (VCP) which is an essential financial instrument that promotes and ensures the cultural process in Vidzeme. The funding of the VCP has been received from the State Culture Capital Foundations (SCCFs) program "Latvia's State Forests" Support for Cultural Programs in the Regions".

It is important to ensure the possibility for every inhabitant to become a part of the process of creating cultural values, therefore public participation to be important. Vidzeme Planning Region (VPR) has actively analyzed and thought about the tools that promote the involvement of the population in decision-making, for example, in decisions also on setting the priorities of the Culture Program and project implementation. The VPR considers the involvement of the public to be important, partly allowing it to become acquainted with cultural projects, and the involvement of the population is seen at two levels. One is the public survey, which determines the areas in which project applicants will be able to submit projects. The second is a public vote to allow the public to get acquainted with the submitted projects, their content and intentions. The result of the citizens' vote will give a view of the public's perceptions of cultural activities in Vidzeme and will allow decision-makers to better understand the needs of the society.

10. The following target groups are aimed to be involved in PB:

Residents of Vidzeme region, representatives of the cultural sector, non-governmental organizations, representatives of local communities, municipalities of Vidzeme region.

10a. Reasons, why these specific target groups were selected

To determine the main priorities in the field of culture, which should be included in the 2020 VCP, we invited the residents of Vidzeme to express their opinion by filling in a survey.

In accordance with the four priorities that received the most public support, the Culture Program Regulations were developed.

Vidzeme municipalities, non-governmental organizations, representatives of the cultural field and representatives of local communities are the main target groups that annually prepare and submit cultural project initiatives to the VCP.

11. Based on the analysis of the citizen survey, the following needs of citizens were taken into account for PB implementation:

The citizens' survey was conducted in one of the municipalities of Vidzeme region – Gulbene.

Gulbene municipality showed in-depth interest in PB process and VPR considered this municipality as potentially suitable and very interested as a research object, as well as saw realistic possibilities to reach appropriate population size so that the obtained results can be qualitatively interpreted. The municipality actively participated in the dissemination of the survey, but after collecting the questionnaires, Vidzeme Planning Region compiled the obtained information and shared it with both EmPaci partners (using the elaborated matrix) and Gulbene municipality. The results of the survey showed the interest of citizens in the implementation of PB processes. This facilitated the decision-making on the implementation of the PB in Gulbene municipality, as well as provided important information on public opinion for the successful implementation of the VPR PB pilot.

PB process-related factors

12. The following steps were undertaken to develop ideas and concepts for the PB process

VPR has initiated meetings with stakeholders to discuss PB design (the Coordinator of VCP, the Head of Culture Capital Foundation of Latvia and experts from Culture Capital Foundation of Latvia, the Council of the Culture Capital Foundation of Latvia).

The citizen survey for culture priorities were aimed to encourage society's initiative to express its views on culture activities that should be funded. The survey results were considered when the Statute of Vidzeme Culture Programme 2020 was prepared, identifying the funded culture areas.

12a. Internal training activities were organised:

☐ Yes ☒ No

13. Citizens were involved in the development of the PB cycle the following way: N/A

14. Citizens were informed about PB initiation in the following way:

Several communication channels, such as the VPR website and the social network, were used to inform the public about the launch of the PB. An informative letter was sent to all municipalities of Vidzeme region with a request to distribute a questionnaire on voting on Vidzeme cultural priorities.

The citizens' vote has been widely reflected in national and local information resources in Latvia, such as Latvia's public broadcaster, the National news agency, social networks, as well as local media and local government information resources.

14a. An own dissemination & communication plan was developed for this:

☐ Yes ☒ No

15. These were the (internal and external) main promoters and success factors in the development of PB:

-

16. These were the main opponents and hindrances in the development of PB and it was coped with these in the following way:

Due to the epidemiological situation and national restrictions:

- Voting in person was not possible to organize. Only online voting platform was used.
- Several initiatives, such as large public events, were not supported because they were intended to attract large numbers of visitors.

Large number of applications received. This required an impressive number of human resources to process the information in a short time, to place it on a voting platform.

- A possible solution - supplement the online platform with an electronic application form.

17. A project team for the PB development was formed:

☒ Yes ☐ No

17a. If yes, the project team was composed of the following functions and it was organized as follows:

The PB pilot team consisted of the EmPaci project team in Vidzeme: a project manager, a communication expert, and a Steering Committee (SC) SG representative. The VCP Coordinator and VPR IT Specialist were also involved in the pilot team. To successfully implement the pilot, consultations with external experts and stakeholders was carried out.

