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Let the people decide! Citizen engagement and enfranchisement in the front end of urban development projects

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Abstract

Purpose – Citizen engagement can promote value creation in urban development projects. This potential stems from the granting of decision-making authority to citizens, labeled citizen enfranchisement in this study. Citizens are focal stakeholders of urban development projects and enfranchisement grants them an explicit say on such projects. Despite this potential for enhanced value creation, there remains limited understanding about how project organizations enfranchise stakeholders in the front end of urban development projects.

Design/methodology/approach – In this research, we designed a multiple-case study to analyze two novel citizen engagement processes in Northern-European cities. In these processes, citizens were enfranchised in ideating, designing, and making selections on urban development projects. We followed a multimethod approach to data collection. The collected datasets include document data, interview data and observation data.

Findings – Our findings demonstrated a distribution and redistribution of decision-making authority throughout the phases of the citizen engagement processes. Citizens' voices were amplified throughout the project front end, although episodes of decision-making authority held by the cities took place periodically as well. By granting explicit decision-making authority to citizens, citizen enfranchisement facilitated a more democratic urban development process, promoting value creation.

Originality/value – In contrast to the earlier research, the findings of our study illustrate citizen engagement taking place at so-called higher levels of stakeholder engagement. In particular, our study reveals a granting of de facto decision-making authority to citizens, also known as citizen enfranchisement. These findings contribute to the earlier research on stakeholder engagement in projects, where the influence of stakeholder engagement has often been considered symbolic or limited.

Keywords Stakeholder engagement, Decision-making, Value, Urban planning

Paper type Research paper

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1. Introduction

Stakeholder management is one of the most established areas of project management research. One especially topical theme in this research area is stakeholder engagement (Aaltonen *et al.*, 2021). Following an intentionally broad definition, stakeholder engagement can be defined as "practices the organization undertakes to involve stakeholders in a positive manner in organizational activities" (Greenwood, 2007, p. 315). In the recent research on stakeholder engagement in projects, special focus has been put to so-called "nonmarket stakeholders" (e.g. Derakhshan and Turner, 2022; Di Maddaloni and Sabini, 2022; Lehtinen and Aaltonen, 2022). This study focuses on one illustrative example of such nonmarket stakeholders: citizens in urban development projects.

The purpose of urban development is to maximize value creation for citizens by delivering timely projects (Gil and Fu, 2022). Urban development projects encompass a wide range of initiatives, such as construction projects, infrastructure development, events, service enhancements, and policy implementations (Toukola and Ahola, 2022). However, creating value for citizens through urban development projects is challenging, due to citizens' roles as nonmarket stakeholders. Nonmarket stakeholders, such as citizens, have varying inputs, needs and requirements for urban development projects, yet they have only a non-contractual relationship with the project organization (Gil, 2023; Hillier, 2012). In this study, we argue that value creation for citizens can be promoted by engaging citizens better in the front end of urban development projects.

An important characteristic of stakeholder engagement is engagement taking place at different levels or "ladders" (see, e.g. Arnstein, 1969; Luyet *et al.*, 2012). However, stakeholder engagement in project contexts tends to be dominated by the so-called lower ladders of engagement, such as informing and consultation, while mostly neglecting the so-called higher ladders of engagement, such as empowering and co-deciding. The higher ladders of engagement would be characterized by the granting of decision-making authority to the engaged stakeholders. Regarding citizen engagement in particular, previous empirical studies have revealed limited opportunities for citizens to influence urban development project scope and objectives (Di Maddaloni and Davis, 2018) and demonstrated how project organizations tend to retain decision-making authority, controlling citizens' inputs rather than inviting them to joint decision-making processes (Ninan *et al.*, 2019b). The influence of the engaged citizens tends to be restricted to minor project details, often in the later project lifecycle phases (Lehtinen *et al.*, 2019). Stakeholder engagement processes in urban development projects have been criticized for being symbolic (Lehtinen, 2021), superficial (Di Maddaloni and Derakhshan, 2019) and lacking real influence (Chow and Leiringer, 2021). These kinds of examples highlight the scarcity of authentic opportunities for citizens to participate in decision-making in the front end of urban development projects.

The stakeholders' "*de facto* ability to influence decision-making" has been labeled stakeholder enfranchisement in recent research (e.g. Klein *et al.*, 2019, p. 9; also, McGahan, 2021). In the context of urban development, citizen engagement and citizen enfranchisement are particularly valuable in the project front end. During these early phases of urban development projects, key issues like project scope and project objectives are open for negotiation before official project sanctioning (Gil, 2023). It can be argued that citizens as focal stakeholders of urban development project should "have a say" about such issues in the project front end. However, previous research has shown limited evidence of citizen engagement and, especially, citizen enfranchisement in the front end of urban development projects. This is in sharp contrast to the general idea of "listening to stakeholders in the project front end" and to the ideals of stakeholder engagement advocated in both general stakeholder theory (McGahan, 2020, 2023) and in research on stakeholders in projects in particular (Chow and Leiringer, 2020, 2021). This study aims to address this research gap by investigating the dynamics of decision-making authority between citizens and project

organizations in the front end of urban development projects. Specifically, we seek to answer the following research question: *How do project organizations enfranchise citizens in the front end of urban development projects?*

To answer our research question, we conducted a qualitative multiple-case study, following a literal replication logic (Yin, 2014) and an inductive research approach Click or tap here to enter text. We studied two novel citizen engagement processes in Northern-European cities through document analysis, participant observations, and interviews. Our findings demonstrate how the two cities enfranchised citizens in ideating, designing, and selecting urban development projects for implementation. The findings illustrate dynamics of decision-making authority throughout the phases of the two citizen engagement processes. Our findings reveal how the citizens' voices were amplified throughout the processes, combined with important episodes of decision-making authority held by the two cities. This distribution and redistribution of decision-making authority throughout the citizen engagement processes promoted a more democratic urban development process. The findings of our study contribute to the understanding of stakeholder engagement, stakeholder enfranchisement, and value creation in urban development projects.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. We first provide a brief review of stakeholder theory and citizen engagement literature as the background for our empirical analysis. Next, we present the research context and methods employed in our study. We then present our empirical findings and discuss their implications. Finally, we conclude by summarizing our theoretical contributions, discussing managerial implications, addressing research limitations, and outlining avenues for future research.

2. Conceptual background and literature review

2.1 Citizen engagement in urban development projects

Stakeholder engagement is grounded in stakeholder theory, particularly in the perspective of "managing *for* stakeholders" (Freeman *et al.*, 2007). This research perspective emphasizes that an organization's primary purpose is to create value for *all* stakeholders, extending beyond stockholders, suppliers, and customers. In the context of urban development projects, the managing for stakeholders' perspective implies that project organizations (e.g. cities) should pay careful attention to their relationships with citizens, to promote value creation. In this study, we build on Freeman's (1984) seminal definition of stakeholders and define citizens as stakeholders of urban development projects as "[any] civic organizations, citizen groups, and individuals who can affect, or be affected by, the achievement of an urban development project."

Stakeholder engagement is a multifaceted concept with various definitions across different research fields (Kujala *et al.*, 2022). However, one definition widely used in project studies follows Greenwood's (2007, pp. 317–318) conceptualization of stakeholder engagement. In this study, we build on Greenwood's definition of stakeholder engagement to define citizen engagement as "organizational practices that are used to involve citizens in urban development project's organizational activities." Numerous recent empirical studies have explored citizen engagement in the context of urban development projects. These studies have focused on solutions, practices, and methods for conducting citizen engagement (Chow and Leiringer, 2021; Lehtinen and Aaltonen, 2020; Ninan *et al.*, 2019b), rationales for engaging and disengaging citizens over the project lifecycle (Lehtinen *et al.*, 2019), and specific issues and questions related to engaging citizens in urban development projects (Cuganesan and Floris, 2020; Di Maddaloni and Davis, 2018; Di Maddaloni and Sabini, 2022). The earlier studies have also shed light on citizens' and local communities' participation, resistance, and influencing activities (Aaltonen *et al.*, 2015; Aaltonen and Kujala, 2010; Purvis *et al.*, 2015; Vuorinen and Martinsuo, 2019). Taken together, the earlier studies have provided a diverse picture of citizen engagement in various kinds of urban development projects.

