The City of Barcelona's participatory democracy open source platform

[Ghita Ennadif](#)   Published on: 01/07/2020

Supported by Barcelona City Council, Decidim is an open source digital platform dedicated to participatory democracy, entirely designed and built in a collaborative manner. Since its inception, the platform has been implemented by several cities, regions and organisations worldwide.

Released in 2017 by the [Barcelona City Council](#), [Decidim](#) ("we decide" in Catalan) is a free and open digital platform for democratic participation that is maintained and developed by a community of users. The project is co-funded by the [European Regional Development Fund](#). On a technical level, Decidim is a framework (or development environment) designed using the [Ruby on Rails](#) development software. The source code is available on [GitHub](#) under an [AGPL 3.0 License](#).

The OSOR team already investigated the [use of Decidim](#) within the French '[Contribuez](#)' platform. The rapid uptake of the solution and the open call for the 2020 Decidim Fest highlight the growing need for participatory democracy solutions.

Decidim allows users to create and customise a platform or web portal to facilitate citizen participation. This portal aims at enabling any organisation (e.g. city or region, association, university) to set up consultation processes such as participatory budgets, public surveys or calls for ideas. To meet this goal, Decidim offers two types of features: spaces for participation and components to be deployed within these spaces.
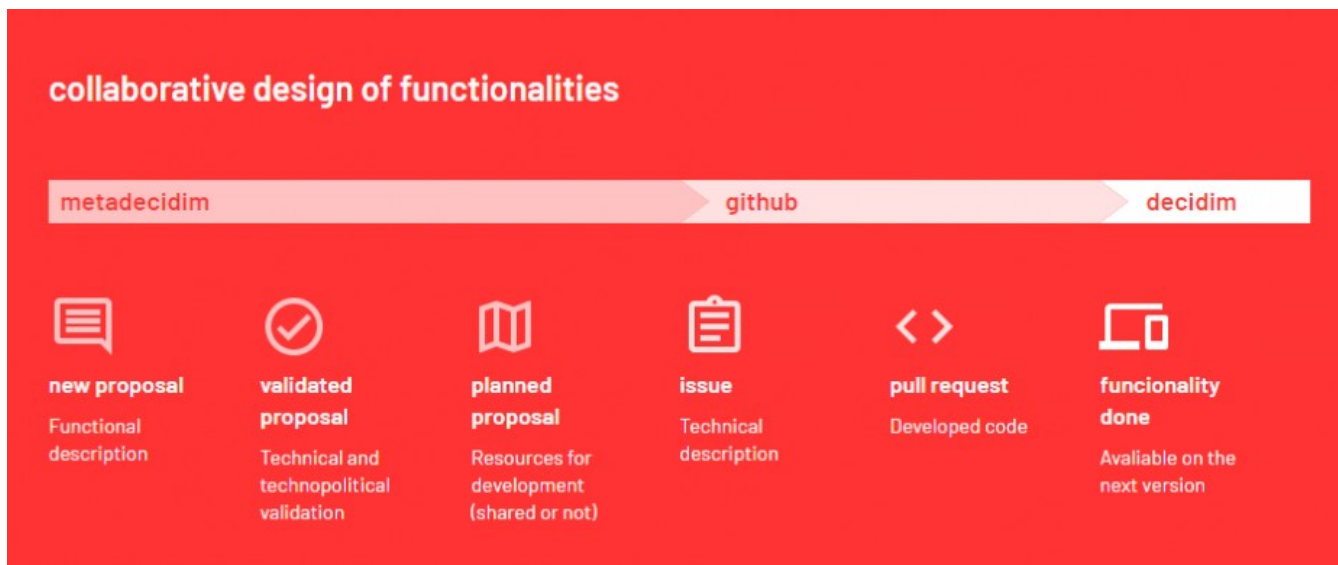
There are four type of spaces for participation:

- The **Processes** are spaces in which an administrator can create, activate, deactivate and manage different participation tools. A practical use of processes could be to host the election process for a committee or set up participatory budgeting.

- The **Assemblies** offer an administrator the possibility of defining groups and collectives that meet periodically, detailing their composition, listing their meetings (with geo-localisation), managing the agenda and the registration of participants, if necessary.
- The **Consultations** are spaces for organizing referendums, allowing for discussion and debate on the topic selected. They are connected to a secure voting system and a space for publishing the results.
- The **Initiatives** allow an administrator to launch citizen initiatives in a collaborative way, to define their objectives and their development, to collect support, and to gather results of discussions and debates.

Within these spaces of participation, different components are available, customizing the space according to the will of the administrator. Examples of components are conferences, surveys, blogs, newsletters and votes.

Metadecidim

decidim.org

Decidim is run by an open source community, named Metadecidim, gathering hundreds of people from different backgrounds. Citizens, developers, designers, public officials, politicians and researchers come together on the Metadecidim online platform to co-construct this tool for participatory democracy. The figure above describes the process of the emergence, development and deployment of any new functionality that Metadecidim wishes to add to Decidim.

So far, Decidim has hosted 1,234 proposals. Metadecidim's online platform provides key indicators on the current state of Decidim. Globally, Decidim has been used in many countries by cities, such as Helsinki, Mexico City and Nancy, regions, such as Québec and Puglia, and organisations, such as Université de Bordeaux and UNED.

Decidim Fest

The 2020 edition of the [Decidim Fest](#) will be held on the 18th, 19th and 20th of November in Barcelona and online. The Decidim Fest aims to address the urgent challenges brought forward by the global pandemic such as climate change, social inequality and human rights violations. The conference's objective is to embrace and foster discussions on these topics at the intersection of democracy and technology.

Metadecidim welcomes proposals to present ideas at the Decidim Fest. An [open call](#) is being hosted on the platform until the 16th of September around two main blocks of content: (1) global challenges in democracy and technology and (2) the future of Decidim.