17b. When and where are different types of resources (people, knowledge, funding) needed and made available in the pilot cases

Consultations with the organizations/municipalities that have implemented the PB are necessary and very useful in preparing own PB model. When planning an IT solution to ensure public voting, it is necessary to involve specialists to consult on the best solutions.

18. For the IT part / online implementation of the PB, the following considerations and steps were taken:

Existing online voting platforms, such as manabalss.lv, projektubanka.lv, balso.riga.lv that would be suitable for public voting on project applications of VCP were observed. The voting platform balso.riga.lv, developed by the Riga City Municipality to implement the participation budgeting program for the city development, was the most appropriate for our PB model.

Given the specifics, it was decided to partially adapt concept of balso.riga.lv and create a customized IT solution - voting platform especially for VCP – balso.vidzeme.lv.

20. The following documents, manuals, regulations were developed and used during the development of the PB process:

Regulations "Citizens' Voting for Vidzeme Culture Program Projects". These rules were available on the voting platform, together with information on the electronic voting process.

IT model/ citizens voting platform elaborated - balso.vidzeme.lv

3. Implementation of the 1st PB pilot

21. These are the general steps of the PB process after final approval:

A citizens' survey on the cultural priorities

It was possible to submit the survey electronically and on the spot.

- 1) Elaboration of regulations VPR organized market research - procurement for the creation of a citizen voting platform. "Citizens' Voting for Vidzeme Culture Program Projects"
- 2) Market research - procurement for the creation of a citizen online voting platform. Development of online voting platform balso.vidzeme.lv
- 3) Submission of project applications – 02.03.2021.-27.03.2021.
- 4) Public vote - voting for cultural initiatives took place from April 8 to April 23, 2020
- 5) Expert forum, assessment on submitted projects, declaration of winners.
Evaluation of cultural initiatives according to the program criteria. Announcement of winners.
- 6) **The implementation period for cultural initiatives** from May 2020 to 15 December 2020

21a. Total annual PB budget (city + district projects)

143 000 EUR (The funding of the VCP has been received from the State Culture Capital Foundations (SCCFs) program "Latvia's State Forests" Support for Cultural Programs in the Regions".

21b. Annual PB budget per citizen: N/A

21c. If applicable, budget earmarked for related internal work, communications etc.: N/A

21d. The PB has been designed as direct democratic tool (citizens' vote = final decision):

☐ Yes ☒ No

21e. The PB is designed for

☒ Region/City projects only ☐ District projects only ☐ Both

21f. Persons eligible participating in the PB:

Age limit for voters - from the age of 16 onwards

Project applicants, according to the regulations are legal entities.

Definition of persons: Project applications can be submitted for activities planned to be implemented in the territory of Vidzeme region.

Number of persons (in total): 155 591 (Age 16+ in Vidzeme region)

Number of person (% of citizens): 84,6%

21g. The following actions were taken to ensure that only eligible persons made proposals / voted:

Online voting on the submitted projects was possible on a specially designed online voting platform. Legitimate voting was ensured by means of authentication, which verifies personal data. The eligibility of project applicants (legal entities) was checked in accordance with the submitted supporting documents.

22. These were the specific dates planned for the PB process after final approval of the PB development:

A citizens' survey on the cultural priorities: 13.12.2019. – 13.01.2020.

Submission of project applications: 02.03.2021.-27.03.2021.

Public vote: 08.04.2020.-23.04.2020.

Expert forum, assessment on submitted projects, declaration of winners.

The implementation period for cultural initiatives - May 2020 to 15 December 2020

23. These amendments were made to the plan due to the COVID-19 pandemic:

Consultations on the preparation of project proposals for cultural initiatives and public participation activities were organized only by e-mail or phone. A face-to-face meeting with stakeholders and training for cultural initiative project applicants was cancelled due to covid-19 pandemic.

The on-site voting module, which was developed and integrated into the online voting platform, was not used due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

24. For citizen involvement in the PB-phases (e.g. information, proposal, co-creation, voting phase), the following steps were taken and events organized:

Active communication work followed, when the developed priority voting questionnaire (survey) was sent to local municipalities with an invitation to place it on their websites. The coordinator of the VCP also played an important role, participating very actively in disseminating information and inviting citizens to get involved and express their opinion on cultural processes in the region. The questionnaire was sent out to local government public institutions: libraries, music schools, art schools, culture houses, implementers of previous years' cultural program projects etc. At the same time, VPR communicated on various social media channels. There were municipalities that undertook to distribute the printed questionnaires to their residents.