Despite the growing interest in the topic, recent empirical studies on citizen engagement have raised concerns about its implications in projects. Community consultation is often perceived as "burdensome, costly, and time-consuming" (Close and Loosemore, 2014, p. 816). Citizens often have "little or no power to change project scope and objectives" (Di Maddaloni and Davis, 2018, p. 36), and there is a "lack of local community input in decision-making" (Di Maddaloni and Sabini, 2022, p. 786). These kinds of findings are in sharp contrast to the premises of managing for stakeholders, where citizen engagement is considered "a necessity" or even "a democratic ideal" (Chow and Leiringer, 2020, 2021). Consequently, an important gap remains in the recent literature concerning the level of citizen engagement and the distribution of decision-making authority, which we will analyze in more detail in the following subsection.

2.2 Levels of citizen engagement, citizen enfranchisement and decision-making authority

When analyzing the concept of citizen engagement further, one primary question is the level of engagement. The key issue here is how much of a say is given to the engaged citizens; in other words, to which extent decision-making authority is, or is not, granted to the engaged citizens. Previous research has proposed various categorizations to address these kinds of questions, typically illustrating a progression from almost symbolic levels of stakeholder engagement to very high levels of decision-making authority granted to engaged stakeholders. For this study, we adopt the widely used categorization by Luyet *et al.* (2012). Building on Arnstein's (1969) seminal "eight ladders of citizen participation", ranging from "manipulation" to "citizen control", Luyet *et al.* (2012) divide stakeholder engagement into five levels: informing, consulting, collaborating, co-deciding, and empowering. Table 1 illustrates these five levels of stakeholder engagement by Luyet *et al.* (2012) and their contextualization in the present study.

Level of engagement	Contextualization for citizen engagement in urban development projects
Information	- Project is (only) explained to citizens - Example: a city sends newsletters or communicates about the project via a website
Consultation	- Project is presented to citizens with the expectation of collecting input (e.g. suggestions, ideas or opinions) from them - The citizens' input may or may not affect decision-making in the project - Example: a city conducts public hearings or interviews about the project
Collaboration	- Project is presented to citizens with the expectation that citizens' input affects decision-making - Example: often similar mechanisms as in consultation; a key difference is the assumed effect on decision-making
Co-decision	- Even deeper collaboration with citizens. Project organization and citizens work together to reach an agreement or a decision - Example: citizens are invited to workshops, focus groups, surveys, or citizen juries. Decision-making is shared (not necessarily equally) between the project organization and the citizens
Empowerment	- Similar to co-decision. Instead of sharing decision-making authority in a collaborative way, decision-making authority is delegated or transferred to engaged citizens - Example: very similar engagement mechanisms as in co-decision; a key difference is the full delegation of decision-making authority

Source(s): Building on Luyet *et al.* (2012), interpretations by the authors

Table 1. The five levels of stakeholder engagement and their contextualization for citizen engagement in urban development projects

When analyzing the five levels of engagement in Table 1, there is a clear progression in the delegation of decision-making authority to citizens. The delegation of decision-making authority evolves from all decision-making authority being solely held by the city (informing, consultation, collaboration) through shared decision-making between the city and citizens (co-decision) to *de facto* decision-making authority being fully granted to citizens (empowerment). In the two highest levels of engagement, co-deciding and empowerment, urban development project organizations allow citizens to directly participate in the decision-making process. This granting of *de* facto decision-making authority to stakeholders has been conceptualized as stakeholder enfranchisement in the latest advancements of stakeholder theory (Klein *et al.*, 2019; Luyet *et al.*, 2012; McGahan, 2021).

In this study, we argue that stakeholder enfranchisement is crucial for value creation, because enfranchisement grants stakeholders a position to determine the value of an urban development project and how value is created and distributed fairly (Gil and Fu, 2022). Through citizen enfranchisement, project organizations (e.g. cities) can (re)shape the value creation process by engaging in negotiations, discussions, and adjustments with citizens to collectively define what value means, how it is created, by whom, and who benefits from it (Gil and Fu, 2022; Gil, 2023). This is particularly relevant in the front end of urban development projects, because enfranchised citizens can significantly influence the project's process and outcomes, as they have control over critical aspects such as project scope, objectives, and benefits (i.e. what value will be created and who will capture it) before the project receives official sanctioning, after which major changes are unlikely to occur.

Building on the levels of citizen engagement, we have examined the nature of citizen engagement in recent empirical studies focused on urban development projects, as presented in Table 2.

The analyses in Table 2 highlight how lower levels of engagement (esp. information and consultation) tend to dominate and there is little evidence of citizen enfranchisement, especially in the project front-end phase. This observation is somewhat surprising, considering that the project front end presents the most fruitful opportunities for negotiation about project scope, project objectives and, consequently, value creation. Indeed, citizen engagement processes in urban development projects have been criticized as "[merely paying lip service], when decisions are already made [in the front-end phase] and cannot be changed in any way" (Di Maddaloni and Derakhshan, 2019). Chow and Leiringer (2021) support this, reporting that the ability of the public to influence key decisions in urban development projects appears constrained.

One key reason for the prevalence of lower levels of engagement in the front-end phase is that many project organizations follow the "rules of the game," which means prioritizing the normative tradition of "on time and on budget" over "value for money" to obtain official sanctioning for the projects (Gil, 2023). Other scholars also argue that an overly inclusive approach to stakeholder engagement in the project front end can be very costly and resource-intensive, leading to challenges in making decisions due to *cul-de-sacs* (Aaltonen and Kujala, 2010). Hence, urban development project organizations tend to favor lower levels of citizen engagement during the early lifecycle phases to secure the timely progress of the project (Flyvbjerg, 2014). The above situation is paradoxical because short-term optimization concurrently hinders the project's future value creation, which is in sharp contrast with the ideals of higher levels of engagement in stakeholder theory (see, e.g. Klein *et al.*, 2019) and research on citizen engagement (Chow and Leiringer, 2020, 2021).

In this study, we follow the Luyet *et al.* (2012) framework and with particular focus on the higher levels of citizen engagement, in order to study citizen enfranchisement in the front-end phase of urban development projects. Specifically, we study the dynamics of decision-making authority between urban development project organizations (i.e. cities) and citizens during the front-end phase of urban development projects, where a novel citizen engagement process was conducted.

