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Participatory budget as a potential of citizenship education for the adults. Case of Warsaw, Poland

ABSTRACT: The article reflects on educational potential of participatory budgeting in adults civic education. Warsaw's participatory budgeting is analyzed in this article as an example of attempt to achieve educational goals on municipality level. Each stage of participatory budgeting implementation is discussed in details emphasizing how adults' civic competences are develop. Taking into consideration analysis of official documents as well as evaluation report it seems that educational potential of Warsaw's participatory budgeting is not fully developed and used. Therefore, in the end of the article recommendations about improvement of existing solutions can be found.

KEYWORDS: Civic education, adults, civic competences, Participatory budgeting.

Introduction

Although civic education can be defined as “all organized systematic educational activities aimed at equipping young people and adults with the knowledge and skills necessary to participate in social and political life” (Raabe, Womela 2008, pp. 9–10).), it is most often associated with a process of formal education aimed at the acquisition by children and young people of appropriate civic competences (knowledge, skills and attitudes) which will enable them to function in a socio-political reality after graduating from school. In this perspective, a young person entering adulthood, thanks to such school education is prepared to be a citizen for the rest of his or her life. Howev-

er, in a dynamically changing reality, filled with rapid changes, uncertainty of tomorrow, social conflicts, migration and the constant clash of interests of many groups on a local, regional and global scale, civic competences require constant modification, supplementing and verification. "It goes without saying that learning to be tolerant, to participate actively in community life and to be critical are life-long processes" (Medel-Añonevo, Mitchell 2003, p. 13).

The process of acquiring civic competences at school should be complemented by civic education of adults. It is not, however, a simple continuation of the education of children and young people, a copy of similar methods and content, because its main aim is not to develop basic civic competences, but, above all, to increase the reflectiveness allowing to analyze the surrounding world and acquire the ability to actively participate in changes occurring in it. Unlike the education of children and young people, therefore, it is of transformative and not adaptable nature (Boryczko 2014, p. 51) This means that it is aimed at preparing to change reality, control local and central government bodies and legally oppose it if it acts against citizens. Other objectives of this adult education include also: closing the gaps in civic competences created due to the low quality of this form of education in the earlier stages of education and self-education; improving professional competences of future local leaders, civic educators, civics teachers, tutors of student self-government, youth workers or employees of the third sector; improving the knowledge and skills of individuals and groups concerning specific social problems (e.g. increasing voter turnout, preventing hate speech and strengthening social cohesion); as well as teaching reflective action in social reality.

Among other objectives, adult citizenship education differs from civic education of children and young people with: a much greater heterogeneity of the audience and other strategies and practices of learning based on reflection (Kolb 1984), life experience (Malewski 2006, p. 47) and rooted in the social context (Jarvis 2011). Unfortunately, these differences are often not taken into account by practitioners of civic education working with adults. Many of these activities are based on methods used in formal or non-formal education aimed at young people, which may be a factor responsible for the poor quality and effectiveness of activities within this scope. This is probably the result not only of a lack of reflection on the activities undertaken in this area among educators and teachers dealing with this form of education, but also their low competences in teaching or facilitating of learning for adults.

While the adult education in Poland has been in the field of interest of theoreticians and researchers for many years (including Solarczyk-Ambroziak, Przyszczykowski 2003; Białas 2007; Kurantowicz 2007; Jurgiel-Aleksand-

er 2013), this does not translate into the quality of practical activities in this field. The literature of the subject lacks the positions related to the methodology of teaching/learning within the framework of civic education by adults. There is also a lack of manuals and coaching textbooks which take into account the specific nature of civic competences acquisition by adults. As a result within the framework of civic education in Poland there are few systemic, long-term, well thought-out and targeted actions that could comprehensively strengthen civic competences of such a diverse group as adults.

