



PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING IN DABROWA GORNICZA - A RESEARCH REPORT

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Abstract

This article contains the preliminary results of our research on participatory budgeting in Poland. We did it as part of the research project No. 2019/33/B/HS5/00353 financed by the National Science Center under the OPUS 17 program "Evolution of the participatory budgeting in Poland - towards a deliberation or plebiscite?" The goal of the research was to find out what opinions about participatory budgeting the inhabitants of Dabrowa Gornicza held. In Poland, the participatory budget is called participatory budżet. The participatory budget is a democratic process in which residents can co-determine public spending in the city in the next fiscal year. In Poland, participatory budgets have been developing for a decade. Until 2018, the decision to introduce a civic budget belonged to local governments. Therefore, although they grew out of one idea, the different variants of budgeting differed among themselves, both in procedural and practical dimensions. In 2018, the law was amended, which introduced the regulation of participatory budgets into the common law.

Keywords: *participatory budgeting, local self-government, governance, civil society.*

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Participatory budgeting - an introduction

Participatory budgeting is a democratic process in which residents can co-decide on public spending in their city in the following financial year. The town determines in its budget the amount of expenditure to be allocated to investments,

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initiatives, and projects proposed by the local community. The city officials analyze the viability of the proposals submitted by the residents. After verification, the proposals are subject to public consultations and then voted on by the residents. The projects that have gained the greatest approval of the residents are included in the city's budget resolution and accepted for implementation. It is to emphasize, the idea of participatory budgeting goes with the concept of civic society and public governance (public supervision, co-management). In Poland, Sopot, Bydgoszcz, and Elblag were the first cities that implemented participatory budgeting.

In the world, the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre (the capital of the state of Rio Grande do Sul) was the pioneer city in this respect. It introduced that innovative formula of public consultations on municipal spending in 1989. The local authorities took that initiative to ensure that every city resident could feel that he actively participated in the managing local funds' process. So, they had a sense of shared responsibility for the city and trust in the authorities. The initiative of the Porto Alegre authorities has significantly improved the quality of life of the city's inhabitants, proved to be a success, and gained popularity all over Brazil. As a result, this idea was introduced in North America, Africa, Asia, and European cities (Szaranowicz-Kusz, 2014, pp.5-6). The first Polish city that decided to introduce participatory budgeting was Sopot in 2011.

Until 2018, such a decision used to be made autonomously by local self-government authorities, who decided about their budgeting procedures independently. Act of 11 January 2018¹ amended the provisions on local self-government. The amendment introduced the concept of participatory budgeting to generally applicable law. Now public consultations had to be conducted obligatorily with residents of independent cities (cities with *powiat* status) and optionally with residents of other gminas and powiats as well as voivodeships (There are three basic units of administrative division in Poland:

gmina, powiat, and voivodeship. The cities with a powiat status include, among others, the cities with a population of over 100,000).

As can be deduced from the paper's title, we will focus on our empirical research methodology and partial data analysis. We will make some theoretical and model generalizations in *Conclusions* and further develop them in the final part of the article *A seed for discussion*. We will present a detailed theoretical context in the monograph that we are currently preparing.

2 METHODOLOGY OF THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

The changes introduced by the Polish legislator prompted us to undertake empirical research and attempt to find out what direction they are heading. Through an analyze selected Polish participatory budgets, additionally, we wanted to determine how often and to what extent the elements of plebiscitary and deliberative democracy appear in the model of local representative democracy.

The research process being part of the undertaken project consisted of several stages:

1. The first stage was a quantitative analysis covering 940 territorial units with independent city statuses. Information on how participatory budgeting is implemented, and how it functions in cities we obtained upon motions to access public information. The information sent to us by officials were e.g., the date of introducing the first edition of participatory budgeting in the city, its type and legal basis, the number of editions, participatory tools used, the impact of the 2018 amendment on local regulations.
2. Having analyzed the above-mentioned, we selected 12 cities for in-depth analyzes (Krosno, Tuchola, Opatów, Nowa Ruda, Rypin, Hrubieszów, Puławy, Tarnowskie Góry, Legnica, Gorzów Wielkopolski, Dabrowa Gornicza, Sopot). We based selection on the dates of participatory budgeting implementation. We considered all the cities that had implemented such budgets before

¹ Act of 11 January 2018 amending certain laws to increase the participation of citizens in the process of

electing, functioning, and controlling certain public bodies, Journal of Laws of 2018, item 130

2018 and after 2018. Another selection factor was a non-standard form of participatory budgeting in some of the cities. The research analyzed local legal acts about participatory budgeting, e. g. regulations, resolutions of councils, orders of executive bodies.

