

Brickstarter

Linnalabor aka Estonian Urban Lab (www.linnalabor.ee/eng) would like to perform as the ambassador for a financing model Brickstarter, created by Helsinki Design Lab. HDL was an initiative of Finnish Development Fund Sitra till 2013. Overview of the design process behind Brickstarter, further explanations and a final pdf report are presented on the webpage www.brickstarter.org.

On the same webpage the authors of Bricksarter, Bryan Boyer and Dan Hill have announced that „Sitra has completed its work on Brickstarter and by publishing this book we transfer the rights to you, the community.“ Which is why we feel comfortable to present this excellent piece of work to you now for further discussions and possibly, initiatives inspired by it.

Brickstarter is a „prototype for a 21st century social service. It proposes a new model for how we make shared decisions about shared spaces. It tests the exciting potential of crowd-funding and crowd-sourcing against the practical realities of debating, governing, investing in, and ultimately delivering the built environment.“

(Brickstarter.pdf page 3)

By:	Regina Viljasaar	Description: Urban Funding call for ideas: Brickstarter model by HDL / Sitra		
With:	Keiti Kjaviv			
With:	Kadri Koppel			
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No matter whether the web platform using the Brickstarter model is created as a public service run by a city, a public partnership in collaboration with a city, or as a social enterprise, it bridges four stages in the life-cycle of any initiative:

1. ideation – usually the public hears about the plans of the administration when they are almost impossible to change and various reasons, the ideas coming from the public don't often reach the administration. In Brickstarter an idea can be initiated and hone it to a satisfactory result collaboratively

2. decision making – it is a transparent platform for making decisions on which strategies,

activities or objects are worth to be implemented and how should this happen

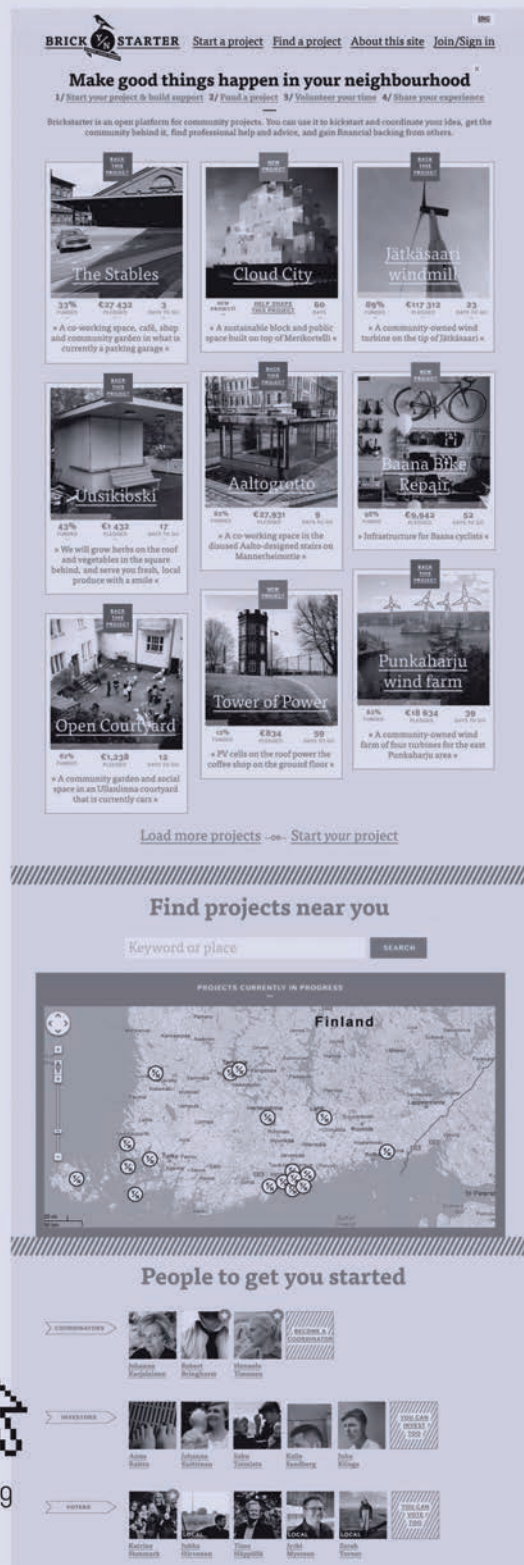
3. financing – anybody can back the initiative financially

