

Report September 2025

Citizen participation in Oldenburg

Name vote for the leisure area on “91er-Straße” – a best practice example within the framework of Speak Up

With the opening of the new leisure area near the street “91er-Straße”, the city of Oldenburg has implemented a participation project that impressively demonstrates how citizens can be involved in the design of public spaces from the outset. The campaign to find a name, which was implemented by the Coordination Office for Participation together with the city's social media team, was deliberately designed as a pilot measure within the Interreg project Speak Up. The aim was to raise awareness of the culture of participation in Oldenburg, try out innovative formats and strengthen the dialogue between the administration and the urban community. The aim was not only to find a new name for the area, but also to encourage citizens to identify with this new location.

The start of the participation process coincided with the official opening of the leisure area on August 15th 2025. This event provided the ideal setting to address people directly on site and invite them to get involved. Visitors were able to submit their name ideas without any registration or hurdles via a display board and a clearly visible suggestion box. This simple format created an open and inviting atmosphere that many took advantage of to contribute their own ideas. Numerous personal conversations with citizens took place during the event, which proved to be very valuable. The staff of the Participation Coordination Office engaged in stimulating and constructive dialogues in which different perspectives, creative ideas and local references were discussed. The exchange was lively, motivating and confirmed that people want to actively help shape the new location. Within a few hours, it became clear that the new space in the middle of the city would not only be a place for people to meet, but also for participation.

Once the ideas had been collected, the evaluation of the proposals began. A total of around 140 name ideas were submitted, 85 of which were deemed valid. These 85 proposals were submitted to the jury for a decision after being pre-sorted according to clearly defined selection criteria. The criteria, which were communicated transparently to all participants in advance, served as guidelines for the selection and ensured that the names were both appropriate and understandable. These criteria included:

- a local connection that reflects the city of Oldenburg, 91er Straße, the former use of the site or the surrounding area
- comprehensibility, so that the names are easy to pronounce and spell and cannot be confused
- a positive effect that conveys a neutral and positive message
- the avoidance of personal references, i.e. neither living nor deceased persons are considered
- identification potential, so that as many people as possible can identify with the name

The jury, deliberately composed of a diverse group of representatives from culture, tourism, business, city marketing, administration and civil society, reviewed the 85 valid proposals and, after intensive discussion, selected five favourites. This revealed the breadth of ideas: from playful, creative names to down-to-earth suggestions with a strong local connection. The final selection consisted of the names: Elsterpark, Heiligengeistpark, OldenWiese, Oldi and Stadtkuhle.

This selection marked the start of a second phase of participation. Since September 1st 2025, citizens have been able to vote on the future name on the municipal participation platform gemeinsam.oldenburg.de. This platform is a central tool for digital citizen participation in Oldenburg and clearly demonstrates how analogue and digital formats can complement each other in a meaningful way. Voting will continue until the end of September, after which the name with the most votes will be officially announced and displayed on a sign at the location. This allows people to experience not only the process, but also the tangible result of their own participation.

The popularity of this participatory format was evident right from the opening. Many visitors took the opportunity to contribute their ideas and engage in conversation with city administration staff. The personal exchange with citizens was particularly valuable: lively and constructive discussions ensued, providing insights into the wishes, expectations and ideas of the urban community. The campaign also attracted a great deal of attention on social media, and local media reported extensively on the new leisure area and the participation process. The combination of a public event and a participation campaign proved to be particularly effective: people who might not otherwise have actively participated in participation processes were involved directly and with a low threshold. At the same time, the online vote reached a digital audience and made the platform gemeinsam.oldenburg.de known to an even wider public.

For the Speak Up project, the name vote is a vivid example of innovative participation practice in a European city. It shows that citizen participation can be further developed when classic elements – such as physical presence and personal contact – are combined with digital offerings. At the same time, the project offers important insights for the internal competence development of the administration: the implementation of the campaign strengthened the municipal team's experience in dealing with participation processes and provided valuable information on which formats work well and which target groups can be reached and how.

The naming vote impressively demonstrates that citizen participation works particularly well when it is visible, understandable and easily accessible. The combination of event and participation created an immediate connection for the participants, who were able to identify directly with the location. The clear criteria and transparent communication also strengthened confidence in the process. The final online vote makes the participation process accessible to a wider audience and concludes with a visible result.

With the official announcement of the name and signage on site, the participation process becomes tangible and comprehensible. Citizens not only see that their vote has been counted, but also that their participation is bringing about concrete changes in the city. This makes the name vote both a successful project for the design of a new public space and a model for the further development of a culture of participation in Oldenburg and beyond. The campaign clearly shows how local and digital participation can work together to build trust, motivate people and actively shape the city together. As part of the Speak Up project, it provides a convincing example of best practice that shows how citizen participation can be innovative, visible and effective.