

# ARTICLES

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## PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING IN POLAND – ASSUMPTIONS VS REALITY<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

Sherry Arnstein (1969), the author of the participation ladder, emphasizes that “social participation” resembles spinach eating – basically no one is against because in the end it is healthy. The article presents different views of participation (civic, social and individual participation). Additionally the key assumptions for one of the techniques of engaging residents in social life, which is the participatory budget, are presented herein. The author, apart from the criteria and values of the civic budget and on the basis of observation and content analysis, pointed out the problems which Polish cities face during the implementation of the participatory budgeting process. The article may provide a starting point for further reflections on not only the general state of participation in Poland, but also on the analysis of Polish participatory budgets.

### Key words

participation, ladder of participation, participatory budgeting, public consultation social activity, society, involvement, Porto Alegre, Sopot, Poland

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## Introduction

Nowadays we can speak about a real participatory boom (Sadura, Erbel, 2012). “Participation” word displaces commonly known “taking part” phrase. Students, employees (employee participation), local leaders, social groups, non-governmental organizations, and individual residents participate. One should ask a question, what is participation, and who can and who should get involved?

Sherry R. Arnstein (1969), author of the so-called participative ladder<sup>2</sup>, defines participation as a “category of citizen’s power (strength). An entity that does not have, or is currently excluded from, political and economic processes, through redistribution of power, is given the opportunity to be strongly involved in those processes in the future. Participation is a strategy by which non-participants join those who decide how information is shared, how the goals and actions are set. In short, it is the means by which they can induce important social reforms that will enable them to participate in the benefits of a rich society.” Anna Olech (2010) understands participation as direct and indirect, formal and informal, individual and collective participation of citizens in making and implementing decisions concerned on the common good. For Anna Jarzębska (2012), coordinator of the project “Let’s decide together (*Decydujemy razem*)”, one of the most important elements of participation is co-deciding. She defines participation as “the co-determination of citizens about important issues and co-operation in the implementation of mutual decisions. Of course, to make this co-determination and cooperation possible, we need willingness to cooperation of both the governing side (people should be asked about their opinion and their opinions should be treated seriously) and citizens (instead of complaining they should submit constructive ideas and engage in implementation). The definitions given by the author allow to see the common elements that are characteristic for participation, namely: decision making, contribution, involvement.

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<sup>2</sup> The so-called participation ladder was established in the late 1960s. Sherry R. Arnstein described the continuum of participation by eight levels from manipulation to therapy, information, consultation, appeasement, partnership, delegation, and civilian control. At the first two levels, the author pointed out the lack of participation, while the next three levels defined as apparent behavior. In the last three levels, she spoke about socialization of power.

British scientists have pointed out that in the literature the concept of participation is often met with an additional term – we can talk about social, civic, individual, community, public, individual, vertical and horizontal participation (Każmierczak, 2011). In reference to the literature review prepared by the Britons, Kaźmierczak (2011) distinguishes three types of participation: civic, social and individual. Social participation, also called community or horizontal, is the participation of local community members in collective action, including: engagement in the creation and functioning of civic groups and non-profit organizations, as well as broadly defined volunteering. Through public participation (vertical), the synonym of civic participation is the participation of individuals in the management process, their involvement in the work of the institutions and structures of the democratic state. We engage in public participation when we are involved in elections or consultations conducted by a public authority. The third type of participation, individual participation, which deals with daily activities, choices and expectations of the individual in relation to the nature and kind of society in which he will function (Brzeziński, 2016).

## 1. Participatory budget – assumptions

The idea of a participatory budget (also known in Poland as the citizen's budget<sup>3</sup>) was born in the late 80's and 90's in South America, in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre. It was there that for the first time residents could decide about redistribution of public money (Osmólska, 2014). The project was a great success and met the interest of the residents. Till 2008, the mechanism was introduced by more than 200 cities in Brazil alone, including 44 million people. The process has also spread to South America (at least 510 cities involved in PB in 2010), Europe (200 cities), Africa, Asia and North America, thus gaining global status (Sintomer, Herzberg, Röcke, Allegretti, 2012). Simply speaking, the citizen's budget is a decision-making mechanism whereby citizens decide to allocate part of the funds from the city budget. In Poland this mechanism was implemented

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<sup>3</sup> Wojciech Kęblowski, author of the book "Participatory Budget. The short guide" suggests, that the term "participative budget" seems to be more appropriate. First of all, it does not create the distinctiveness of Polish "budgets" and combines them with hundreds of similar experiences in other countries. The second argument for the use of this form is the possibility of opening this initiative to participation (contribution) not only of fully-fledged citizens, but also of non-registered or non-citizens (i.e. immigrants) or the so-called city users (i.e. students).

