

THE CO-CREATION RADAR

**A COMPREHENSIVE PUBLIC
PARTICIPATION EVALUATION MODEL**

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BIBU

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Public participation should be evaluated comprehensively

In this report from the Tackling Biases and Bubbles in Participation (BIBU) research project, we introduce a model that municipalities, cities or other organisations can use to evaluate and develop innovations that promote civic participation.

A well-functioning democracy cannot exist without citizens who want to have an impact on society. Interest in political participation by joining political parties and voting has weakened, yet the desire to effect change remains. Citizen participation has become increasingly important in Finland, and the public sector has been tasked with developing participation opportunities for citizens.

The Finnish Government's democratic-political action programme defines how democracy should be promoted in Finland (Ministry of Justice, 2017). The Open Government III Action Plan supports the development of open governance and of new participation channels within the framework of the International Open Government Partnership project (Ministry of Finance, 2017). The Local Government Act of 2015 supports and obliges municipalities to promote numerous opportunities for citizen participation and impact. Participation-strengthening innovations are developed both nationally and locally at municipal level to complement representative democracy, including participatory budgeting, residents' forums and panels, partnership meetings, senior and disability advisory committees and crowdsourcing.

It is important to evaluate the effects of such new participation channels throughout the implementation process. Evaluation helps **recognise areas in need for improvement** and supports the **quality and relevance** of public participation. Only a comprehensive evaluation can establish **the benefits and costs of public participation**.

Often, the scope of civic participation evaluation is narrow. It reports the number of participants and details their feedback, but is only conducted ex-post. This is problematic. Public participation is about interaction and the impacts of participatory decision-making go beyond the experiences of individual participants; these impacts have also structural consequences.

The co-creation radar (Figure 2, p. 10) is an evaluation model which enables a comprehensive evaluation of participation processes and programmes. With the model,

- An organisation that conducts public participation can create a comprehensive evaluation of its current strengths and areas for improvement.
- The radar chart allows for comparisons among different public participation instruments of the same organization at different times as well as with other organisations that have conducted similar evaluations.
- If the evaluation is conducted by an experienced evaluator, there is abundant information available to draw on when solving challenges ahead.

The model is based on over 20 years' experience in evaluating participation, and on the synthesis of hundreds of evaluation criteria and indicators.

Citizen participation improves the quality, legitimacy, and democracy of decision-making

FROM CONSULTATION TO PARTICIPATION

Public participation refers to various ways of being involved in decision-making and planning. Traditionally, governance has been developed based on the government's needs and starting points, in which case citizens are **consulted** in decision-making. In this approach, citizens are active, but the motivation to participate is external. With the rise of New Public Governance, governance increasingly frequently favours approaches based on **participation** or strong interaction, networking, and co-creation between various actors, including citizens. In this approach, citizens are active and the motivation to participate is intrinsic. Ever more often, the role of public administration is to create platforms that enable participation.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION HAS MANY POSITIVE EFFECTS

Participation advocates claim that participation helps improve the quality of planning and decision-making (Figure 1). Studies suggest that services can be allocated more efficiently by involving local residents, and that local participation strengthens districts' identity, residents' sense of belonging, and local vitality. Even budget cuts are easier to accept when residents have been included in decision-making. Critics, on the other hand, claim that increasing participation complicates decision-making and is inefficient, as public officials have to spend time dealing with irrelevant issues. However, when planned thoroughly, public participation runs smoothly and cuts to the heart of the matter. In such cases, citizen participation improves the quality and legitimacy of decision-making and develops citizens' abilities to take part more fully in political processes.