Among the major problems that require in-depth analysis in further research, we can first identify the incidental nature of this form of education. It is carried out primarily by non-governmental organizations, often in response to a specific problem or need. Such actions include, for example, educating about the participation budget (Kłębowski 2013; Bluj, Stokłuska 2015), actions aimed at increasing voter turnout and voter awareness (Mamprawowiedziec.pl; Latarnikwyborczy.pl), civic control (Panoptykon Foundation 2015; Szumańska 2014), or addressing the problem of migrant integration. As Anna Kuliberda points out: “elements of education will appear [there] in passing as a means of achieving the goal of change” (2011, p. 3). Another problem beyond incidence is the fragmented nature of these activities. There are no regular and systemic actions that may lead to an increase of *active citizenship* attitudes (see Hoskins et al. 2006, pp. 6–32) in the entire society. Due to the lack of a macro-level strategy and methodology developed at the micro level, educational tools used in this education are used in a way that is not very conscious, which often results in their inefficient use.

In this article I will focus on one such tool – a participatory budget – which allows for the development of many civic competences. Exploited in an intentional way, based on conscious educational assumptions and on an andragogical theoretical foundation, it can be an excellent educational tool by increasing citizens’ knowledge of city finance management, developing their critical thinking skills and ability to control the actions of authorities, increasing social cohesion at local level, or involving disadvantaged groups in decision-making processes. Unfortunately, in Polish social reality, the participatory budget is used more than for educational purposes as a tool for promoting cities and districts, as well as strengthening their positive image among the citizens. Representatives of non-governmental organizations monitoring the procedures of participatory budgets in many Polish cities express their reservations about its implementation and benefits, at the same time formulating a long list of objections (Kłębowski 2013; Kłębowski 2014; Koch, Potkański 2015; Unit for Social Innovation and Research “Stocznia” 2015). In this article, however, I will not cite those indeed accurate arguments.

I will focus mainly on evaluation of educational assumptions of the Warsaw participatory budget and their implementation based on the analysis of existing data from official documents of entities implementing this activity¹. The aim of this study was the attempt to answer the question whether policy makers are making informed and effective use of the participatory budget programme in the field of civic education for adults: do they refer to its educational potential in their records?; what educational objectives and contents are implemented within the framework of the participatory budget? What are the effects of adult citizenship education which are to be achieved and are achieved within the framework of a participatory budget?; are the educational elements used effectively and in what form? In selected documents, I have analyzed the educational assumptions in terms of objectives of content, form of implementation and effects, which concerned raising selected civic competences of adults. All official records related to the Warsaw participatory budget were analyzed (ordinances of the President of the Capital City of Warsaw, resolutions of the Warsaw Council, regulations) since the first edition and 3 official evaluation reports commissioned or carried out by the Social Communication Centre of the Capital City of Warsaw, i.e. the unit responsible for, among others, the implementation of the participatory budget in Warsaw.

The potential of the participatory budget in adult citizenship education

A participatory budget is “a decision-making process in which the inhabitants co-create the budget of a given city, thus co-deciding on the distribution of a certain amount of public funds” (Klębowski 2013, p. 8). Apart from increasing transparency of financial flows in the city, building trust and understanding between residents/authorities and strengthening the image of a city friendly to the inhabitants (Baiocchi, Ganuza 2014, p. 19), it may also have a strong educational impact. The first example of such a social impact, which I would like to point out, is the economic education of citizens. Thanks to the participatory budget, the inhabitants can deepen their knowledge of the

¹ I am aware that the analysis of documents coming from external sources (e.g. evaluations conducted by non-governmental organizations) could contribute a lot of interesting topics to the analysis. However, the choice of only official documents is purposeful, since the structure itself and their content also indicates the attitude of the city authorities to the educational assumptions of the participatory budget expressed through the narration contained in these documents.

city's mechanisms of constructing and spending local budgets, sources of financial income and budget commitments (Unit for Social Innovation... 2015, p. 8). It also helps to strengthen knowledge on the functioning of local government, management of the city, ways of making decisions at the local level, creation and functioning of networks of self-government links, relations of government with central authorities and citizens' rights under local government legislation (Kłębowski 2013, p. 5).