in 2011 by the Sopot Development Initiative – an informal group of inhabitants of Sopot, which implemented it as one of the postulates of broader efforts to involve citizens in the issues of the city under the campaign “Democracy is not just elections” (Stokłuska). Hence, the participation budget in Poland is considered as one of the techniques of civic participation, whose decisions, unlike for example from social consultations, are binding. Participants in the participatory budget, in addition to its binding nature, have distinguished a number of other, key and closely related criteria, i.e.:

- First of all, an integral part of the participatory budget is the public discussion between the citizens, who meet and deliberate on at least one of the steps of the mechanism on specially designed fora or meetings;
- Secondly, the discussion under the participatory budget mechanism refers to clearly defined, limited financial resources. It is extremely important for residents to be aware of how much money they have available;
- Thirdly, the participatory budget is not limited to the level of the district, housing or institution – at least one of the steps applies to the city-wide level. Wojciech Kębłowski (2013) emphasizes that projects, which operate at a too local level, can easily be dominated by the interests of particular social groups or political options;
- Fourthly, the results of the participatory budget are binding. Investment proposals, whether soft projects selected by residents must be implemented;
- Fifth, the participatory budget is not a one-time process, but long-term one, organized every year (Sintomer, Herzberg, Röcke, Allegretti, 2012).

Apart from that, the mechanism should be characterized by transparency and openness of procedures, openness and inclusiveness, while the governors should support the activity of the inhabitants and give them as much opportunity and space to cooperate as they can. Kębłowski (2012) also points to the three conditions that must be fulfilled in order to make the civil budget mechanism successful:

- Participatory budget should apply the experience and traditions of social activism and earlier actions undertaken by the inhabitants (i.e. council housing, contribution in social consultations);
- Participatory budget should coincide with different goals – both top-down and bottom-up;
- Participatory budget should be based on the political will of the widest possible cross-section of “actors”.

However, not only the criteria distinguished by the researchers of this phenomenon are the only indicators of correctness of the civil budget process. During designing of the mechanism, attention should be paid to the value of the participatory budget. An interesting summary of the requirements that the participatory budget mechanism should meet are the 18 features proposed by Wojciech Kębłowski (2013) in the book “Budżet partycypacyjny. Krótka instrukcja obsługi” that describes the “ideal” budget. And so:

1. Highlighting once again that the participatory budget should extract from existing participatory actions undertaken by the inhabitants of the given city (use in this case the activities of non-governmental organizations, councilors of housing citizens, neighborhood councils).
2. The annual implementation of the participatory budget and preparation of the methodology should be the result of mutual actions by both city councilors, housing councilors, non-governmental organizations, public institutions, informal social groups, but also the residents themselves. A common mistake is that the budget is an initiative of only one organization, a political party or a group of people not supported by the municipal authorities;
3. The participatory budget mechanism should be part of the administrative reform.
4. The participation budget is to represent top-down and bottom-up goals, i.e. to connect and engage both formal and non-formal groups.

The values mentioned in points 1–4 define the situation in which a civil budget can be introduced. It is about the right conditions, such as a mature and responsible society, as well as political and social context. It is worth emphasizing that the lack of these values does not mean that there is no discussion about the introduction of this mechanism in a given city.

5. Another important feature of the “ideal” mechanism of participatory budget is inclusiveness. This means that its purpose is to involve citizens in a public debate. A necessary activity prior to introducing this mechanism should be an information campaign, due to which the activity and involvement of the inhabitants in the participation activities will also increase, apart from interest in the process.
6. The possibility of view exchanging among residents on specially prepared meetings is also an important element which influences the quality of the mechanism. The fact that the inhabitants will be able to participate in such a meeting should ensure that the form begin to bonds between them, as