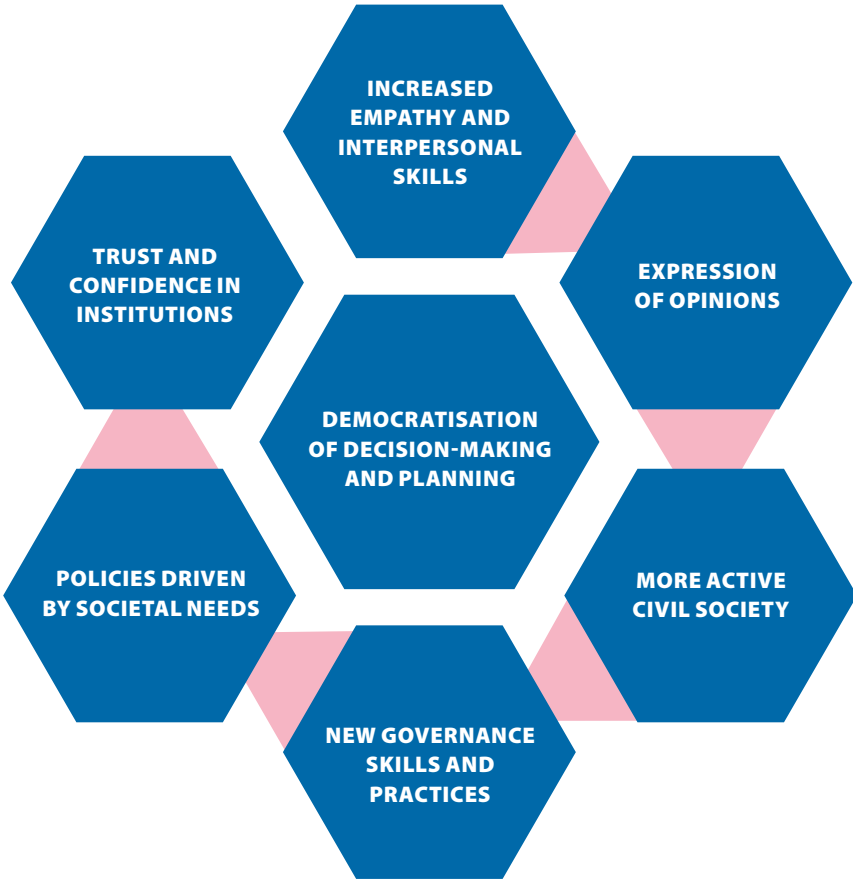


Figure 1. Positive effects of participatory decision-making and planning.

PARTICIPATION CAN BE DONE IN MANY WAYS

In recent years, a plethora of new public participation methods and channels have been developed in order to enable citizens to influence planning and decision-making processes. (Table 1).



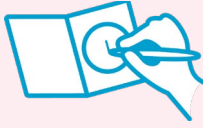

			
INFORMATION-BASED PARTICIPATION	PARTICIPATION IN PLANNING	PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING	PARTICIPATION THROUGH ACTION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information from the service provider • Interaction with and consultation of residents • Communications • Channels of communication • Digital services and participation channels • Guidance and advice • Customer feedback questionnaires • Petitions • Open data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital participation channels • Participatory budgeting • Resident forums and panels • Local decision-making bodies • Community and civic association nights • Partnership meetings • Strategies • Co-creation and service design • Schemes, projects, and programmes • Experts by experience • Personal service design 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voting in elections • Municipal formal decision-making bodies • Senior advisory committees • Disability advisory committees • Youth councils and other youth influence groups • Consultative referendum • Local decision-making bodies • Participatory budgeting • Statements • Appeals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jointly organised events • Volunteering • Civil society organisations • Municipal/ neighbourhood activism • Community associations • Joint projects and development work • Independent citizen activism • Pop up activities

Table 1. Examples of participation methods conducted in Finnish municipalities (Kuntaliitto 2019, modified). Authors' translation

EVALUATION IMPROVES THE SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF PARTICIPATION

As public participation has become more widespread, in many countries public participation and its impacts are increasingly being evaluated systematically. It is important to evaluate the effects of new participation channels throughout the process. An evaluation uncovers the experiences and needs of different actors, and better helps to focus public participation on essential issues. When participation methods are evaluated and selected based on an identified need, the quality and relevance of public participation are improved. It is also easier to justify the use of public funds on participation projects by evidencing the benefits and costs of public participation with an evaluation. An evaluation also helps public authorities communicate and show residents and stakeholder groups how participation has been carried out, and how municipal residents have been involved in decision-making and local governance. Conducting an evaluation creates a learning environment that supports skills development and facilitates the scaling of participation processes.

In Finland, the evaluation of participation is being studied by a working group convened by the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, which includes experts from municipalities, regions, universities, and other research institutions. The aim of the working group is to prepare recommendations for municipalities and regions on how to evaluate and measure participation by autumn 2019.