3. In the third stage of the research, we gathered opinions on formal procedures and informal rules governing participatory budgeting from representatives of local authorities, i. e. persons directly involved in creating and coordinating participatory budgets, through individual in-depth interviews (IDI) with full transcriptions (5 interviews in each of the 12 cities). In this research technique, the researcher (moderator) talked to the respondent directly (no third parties are involved). The aim of interviewing the main actors of the participatory budgeting process was to increase the knowledge about this phenomenon and determine those persons' emotional and motivational patterns of behavior.
4. The fourth stage of the research consisted in conducting Computer-Assisted Personal Interviews (CAPI) among the inhabitants of the selected 12 cities (1,853 respondents). The respondents were selected using the random-quota sampling method. The questionnaire consisted of 28 questions aimed at obtaining the respondents' opinions on the participatory budgeting procedure in their cities.

This article focuses on the data gathered among the residents of one of Dabrowa Gornicza city.

3 RESULTS OF THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Dabrowa Gornicza lies in southern Poland, in the Silesian Voivodeship, in the eastern Upper Silesian Industrial Region. The city has a population of about 121,000.

Participatory budgeting has been present in Dabrowa Gornicza since 2013. Throughout those several editions of participatory budgeting, the city officials have been using a variety of participatory formulas, such as public consultations, information meetings, supporting the residents in writing applications, debates, evaluation

meetings, application writing marathons, workshops, etc. Until 2017, participatory budgeting took the so-called plebiscite form. In 2017, the city authorities decided to change the way of project selection. A civic dialogue was introduced, which intended to involve the residents of particular neighborhoods and districts of the city in a series of meetings, both diagnostic and planning ones. The amendment to the Act on self-government initiated by the Polish government in 2018 obliged the authorities of Dabrowa Gornicza to carry out participatory budgeting according to strictly defined guidelines (obligatory voting) and prompted them to run two parallel processes:

- the Dabrowa Gornicza Participatory Budgeting, a model example of participation (implemented according to the mayor's order), and
- the Civic Budgeting, implemented under the resolution of the City Council and based on statutory guidelines.

The statutory changes aim at triggering deliberative processes. Has that happened? We will attempt to answer that question by analyzing the responses obtained from 210 residents of Dabrowa Gornicza, the survey participants conducted in the city from February to June 2021.

The first question was a request to define participatory budgeting. As shown in table 1, more than every second respondent (55%) defined it correctly as a decision-making process within which inhabitants co-decide about a part of their city budget. The remaining respondents were not able to produce it. In their opinion, it is free and non-returnable financial aid, granted by the state, to the implementation of specific tasks of local governments (7%) or an annual statement of planned revenues and expenses (23%). It should be emphasized that every sixth respondent (15%) was unable to define the discussed term. Although participatory budgeting has been present in the city since 2013 and its authorities have been promoting its subsequent editions, every second participant could not define this form of social participation correctly.