- they will have a common cause, which in turn will result in a sense of being a member of the local community with the same goal (Gerwin, 2012).
7. Apart from deliberating and developing of a consensus among the participants in the debate, it should be possible to express their opinions, even in the context of a different vision of the city.
  8. The educational character of the participatory budget is another important feature of this mechanism. Residents should count on support from officials or non-governmental organizations not only in the case of project preparation, valuation or selection of a suitable location for a given investment, but also of the creation of a „plane” on which residents and officials can learn from each other about the functioning of the city and its needs. It is also important that the inhabitants, apart from getting knowledge about how the city functions, start to feel responsible for it.
  9. The participatory budget mechanism is a multi-level process – residents should decide both on the level of housing (districts) and on the city level, so projects which are the most important for the development of the city.
  10. The participatory budget should be a combination of direct and representative democracy. Apart from the discussion, contribution in the participatory budget should make people aware that they are co-responsible for the city.
  11. Each participant in the process must be treated as an equal partner. The participatory budget mechanism seeks to obliterate the division into residents and officials.
  12. Participants of the participatory budget process should be involved at all stages of it, which means that they are responsible for: development of the clear rules, determination of the subject matter and criteria for assessing proposals made by residents. Kębłowski (2013) emphasizes that the more responsibilities are allocated to participants in the participatory budget, the greater is its transparency.
  13. The distribution of funds for the participatory budget should be based on “inversion of priorities”, meaning that more funds should be allocated to the most needy areas of the city and should reach social groups which are in the most need.
  14. One of the characteristics that differentiates a participating budget from other participation techniques is its binding nature. Therefore, projects that have been selected by the inhabitants must be implemented so that

they can see the real effects that gives contribution in the process, which is the participatory budget.

15. It is important that some of the projects are implemented before the next edition of the program – therefore, both the long-term and the short-term (several weeks or months) should be incorporated in participatory budget.
16. Contribution of participants in “monitoring” of individual projects is also affected by the transparency of the process.
17. It is extremely important to be able to evaluate the mechanism by the residents and, if necessary, to change the procedures of the participatory budget. Łukasz Ostrowski and Rafał Rudnicki (2015) emphasize that from the point of view of the evaluation organization of the participatory budget, four important roles can be identified: the initiator (the evaluator), the principal (the entity who funds the evaluation), the implementer (a person, institution or organization that is responsible both for the organization and for the content of the design and conduct of the evaluation), the recipient (all persons, social groups and institutions interested in the results of the evaluation). Usually, the initiator of the evaluation is the institution responsible for the implementation of the participatory budget, i.e. the commune office. Practice shows, however, that this is not the only possible entity. So we can talk about the external evaluator, the municipal office, and also the social party.
18. The last mentioned by Kębłowski feature is the cyclical nature of the process – it is important that the civic budget is not limited to one edition, but has been going on for at least several years.

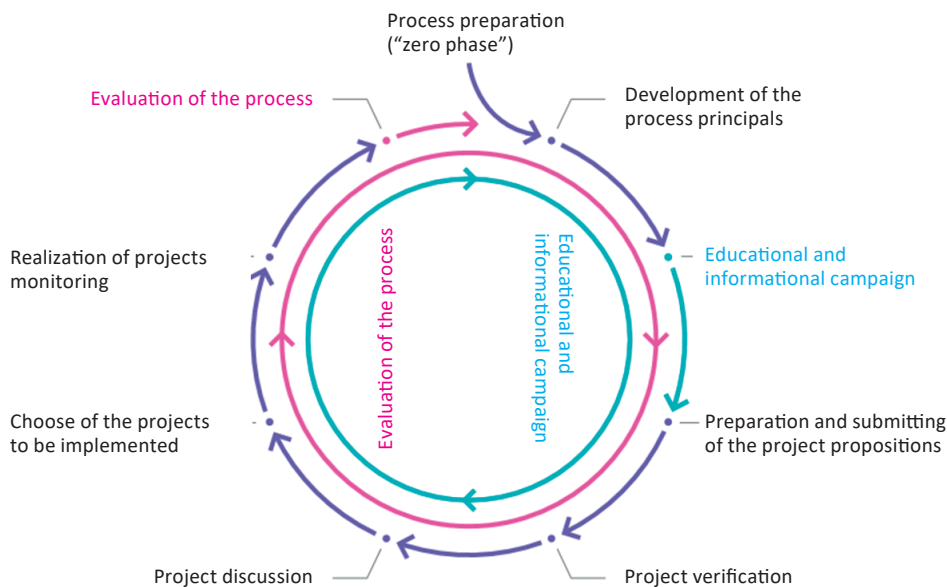
However it is worth noting that the participation budget is a tool with a strong “personalization”, as the authors of the publication “Standards of Participatory Budgeting Processes in Poland (*Standardy procesów budżetu partycypacyjnego w Polsce*)” (2015). This means that the final shape of this process may differ from the general assumptions, depending on where it is introduced (i.e. size of the town, local context, activity and involvement of the population). However by using values, attributes and principles, each process of participatory budgeting should take into account several necessary steps: preparation of the process so-called “zero phase”, elaboration of the principles of the participatory budget, information and education campaign<sup>4</sup>, elaboration and submission of project

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<sup>4</sup> The education and information campaign should continue throughout the process, along with the next stages.

proposals, discussion of projects, verification of projects, selection of projects for implementation, monitoring of project implementation, evaluation<sup>5</sup> – drawing below.