Another educational aspect of the participatory budget is its deliberative nature including, among others, debates and public consultations (Pape, Lerner 2016, p. 83). The participants, by taking part, can not only develop communication skills (e.g. rhetorical skills, speaking skills; social conflict management skills) but also strengthen civic attitudes related to building dialogue (e.g. respect and understanding of different points of view; willingness to find a compromise and overcome conflicts, emphasizing the importance of connecting features in opposition to dividing ones). The deliberative aspect of the civic budget also allows to develop critical thinking skills, including through evaluation and assessment of project ideas submitted within this budget. According to Anna Koch and Tadeusz Podkański, this educational element that is "systemically the most important element in the process of participatory budgets – and it is still underdeveloped (the social perception is dominated by pressure on the plebiscite dimension – voting for projects, the majority of city offices still do not sufficiently notice this aspect and therefore does not support it actively enough)" (2015, p. 25). Debates or consultations with officials also help to strengthen public confidence and create a sense of shared responsibility for the common good. The participatory budget, which is prepared in a thoughtful way: "is not only about helping the inhabitants to prepare investment proposals, but also about creating a space in which the inhabitants and officials can not only co-decide, but also learn from each other of the way the city functions and what its needs are. Under the participatory budget, participants should acquire skills and knowledge of city management so that they become co-responsible for them" (Koch, Potkański 2015, p. 24).

Preparing projects within the framework of participatory budget may also increase knowledge about the needs of the local community and the ability to diagnose its problems, necessary to prepare effective solutions that meet the needs of the community. It also has the potential to have a positive impact on the increase in social cohesion in a given area and can provide a basis for the inclusion of disadvantaged groups by listening to their voices and including them in co-decision on the direction of development of the district. When writing about the civic budget, one should also not overlook its poten-

tially positive impact on increasing civic involvement and building a community of interests and co-responsibility for the local environment, by means of passive (vote for projects) and active (signing, submitting and promoting projects) participation in its course (Koch, Potkański 2015, p. 11).

Warsaw's participatory budget as a tool for adult education

In 2014 Warsaw, following the example of other Polish cities such as Cracow, Sopot or Lodz, introduced a participatory budget. By 2017, three editions have already been completed, and the fourth is currently underway. As you can read on the website of the Warsaw participatory budget: “The main assumption of the participatory budget is to educate the inhabitants about spending public funds, as well as a direct discussion about financial issues (...) The participatory budget is a huge project of an educational nature. Thanks to their involvement in the process of deciding on municipal expenditures, the residents will learn more about how the district and its units budget is created, and where the resources that contribute to local government budgets come from.” (Social Communication Centre 2016, p. 12). In addition, other objectives can also be found in earlier documents: “enhancing public participation in decision-making concerning the public sphere, as well as developing local awareness, spreading the idea of local government and strengthening local self-government” (Social Communication Centre 2014, p. 1). All of the above mentioned are perfectly in line with the program of developing civic competences of both young people and adults. The authors of this programme of public consultations, as well as the city authorities, clearly state that the participatory budget is an educational tool, increasing economic knowledge, improving the skills connected with social communication, increasing civic activity, and contributing to solidarity and social cohesion by deepening knowledge about the local community.

In practice, these objectives are implemented within the framework of formal and non-formal education of children and young people. Social Communication Centre, organizational unit of the Capital City of Warsaw, responsible for the implementation, management, monitoring and evaluation of civic budget in Warsaw at the city-wide level, in cooperation with non-governmental organizations (among others: Pole Dialogu [Field of Dialogue] Foundation) has created and implemented an educational program under which it has organized a series of workshops preparing young people to participate in the participatory budget procedure in Warsaw primary, lower secondary and

upper secondary schools². As part of this cooperation, also educational materials – presentations and lesson scenarios – intended for teachers have been prepared. In this respect, a lot of well-designed and well thought-out actions have been taken to involve young inhabitants in the process of these social consultations and increase their civic competences.