Participatory budgeting is one of the most widespread democratic innovations in Finland and worldwide

Participatory budgeting is a democratic innovation, in which different interest groups (for example, residents, associations, and businesses) debate and seek agreement on how to spend money and resources.

Participatory budgeting originated in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 1989. Since the early 2000s, the method has spread to Latin America, Europe, North America and Asia, including China.

Participatory budgeting has quickly spread across the world. In 2016, over 1 500 projects in various countries were reported; only two years later in 2018, the same count doubled with over 3 000 participatory budgeting projects.

Since 2010, there have been over 20 participatory budgeting pilot projects in Finnish municipalities (see Table 2 for a sample). The number of projects has grown each year, but most of the activities still take place in the cities and municipalities in the Helsinki metropolitan area.

The Cities of Helsinki and Espoo have made participatory budgeting a permanent part of the city budget. Other municipalities and cities that have included participatory budgeting in their yearly budget include Lahti, Oulu, Pieksämäki, Pudasjärvi, Rovaniemi, and Tuusula.

PILOT	MUNICIPALITY	YEAR	FUNDING	IMPLEMENTED BY
Helsinki City Library	Helsinki	2012	€100,000	City of Helsinki, Sitra
RuutiBudjetti	Helsinki	2013–	Varies	City of Helsinki Youth Department
Maunula House	Helsinki	2013– 2016	N/A	City of Helsinki
OmaTesoma	Tampere	2014	€110,000	City of Tampere, Pirkanmaa Region Council
Suvela playground	Espoo	2015	€40,000	City of Espoo
ManiMiitti	Espoo	2015–	Varies	City of Espoo Youth Department
Pudasjärvi participatory budgeting	Pudasjärvi	2017–	Varies	Municipality of Pudasjärvi
Tuusula participatory budgeting	Tuusula	2018–	Varies	Municipality of Tuusula
Oulu participatory budgeting	Oulu	2018–	Varies	City of Oulu
Helsinki OmaStadi	Helsinki	2018–	€4,400,000	City of Helsinki

Table 2. Examples of participatory budgeting projects in Finnish municipalities and cities.

Comprehensive evaluation and comparison using the co-creation radar

The **co-creation radar** (Figure 2) is a comprehensive participation evaluation model. Its premise is the observation that even when the effects of public participation have been evaluated, the assessment has been too narrow in scope, usually focusing on an evaluation of the participants. This is understandable, because the number and representativeness of participants and their feedback are easy and straightforward indicators. However, they are insufficient to reflect structural and other impacts, which can be observed using the radar, such as an increase in the organisation's skills and competences, and the realisation of decision-making accountability.

Evaluations that are narrow in scope often result in information that is already familiar to those who plan and implement participation processes (for example, the over-representation of the highly educated). This problem can be avoided by using the co-creation radar, since evaluation themes and indicators that most benefit the