**Figure 1.** Steps of the participatory budget



Source: Serzysko, E. (2015). *Standardy procesów budżetu partycypacyjnego w Polsce*. Warszawa 2015.

The exact progress of these stages (duration, tools and voting methods, the formula for selecting projects, evaluation methods) should be established at the local level, during discussions with the inhabitants. The above values make it possible to distinguish the civic budget from other techniques involving citizens in social life, this is: civic panel, social consultations, civic committees, participation assessments, participation planning, civic cafes or open spaces (Chrzanowski, 2014). These features create a set that allows one to determine the quality and effectiveness of a participatory budget mechanism. What are the participating budgets in Poland? Are the residents willing to be involved in this process? What is the implementation of selected projects? Are the actions taken during the civic

<sup>5</sup> Evaluation as well as educational and informational campaign should continue throughout the process.



budget being evaluated? What is the purpose of the participating budget and what benefits does it bring to the city and its people?

## **2. Participatory budget – reality**

The mechanism of the participatory budget appeared in Płock for the first time in Poland in the years 2003–2005, where the Płock City Council, the Polish Oil Company (PKN) Orlen and the United Nations Organisation created the so-called „grant fund”. This initiative allows local non-governmental organizations to apply for co-financing for their projects. Thanks to the involvement of funders, the grant foundation has been able to subsidize Płock associations, clubs and foundations in their activity for the improvement of the life of Płock residents in every field, starting with sport through social care and culture („Grant Fund for Płock” Foundation). In the popularly known form in Poland, the participatory budget was made in Sopot (Kębłowski, 2014) and was the result of informal activities of the population groups in Poland named Sopot Development Initiative. Residents of Sopot could decide how to allocate 3 million zlotys<sup>6</sup>, resulting in about 200 Sopot residents submitting more than 500 projects to the 2012 budget (Stokłuska). At the first participation in Poland, there were many controversial issues such as voting time, the choice of voting methods, formal voting process, and the division of the city into districts for which one can submit local projects or district projects. Although the project of participatory budgeting in Sopot was a pioneering project and many cities derive from it, Wojciech Kębłowski (2012) emphasizes that it was not a perfect project. As mentioned earlier, in order for a participating budget to be successful, three conditions must be met for the context in which it is implemented. In Sopot none of these conditions were fulfilled in full. Firstly by introducing a participatory budget, one should draw on the experience and traditions of social activism. It was true that before the planned implementation of the participatory budget social consultations were conducted, but they were only informative and therefore the initiators had to build the process from scratch. Keep in mind that social consultations are not limited to presenting plans, but also to hearing opinions of residents, modifications of those plans and information about the final decisions (Rogaczewska, Chodacz, Hejda, Prędkopowicz, 2014). Secondly in the participatory budget, different goals should be coincided: top-down and bottom-up.

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<sup>6</sup> It was an amount lower than 1% of all city budget expenditures.

In Sopot the goals of the informal group of citizens differed considerably from the motives of some councilors. The Sopot Development Initiative was intended to give citizens the right to co-decide on urban policy, and councilors wanted to limit the participation of citizens only to expression support or opposition to projects previously prepared by officials. Thirdly, this process should be based on the political will of the widest possible amount of “actors”. In the case of Sopot councilors as well as the president of the city, they were opponents of the civic budget even in 2010. At present their attitude towards this technique of participation has changed considerably. Kębłowski (2012) estimates that this metamorphosis is not related to the genuine change of views, but the fear that the “success” of the first participatory budget would be attributed to someone else.

After Sopot, there was also time for other cities interested in the idea of a participatory budget. This mechanism was present in Łódź, Dąbrowa Górnicza, Płock, Elbląg, Toruń, Gorzów Wielkopolski, Warszawa, Olsztyn and Zielona Góra. Normally citizen’s budgets are based on Article 5a of the Local Council Act, under which residents may be consulted, in cases described in the Act and in other matters with high community importance. The principles and procedures for conducting those consultations are determined by the relevant municipal council resolution (Kraszewski, Mojkowski, 2014). The popularity of participative budgets has also contributed to discussions on the creation of a special law act that would provide minimum standards for all mechanisms introduced in Poland (Gerwin, 2016). At present in more than one hundred Polish cities, citizens may participate in the process. What mistakes and problems are met by the Polish cities, which have already introduced the civic budget or are during the implementation process?