VIDZEMES KULTŪRAS PROGRAMMA 2020



A visual used in communication to call for a vote on cultural project initiatives.

A visual used in the communication, inviting to express an opinion and fill in a questionnaire on cultural priorities, which should be supported in the Vidzeme Culture Program 2020.



opinion and fill in a questionnaire on cultural priorities, which should be supported in the

25. For the activation of specific target groups of the PB, the following steps were taken and events organized:

- To reach an audience that does not have access to digital tools or does not have the necessary skills to use them, the citizens' survey on cultural priorities was available in printed form in municipal institutions.
- The developed online voting platform has an integrated on-site voting module that allows citizens to vote on cultural project initiatives in municipal institutions, where their vote is accepted.
- By informing the public about the PB process and the opportunity to vote on the submitted cultural project initiatives, various communication channels were used to reach as many different groups of the population as possible.
- Extensive work was invested in developing the citizens' voting platform and in communication on the submission of cultural initiatives, as well as the PB pilot and citizens' voting process.
- The citizens' vote on projects submitted for VCP in 2020 has been widely reflected in national and local information resources in Latvia, such as, VPR website and local municipalities' websites; publicity in local and national news media (TV, newspapers, news agency, online media and other channels); social media campaigning carried out.

25a. For the activation of women into the PB, the following steps were taken and events organized:

In the case of cultural initiative project applicants, according to the regulations, they are legal entities. We obtained information on how many of them were women or men if we collect data on the signatories of the organization. In total, we received 149 applications for cultural initiative projects - 75 of them were submitted by organizations where the

signatory is a man and in 74 cases a woman. 69 project applications were supported - in 34 cases the signatory was a man and in 35 cases a woman.

26. The following actions were taken to provide information about PB in a citizen-friendly manner:

Communication channels were used, which target the general public and / or certain specific target groups, such as people in the field of culture (applicants of cultural projects), residents of Vidzeme municipalities, people who are interested in cultural events in their territory or elsewhere and vote for, in their view, the most important project ideas). Databases were created for addressing specific target groups in person (by e-mail) (representatives of the cultural field, such as cultural coordinators in municipalities in the region), information on social networks, announcements to regional and national media, as well as municipalities in the region to inform the widest possible audience throughout Vidzeme.

27. The following actions were especially taken to achieve a high participation rate:

Communication channels were used, which have a wide potential target audience - regional media (newspapers, television, online news media, etc.), municipal information resources (websites, printed publications), as well as individuals were addressed in person by e-mail. Within the framework of the social network campaign, paid advertisements were also created, the settings of which provide an opportunity to distribute the advertisement to precisely selected target audiences - residents of specific territories, age groups, gender. Communication activities were planned in a balanced way during the implementation of the pilot activity, gradually informing the public, which was most active by directly inviting to submit cultural projects and later vote on the submitted initiatives. The effectiveness of communication activities is evidenced by the wide publicity (information disseminated by both local and national media, niche media, municipalities), which is reflected in media monitoring, the number of submitted cultural projects (149) and more than 8 thousand people who voted and expressed their views. on cultural projects.

28. The following steps were taken to train the own actors for PB:

The planned training event for local governments and cultural initiative project applicants in March 2020 was cancelled due to the virus pandemic and national restrictions.

29. If applicable, the following steps were taken to train actors in other municipalities (outside EmPaci-project):

VPR established close cooperation with Gulbene municipality, which is located in Vidzeme region, providing the necessary support and knowledge gained in the EmPaci project partnership to help Gulbene municipality implement PB.

4. Results of 1st PB pilot

If as a 1st step, the **priorities** were to be voted by citizens:

30a. Priorities for voting predetermined:

- (1) Development of creative initiatives in the region
- (2) Preservation and promotion of intangible cultural heritage
- (3) Public involvement in the formation of the cultural process
- (4) Preservation and promotion of the common natural and cultural heritage
- (5) Local history
- (6) Preservation and promotion of material cultural heritage
- (7) Professional national and international art and culture in the region

(8) Events in county libraries and museums

30b. The voting for priorities was conducted the following way:

The priorities of the Culture Program were selected on the basis of the goals and tasks set in the Vidzeme Region Development Strategy, as well as the strategic goals and program settings of the National Culture Capital Fund.

Eight priorities were selected, and a questionnaire was prepared, inviting citizens to rank them in order of priority.