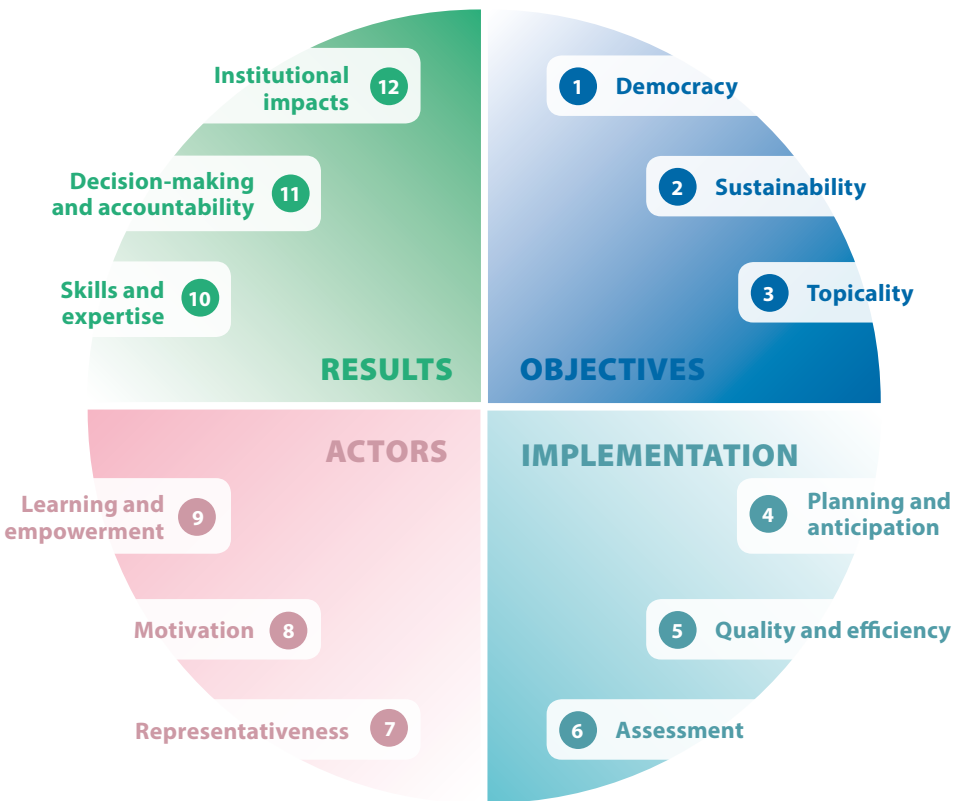


Figure 2. Co-creation radar.

development of public participation at different stages of the participation process can be tailored to the needs of the organisation.

The co-creation radar contains **12 main indicators, which enable a comprehensive evaluation of the effects of participation.** The indicators can be divided into **four areas: objectives, implementation, actors, and results.**

WHAT ARE THE USES OF THE CO-CREATION RADAR?

The co-creation radar can be used either to **evaluate individual participation projects** (for example, participatory budgeting), or for an **overall evaluation** of a unit or organisation that conducts public participation.

The use of the evaluation model depends on the stage at which the participation process is (Figure 3). The initial evaluation maps the expert's skill levels, the resources available, and the objectives envisioned for the participation project (diagnostic evaluation). For ongoing projects, the model can be used to identify areas that are most in need of development (formative evaluation). Once the project is completed, an impartial post-project evaluation can be conducted (summative evaluation).

The co-creation radar can also be used to identify and prioritise areas that can be later evaluated in more detail, either through research or lighter follow-ups. For example, the implementation of the project and participants' learning and

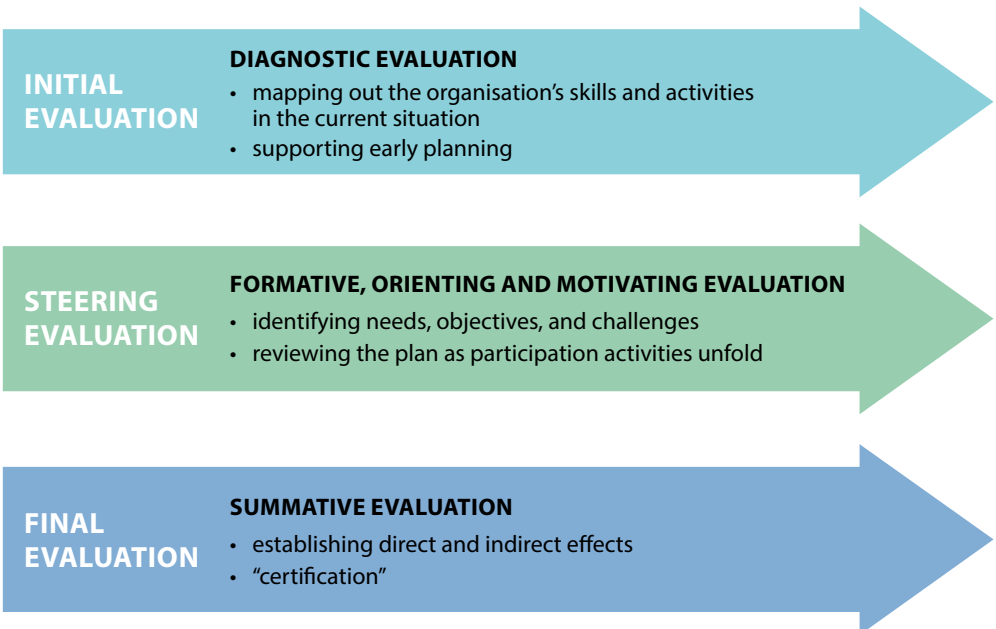


Figure 3. Uses of the co-creation radar at different stages of the participation process.

empowerment can be evaluated using “deliberative quality” criteria, by evaluating whether the discussions that occurred during the process were relevant, appropriate, argumentative, reciprocal, and whether they promoted learning.