Study	Context and analysis	Key conclusion regarding citizen engagement	Level of citizen engagement
Babaei *et al.* (2023)	Qualitative analysis of UK-based experts (32 interviews) on urban development projects and citizen engagement	Citizen engagement is merely symbolic and a tick-box exercise where citizens have no real opportunities to influence project decision-making	• Information • Consultation
Di Maddaloni and Davis (2018)	Qualitative analysis of several public mega construction projects in the UK	Project managers perceive limited opportunities for citizens to have a major say on project scope or objectives	• Information • Consultation
Gil and Fu (2022)	Multiple-case study: qualitative analysis of three mega urban development projects in the UK	Engaging and even enfranchising citizens after the front-end phase create collective action problems leading eventually into hub-and-spoke governance (excluding citizens) with limited opportunities to influence decision-making	• Collaboration • Co-decision • Empowerment (symbolic)
Kroh and Schultz (2023)	Quantitative analysis with multiple methods (survey, text mining and text analysis) of urban innovation project in Germany	Formal citizen engagement has a positive effect on the innovativeness and implementation intention of urban innovation projects, but only when the intensity of engagement is moderate	• Information • Consultation • Collaboration
Lehtinen and Aaltonen (2020)	Multiple-case study: qualitative analysis of two infrastructure projects in Finland	Systematic approach to citizen engagement with several activities, but none of the activities provided citizens with real opportunities to influence decision-making	• Information • Consultation • Collaboration
Lehtinen *et al.* (2019)	Single-case study: qualitative analysis of a mega urban development project in Finland	Citizens had some real influence during the late lifecycle phases through a survey that was utilized to determine some minor details of the project, manifesting symbolic enfranchisement	• Information • Consultation • Collaboration • Co-decision (symbolic)
Ninan *et al.* (2020)	Single-case study: qualitative analysis of an infrastructure megaproject in India	Information and Communications Technology (ICT) is used primarily for strategically managing and influencing citizens' perceptions	• Information • Consultation • Collaboration (symbolic)
Ninan *et al.* (2019a)	Single-case study: qualitative analysis of an infrastructure megaproject in India	Social media can be used for engaging citizens but mainly for the self-serving purposes of project organizations like branding the project	• Information • Consultation
Ninan *et al.* (2019b)	Single-case study: qualitative analysis of a metro rail megaproject in South India	Public megaproject organizations hold the power to make decisions and tend to control citizens' inputs instead of inviting them to joint decision-making processes	• Information • Consultation

Source(s): Analyses and interpretations by the authors

Table 2. Recent empirical studies on citizen engagement in urban development projects

3. Empirical research methods

3.1 Research design

We conducted a multiple-case study following a literal replication logic (Yin, 2014). A multiple-case study was considered appropriate because it enabled a qualitative and processual approach to study our research phenomenon, which had not been studied previously in detail. We followed the theory-generating approach to case research (Ketokivi and Choi, 2014), where our logic of reasoning was dominantly inductive, with a view to generating new understanding about citizen enfranchisement in the front end of urban development projects.

The case selection was based on literal replication logic (Yin, 2014). Literal replication enables greater accuracy and richness of a new theory, as multiple cases serve to confirm inferences drawn from previous cases, like a series of experiments. As part of a broader research project focusing on citizen engagement in urban development, we identified and gained access to two novel citizen engagement processes in two different cities of a Northern-European country. Importantly, both citizen engagement processes focused on citizen enfranchisement in the front end of urban development projects. We considered studying these two cases an unusual opportunity to study citizen enfranchisement in the context of urban development projects, in order to develop new theory and gain new insights about the phenomenon (Siggelkow, 2007).

3.2 Case contexts

We labeled the two novel citizen engagement processes based on the size of their respective cities: Case SmallCity and Case MediumCity. Table 3 summarizes key information of the two cases.

The term "allocated budget" in Table 3 refers to the budget allocated to the urban development projects ideated, designed, and selected by citizens, later implemented by the cities. In both cases, this overall budget was distributed among five city regions. A portion of the budget was allocated to urban development projects focusing on the overall cities (e.g. a citizen event with no geographical focus).

In both cities, the novel citizen engagement processes followed a model called Participatory Budgeting (PB). Citizen enfranchisement is one core premise of PB. PB can be defined as a procedure that "allows the participation of non-elected citizens in the conception and/or allocation of public finances" (Sintomer *et al.*, 2012, p. 2). PB has received

	Case SmallCity	Case MediumCity
City size	~40,000 inhabitants	~250,000 inhabitants
Timeline of the citizen engagement process	09/2021–02/2022	04/2020–11/2020
Theme of the citizen engagement process	No defined theme	The wellbeing of children and youth
Scope of the citizen engagement process	• Enfranchise citizens in the ideation, design, and selection of urban development projects • The selected projects would be implemented later by the cities	
Allocated budget	100,000 EUR	450,000 EUR
Distribution of the allocated budget	• The city as a whole (30,000 EUR) • Five city regions (10,000–22,000 EUR each)	• The city as a whole (100,000 EUR) • Five city regions (70,000 EUR each)

Table 3.
Key characteristics of the two cases

Source(s): The authors

significant attention in research fields such as public administration, administrative sciences, and urban and regional research (Bartocci *et al.*, 2022; Ganuza and Baiocchi, 2019). However, there has been virtually no discussion of PB in the context of project management research. Positioning PB in the context of citizen engagement in urban development projects, PB can be viewed as a project front-end process, in which engaged citizens generate ideas for developing an urban area (i.e. project ideation), develop those ideas into project proposals (i.e. project design), and decide which project proposals will be implemented (i.e. project selection; voting by the citizens, leading to project implementation). There are varying forms of PB, with the level of citizen engagement ranging from a mere consultative role to empowerment (cf., section 2.2). In the two cases of this research, both cities had committed to implementing the urban development projects chosen by participating citizens. Because of this commitment, the two citizen engagement models resembled mostly a form of PB called "Porto Alegre adapted for Europe" (see Sintomer *et al.*, 2008). Importantly, in this approach, the ultimate decision-making authority on which projects will be implemented was entirely delegated to citizens, indicating citizen enfranchisement.

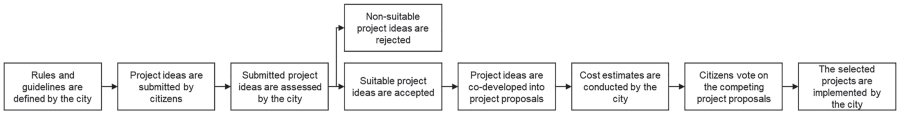
The phases of the two citizen engagement processes have been depicted in Figure 1. Our analysis focuses on the phases of the citizen engagement processes before project implementation. In the following findings section, we will discuss citizen enfranchisement and dynamics of dynamics of decision-making authority throughout these phases of the citizen engagement processes.

3.3 Data collection and data analysis

Data collection for this study took place in two phases. Data collection in the case MediumCity was conducted in 2020, and data collection in the case SmallCity was conducted in 2022. Throughout the research, a multimethod approach to data collection was followed. Multimethod approaches are considered appropriate and typical in exploratory, qualitative studies (Anguera *et al.*, 2018). In MediumCity, the multimethod data collection consisted of observation and document data. In SmallCity, it consisted of interview and document data. The datasets collected and utilized in this study are illustrated in Table 4 and discussed further later.

We followed qualitative approaches to data analysis with the two novel citizen engagement processes as the units of analysis. In our analysis, we combined features of three strategies of process analysis: narrative, grounded theory, and temporal bracketing strategies (Langley, 1999). Elements of narrative and temporal bracketing strategies enabled us to identify and analyze the main phases of the citizen engagement processes, analyze their interrelationships, and put them in chronological order. The grounded theory strategy enabled us to inductively analyze key content of the phases. In particular, we focused on understanding the citizens' and cities' roles, activities and actions, and the distribution of decision-making authority throughout the two citizen engagement processes. The roles of the different datasets (documents, interviews, observations) in our research are explained in Table 4 and discussed further below.

3.3.1 Document data. Document data were collected from the cities' IT systems used to manage the citizen engagement processes. The document data was provided by the cities, as



Source(s): The authors

Figure 1.
The phases of the citizen engagement processes

Dataset	Role of the dataset in this study
- Document data of the initial project ideas and the developed project proposals in the cities' PB processes - MediumCity: 379 project ideas - SmallCity: 551 project ideas	- This dataset includes the descriptions of the initial project ideas and the developed project proposals - The dataset also illustrates the relationships between the project ideas and the developed project proposals
- Observation data from project design workshops - MediumCity, $n = 5$ project design workshops observed	- This dataset focuses on the co-development work that took place in the project design workshops - In the project design workshops, project proposals were co-developed collaboratively between citizens and city representatives
- Interviews with city representatives - SmallCity, $n = 5$ interviewees	- This dataset focuses on the ways the city tried to activate specific citizen groups to participate in PB

Source(s): The authors

Table 4.
The datasets utilized in the empirical study

requested by the researchers. The document data consists of MS Excel files and includes the following information:

(1) Titles and descriptions of the initial project ideas submitted by the citizens, grouped based on the city regions;

(2) Responses from the city representatives and decisions whether an initial project idea was accepted or rejected by the city representatives;

(3) Titles and descriptions of the developed project proposals, co-developed by citizens and city representatives in the project design workshops;

(4) Relationships between the initial project ideas and the developed project proposals;

(5) Cost estimates of the developed project proposals, conducted by city experts;

(6) Results of the voting phase.