The developed priority voting questionnaire was sent to local municipalities with an invitation to place it on their websites. The coordinator of the cultural program also sent out a questionnaire to local government public institutions: libraries, music schools, art schools, culture houses, implementers of previous years' cultural program projects etc. At the same time, VPR communicated on various social media channels. There were municipalities that undertook to distribute the printed questionnaires to their residents.

Based on the results of the survey, four priorities were included in the VCP. Cultural initiative project ideas must meet one of the four priorities in order to be supported and financed.

30c. Number of citizens participating: 726

30d. Participation rate (% of citizens):

30e. Number of votes received in total: 726

30f. Priorities voted for:

Of the eight cultural priorities, the following four were identified as the most important in the citizens' vote:

- 1) Development of creative initiatives in the region
- 2) Preservation and promotion of intangible cultural heritage
- 3) Public involvement in the formation of the cultural process
- 4) Preservation and promotion of the common natural and cultural heritage.

31. The PB was limited to certain areas of the budget or priorities of programmes only:

☒ Yes ☐ No

31a. Proposals and votes were limited to the following areas / priorities:

Proposals must meet one of the four priorities to be supported and financed.

Proposal phase:

32a. The proposal phase was implemented in the following way:

The submission of project applications for cultural initiatives took place from 2 to 27 March, 2020. After the application deadline, information on each application (short summary, descriptive photo and requested funding) was published on the voting platform.

32b. Number of citizens participating:

According to the conditions, project applications in the Vidzeme Culture Program can be submitted only by legal entities.

32c. Participation rate (% of citizens):

32d. Number of proposals received in total: 149

32e. Main categories of proposals:

Cultural initiatives were submitted in line with the thematic priorities of the program:

- 1) Development of creative initiatives in the region
- 2) Preservation and promotion of intangible cultural heritage
- 3) Public involvement in the formation of the cultural process
- 4) Preservation and promotion of the common natural and cultural heritage.

In 2020, 69 projects were supported, 261 different activities were implemented (224 events, 23 publications, 4 games, 9 books, CDs).

32f. Information provided to citizens after completion of the proposal phase:

Confirmation of received submitted project and information that a summary of the project, a descriptive photo and the requested funding will be published on the voting platform.

Feasibility check:**33a. A feasibility check of proposals or voted projects was implemented:**

☒ Yes, of the proposals ☒ Yes, of the voted projects ☐ No

33b. The feasibility check was implemented in the following way:

A feasibility check, considering the program criteria approved in regulation, was carried out by the expert's commission. The commission consisted of 3 representatives of VPR and representatives of funding provider organizations: State Cultural Capital Fund; the "Latvia's State Forests".

33c. If applicable, political decision-makers were involved in the feasibility check in the following way: N/A

33d. If applicable, citizens making specific proposals were involved in the following way: N/A

33e. The difficulties that became apparent through the feasibility check:

- Large number of applications received. This required an impressive amount of human resources to process the information in a short time, in order to place it on a voting platform.
- Given the situation with the Covid-19 pandemic and the restrictions announced in the country several initiatives, such as large public events, were not supported because they were intended to attract large numbers of visitors.

33f. As a result of the feasibility check, the PB process should be changed as follows:

Following the feasibility check, it was concluded that several project applications did not meet the administrative criteria. Therefore, it was decided for PB 2021, to publish only those projects that had passed the administrative criteria.

In order to simplify the submission of project applications, it was decided to supplement the voting platform with an electronic project application form.

33g. Ratio of ideas given vrs. plans that make it to voting stage:

All submitted project applications were published on the voting platform and put to the public vote. Of the 149 projects submitted, 69 were approved after a vote and a feasibility check.

Voting phase:**34a. The voting phase was implemented in the following way**

Public vote: 08.04.2020.-23.04.2020.

Online voting took place on the created voting platform balso.vidzeme.lv. Given the situation with the spread of the Covid-19 virus and the national restrictions, it was not possible to vote on the spot, although the developed voting platform provided such a possibility.

The VPR carried out an information campaign informing about the start of voting, the newly established voting platform, and the opportunity to get involved in defining cultural processes in the region and to decide on project applications to be implemented.

34b. Each citizen was given the following number of votes: Citizens had the opportunity to vote for 1 - 3 different projects

34b. Number of citizens voting: 8 925

34c. Participation rate (% of citizens):**34d. Number of votes received in total: 12 364****34e. Results of the votes (which projects with which amounts and votes were winning):**

In total 69 projects were approved, allocating available funding of 143 000,00 EUR.