4. implementation – besides money, also time and knowledge can be invested

In other words, Brickstarter combines the functions of crowdfunding and crowdsourcing, participatory budgeting, and public opinion polling platforms, adding transparency and non-hierarchical communication between institutions and citizens.

1. OVERVIEW OF HOMEPAGE

As should be evident throughout, these mockups take the visual style of the contemporary web as a starting point. A screen such as this, the welcome page, is designed to be natural, effortless. The page is divided into two main sections. The first is a call to action inviting visitors to "make good things happen in your neighbourhood" and providing four specific avenues to do so. The remainder of the page are opportunities to dive into existing proposals, either by project description, by location, or by checking out what people are supporting. It's worth stressing that while you don't know what you get with an open platform, you can set a direction and filtering the projects shown on pages like this. It's an important opportunity to broadcast the interests of the platform.



2. OVERVIEW OF PROJECT PAGE

A fictional project in progress, aiming to convert a bit of underused/disused infrastructure in central Helsinki into a co-working space. Yes, all the examples here are the usual clichéd set of co-working spaces, community gardens and so on, and each of the spaces and buildings mentioned here are real. In designing these mockups we used plausible details wherever possible so that the outcomes would be plausible.

ENG

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CURRENTLY

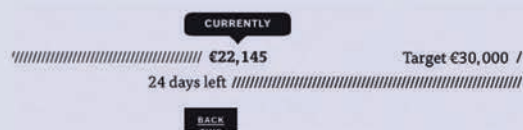
3. LANGUAGE

The language drop-down offers Finnish, Swedish, English, Russian as basics, and perhaps more. One of the things we're interested in is how rapidly Finland, and Helsinki in particular, is diversifying. That means tools for Finnish communities need to handle a wider selection of languages. Of course, cultural diversity is beyond language, but here's a start, and this little drop-down is a hint to generate debate about that.



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4A. TARGET

This proposal has a financial target, and a countdown of time remaining for the project to fulfil this target. The money requested in this hypothetical project is for making this into a convincing proposal: to pay for professional services, permits, some marketing, facilitation, and so on, rather than the full project budget. And as we'll see further on, money isn't the only way to offer support.

4B. TIMER

In terms of timers, we've somewhat randomly given 60 days per project, as it seems more complex than a Kickstarter project (where they advise that 30 days or less is best, though they too can last for up to 60.) Those dynamics are interesting, and will need testing for urban projects to establish a rule of thumb for an ideal fundraising timeline.



5. DETAILS

5A. SCALE

The details bar gives some sense of what work the funding might be for, and the scope of this work based on how large it is. 'Packages' of work are determined to be either S, M, L, or XL, and consist of necessary permits, advice, contacts, guides and so on.

5C. LEADERS

Here you can see who's leading the project, recognising it always takes one or two committed individuals to drive such endeavours.

5B. PARTNERS

The partnership crests here communicate the kind of partnership required for the success of this project, whether it is intended to be managed by the municipality, by a private entity, or a combination of both. At the very least, all projects require a certain degree of community support.