In the list above, the term "relationships between project ideas and project proposals" refers to the information about which initial project idea(s) were included in a specific, developed project proposal. This phenomenon will be discussed further in the findings section.

Analysis of the document data took place in two phases. In the first phase, the following information were sought from the document data to form a comprehensive understanding of the citizen engagement process and its main phases: the process of merging initial project ideas to larger project proposals, the reasons for rejecting initial project ideas as communicated by the city representatives, and examples of more and less comprehensive project descriptions (i.e. the varying quality of the initial idea descriptions).

In the second phase, we targeted our focus on the co-development phase of the citizen engagement process. More precisely, we analyzed the co-development of the initial project ideas into project proposals. In particular, the project proposals were compared with the initial project ideas, with respect to the nature or depth of co-development. We sought for evidence of project proposals where the quality, clarity or comprehensiveness of the project descriptions were improved between the initial project ideas and the developed project proposals. For example, if the project description of an initial project idea was considered "fuzzy" or "not concrete enough", the clarity and comprehensiveness of such ideas was often developed in the development workshops (e.g. in terms of defining the project scope).

3.3.2 Observation data. Observation data were collected in MediumCity. During the idea development phase, the city organized seven project design workshops. Five workshops were observed by one or two researchers. The collection of the observation data is summarized in Appendix 1.

In each project design workshop, development work took place in two to four small groups, depending on the number of participants. Thus, the researcher(s) observing a design workshop limited their attention to one small group at a time. Depending on the workshop, the researcher(s) either focused on one small group throughout the whole session or moved between several small groups. When observing the workshops, the researcher(s) made comprehensive notes on the development work. The focus of these notes was especially on the roles and activities of the participants and the nature of the development work taking place in the workshops. The focus was on both the citizens participating in the workshops and the city representatives facilitating the development work. After each workshop, the two researchers met to discuss and, if both researchers had been present in the workshop, compare notes, observations, and interpretations.

During data analysis, we focused on the ways and nature of interaction between the participants in the workshops and the roles given to and taken by the participants. From this data, we analyzed citizens' and city representatives' roles, activities, and actions during the idea development phase and how decision-making authority was distributed among the actors.

3.3.3 Interview data. Interview data were collected in SmallCity. In total, five city representatives were interviewed after the idea collection and idea development phases. The interviewed city representatives included the main responsible person for the citizen engagement process in SmallCity and five other informants who had experience working with and approaching specific citizen groups with respect to PB. The semi-structured interviews lasted 49–58 min. All interviews were recorded and transcribed by an external service provider. The interview protocol covered the specific citizen groups the interviewees had experience with and the ways of activating those citizen groups throughout the PB process. The collection of the interview data is summarized in Appendix 1.

When analyzing this dataset, we focused on two key areas: the different citizen groups identified and approached by the city throughout the citizen engagement process, and the methods for approaching and activating these specific citizen groups. By the term "activate," we refer to the various ways the city tried to promote and encourage citizens' participation in the citizen engagement process.

4. Findings

In this section, citizen engagement and citizen enfranchisement throughout the citizen engagement processes of the two cities will be discussed. The focus will be especially on the delegation and distribution of decision-making authority throughout the phases of the processes. These dynamics of decision-making authority through the citizen engagement processes are illustrated in Figure 2 and will be discussed further next.

4.1 Defining the rules of the game

The first phase in both cities was designing and setting up the citizen engagement processes. This refers especially to the cities deciding on the allocated budget and the potential theme guiding citizens' project ideation, as well as the rules and guidelines constraining the processes. Regarding decision-making authority, these "rules of the game" were defined entirely by the cities; in other words, *complete decision-making authority was held by the cities in this phase of the citizen engagement process.* This means that there was little citizen enfranchisement in this phase of the process.

Figure 2.
The dynamics of decision-making authority through the citizen engagement processes

Source(s): The authors

In the focus years of this study, the allocated budgets were 450.000 EUR in MediumCity and 100.000 EUR in SmallCity. In both cities, the overall budgets were divided among different city regions (see Table 3). This way, the project organizations (i.e. the cities) ensured a distribution of urban development projects targeting and benefitting different geographical areas and demographics. From the perspective of citizen engagement, this distribution of the budget among city regions can be considered a way for the cities to promote equality and democratic value creation.

Regarding themes, MediumCity focused the citizens' project ideas on the well-being of local children and youth. If a project idea was not aligned with this theme, it would be rejected by the city later in the process. As a similar example, the theme of a later round of citizen engagement in MediumCity was city safety. Setting a theme for the citizen engagement process can be seen as one additional way for a city to exercise its decision-making authority in this phase of the citizen engagement process. In SmallCity, no such theme was defined.

4.2 Collecting project ideas

After the rules and guidelines had been defined by the cities, the citizen engagement processes began with the project ideation phase. The premise of this phase was to invite *all* interested citizens and citizen groups (e.g. clubs, associations, etc.) to submit project ideas. These initial project ideas created by the citizens would then compete for funding later in the process. A key aspect of this phase was the creation of the project ideas by the citizens themselves; in other words, the cities did not intervene in citizens' and citizen groups' ideation at all. In terms of decision-making authority, *complete decision-making authority was granted to the engaged citizens in this phase of the citizen engagement process.* Thus, already this early phase of the citizen engagement process demonstrates potential for citizen enfranchisement.

In practice, the ideas collected from the citizens were stored in web portals in both cities. In these web portals, forms for collecting the key features of the ideas (esp., a title and a description) had been designed by the cities. An important aspect of this phase of the citizen engagement process was the almost complete lack of restrictions on *who* can submit project ideas. In fact, even local residency was not a requirement for submitting project ideas. Even more, the inclusiveness of this phase was not limited to just allowing any interested citizen to submit project ideas. Instead, both cities pursued more wide-ranging citizen engagement through marketing and by providing opportunities for submitting project ideas in alternative ways and avenues.

Examples of marketing include visibility in street marketing, newspapers and magazines, presence in social media, and information sharing through the cities' web sites. Examples of public presence include visibility in public spaces (e.g. libraries, schools) and participation in different events and occasions. Highlighting the importance of public presence, the interviewees of SmallCity described how over 50% of the project ideas were collected by paper forms (i.e. enabled by an "offline presence"). The following excerpts from the document data exemplify this: "the project idea was collected at [name of a supermarket]" and "the project idea was collected at the event of a local neighborhood association [the specific name of the association omitted]".

The preceding discussion highlights and emphasizes the inclusive nature of the ideation phase of the citizen engagement process. The term "inclusivity" refers to both *allowing* ideation in an inclusive way, as well as *promoting* wide-range citizen engagement. It can be argued that the citizens' focal role in project ideation and inclusiveness of the ideation phase together *promote citizen enfranchisement already in the front end of the citizen engagement processes.*

The inclusiveness of the ideation phase is further highlighted by special consideration of so-called hard-to-reach citizens groups. Earlier experiences have demonstrated how citizen engagement can easily become dominated by already active or better-off people. As one key interviewee from SmallCity explained:

> If we were to put lots of resources into marketing—you know, allocate a ridiculous amount of money—we would get the number of participants a lot higher. But those [new] participants would be those people who are active in the city anyways.