The first of the problems that can be seen in Polish cities, which have decided to implement a participatory budget, are the meetings which are related to the process itself. The low attendance at these meetings may be the result of poorly conducted information campaigns or inappropriate meeting topics, which usually focus only on formal issues such as who can vote, what are the voting methods, etc. (Osmólska, 2014). Process principles should not only be consulted with residents, but should be developed with them. Kębłowski (2014) points out that half of the analyzed cases in the cities that introduced the budget did not have a single meeting and in every tenth city they were replaced by meetings with the president or mayor (such solutions were used in Płock, Bydgoszcz, Piła and Rzeszów) or by unofficial meetings, as in the case of Kielce, where the meeting were organized by the local media. Another problem may be the issue of financial resources for projects, which are implemented within the participatory

budget. A study by Kębłowski (2014) shows that a dozen or so towns have allocated only a minimum amount of financial resources, defined as “not less than”. Once again, in every tenth city the funds either were not set at all or they were changed during the budget edition. We can talk about such situations as in the case of Wrocław, where the pool of funds was changed from 2 million PLN to 3 million PLN, and in Łódź, where the pool for qualified projects was increased from 20 million PLN to 40 million PLN. Such behavior can lead to manipulation, loss of confidence and discouragement of residents in taking part in subsequent editions. Recently a lot of controversy was raised by the issue of cost of projects in one of the editions of the participatory budget of Toruń. On the official urban traffic community profile – Residents’ Time (*Czas Mieszkańców*), there was information that after closing the list of submitted projects and after the final evaluation of projects, results on the voting list were in terms of valuation of a number of projects, what resulted in shifts on the list of projects selected for implementation. A similar situation took place also in the previous edition, when the project submitted by the Dobrzejewice Forest Superintendence, related to forest planning in Bielawy, was valued at only 400 thousands PLN and after the announcement of the voting results it was already worth 1.2 million PLN, which was half of the funds allocated to the whole city. In this way about 10 projects (Stabilo Foundation) were lost. One of the biggest problems, although one can also say that challenges which cities that have implemented the participation budget are facing, are the binding nature and the efficient implementation of the winning projects. In many self-governments, after the vote the projects selected by the inhabitants or the scope of their projects have been rescinded, suspended or changed in terms of scope of work. This situation occurred even in Płock, where in 2012 in the first edition the implementation of the project: construction of a city marina modeled on the historic water station “Płock” was suspended due to significantly higher costs than initially it was assumed (Projects selected for implementation). The problem with the timely implementation of the project appears also in Gdańsk, where the qualified project in Gdynia civic budget of the settlement square in Gdańsk was chosen to be completed in 2014, is still the only one which was not completed (Lange, 2017). In the previously discussed Sopot some of the selected projects have been delivered to realization in a modified form (Kębłowski, 2014). Residents should see that their decisions on selected projects are systematically implemented. In case of problems with their implementation, the inhabitants should find information such as why the given project has not yet been implemented. Due to such actions the inhabitants will be more eager to engage in further editions of the participatory budget. It may

also be a concern that residents do not always decide which of the complex ideas will be implemented within the budget. In Grójec such a decision was made by the mayor, who announced the participation budget on Facebook profile, where the ideas were reported in the comments, and the vote was held by collecting the so-called “likes” (Kębłowski, 2014).

## Summary

In the last few years, more and more cities in Poland decide to implement the process of the civic budget or decide to continue this process. As already mentioned above it is important that this is not a one-time initiative, but a cyclical process that will enable residents to engage and allow them to take substantial action. The problems encountered by Polish cities mentioned by the author may indicate that the technique is still „new” and that each of its stages should be evaluated. This will allow to avoid mistakes which were made and point to other, better solutions. It is also worthwhile to study the solutions that other cities have taken advantage of, but in this case a strong „personalization” of the budget should also be taken into consideration. The procedures and principles of the mechanism should refer to the size of the city in which the budget is being made, based on the existing activity of the inhabitants and the local context. Implementation of the civilian budgets in Poland is certainly a great success, which, despite some drawbacks, has many benefits. One can also say that the Polish participatory budgets certainly need time to eliminate mistakes or develop procedures that will be different in various communities (Osmólska, 2014).

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