However, unlike a wide educational campaign in adult schools, no educational programme has been created. Educational activities take place mainly through promotion of the process itself – posters and information leaflets, campaigns in the media, communication media, district offices and other public institutions (schools, libraries, cultural centres, etc.). However, no workshops for the general public are organized, preparing residents to passive participation in the participating budget (choosing and voting for projects) or to active participation in the participating budget (signing, submitting and promoting projects), apart from consultations with officials and marathons of writing projects. It is not surprising, therefore, that in 2016 the turnout was just over 7% (Leczyńska et al. 2016b, p. 47). Nevertheless, decision-makers are trying to demonstrate – in my opinion doubtful – success of the educational aspect of the project. Although the 2016 evaluation report shows that the budget has achieved its educational goal: 72% of the project promoters and 72% of the respondents participating in the evaluation stated that: *The participatory budget has increased my knowledge of spending public funds* (Leczyńska et al. 2016b, p. 68); and respectively 69% and 72% have confirmed that: *The participatory budget has increased my knowledge of the city activities* (Leczyńska et al. 2016b, p. 66), the fact that evaluation has covered only about 3% of people voting in the budget³, causes great reservations about the results of achievement of these objectives.

At this point, I would like to highlight the method of conducting the evaluation of the achievement of educational objectives within the participa-

² According to the Ordinance No. LXI/1691/2013 of the Council of the Capital City of Warsaw regarding the rules and conducting consultations with residents of the Capital City of Warsaw and Ordinance No. 5409/ 2014 of the Capital City of Warsaw dated 13 January 2014 on public consultation with citizens of the Capital City. of Warsaw as regards the participation budget for the year 2015 (as amended), all residents of Warsaw, including minors, i.e. all persons whose permanent place of residence is the Capital City of Warsaw are entitled to active and passive participation in the procedure. As far as minors are concerned, they can both vote and submit drafts, but to do so they needed the consent of the legal guardians.

³ In total, 3584 evaluation surveys have been analyzed and, on this basis, results of the implementation of the budget objectives in 2016 have been prepared. (Leczyńska at al. 2016b, p. 66–69)

tory budget. Despite repeated emphasis on the educational dimension of the budget, the programme's assumptions indicating its implementation may raise considerable doubts. During the first edition, the indicator that this educational goal has been achieved was as follows: "Number of participants in consultation meetings, consultation on-call time, pre-selection meetings and open meetings with residents (assumed indicator value: 4 000)" (Social Communication Centre 2014, p. 25). Also in the next, 2nd edition, the indicator concerning the achievement of educational results was calculated by the total number of all participants in all meetings on priorities, discussion and pre-selection with the inhabitants⁴ (SCADA 2015, p. 79). In the next edition, as I wrote above, decision-makers have already pointed out that attendance at meetings alone does not testify to the growth of specific knowledge, but a rather small sample of the respondents participating in the evaluation does not allow to answer the question whether the objective has been achieved.

Informal conversations with the employees of the Social Communication Centre also showed that the educational objective was not a priority element of the budget and was included in the documents concerning this programme, rather for image reasons, and was not entitled to a deliberate strategy of developing civic competences of Warsaw inhabitants. I also know that prior to the introduction of this type of public consultation, no diagnosis of educational needs and the level of competences of the adult citizens have been conducted, which, from the point of view of the methodology of teaching, is a necessary condition for any effective educational activities.

The method of evaluation of the educational indicator of the participatory budget is, in my opinion, symptomatic in terms decision-makers' approach to this area of public consultation, which is the participatory budget. The lack of awareness on the number of areas in which it can strengthen civic competences leads to the fact that, despite the declared priority given to the budget as an educational tool, in practice no significant attention is paid to this area and no real effective educational solutions are introduced at the various stages of such public consultations. Good practices in the methodology require determination of clear objectives (including detailed objectives), learning outcomes and achievement indicators. These basic methodological assumptions are missing from the documents that I have examined. The shortcomings highlighted above raise considerable doubts as to whether the municipal authorities are deliberately pursuing the "educational objective" of the partic-

⁴ The indicator was 3411 (SCADA 2015, p. 79)

ipatory budget or whether it is merely included in the documents as a fashionable but empty slogan.