To mitigate this perceived challenge, SmallCity piloted targeted citizen engagement activities throughout the citizen engagement process. The interviewees described various ways for targeting different citizen groups, the most illustrative being tailored ideation workshops, often called "pop-up ideation workshops". These targeted events were organized in senior houses, events co-organized by the local church, schools, and different forms of housing shelters, for example. Irrespective of the location, the general idea was that the city representatives facilitated the ideation process by initiating and guiding the discussion and trying to activate and encourage participants to come up with project ideas, considered important by them. Exemplifying the important role of these tailored workshops, project ideas such as "let's clean the local park [idea collected in an event for homeless people]" and "let's bring new chairs to the town square [idea collected in an event by the local church]" were identified from the document data. The following brief story by a SmallCity's interviewee describes some experiences of activating one hard-to-reach citizen group.

An illustrative example of a hard-to-reach citizen group were unemployed people and people with limited ability to work. Due to their challenging life situations, it was often difficult for these people to come up with creative project ideas. Often these people also lacked overall knowledge of the ongoing citizen engagement process, as well as even basic IT skills, for example. This is why it was considered important to "give everyone sufficient opportunities to participate" by, for example, allowing participation at different times and in a familiar and safe location (e.g. a premise providing services for these people). Effort was put into spreading knowledge about the ongoing process ("hey, did you know that this citizen engagement thing is now ongoing!") as well as promoting the feeling of confidence among these people. As one interviewee described the latter issue: "in my experience, people in those challenging situations [e.g. unemployed] may feel a lacking ability to really influence their own surroundings". In practice, the key person responsible for working with this citizen group came up with a creative method to promote ideation:

> So, when I was thinking how to promote ideation [among this citizen group] — I created these imaginary people in the form of cards. The cards described, you know, something like the age and the gender of the imaginary person and . . . what this person is interested in or, you know, lonely people, for example — and then we had the cards on the table and the participants would draw cards one by one — we would then read the cards out loud and think together, what this kind of a person would like to have or get [i.e. project ideas].

> And then I [the city representative] documented the discussion. And in the end, I think it was about 50 project ideas that we created.

In total, 379 initial project ideas were submitted in MediumCity and 551 in SmallCity. The categorization of the initial ideas is illustrated in Table 5.

4.3 Assessing the project ideas

After the project ideas had been collected from the citizens, the citizen engagement processes continued with the idea assessment phase. The ideas were assessed by the cities with no interaction with the citizens. Thus, *this phase of the citizen engagement process reveals a transfer of decision-making authority back from the engaged citizens to the cities.* This transfer of decision-making authority back to the cities means very limited citizen enfranchisement in this phase of the process. There is a strong link between the idea assessment phase and the first phase of "defining the rules of games". This linkage is due to the rules and guidelines defined in the first phase being utilized by the cities when assessing the project ideas submitted by the citizens.

SmallCity		MediumCity	
Category	No. of initial project ideas	Category	No. of initial project ideas[a]
Culture and events	54 (~10%)	Environment, nature, and urban spaces	49 (~13%)
Environment	163 (~30%)	Equality and non-discrimination	26 (~7%)
Infrastructure and traffic	65 (~12%)	Hobbies and leisure	190 (~52%)
Sports and hobbies	150 (~27%)	Knowledge, skills, and jobs	23 (~6%)
Welfare and community spirit	119 (~22%)	Other	12 (~3%)
		Participation and influence	18 (~5%)
		Safe and pleasant life	48 (~13%)

Note(s): [a]. There is a minor mismatch between the total number of project ideas (379) and the count of categorized project ideas in Table 5 (366). This is because the city had already filtered out a few non-implementable project ideas before the categorization
Source(s): The authors

Table 5. Categorization of the project ideas submitted by engaged citizens and citizen groups

First, as mentioned earlier, MediumCity had set a theme for this round of citizen engagement: the well-being of local children and youth. If a project idea was not aligned with this theme, it was rejected by the city representatives in this phase of the process. Second, both cities had defined rules describing the constraints a project idea had to stay within to be allowed to proceed in the process. If a project idea did not meet these requirements, it was again rejected by the city representatives. In MediumCity, the criteria for assessing the initial project ideas included the following (assessment criteria in SmallCity were quite similar):

(1) Legality of the project idea

(2) The city's authority (i.e. the project idea must be implementable by the city)

(3) Feasibility with the reserved budget (i.e. maximum project size)

(4) Alignment with the theme of the citizen engagement process

(5) Open and free of charge (i.e. no restrictions, accessible by all local children and youth)

(6) Fixed in term or experimental in nature (i.e. the city will not commit to long-term or permanent project costs)

After the idea assessment phase, of the 379 (MediumCity) and 551 (SmallCity) project ideas submitted initially, only 227 and 336 were accepted. Thus, approximately 40% of the initial project ideas were rejected at this phase of the citizen engagement process. This is clear evidence of the cities exercising their decision-making authority in the idea assessment phase of the citizen engagement process. This phenomenon is exemplified further next.

A typical reason for rejecting initial project ideas was a lack of resources. Project ideas rejected for this reason were often too large with respect to the allocated budgets. Examples of these kinds of project ideas included citizens' calls for "improved street lighting to [exact location omitted]," "an extension of skateboarding facilities at the sports center," and "construction of facilities for stair running." For each case like these, the city communicated the reason for rejecting the idea, typically the lack of sufficient funding, and the name of a contact person (i.e. the responsible city representative). This communication took place via the web portal.

Other typical reasons for rejecting project ideas included similar or related development work already taking place, the proposed aspect already existing in the city, and the cities not

having authority or ownership over a proposed issue. For instance, there were several occasions when citizens expressed interest in new or improved facilities (e.g. dog parks, youth spaces, and sports facilities), but the responses from the city representatives revealed similar work being already ongoing or under planning. In some similar cases, the responses from the city representatives revealed that the requested facility (e.g. a facility for winter swimming) already existed.

4.4 Developing project proposals

After the project ideas had been submitted by the citizens and assessed by the cities, the citizen engagement processes continued with the idea development phase. In this phase, the accepted project ideas (cf., idea assessment) were developed into comprehensive project proposals. The developed project proposals form the material for the subsequent voting phase.

The core premise of this phase of the citizen engagement process was the co-development of project proposals together by the citizens and the city representatives. In terms of decision-making authority and citizen enfranchisement, *this phase of the citizen engagement processes illustrates shared decision-making authority between the cities and the citizens*. The shared decision-making authority means potential for citizen enfranchisement as well. The phenomenon of shared decision-making authority will be discussed briefly in the following subsection. This discussion builds especially on the observation data. The two subsequent subsections discuss two key implications of the idea development phase: the merging of similar project ideas and the improved quality of project descriptions. These two implications were identified especially from the observation data and the document data combined.

4.4.1 Shared decision-making authority in the citizen workshops. The idea development phase was organized through citizen workshops in both cities. The workshops were open to all interested citizens, whether they had submitted project ideas or not. In the workshops, participants were divided into several smaller groups. The number and size of these groups depended on the number of participants in a workshop. The project ideas submitted by citizens were divided among the smaller groups. Each smaller group was guided by a city representative acting as a facilitator. In addition, a development canvas was utilized by the facilitators.

In principle, the city representatives working in the workshops could be considered "mere facilitators" of the smaller groups; that is, guiding and instructing the citizens' co-development work. In practice, however, the observation data reveals significant variance in facilitators' roles and involvement in the group work. On one hand, there were several observations where the facilitators' roles were almost limited to documenting the citizens' discussion in the development canvas and, for example, to just supervising the work when needed (especially in terms of schedule). Typical characteristics of these kinds of situations were citizens' independent discussion and an active role in the co-development work, not calling for stronger involvement from the facilitator.

