

EGL presents: Gaia Participatory Budgeting

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We've interviewed Gil Nunes about Gaia Participatory Budgeting For Youth. Young people can apply to receive funds for their project ideas. Gil is a youth worker in the City Council of Gaia (Portugal) and a EGL Charter Ambassador.

Gaia Participatory Budgeting For Youth was presented last year at the 4th EGL conference in Romania, as a good practices from local youth work in Portugal. Could you tell us a bit more about the project and its main aims and goals?

Gil: "The first major goal of Gaia Participatory Budgeting (GBP) for Youth is to emphasize the quality of democracy, especially the values of youth participation and its implication on daily municipal decisions and active citizenship.

GPB for Youth also intends to permanently support young people. It does this by analyzing their ideas, contributions, and suggestions. One of the major goals of the project is to promote the importance of the voting process among young people to make it clear that voting can make a difference in the field.

Young people from age 13 to 30 can apply for GPB For Youth if they live, study, work, or were born in Gaia. In 2023, each candidate can apply for a total amount of 40.000 euros in one of these areas:

- creativity, culture, and sports
- environment and sustainability
- social inclusion.

Young people can apply until the 24th of March.”

Can you describe the process behind the project? What are its stages, selection process, and who were the winning projects?

Gil: “It’s in fact a process that lasts all year. The first stage for proposal reception takes place from January to March. During this period, a team of youth workers makes a tour around schools and promotes the project to engage young people and to collect proposals. There’s a specific platform designed to receive and edit proposals. The second stage refers to the technical analysis of the proposals and happens from March to April. The Technical Committee has a wide range of competencies, that try to address the demands of the different received proposals. So, after publishing admitted and excluded proposals, there is a necessary complaint period, in May.

After knowing the finalists there is the voting stage in July. Young people can then select two winning proposals per area. During the summer, from August to September, the winning projects are announced at a public ceremony. And by November, winning projects are included in the municipal budget for next year.

We have a total of 6 winning projects, 2 per area. But we must say that even the non-winning projects are analyzed by the municipal team.

The winning projects from GPB in 2021 were:

- **Creativity, Culture and Sports**
 - *World Garden*, by Beatriz Bensabat: a garden with flowers from all over the world.
 - *Municipal Centre for Throws*, by Joana Fortuna: pole vault, discus, hammer or javelin throw center just next to one of the major stadiums in Gaia.
- **Environment and Sustainability**
 - *Happiness Garden* by Andreia Gonçalves: a garden for all generations that will include a big lake.
 - *Gaia Drinks Water* by Mariana Santos: a route of 16 fountains (for people and animals) that will be built in the city center.
- **Technologies and Entrepreneurship**
 - *We Gaia*, by Filipa Martins: an app to discover Gaia and its treasures.
 - *Gaia Discover*, by Mariana Ribeiro: an app to emphasize commerce, tourism, and leisure of Gaia.”

What are the key good practices we can learn from Gaia Participatory Budgeting? Could you describe the impact of the projects such as the Animal Park, Gym for Elderly People, and some others?

Gil: “It’s a tremendous satisfaction to see that the winning projects of Gaia Participatory Budgeting are making a difference in the field. “[Animal Park](#)”, by Mariana Carvalho, for instance, represented the first animal park of Gaia. Many more animal parks were built after this first wonderful experience. And

“Gym for Elderly People”, by Catarina Silva, was also a major experience built just next to very large urbanization. It represents a free gym for many elderly people who otherwise would have more difficulty to do their daily exercise.

But we have more good examples. A project called “Believe in Future”, by Luís Gouveia, created a solid bridge between companies and students. “Holding Hands”, by Leonor Riscado, provided superb contact between old and new generations in one specific parish. And “Generations of Wisdom”, by Luís Maia, gave retired people the opportunity to pass their knowledge to children from kindergartens and elementary schools. “Open Air Workshops”, by Inês Soares, provided a cycle of workshops like tai chi and yoga freely for one week in a green park of Gaia.

Right now, we are also implementing “Stop Bullying” project, by Vera Santos. This is a creative book and a board game dedicated to preventing bullying in kindergartens.”

How do you ensure the quality development of youth work in the municipality of Gaia?

Gil: “In Gaia nothing is done without first asking young people for their opinion. And, right now, is a very important phase for all of us. We’re analyzing the impact of the Municipal Plan for all Youth(s) and defining the new cycle of insights “New Voice to Youth(s)”. This will lead to the Municipal Plan for All Youth(s) 2.0.

We’re pretty sure that this new cycle will also work as a barometer of young people’s needs and wishes for the future. Although, without forgetting that Portugal has strong connections with other non-European realities. This kind of project boosts young people to European opportunities, such as the ones related to democracy and solidarity values. For instance, GPB+ Youth has been a clear example on how young people of Gaia worry about two major topics: environmental affairs and solidarity between generations. This shows that the youth sector can’t be an island of wisdom but a system of people and knowledge instead.

We’re constantly trying to sew Gaia’s office demands to the European Charter on Local Youth Work from EGL. I think this has been a good combination because young people design and lead the projects, while respecting European values and making a clear contribution to their development. Also, volunteers with a great sense of belonging are doing these projects. For instance, some of GPB’s previous winners came from inner Gaia, which is something that really fulfils our hearts and ambitions of promoting equality between all.”

What are some of the key tools and resources you use for improving youth work in the municipality? Have you used the European Charter on Local Youth Work so far?

Gil: “Yes, we’ve been using it in all of our projects. For instance, Erasmus EU/ON Scaling UP is an Erasmus project dedicated to spread European and democratic values all over Portuguese territory. And the “Gaia is You” tour promotes an informal dialogue between the mayor Eduardo Vítor Rodrigues and students from secondary schools. We think that it’s crucial for building a solid network between young people, youth workers, and policy makers. And we feel the impact on the youth office every single day.

And yes, we use some activities to also promote the EGL Charter and its major goals. Erasmus EU/ON

Scaling UP tour, for instance, was a good opportunity to show EGL opportunities to the whole country. And we must say that Europe Goes Local was always a point of expanding dialogue of youth work, European values, democracy, and the decisive the importance of social cohesion. In fact, in parallel to its role as a decisive document, EGL is also a good starting point for several productive discussions. I think it is a great road to explore.”

How far is the GPB project now? And what are some remaining challenges in the implementation?

Gil: “We’ve used 2022 to reflect, analyze, and calibrate all the procedures in order to make Gaia Participatory Budgeting for Youth more effective and clear. Of course we can’t ignore the world context. The COVID-19 pandemic stopped the implementation of several projects. The collateral effects of the war in Ukraine had the consequence of inflation. Because of this, construction raw materials suffered a major impact.

2023 is the year of a new package of GPB+ Youth projects, and also the year of several new initiatives. In the next months, we will kick off a project called “Gaia without cigarette butts”. This project will implement a chain of cigarette ashtrays in all the districts. The project “Gaia drinks water” will provide water fountains to the city. There are also more material projects. “Multigenerational Park of Serzedo”, by Mariana Pinho, and “Sensorial Garden”, will be built and will play a decisive contribution to Gaia’s full development. These will provide more life quality to the population.

At the end of each Gaia Participatory Budgeting Youth, we reflect and a debrief on what went well and wrong in every edition. We give a voice to young people through questionnaires and interviews. We make the final reflection together with the youth council and launch the basis for next year’s edition.”

More information

You can find more information about the project in Portuguese [here](#).

You can find the website of the municipality of Gaia in Portuguese [here](#).