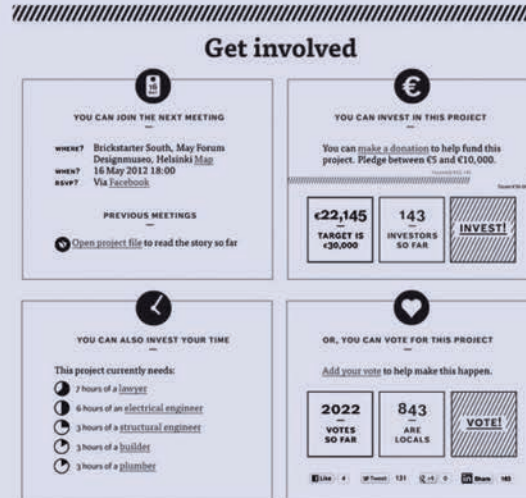
6. BADGES

Badges - a concept borrowed from the popular website Foursquare - are used here as a way to celebrate the projects which most clearly embody the values of sustainable wellbeing. It's amusing to draft the lists of badges and we've gotten a bit lost in it: *Pramistan... the project is designed to be convenient for parents and child carers.* If you want to use Brickstarter to propose a drive through fast food restaurant you're welcome to do so, but through basic game mechanics we expect that such suggestions will be downplayed on the site. Brickstarter cannot magically ordain anything into existence, but we aspire to help boost up the proposals that are best and most balanced across economic, environmental, and social aspects.



7. PITCH

We're interested in video as a 'higher bandwidth' way of conveying ideas; higher than the standard text field implies, anyway. This may be seem too demanding, but then so is the process of urban development. Just about anyone can produce a video now, thanks to the prevalence of cameras in smart phones, and by virtue of focusing on urban projects it's always possible to simply stand in front of a place and talk about what it could be.



8. GET INVOLVED

We've sketched four different ways of getting involved. Perhaps too many in reality, but it's nevertheless a means to flush out the right questions. For most users this is the crux of the service - given they won't be running projects, but simply observing, enabling or discussing them.

8A. MEETINGS

We're suggesting it's mandatory to hold real, physical meetings. We feel the permanence of Brickstarter decisions, unlike those of crowdfunding sites that focus on products and consumer goods, might necessitate looking your neighbour in the eye. Note 'Brickstarter South' implies an event (or even physical space), like a monthly gathering of prospective civic start-ups, which might enable peer discussion as well as debates and votes.

8B. INVEST

This is where you can invest your hard-earned dosh in the project. This seems a no-brainer - and yet this area is fraught with complexity - and politics, for that matter. By representing funding as only one out of a variety of ways to support a project, the aim is to reduce the dominance of financial commitments as the sole means of success for a project.

8C. VOTE

Here you can show your support for a project without committing any money. It's sort of a counterbalance, as if these two boxes – Invest and Vote – are in tension. In this case, a vote might sit somewhere between a vote in a local election and a Facebook 'Like' button. Where the latter is infinite, ad-hoc, and because of that almost meaningless, and the former is finite, infrequent and outsources responsibility for a few years. We want to find something in the middle. Note also we might be able to infer a difference between locals and others, but again we draw something simple which has very complex implications. What constitutes as the local constituency of a bench on the sidewalk? What about a geothermal powerplant? And do all projects have the same definition of "local" or does it change based on the nature of the proposal? Should the voice of those potentially affected by it carry more weight than others?

8D. VOLUNTEER

We're also interested in a Brickstarter service that can act as a kind of broker for people to find professionals who are interested in contributing to such projects, on a *pro bono* basis via time-banking. We feel this is particularly important as it both reinforces the idea that amateurs need professionals and vice versa (these are not mutually exclusive), but also that one of the major hurdles for community-led projects is simply *being convincing*. Understanding who you might need, and then finding them and convincing them to help with the project, is key to whether projects get a hearing from institutions – or not.



9. CONTRIBUTORS AND BACKERS

Project Backers is where the different forms of support are collected and given a face. From coordinators, investors, voters, volunteers, and even the relevant councillors. Note that although councillors hold a special role, they also look like any other user, save a special space to make their views on the project explicit. You also have a one-click way of getting in touch, with the councillor, or organisers. All of these little details have implications, especially for the inboxes of the people pictured here.