Analysis of particular stages of the Warsaw participatory budget in the perspective of exploiting their educational potential

The decision-making process within the Warsaw participatory budget consists of 6 steps. The first is the creation of district participatory budget teams. According to the latest guidelines from 2016, these teams include: “up to 5 representatives of local non-governmental organizations; up to 6 representatives of the district residents; 4 to 5 employees of the district office or the employees of the organizational units located in the district; 1 representative of each of the clubs operating in the district council, as indicated by the club; 1 representative of councillors who do not belong to any of the clubs operating in the district council, designated by them from their circle; 5 representatives of resolution bodies of lower-level entities in the district; 1 representative of the youth district council; 1 representative of the district council of senior citizens” (President of the Capital City of Warsaw 2015, p. 5). As we can see, these teams are quite numerous (from 13 (Białołęka) to 27 (Targówek) members (Leszczyńska et al. 2016a p. 9), which allows to involve many citizens into direct works on the budget. The task of the teams is to develop detailed rules for the implementation of the participatory budget in a given district, as well as to monitor and support the entire procedure and undertake promotional activities at the district level, contact with the inhabitants and participation in information activities, e. g. in marathons of writing projects or discussion meetings (Leszczyńska et al. 2016a, p. 10). It is worth noting that working in such a team may allow those involved in its work to acquire knowledge and skills related to the functioning of public administration. Moreover, participation in the work of the district teams, as long as it is satisfactory for the participants, may contribute to the increase of their subsequent civic involvement.

In practice, already active people participate in the works of these teams, often the same people every year. This often results in the formation of closed interest groups at district level, which, instead of building social capital in the local community, make people increasingly mistrustful of the participatory budget. A frequent objection with regard to the participatory budget is precisely the argument that it is primarily used to implement particular interests of particular individuals or groups and that it does not constitute a real tool allowing all inhabitants to decide about the fate of their district.

The next stage of the Warsaw budget implementation is a discussion of residents on development priorities of the districts. As you can read in one of the evaluation reports, it is aimed at: “clarification of the basic principles of district functioning, including in particular attention to the needs related to their sustainable development” (Centre for Social Communication 2015, p. 13). Despite the fact that it is one of the most important educational elements – expanding citizens’ knowledge not only concerning the course of the participatory budget itself, but also raising their awareness of the problems of local communities, thus creating an attitude of responsibility for the community and social solidarity – as the authors of the evaluation of 2016 point out, it is not used effectively and therefore does not fulfill its purpose (Leszczyńska et al. 2016b, p. 13). The report contains, among others, the following recommendations – raising the profile of meetings thanks to the presence of representatives of local authorities, greater emphasis on economic education by indicating that the participatory budget is a part of the district budget (Social Communication Centre, 2015 p. 14). Moreover, the evaluation’s authors point out with concern that a small number of people took part in the meetings, as evidenced by the low number of questionnaires collected after them (Leszczyńska et al. 2016a, p. 22). Despite the fact that debates on district priorities may be an important element of residents’ education and the development of their pro-social attitudes, insufficient promotion and the availability of information is the reason of their failure to fulfill these functions in a sufficient way. They usually gather mainly members of district teams, delegated employees of district offices and few project providers. The postulated polyphony of voices in the discussion on the development of districts and allowing various representatives of residents to speak remains only in the sphere of declaration.

Another important educational element, which at the same time constitutes the third stage of the participatory budget procedure, is the submission of projects by residents, which are likely to be financed from the pool of district funds allocated to the participatory budget. At this point, due to the given priorities of this article, I will not go into the detailed regulations concerning the submission of projects, but I will focus on the possible educational aspects of this stage. Despite the decrease in the number of voters compared to previous years, the upward trend can be seen among people submitting projects to the participatory budget. In the third edition of the participatory budget, 2649 projects were submitted, i.e. 316 more projects than in the second edition (Leszczyńska et al. 2016a, p. 23). Given that one of the objectives of the participatory budget is precisely to increase civic involvement, it is important, among others, whether people submitting projects are active in oth-

er areas on a daily basis (e.g. are members of NGOs) or have been motivated to engage in civic activities through a participatory budget. According to the evaluation carried out in 2015, 44% of project providers operate within housing communities/cooperatives/neighbourhood groups; 40% in NGO/foundation/association (40% are project providers); 26% in educational institutions (SCADA 2015, p. 80). Therefore, they are rather active citizens. On the other hand, however, the results of the evaluation in the following year show that as many as 49% of the project providers declared that they committed themselves to other social activities as a result of their participation in the budget, which may indicate a positive impact on civic attitudes in the field of social participation (Leszczyńska et al. 2016b, p. 64).