On the other hand, there were also several situations where the facilitators took, or had to take, a more active role in guiding or even directing the discussion. In contrast to the previous, an illustrative characteristic of these kinds of situations was a less active role taken by the participating citizens. Empirical examples of the more active roles taken by the facilitators (i.e. to engage the citizens) include facilitators "initiating the discussion" and "asking direct questions from the participants". In some cases, the facilitators had even prepared some ideas or thoughts prior to the workshops. The facilitators also referred to their own expertise or experiences to initiate or activate the discussion between the workshop participants.

The two paragraphs above describe varying roles and involvement taken by the cities (i.e. the city representatives) in the citizen workshops. This phenomenon is labeled shared decision-making authority in this phase of the citizen engagement processes.

In addition to the co-development work between the citizens and the cities, the co-development work was also guided by a development canvas. The development canvas included a list of pre-defined elements, to be covered in a co-developed project proposal (see Appendix 3). The city representatives documented the results of the co-development work in the development canvas. The rationales behind utilizing a development canvas were to guide the group work and to promote the creation of comprehensive and comparable project proposals.

4.4.2 Merging similar project ideas. The first identified implication of the idea development phase was the merging of similar project ideas. When the city representatives analyzed the initial project ideas received from citizens, groups of very similar project ideas were identified in both cities. Proposals for merging similar ideas were then presented in the workshops to the workshop participants by the city representatives.

Illustrative examples included several project ideas for skateboarding facilities (MediumCity) and improved or additional waste bins (SmallCity), for example. The result of idea merging can be revealed by comparing the sets of accepted project ideas to the sets of developed project proposals. In MediumCity, the 227 accepted project ideas were developed into 120 project proposals. In SmallCity, 336 accepted project ideas were developed into 188 project proposals. Thus, the number of project proposals competing for funding was cut by approximately 45%.

The process of idea merging is illustrated in Figure 3. The top part of the figure illustrates the cities' citizen engagement processes as funnels, starting with a large set of initial project ideas, cutting down to a smaller number of accepted project ideas and merging further into a smaller number of project proposals. The lower part of the figure reveals how the process of idea merging led to three kinds of developed project proposals: project proposals based on a single initial project idea (most of the project proposals), project proposals combining a couple of initial project ideas (about quarter of the project proposals), and project proposals merging several initial project ideas (a small part of the project proposals).

Exemplifying idea merging a bit further, one developed project proposal in SmallCity was entitled "Garbage bins to the southern city." The document data reveals how this developed project proposal was built on three initial ideas (i.e. the initial project ideas submitted by the citizens), all calling for new garbage bins for specific areas in southern SmallCity. In a similar vein, a project proposal entitled "Let's get rid of the Spanish slugs" was developed based on three initial ideas proposing alternative ways to get rid of this unwanted alien species in the city. In contrast, an example of a project proposal based on a higher number of initial project ideas was "Recreational activities to an activity center [the exact name of the center omitted]." In this case, the engaged citizens had submitted numerous project ideas related to an activity center for intellectually disabled people in SmallCity. These initial project ideas ranged from arts to various forms of sports and hobbies and from different kinds of trips to activities such as a cooking club. In the idea merging process, nine of these initial project ideas were considered similar enough to be merged into a single project proposal.

4.4.3 Developing the quality of the project descriptions. The second identified implication of the idea development phase was improving the quality and comprehensiveness of the project descriptions. Although the questions and instructions in the web portal and the paper forms guided the submission of the project ideas, the quality and comprehensiveness of the initial project descriptions varied. This varying quality and comprehensiveness of the project descriptions was identified by analyzing the document data. On one hand, there were project ideas with very comprehensive descriptions, basically ready to be copied and pasted to a project proposal. However, there were also project ideas with very vague or incomplete project descriptions.

Regarding clear and easy-to-understand project ideas, illustrative examples relate to small construction or infrastructure projects. Several project ideas called for new skateboarding facilities in specific locations or for improved facilities at specific beaches,

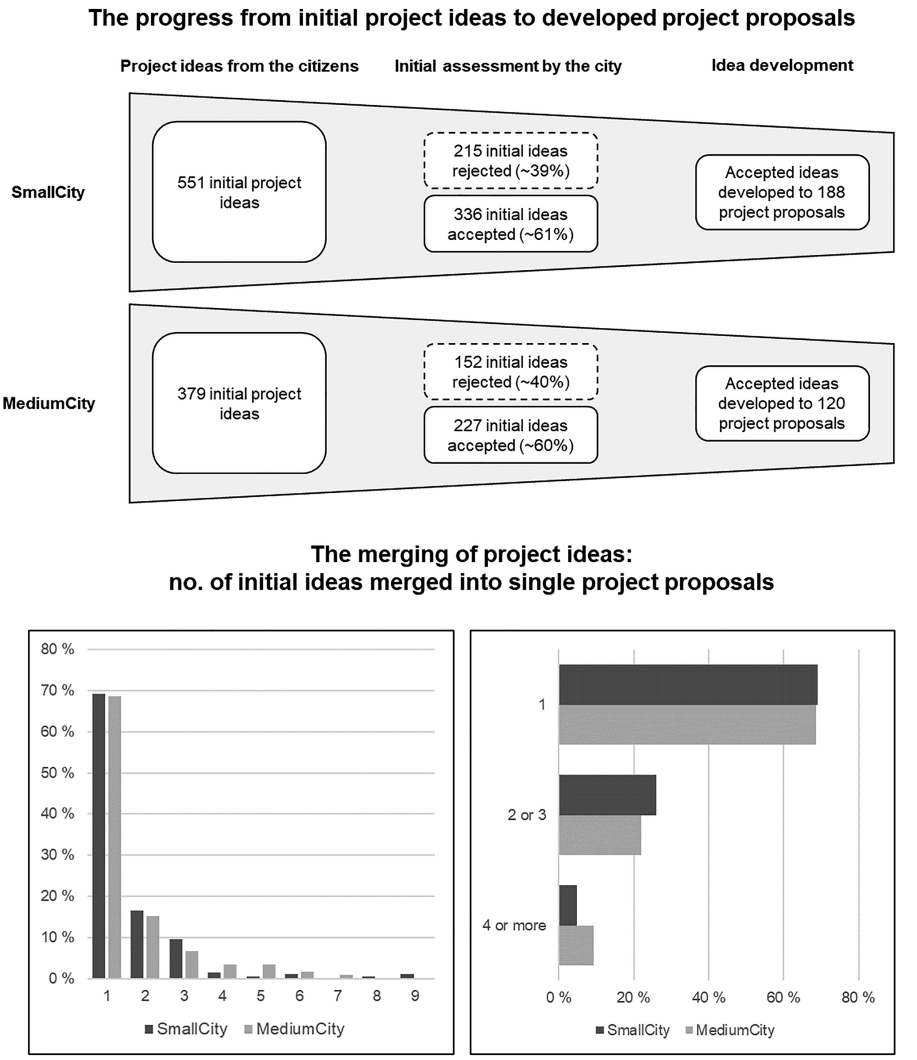


Figure 3.
The processes of idea collection, idea assessment and idea development

Source(s): The authors

for example. With ideas like these, it is easy to understand what would be pursued or accomplished with the funding. A contrasting example was a project idea entitled "Mental health problems." Although focusing on an important topic, the description of this idea just called for "preventive actions early enough," not specifying what those preventive actions would be or what would be done if funding were granted. It was especially project ideas like the latter, on which the idea development phase had important implications.

Analysis of the document data revealed several occasions, where the potential vagueness of a project description was mitigated through the idea development process. In practice, most typically, this "mitigation of vagueness" meant clarifying the scope of the proposed

development project. As one example, a citizen's project idea in SmallCity was entitled "The cleanliness and safety of a local underpass [exact location name omitted]". Based on the initial project description, it was difficult to understand *what exactly would be done* to improve the cleanliness and safety of this location. After the idea development phase, the co-developed description of the project proposal included a significantly clearer action plan. As quite a similar example of vagueness, another project idea was entitled "We need to hear children and youth better in the city decision-making, especially in decisions concerning them". As can be interpreted already from the project title, *the exact ways of considering children and youth better* were very vague in this project idea. Comparing the initial project idea and the co-developed project proposal, the developed version described a significantly clearer proposal of producing a supplement to a local newspaper, promoting the engagement of children and youth in local decision-making.