34e. Total PB budget realized / implemented: 143 000 EUR**34f. Was part of the total PB budget unused?**

☒ No ☐ Yes, unused

34g. Information provided to citizens after completion of the voting phase:

After the end of the voting, on the platform balso.vidzeme.lv, information is placed next to each project on whether it has received support or not.

It also shows how many votes each initiative has received.

34h. Extent to which the approved projects can be realized:

-

34i. Timeframe planned to realize the approved projects:

May 2020 to 15 December 2020

34j. Extent to which citizens were involved in the realization of the approved projects:

In 2020, 69 projects were supported, 261 different activities were implemented (224 events, 23 publications, 4 games, 9 books, CDs), which involved more than 21 650 visitors (excluding readers and TV viewers).

35. Citizens were informed about the completion of the 1st PB pilot in the following ways:

Information on cultural events and activities implemented within the framework of approved projects was regularly published on the website of Vidzeme Planning Region.

36. Other actors involved (e.g. local council) were informed about the completion of the 1st PB pilot in the following ways:

Meetings have been held with the stakeholders involved in the implementation of the PB pilot (State Cultural Capital Fund, "Latvia's State Forests", Ministry of Culture) informing about the PB result

5. Assessment of 1st PB pilot and enhancement for 2nd PB pilot

37. Objectives for PB as specified in Question 9 were reached as follows:

The public vote implemented in 2020 showed the high interest of Vidzeme residents in cultural projects, promoted the recognition of the Vidzeme cultural program on a much wider scale than before.

The conclusions reached on public voting will be valuable both for the VPR, promoting the public participation process, and for local governments and public administration institutions to develop mechanisms for involving citizens in decision-making.

38. Besides the objectives for PB as specified in Question 9, the following additional issues can be seen as a success for the PB pilot:

- **Visibility**
 - By involving the public in decision-making, a much wider publicity of the Vidzeme cultural program has been achieved.
- **Transparency**
 - Applicants are more responsible towards the information provided in the application, which has become publicly available.
 - less opportunity to include misleading information in the application.
- **Self-promotion of submitted initiatives**
 - There is still a part of society who find it unacceptable for an applicant to promote their idea and invite the public to vote (for example, through networks of the applicant's friends and communities)

39. Some objectives for PB as specified in Question 9 were not reached due to the following reasons:

Consultations on the preparation of project proposals for cultural initiatives activities were organized only by e-mail or phone. A face-to-face meeting with stakeholders and cultural initiative project applicants was cancelled due to Covid-19 pandemic.

The on-site voting module, which was developed and integrated into the online voting platform, was not used due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

40. To our knowledge, the following elements of the PB process are innovative compared to other PB initiatives in the BSR:

The participatory budget approach was tested in the field of cultural projects, linking it with the VCP, which is a part of the program of the State Culture Capital Fund administered by the VPR. This approach differs from traditional participatory budget implementation practices, where infrastructure development projects are traditionally planned. This approach differs from the traditional practice of participatory budget implementation, when projects related to infrastructure development are traditionally planned and PB financing is provided by a specific municipality. In the case of the VPR pilot, the PB was introduced at the regional level, not within one municipality, and the funding provided came from the State Culture Capital Fund program.

41. The PB benefitted from the transnational approach of the EmPaci project in the following way

Considering that Latvia does not have a stable tradition in the implementation of the participatory budget and in the Vidzeme region, the EmPaci pilot was the first to be implemented in this direction. The cooperation in an international project partnership is very important, as it can provide the necessary knowledge base.

42. These changes are already planned for the 2nd PB pilot to better reach objectives of PB:

In the next pilot, we are willing to improve the evaluation model to increase the power of public voting. In Vidzeme case, the submitted cultural initiatives are subject to public voting and are also evaluated by a commission of experts in accordance with qualitative criteria.

We are looking for an evaluation model, a successful solution, how to combine public votes and expert evaluations in a balanced way and integrate them into the common evaluation.

43. These changes are already planned for the 2nd PB pilot to better involve target groups:

Analysing experience of 1st PB, we have identified processes that could be improved for next Pilot. One of them is supplementing the voting platform with an electronic application form. A very large number of applications were received, and it required an impressive investment of human resources to process and publish the information into the voting system in a very short time.

Electronic submission of cultural initiatives would be more convenient for applicants and would be designed to minimize non-compliance with administrative criteria.