Another educational element of this stage are activities aimed at improving the quality of submitted projects: on-call duty of officials providing expert advice related to the preparation of projects (a total of 121 in 2016) and marathons of project writing, which took place in 2016, 19 in fourteen districts (Leszczyńska et al. 2016a, p. 23). The aim of these meetings is to increase the competence of project authors in the field of project writing and to increase their knowledge of project topics (e. g. infrastructure, education, culture, sports at district level) so that they are best prepared and have a chance to be positively verified in subsequent stages⁵. It is also worth noting that such meetings allow local authorities represented by officials to be integrated with members of the local community, which can contribute to the increase of the public trust.

Unfortunately, evaluation of these actions is not positive. As you can read in the 2016 report: “there is currently no data which could prove the higher usefulness or effectiveness of any of the measures” (Leszczyńska et al. 2016a, p. 32). The authors of the evaluation report estimate that about 350 people took part in the marathons in total, which is a rather low indicator, because this indicates that only about 10% of the projects submitted later were consulted⁶. Low attendance may mean that on-call time and marathons do not sufficiently fulfill their educational function. It is also worth emphasizing here that coordinators of district teams often paid attention not to the educational dimension of such meetings, but rather to their promotional im-

⁵ Each project submitted is subject to verification by officials. The verification is carried out at 3 levels: general verification; formal verification; substantive verification (President of the Capital City of Warsaw 2016, pp. 5–6).

⁶ Assuming that some people came with one project in groups, which sometimes happened (Leszczyńska et al. 2016a, p. 30).

pact and strengthening the positive image of district among residents. Moreover, I think it is important to draw attention to the fact that while on-call time of employees is mainly aimed at expert consultations (e.g. verification of the cost estimate of cycling path construction by an employee of the infrastructure department), the marathons of project writing require, in addition to the substantive knowledge in a given field, also competence related to teaching others, which most members of the district teams do not have. The argument seems to confirm the fact that the evaluation of such meetings was much more positive when conducted by representatives of non-governmental organizations with experience in educational work.

The next stage of the participatory budget procedure consists of open discussions on projects aimed at consulting the submitted projects with various stakeholders – officials, representatives of public institutions, NGOs, but above all inhabitants. This is an opportunity not only to actively involve citizens in shaping local policies and developing their own district, but also to develop the skills associated with participation in civic consultations, i.e.: critical thinking, ability to communicate one's own concepts and ideas, respect for different opinions; willingness to seek solutions of conflicts and ability to manage them; knowledge of the needs and resources of the local community. However, according to the evaluation, most of the participants in the debates were project providers (1209 of submitted evaluation questionnaires) and only 1/3 residents (766 of submitted evaluation questionnaires) (Leszczyńska et al. 2016b, p. 34). Project providers positively evaluate these meetings, stressing that they helped them to improve their projects. However, the inhabitants who took part in them paid attention to the deficiencies of their organization. As many as 31% of them indicated insufficient time devoted to asking questions, consulting and submitting their opinions, and 14% raised objections to the work of meeting moderators and maintaining discipline (Leszczyńska et al. 2016a, p. 39). For example, the evaluators point out: "insufficient time for presentation and discussion of the project caused that further conversations, additional questions, etc. were continued on the backstage. Of course, this is a positive situation, because that was the aim of these meetings. In many cases, however, there was no space for this and sometimes no time. The speakers disturbed other presenters, the speakers had no place to go because there was often only one room available" (Leszczyńska et al. 2016a, pp. 40–41). Again, as in the earlier stages of the participatory budget, an insufficient use of the great educational potential of the tool of direct social impact, i. e. participation in debates or social consultations, can be seen. The main participants in the debates are project providers, who often compete with each other trying

to depreciate ideas of the “competition”. Few inhabitants often have the impression that they take part in the popularity plebiscite rather than in substantive discussions. The whole atmosphere, therefore, instead of building social cohesion and a sense of shared responsibility for the fate of the district, is transformed into a competition between local activists.