The unclarity or incomprehensiveness (e.g. vagueness) of project ideas can be problematic for the citizen engagement process in several ways. First, it can make it challenging for city experts to estimate the budgeted costs of the project ideas in the next phase of the citizen engagement process. These cost estimates are important because budget restrictions may limit citizens' voting decisions and affect the results of the voting phase. Second, a vague project description can create risks such as losing or destroying the original intention of the citizen's idea, or difficulties for the other citizens to understand the project idea in the voting phase. Thus, developing the quality and comprehensives of the project descriptions in the idea development phase was a critical phase of the citizen engagement process.

4.5 Budgeting the project proposals

Throughout the phases of the citizen engagement processes, the initial sets of project ideas (551 and 379 ideas) had been, first, assessed into smaller sets of accepted project ideas (336 and 227 ideas) and, second, co-developed into a final set of comprehensive project proposals (188 and 120 proposals). Before the last phase of the citizen engagement process (i.e. voting), the developed project proposals were budgeted by city experts.

The term "budgeting" here refers to estimating the cost of each project proposal. This is obviously necessary for the cities to prepare for project implementation. However, from the perspective of citizen engagement, the budgeting phase serves another purpose as well. As will be explained further in the next section, the cost estimates have important implications for the results of the voting phase as well. Regarding decision-making authority, *budgeting was another phase of the citizen engagement process where decision-making authority was held completely by the cities.* Consequently, citizen enfranchisement was not visible in this phase of the process.

4.6 Making decisions through voting

The final phase of the citizen engagement processes, prior to project implementation, was voting. From the perspectives of citizen engagement, the voting phase is important because *the two cities had granted complete decision-making authority to participating citizens in this phase of the process*. In other words, the cities had committed to implementing all project proposals chosen through the voting phase. This means that after some characteristics of, or potential for, citizen enfranchisement in the earlier phases of the citizen engagement processes, this phase indicates complete citizen enfranchisement.

Voting took place via the web portal. Similarly to idea collection, this phase of the citizen engagement process had very few rules or constraints. The only main exception was eligibility to vote. In both cities, eligibility to vote was granted to all city residents aged 12 or older.

The voting process was a bit different in the two cities. In MediumCity, each eligible voter had two votes at their disposal. A voter could cast these votes on projects in any city district, irrespective of their own residence. In SmallCity, on the other hand, the voter could choose any combination of project proposals in one or more city districts, as long as the pre-defined budget limitation for each district was obeyed. Thus, some voters perhaps prioritized one or two larger project proposals while others allocated their votes to a higher number of smaller project proposals.

After the voting phase ended, 31 projects were chosen for implementation in SmallCity and 12 projects in MediumCity. The voter turnout was 6.3% in SmallCity (about 2,000 voters) and 1.4% in MediumCity (about 3,000 voters). The projects selected for implementation are illustrated in Appendix 2. Even if the main premise of the voting phase is the absolute decision-making authority granted to citizens, a closer look at the voting results reveals the linkage to the budgeting phase discussed before. In both cities, there was at least one city district in which some of the projects received fewer votes than others but was still selected due to their cost estimates and overall budget allocation restrictions. An illustrative example from SmallCity is provided in Table 6.

5. Discussion and conclusions

In this explorative study, we studied two novel citizen engagement processes, in which the engaged citizens were enfranchised in the front end of urban development projects. This way, this study was designed to answer the following research question: *How do project organizations enfranchise citizens in the front end of urban development projects?* In particular, the two novel citizen engagement processes granted the engaged citizens explicit decision-making authority (i.e. citizen enfranchisement) in ideating, designing, and selecting urban development projects, later to be implemented by the cities. We will next discuss the four main contributions of our study, with respect to the earlier literature on stakeholder engagement in projects.

5.1 Theoretical contribution

First, *our empirical study reveals citizen engagement taking place at higher ladders of stakeholder engagement.* In related research fields such as public administration, the premise of stakeholder engagement taking place at different levels (or "ladders") is widely accepted (Arnstein, 1969; Ianniello *et al.*, 2019). In earlier empirical research in project contexts, however, stakeholder engagement has dominantly taken place at the lower or middle levels of such typologies (e.g. Chow and Leiringer, 2021; Di Maddaloni and Davis, 2018; Di Maddaloni and Derakhshan, 2019; Lehtinen *et al.*, 2019; Lehtinen and Aaltonen, 2020; Ninan *et al.*, 2019b). The finding of citizen engagement taking place at a higher ladder significantly broadens our understanding of the varying nature of stakeholder engagement in project contexts.

Table 6.
Illustration of the role of the project cost estimates in the results of the voting phase

MediumCity (District 2) Project	No. of votes	Cost estimate	Chosen or not
Garbage bins for the district	317	4,000 EUR	Chosen
Tables and chairs for the district	291	5,000 EUR	Chosen
Sports activities for children and youth	258	5,000 EUR	Chosen
A facility for lending sports equipment in the swimming hall	255	2,000 EUR	Chosen
Restaurant day	250	4,000 EUR	Chosen
A market event in a local meeting place	248	5,000 EUR	Not chosen
Disc golf equipment for the district	245	3,000 EUR	Chosen

Source(s): The authors

Second, *citizen engagement occurring at a higher ladder is manifested in explicit (de facto) decision-making authority granted to the engaged citizens*. Importantly, the explicit decision-making authority granted to the engaged citizens is not symbolic or limited to just details of the project; instead, it includes authority over both project scope (i.e. project design) and project selection (i.e. voting). By granting explicit decision-making authority to engaged citizens, cities pursuing citizen engagement at higher ladders promote citizens' participation in deciding how their cities are developed.

This transfer of explicit decision-making authority from the project organization (i.e. the city) to the engaged stakeholders (i.e. the citizens) is an important contribution to the earlier literature. Even in the few earlier studies of stakeholder engagement in projects taking place at middle ladders instead of the lowest ladders—that is, with moderate levels of stakeholder influence (i.e. consultation or collaboration) (Luyet *et al.*, 2012)—the influence of the engaged stakeholders tends to be limited to small details in the projects (e.g. Hooton *et al.*, 2011; Lehtinen *et al.*, 2019). The significantly broader decision-making authority granted to stakeholders in our study is a significant contribution to this earlier knowledge. This way, our study contributes to a better understanding of how to engage stakeholders on an extended level (Di Maddaloni and Davis, 2018; Eskerod *et al.*, 2015; Eskerod and Huemann, 2014), in particular at the higher ladders of stakeholder engagement.

Third, in addition to the overall phenomenon of transferring decision-making authority, *our study reveals a dynamic (re-)distribution of decision-making authority throughout the phases of the cities' citizen engagement processes*. Theorizing this finding further, the delegation of decision-making authority to stakeholders has been conceptualized as "stakeholder enfranchisement" in the latest advancements of stakeholder theory (McGahan, 2021). According to Klein *et al.* (2019, p. 9), "stakeholders achieve their status as enfranchised because they contribute resources and capabilities that are central to the organization's value creation". In our study, engaged citizens contributed their resources and capabilities in the form of submitting project ideas, developing project proposals, and voting. Further, a key question of stakeholder enfranchisement is how to "achieve agreement among stakeholders on a set of rules that will lead to joint creation of value" (Klein *et al.*, 2019). In our study, the cities devised a set of rules, including rules for the citizen engagement processes, procedures for the facilitation of the idea development work, and cost evaluation of the project proposals. This way, even if the engaged citizens were granted absolute decision-making authority on project selection, there were still times when the cities held decision-making authority on their sides and set limits on the citizens and the citizen engagement process.