Table 1. What is participatory budgeting in your opinion (N = 210)

1	An annual statement of planned revenues and expenses	23%
2	A decision-making process in which residents co-decide about a part of their city's budget	55%
3	Free and non-returnable financial aid granted by the state for the implementation of specific tasks of local governments	7%
4	I don't know, I can't define	15%

The authorities of Dabrowa Gornicza prepared a participatory budgeting website dedicated to the inhabitants. It contains all relevant information concerning each edition of participatory budgeting. In addition, the residents can broaden their knowledge of participation thanks to the units functioning within the City Hall structure: the Department of Non-Governmental Organizations and Civic Activity, and the Center for Civic Activity. Are the residents of Dabrowa Gornicza interested in the idea of participatory budgeting in their city? Do they know how it functions? The responses obtained from the participants show that every third of them (31%) did not know/could not determine who decided about the participatory budgeting rules in their city. The equal number of respondents believed that the city authorities decided about such rules and based their actions on guidelines provided for in statutory acts passed by the Parliament and on the guidelines created themselves. In the opinion of every fourth respondent, the city authorities have created the participatory budget based on the statutory acts passed by the Parliament. There were also opinions that the city authorities developed those rules on their own, following the guidelines they have created themselves (16%).

Respondents' responses show that it was difficult for them to point out the persons responsible for preparing participatory budgeting rules and determining the legal basis on which they are based.

Table 2. Who in your opinion decides about the participatory budgeting rules in your city? (N = 210)

1	The city authorities on their own, following the guidelines they have created themselves	16%
2	The city authorities within the framework set by statutory acts passed by the Parliament	20%
3	The city authorities, following statutory guidelines and guidelines they have created themselves	31%
4	I don't know, I can't define	31%
5	Others (who?)	2%

Every second respondent correctly defined the participatory budgeting. Then appeared a question about did they participate in its editions in Dabrowa Gornicza? The answers we received (Table 3) show that this form of social participation is not popular among 66% of the respondents who have not participated in any participatory budgeting edition. At the same time, more than one in ten respondents stated their participation in all editions (12%), and one in four in some of them. It is to presume that they have participated only in those projects they found important. Those who participated in participatory budgeting argued that:

- their opinion was significant and had an actual impact on the development of their city/district (59% of the respondents in this group),
- participatory budget voting allowed them to get involved in local affairs (31% of the respondents in this group),
- initiatives of such kind were effective and helped the city authorities make the right decisions (17% of the respondents in this group).

The reasons why some of the respondents have not taken part in participatory budgeting were:

- unawareness of the existence of such a process (46% of the respondents in this group),
- lack of time (22% of the respondents in this group), and
- lack of interest in such matters (17% of the respondents in this group).

The results of the survey indicate that, still, too few inhabitants of the city are involved in participatory budgeting. The ones who include mainly local

activists or people who care about the development and the quality-of-life improvement in their local communities. The city authorities should try to activate the inhabitants in this respect.

Table 3. Have you taken part in each edition of participatory budgeting in the city? (N = 210)

1	I have not	66%
2	I have only taken part in some of the editions	22%
3	I have taken part in all the editions	12%

Table 4. Which three most important economic areas should participatory budgeting concern in your city? (N = 210)

1	green areas (e.g., parks, squares)	52%
2	road and communication infrastructure (e.g., bicycle paths, roads, pavements, parking spaces)	51%
3	sport and leisure (e.g., sports activities, sports fields, playgrounds)	33%
4	culture (e.g., art classes, concerts, festivals)	26%
5	ecology (e.g., smog sensors in public spaces)	22%
6	health (e.g., disease prevention, purchase of medical equipment)	21%
7	safety (e.g., video surveillance, lighting)	20%
8	education (e.g., support for school libraries, renovation of school buildings)	18%
9	public transport (e.g., higher frequency, renovation of stops)	15%
10	renovation of municipal buildings	8%
11	development of public Wi-Fi networks and public mobile applications	5%
12	computerization of public services and e-administration	4%
13	history (e.g., monuments, exhibitions, support for museums)	3%

Note: the respondents were allowed to choose up to 3 answers

The projects, that the city of Dabrowa Gornicza implements as part of participatory budgeting,

were initiated by the residents and they fall within various sectors of the economy. According to the respondents, participatory budgeting should cover mainly: green areas (52%), road and communication infrastructure (e.g., bicycle paths, roads, pavements, parking spaces) (51%), sport and leisure (e.g., sports activities, sports fields, playgrounds) (33%), ecology (e.g., smog sensors in public spaces) (22%), health (e.g., disease prevention, medical equipment) (21%), and safety (e.g., video surveillance, lighting) (20%). Table 4 presents the detailed information in this respect.

