Beer coasters sparking civic dialogue

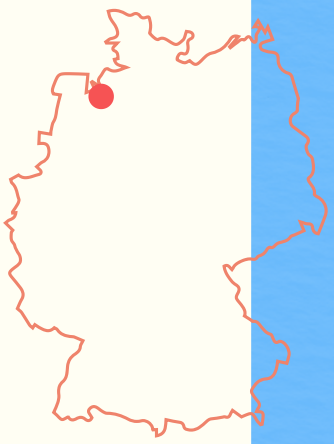
City of Oldenburg

INTRODUCTION

The **“Oldenburg Coaster”**, or "Oldenburger Deckel", is a **low-threshold participation format** run by the city's own Coordination Office for Participation. It brings together citizens and city administration in one open, informal dialogue setting.

The format uses **beer coasters printed with a handful of thought-provoking questions** on topics like civic engagement, urban development, neighbourhood life, and cultural diversity, distributed in bars, restaurants, and public spaces across the city. A **QR code** on each coaster leads directly to an o**nline survey on “Gemeinsam Oldenburg”**, the city's participation platform, letting anyone respond in the moment, wherever they happen to be.

The city has run **three editions so far**, through **moderated discussion rounds** bringing people from different backgrounds together. The goal, like Oldenburg's other participation work, is to help build a **broadly supported vision for the city's future**, alongside **concrete, practical measures** for sustainable, livable, and resilient urban development.



GERMANY

ENGAGEMENT LEVEL

- ○ Inform
- ● **Consult**
- ○ Involve
- ○ Collaborate
- ○ Empower



MANDATE

The **Participation Coordination Office** designs and runs the whole format internally, with support from the municipality's own **communication teams** to help it reach different audiences. **No external moderators** are involved, and **no formal meetings** take place.

The format stays **informal**, and **isn't tied to any single political decision**. Even so, it gives topics and perspectives from the urban community **real visibility**, **feeding directly into the administration's own work**. Along the way, it also **strengthens exchange** between different actors, and **builds a stronger culture of dialogue** within the municipality more broadly.

The city **documents** every discussion, so it can genuinely inform future participation processes and political discussions, rather than existing purely for its own sake.

RECRUITMENT AND PARTICIPATION

The Oldenburger Deckel stays **open to anyone interested**. The city **spreads invitations** through its own websites, social media, administrative networks, and local initiatives and organisations.

That openness is deliberate: the format aims to bring together as **many different perspectives** from the urban community as possible.

Being **informal** and **dialogue-based** keeps the barrier to entry low, letting people join in **without needing any special expertise or a formal invitation**.

PROCESS DESIGN

The Oldenburger Deckel runs over **several weeks at a time**, rather than as a single, traditional event. Its core method is simple: **five thought-provoking questions**, printed directly onto beer coasters, **distributed in restaurants and public spaces** to reach as many people as possible and to spark spontaneous participation. A **QR code** on each coaster links straight to an online survey, so people can respond digitally, at their own moment.

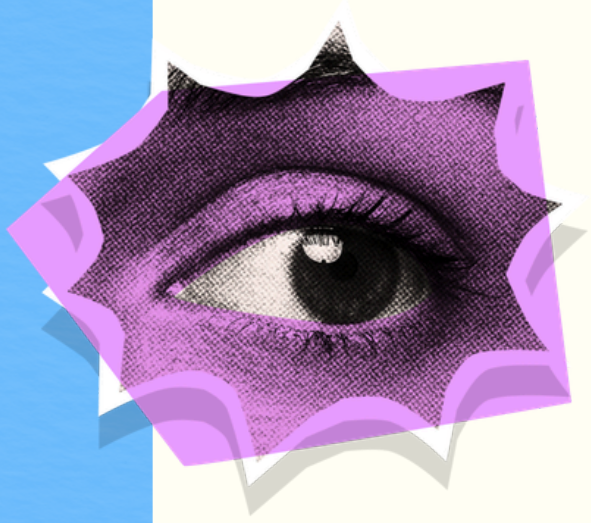
The city **collects and analyses** every response it receives, building up a picture of citizen opinions, ideas, and priorities over time.

FOLLOW-UP

The Oldenburger Deckel produces a **steady stream of citizen feedback and ideas**, gathered through the coaster questions and the Gemeinsam Oldenburg survey. That feedback offers real insight into how residents see topics like civic engagement, neighbourhood life, and quality of life in the city.

The city documents and analyses every contribution, and uses it to keep developing the format itself, as well as to guide future planning and participation work more broadly. Results go up on the **online platform** too, so the process stays **transparent**, and the **dialogue can continue publicly**.

Longer term, this feedback **feeds into future participation formats and municipal initiatives**, gradually building citizens' perspectives more firmly into how the city plans and makes decisions.



RESOURCES

The Oldenburger Deckel runs on a **modest budget**, covering mainly the production and distribution of the coasters themselves, and the upkeep of the online survey on Gemeinsam Oldenburg.

Several staff members from the Coordination Office for Participation handle its design, organisation, and communication, without needing any external service providers.

Beyond that, the format relies on **resources the city already had in place:** its existing communication channels, and the online participation platform used to collect and analyse responses.

STRENGHTS

- A genuinely **low-threshold**, open dialogue format.
- Creates **direct exchange** between citizens and the administration.
- Highlights a **real diversity of perspectives** from across the city.

CHALLENGES

- Reaching a **truly diverse group of participants** remains difficult.
- The **QR code** still gets scanned too rarely. Building up the format is an ongoing effort.

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Use **informal dialogue formats** as a genuine complement to more traditional participation processes, not a replacement for them.
- Keep the format **running consistently over time**. That continuity builds trust, and helps grow a real culture of participation.



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