HOW IS THE CO-CREATION RADAR USED?

The co-creation radar can be used both as a self-evaluation tool and as a model that helps collect information on the impacts of participation in each of the four areas with specifically defined indicators and criteria.

Table 3. The co-creation radar indicators.

AREA	DESCRIPTION	INDICATOR	QUESTIONS
I Objectives	Participation projects usually aim to promote democratic values, sustainable development and other current objectives.	1 Democracy	Is the primary goal of the project to democratise decision-making? Can the participants themselves influence the implementation of the project? Is the project conducted transparently and openly? Is the operational model seen as legitimate?
		2 Sustainability	Do the objectives of the project take into account ecological, social, and economic sustainability? Is the project linked to relevant sustainable development programmes and goals?
		3 Topicality	Are the objectives of the project carefully justified and based on considered judgement? Are they timely? Have the objectives been open to modification when necessary?
II Implementation	The implementation of a project usually includes three stages: planning, execution, assessment.	4 Planning and anticipation	Have sufficient resources been allocated to the project? How have the project’s questions been framed? How has the accessibility of events been taken into consideration? How have the tools and methods used in the project been selected?
		5 Quality and efficiency	How are the quality of the implementation of the project and the efficient use of resources balanced? Is the chosen management method effective? What strategies are used to communicate about the project? How are events facilitated? What are the discussions at the events and on the platform like? What kind of digital support has been arranged?
		6 Assessment	What kind of evaluation activities have been planned for the project? How will the project’s indirect effects be assessed? How is data collected, analysed, and to whom is it reported? Has the project been modified following the assessment?

Table 3 contains definitions of the co-creation radar’s main indicators, which enable a comprehensive evaluation of the various areas of public participation. The questions supporting the indicators can form the basis for either an informal or guided self-evaluation. They can also be used to quantitatively draw a “radar chart” that visualizes the overall situation and helps compare 1) different organisations, 2) the development of public participation within the same organisation, or 3) the success of various aspects of a single participation project. To draw the radar chart, each indicator is intuitively quantified on a seven-point Likert scale. Based on this, a radar chart depicting the current situation of public participation can be drawn (Figure 4).

AREA	DESCRIPTION	INDICATOR	QUESTIONS
III Actors	A participation project typically aims to reach diverse groups of participants (participant eco-system) and to gather their knowledge and views, as well as support their learning and empowerment.	7 Representativeness	How heterogeneous was the group of participants? Who took part? How was the representativeness of future generations taken into account?
		8 Motivation	How motivated were the participants? Were they satisfied with the events? Did they manage to network with other stakeholders? Did they receive compensation for their participation? Was low motivation the reason for non-participation? Were people motivated the right way?
		9 Learning and empowerment	What skills did participants learn during the participation process? Do they now have a better understanding about substantive discussions and/or the decision-making process? How did participants collaborate with other stakeholders?
IV Results	The effects of the project on the organisation itself; the impact on decision-making and the wider institutional environment	10 Skills and expertise	How have the organisation’s own competences and skills developed? Have outside experts been consulted, e.g. through research cooperation? Did stakeholder groups receive training? Is the organisation supporting learning? Were there sufficient resources allocated and opportunities sought to develop in-house expertise?
		11 Decision-making and accountability	How committed is the organisation to the project? How is participant feedback linked to decision-making? How was the feedback analysed? What feedback have citizens received and how was such feedback communicated?
		12 Institutional impacts	What new collaborations with universities, museums, schools, businesses, and other stakeholders have arisen? Have any new businesses been created? Has the participation project inspired changes in the organisation’s entrenched practices? Have decision-makers learned from citizens?

WHAT DOES THE CO-CREATION RADAR ENABLE?

The co-creation radar can be used to establish at a glance the key strengths and areas for development of public participation. Figure 4 shows how different participation profiles can be compared using the radar.