A significant element of social participation is public consultations. Even though, according to the declaration of Dabrowa Gornicza authorities, the city takes this form of contact with the inhabitants very seriously and keeps improving and extending it, the collected empirical data shows that more than every other respondent was unable to assess it (54%). It is to assume that these people are not interested in what is happening in their immediate surroundings and do not participate in open discussions, meetings, workshops, and other forms of public consultation. That group may also include those who felt that no such meetings were held (6%). Simultaneously, every fourth respondent stated that the city authorities did initiate a dialogue with the residents and took their opinion into account. Every sixth respondent declared that the meetings with the residents were only formal and had no impact. As can be inferred from the responses of Dabrowa Gornicza residents, only 25% of them positively assessed the city's public consultations as part of participatory budgeting.

Table 5. How do you evaluate the process of public consultation (open discussions, working meetings, and a dialogue between the authorities and the residents) regarding the city's participatory budgeting? (N = 210)

1	The city authorities initiate a dialogue with the residents and take their opinions into account	25%
2	Meetings with the residents are only formal and have no impact	16%
3	Meetings with the residents are not held	6%
4	I don't know/hard to say	54%

The city's participatory budgeting is improved every edition. The authorities try to consider the

changes proposed by the residents. As the information in Table 6 shows, the process of civic participation still requires many modifications. The respondents think that the authorities of Dabrowa Gornicza need to:

- intensify the information and promotion activities related to participatory budgeting,
- strengthen cooperation with the residents in the process of establishing the rules of participatory budgeting,
- simplify the project submission process,
- support project promoters in information and promotion activities regarding their projects, and
- facilitate voting.

Table 6 presents the detailed information in this respect.

Table 6. In your opinion, what should the city authorities do to change the functioning of participatory budgeting in the city? (N = 210)

1	intensify the information and promotion activities	37%
2	strengthen cooperation with the residents in the process of establishing participatory budgeting rules (e.g., through public consultations, workshops)	30%
3	simplify the project submission process	26%
4	support project promoters in information and promotion activities of their projects	22%
5	facilitate voting	20%
6	extend the time for submitting projects	14%
7	extend the voting time	8%
8	other (please specify)	8%

Note: the respondents were allowed to choose up to 3 answers

4 CONCLUSIONS

The participatory budgeting idea gives city residents a chance to have an impact how local authorities use local funds. In addition, participatory budgeting makes it possible for city authorities to broaden their knowledge about the needs of city residents.

One of the goals of our project was to find out what the opinions of the residents of Dabrowa Gornicza

on participatory budgeting are. Because the exploration was not fully representative, the analysis of the gathered data does not allow generalizations. We can, however, try to draw some conclusions.

Many of our respondents did not know what civic participation was and on which legal grounds it is based.

Still, too few of them actively participate in the budgeting process. It is local activists who are most often involved in participatory budgeting.

Most of the respondents stated that the city authorities insufficiently promoted this form of civic activity and that it was necessary to modify participatory budgeting-related promotional activities.

The preliminary and selective analysis of the research material allows us to conclude that Dabrowa Gornicza's participatory budgeting is not deliberative.

One should bear in mind that there are two parties to participatory budgeting: local authorities represented by their officials, decision-makers, and members of local government, as well as non-governmental organizations and citizens/residents. Local authorities should listen to and analyze the proposals of residents who co-decide about participatory budget funds. Budgeting should be based on a bilateral deliberation between these two actors of the civic participation process.

In Poland, participatory budgeting is one of the most popular initiatives, thanks to which city residents are involved in the city management process. It is also a lesson of civic activity. For local authorities, it is a lesson of deliberating and considering the opinions of the local community in the process of making decisions that are important to its members. At the same time, it is to remember that voluntarism is not the only reason why participatory budgeting is popular. The 2018 statutory changes imposed an obligation on independent cities to implement participatory budgeting with voting.