The fourth and final theme of theoretical contributions relates to *the question of for whom value is created*. Enabled by the explicit decision-making authority on the selection of urban development projects granted to the engaged citizens, it can be argued that the two citizen engagement processes promoted societal value creation by bringing the voices of citizens to the forefront in urban development. In addition, one of the main principles in the studied citizen engagement processes was to consider all citizens equally and to engage citizens in an inclusive way. This was evident both in the overall lack of unnecessary rules or constraints, and in the plurality of avenues provided for citizens to participate in the engagement processes (e.g. both online and offline). Tailored and targeted practices to reach and enfranchise marginalized stakeholder groups were created as well. These are important findings because previous research has highlighted how these kinds of stakeholder groups are easily excluded or forgotten (Derry, 2012), even though stakeholder research especially stresses the need for equality in stakeholder engagement, especially in urban development, to overcome social injustice and address contemporary social sustainability challenges (Di Maddaloni and Sabini, 2022).

5.2 Managerial implications

In addition to its theoretical contribution, our study has important implications for practitioners. By covering the phases of two novel citizen engagement processes, we have provided comprehensive examples of enfranchising citizens in the ideation, design, and selection of urban development projects.

Starting with project idea collection, we have highlighted the importance of providing citizens with wide-range opportunities for participating in the citizen engagement process (e.g. both online and offline). This promotes inclusiveness of the citizen engagement process. We have also emphasized how, for the same reason, a city pursuing citizen engagement and citizen enfranchisement should not limit participation in this phase of the process in any unnecessary ways. With regards to project assessment, however, a city can exert its authority on the project ideas submitted by citizens (e.g. by deciding on the rules or a potential theme guiding the citizen engagement process).

Continuing with project idea development, our results have highlighted two important implications of this phase of the citizen engagement process: merging similar project ideas and developing the quality of project descriptions. Both two aspects enhance the potential for value creation by identifying synergies, removing unnecessary overlaps, and securing the comprehensiveness of project proposals.

Finally, regarding voting, we have emphasized the importance of a city's commitment to fulfill the citizens' voting decisions. This way, the citizen engagement process enfranchises citizens by granting them absolute decision-making authority on urban development projects. In fact, the issue of enfranchisement can be broadened even beyond PB, the method of citizen participation followed by the two cities in this research. In addition to PB, we encourage practitioners to seek additional ways for enfranchising stakeholders in different project contexts.

5.3 Research limitations and ideas for future research

The main limitations of this study relate to its exploratory, qualitative design. However, the goal of this study was not to generalize the findings to other contexts, but to introduce a prospective and novel method of citizen engagement with potential for citizen enfranchisement. At the cost of the achieved comprehensiveness, this caused a limit for the level of detail or depth we could cover in each phase of the citizen engagement process. In particular, the focus of this study was deliberately limited to the phases of the citizen engagement processes prior project implementation. In addition, to cover all six phases of the two citizen engagement processes, partly different data were collected from the two cities. This enabled a richer dataset to be covered in this article but restricted us from designing a comparative research setting. To mitigate the potential threats to validity and reliability, we followed three different strategies for data analysis and utilized multiple data collection methods.

By introducing a novel mechanism of citizen engagement and citizen enfranchisement to the project management literature, our study has opened a new avenue for research in the field of stakeholder engagement in projects. Enabled by this opening and building on the limitations of this study discussed above, the following avenues for further research are proposed:

(1) Comparative research on various forms of PB and on models of citizen engagement and citizen enfranchisement in general, in different contexts.

(2) More detailed understanding of reaching and activating marginalized stakeholder groups in different phases of citizen engagement processes.

(3) Deeper focus on citizens' viewpoints of participating in citizen engagement processes (e.g. reasons behind individual voting decisions).

(4) More nuanced understanding of project organizations' and stakeholders' experiences of each individual phase of a citizen engagement process, such as effectiveness of citizen engagement and potential challenges in citizen engagement processes.

(5) Broadening the focus from the earlier phases of a citizen engagement process to the project implementation phase, especially to study the actual realization of value creation through citizen engagement (e.g. follow-up assessments of the projects accepted for implementation).

We encourage these ideas to be approached at least from the perspectives of stakeholder theory and organizational governance, which are fruitful theoretical lenses to study these issues in detail. In addition to more detailed research on PB, the findings of this study open areas for new kinds of future research on stakeholder engagement and stakeholder enfranchisement in general. PB can be considered only one example of stakeholder engagement with explicit decision-making authority granted to the engaged stakeholders. We encourage scholars to study additional ways to pursue the same goal. In addition, the premise of stakeholder engagement being pursued through a collection of supplementary mechanisms is widely accepted in the literature. We propose future research on the role or potential of PB in such combinations of stakeholder engagement mechanisms in different contexts.

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Appendix 1

Interview data

Interviewee	Time of the interview	Duration of the interview
• Assisting process leader	February 2022	55 min
• Special role for targeting elderly people		
• Special role for targeting young adults	February 2022	56 min
• Special role for targeting immigrants	February 2022	49 min
• Special role for targeting unemployed people	February 2022	58 min
• Process leader	February 2022	57 min

Observation data

Workshop ID	City district covered in the workshop	Time of the workshop	No. of participants	Observers
1	The whole city	August 2020	~25	Researcher 1 and researcher 2
2	South-east	August 2020	8	Researcher 1
3	North-east	August 2020	~15	Researcher 2
4	West	September 2020	15	Researcher 1
5	City center	September 2020	9	Researcher 1
6	South	September 2020	No data	No data
7	Workshop dedicated for young people	September 2020	No data	No data

Table A1. Observation and interview data

Source(s): The authors

Appendix 2
The projects chosen for implementation through the citizen engagement processes

MediumCity
The city as a whole

(1) Stress management and support for mental health

City Center

(1) Versatile facilities for skateboarding

Northeast

(1) Improvement of the yard of a local school

(2) Refurbishment of a local beach

Southeast

(1) Improvement of the local sports center

South

(1) A changing room at a local beach

(2) Facility improvement at an outdoor location

(3) A summer kiosk for a local beach

(4) Facilities for skateboarding and BMX cycling at the yard of a local school

(5) A pony riding event for the local children

West

(1) A versatile skateboarding facility for a Western city district

(2) Facilities for moped and bicycle maintenance and fixing

SmallCity

The city as a whole

(1) Summer jobs for youth—cozier green areas in the city

(2) Make local meadows flourish

(3) Get rid of the Spanish slug

(4) Share leftover food

(5) Plant trees in wastelands

(6) A summer café for local citizens

District 1

(1) Garbage bins for the district

(2) Cherry park for a local neighborhood

(3) Measurement equipment for blue-green algae for a local beach

(4) Improvements to sled hills

(5) Free-of-charge sports activities in the district

(6) Disc golf equipment for a local neighborhood

District 2

(1) Garbage bins for the district

(2) Tables and chairs for the district

(3) Sports activities for children and youth

(4) A facility for lending sports equipment in the swimming hall

(5) Restaurant day

(6) Disc golf equipment for the district

District 3

(1) Flower fields for the district

(2) Garbage bins for the district

(3) Clean the roadsides in the district

(4) A school disco in the district

(5) A picnic table at the local beach

District 4

(1) Clean the riversides in the district

(2) A hang-about place for youth

(3) A sunflower field for the district

(4) Lending SUP boards in the district

District 5

(1) Garbage bins for the district

(2) Free-of-charge sports activities at a local park

(3) An outdoor gym in a local neighborhood

(4) A summer party in the district

Source(s): The authors

Appendix 3
The development canvas utilized in the idea development phase

The following elements were included in the development canvas of MediumCity:

(1) Title and summary of the project proposal

(2) The goal of the project proposal

(3) Target group

(4) Action points (what should be done in order to reach the goals of the proposal)

(5) Location

(6) Partners or collaborators

Source(s): The authors

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