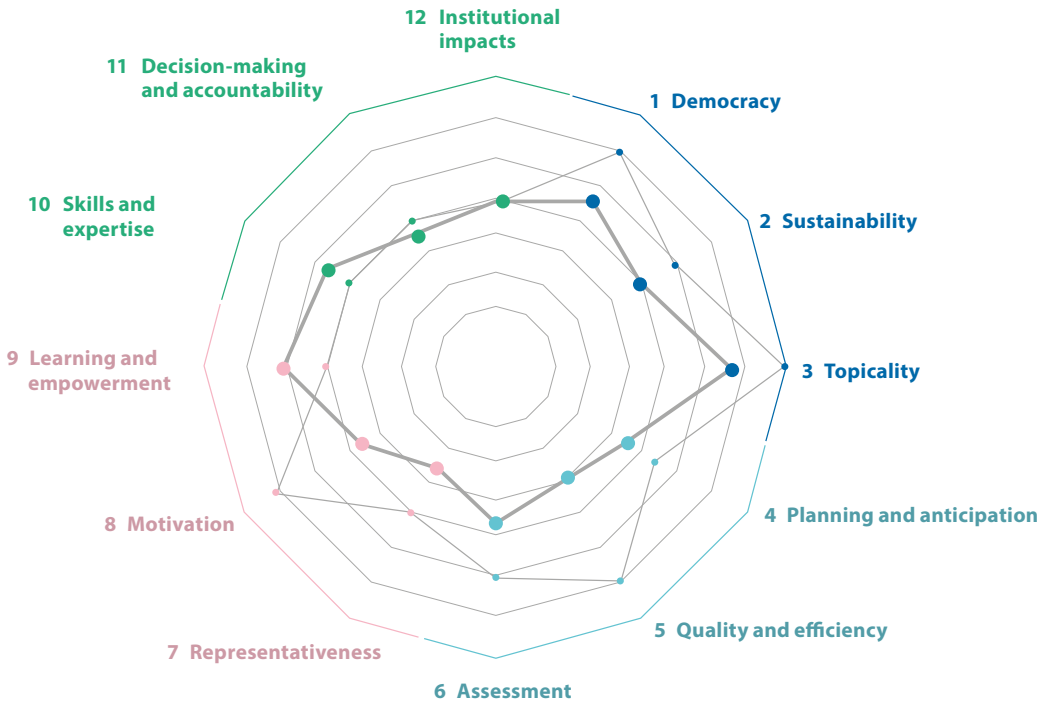


Figure 4. Radar chart examples drawn with the co-creation radar. The farthest away the evaluation line falls, the more successful the public participation project has been evaluated to be.

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An evaluation based on the co-creation radar helps develop public participation in the following ways:

- The municipality or organisation that conducts public participation can create a comprehensive evaluation of its current strengths and areas for improvement.
- The radar chart allows for comparisons among different public participation instruments of the same organization at different times as well as with other organisations that have conducted similar evaluations.
- If the evaluation is conducted by an experienced evaluator, there is abundant information available to draw on when solving challenges ahead.

HOW THE CO-CREATION RADAR WAS DEVELOPED

The co-creation radar was developed based on over 20 years of research on the processes of participatory planning and decision-making. The EU-funded PE2020 project, which ran from 2014 to 2017, collected information and compared about 300 innovative participation projects. This research facilitated the creation of a synthetic evaluation model. Included in the model were 40 key criteria that had been used to evaluate the success of participation projects from the point of view of relevance, implementation, efficiency, and impact.

In the BIBU project, this evaluation model has been further developed into a generic tool for evaluating participation by compiling some 300 indicators. The evaluation model has been further tested and developed in participatory budgeting project evaluations conducted in collaboration with the Cities of Helsinki and Vantaa.

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TACKLING BIASES AND BUBBLES IN

PARTICIPATION research project (BIBU), funded by the Strategic Research Council of the Academy of Finland, studies changes in citizenship.

The multidisciplinary project includes researchers from six universities and research institutions.

Tackling Biases and Bubbles in Participation

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Layout: Kaskas Media

Tackling Biases and Bubbles in Participation, 2/2019

ISSN 2669-8080 (print)

ISSN 2669-8927 (online)