Therefore, the authorities of Dabrowa Gornicza decided to parallelly conduct two types of budgeting - the hitherto functioning participatory one and the civic one carried out by the

aforementioned Act and with the use of voting. Projects submitted as part of civic budgeting (the statutory one) are verified by the city hall and then selected in citywide voting. Projects submitted as part of the traditional Dabrowa Gornicza participatory budgeting (implemented in 35 districts) are developed at Resident Forums during workshops organized for the residents of individual neighborhood units. Consultation desks are organized in separate neighborhood units, where the residents can obtain information, ask questions, and exchange opinions. There are consultants in each community whose role is to support the need identification process and help develop solutions.

5 A SEED FOR DISCUSSION

Deliberation is, first, a public pre-decision communication process focused on seeking appropriate arguments for specific assessments and solutions to the discussed public problems. One of the tools used by communicating parties is persuasion, and the goal is to achieve a consensus with mutual respect for emotions, subjective knowledge, and group interests. Deliberation does not shun emotions, but it does not mean they should be vented here. Four basic features characterize it:

1. persuasive way of selecting arguments.
2. orientation towards achieving a consensus, considering the interests of social actors.
3. public and transparent nature of the discourse.
4. open access (limited under justified conditions with the reasons given and appropriate appeal procedures).

Voting, like several other solutions, may be helpful in deliberation. At the same time, the deliberation cannot be reduced only to the voting (majority or proportional) accompanied by different methods of persuading one to make a specific choice from a list of options. Deliberation builds social commitment (enhances participation), develops multilateral communication, and leads to individual, group, and organizational learning. Thanks to them, it is possible to develop jointly and implement solutions (co-decision, co-governance). Reducing deliberation to voting is therefore not a solution but a mistake. This mistake denies the essence of deliberation,

distorts its meaning, and makes it difficult, if not impossible, to root its ideas in cultural reference models, without the bottom-up shaping of which it is impossible to expect top-down changes to succeed. Achievements of the respected supporters of the top-down public policy implementation model confirmed that. Deliberative budgeting is essentially a systemic 'product', fundamentally different from budgeting conducted using voting. Deliberation understood this way is fueled by advanced participation. However, it is not easy to develop perfect participation as it requires time, willingness, patience, tolerance, and a genuine orientation towards public problems. Hence, like in Poland, deliberative solutions are usually used with less advanced forms of participation, extensive in their characteristics and changing phenomena and processes. It can be categorized, understood, and practiced in various ways (Cornwall, 2009, pp. 299-300). We can feel, understand and practice participation more or less instinctively - that is the case when it is continually being suggested to us by binding patterns of behavior (adequately strong in a given culture). We can feel, understand, and practice it superficially, casually, or only 'officially', and much of it depends on the specific context. Simplified, participation can be understood, among others:

- as the essence of democracy (often reduced to procedurally secured voting),
- as an action of citizens who are aware of their rights and obligations,
- as joint and mutual learning, deepening, an exchange of opinions, arguments, persuasion aimed at deepening the knowledge about the discussed problems and their better understanding,
- as (self) organizing and agreeing on local decisions that guarantee the highest possible scope of self-sufficiency understood in an individualized way, closer to the neo-liberal credo of "do it yourself and for yourself", or closer to the collective logic of self-sufficiency created by bottom-up community participation aimed at multiplying local resources and well-being,
- as "everything that happens" in public relations - the motives of these relations may be different and intertwined as they often are the law and its interpretation, as well as

- actions and their determinants, which may guide relations towards consensual cooperation or pluralized competition,
- as 'bottom-upness' which affects public institutions by concretizing the meaning of grassroots democracy, expanding its scope, and at the same time, weakening centralism (although not necessarily authoritarianism, which can take various forms of bottom-up populist leadership),
 - as a mobilization practice aimed at committed contestation, resistance, being an expression of the aspirations for self-determination and autonomy,
- as a form of association, a form of institutionalized collective action, an organizational tendency created by binding patterns of behavior that may also manifest negative tendencies, as a tendency to close the syndicate or defend the bastion of 'what is ours'.
- The above approaches to participation show that there is no simple and universal recipe for participation itself, which does not contain deliberation, but there is no deliberation without it.

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