The last stage of the participatory budget is to promote the submitted projects, so that the largest possible number of inhabitants find out about them and could consciously decide in the process of voting which projects are, in their opinion, the most necessary in the district. Here, an important educational element is, on the one hand, to increase the knowledge of local community members about the problems and needs of the inhabitants in their districts and to develop critical thinking and decision-making skills. Moreover, project providers have the opportunity to learn how to communicate with members of their community, create local networks and encourage to collaborative action. As the evaluation shows, this tool also did not fully achieve the desired results – projects were most often promoted among families, friends and neighbours (76%) and through Facebook (53%), as well as on posters and leaflets (52%) (Leszczyńska et al. 2016b, p. 41). It is also worth mentioning that a large part of the projects submitted concerned support for specific public institutions, e.g. renovation of the school field, purchase of books for the local library, purchase of interactive whiteboards for kindergarten, organization of extra-curricular activities at school. These projects were promoted by the authorities and staff of these institutions and often (especially in schools) parents were almost held accountable for whether they voted for the school project, which obviously contradicts the assumptions of the participatory budget.

The last stage preceding the final selection of projects and their implementation is a vote for the submitted projects, which takes place via an electronic platform (95% of votes cast in this way in 2016) and in paper form (5% of votes cast in this way in 2016)⁷. Interestingly, despite an increase in voting via the Internet, which seems to be a simpler method than filling in handwritten cards, the third edition recorded a decrease in the total number of voters by 43,989 people in comparison with the second edition and by 38,487 people in comparison with the first edition⁸. Of course, the reasons for this de-

⁷ In the second edition of the budget (2015), 59% voted through the electronic platform, 41% using cards. The changes introduced in 2016, which consisting in the fact that voting cards had to be handed over in person to the district office, probably contributed to a significant increase in voting via the Internet.

⁸ In 2016, 128 406 people participated in voting

crease in interest in voting in the budget may be many – the “novelty effect” is exhausted, disappointment with the procedure (Kłębowski 2014, p. 32); lack of visible effects; the feeling that the participatory budget is of a facade nature and is only a cosmetic procedure aimed at false actions of the authorities in relation to the inhabitants (Kłębowski 2014, p. 37).

Strengthening the educational dimension of Warsaw’s civic budget

The participatory budget has a huge potential that can be used successfully in the informal and non-formal education of adults. It seems that Warsaw’s decision-makers and people involved in its implementation seem to overlook its educational aspects. At the declarative level, this dimension is emphasized, but this does not translate into almost any practical measures. According to the above analysis I have conducted, the Warsaw participatory budget makes only little use of its educational potential to strengthen the civic competences of adults.

Firstly, the budget was introduced without a prior diagnosis of the educational needs of the target persons. Secondly, it lacks the clearly defined and operationalized detailed objectives related to civic learning, as can be seen in the evaluation method. Moreover, individual activities are not based on methodical assumptions of adult education. Of course, these arguments can be rebutted by claiming that adult learning is most often done in the context of non-formal education, in a random and pointless way (situational learning (Lave, Wagner 1991). In this context, the very educational situation created by the participatory budget already allows for the development of civic competences. I think, however, that the biggest objection indicating that the educational potential of the Warsaw participatory budget is used only to a small extent is the fact that its recipients are primarily people with civic competences already developed to a certain extent. The analysis of evaluation reports shows that these are mainly the leaders of local communities, representatives of authorities, local officials who take part in the particular activities of the participatory budget year after year. However, in the proposed forms of actions described in official documents, there is no strategy of reaching out to people with low civil competences, who should be the priority recipients of civic education. In this context, therefore, “educating the already educated” seems to be a waste of public money earmarked for this form of non-formal education.

Not wanting to finish this article just by criticizing the current Warsaw participatory budget, at the end I would like to propose a few solutions that could improve its educational effectiveness:

- at the strategic planning stage: The city authorities, in cooperation with practitioners and theoreticians, should create a comprehensive, long-term strategy of civic education of adults preceded by an earlier diagnosis, one of the elements of which would be a participatory budget. Moreover, as in the case of educating children and young people about the participatory budget, the city authorities should commission similar activities under the grant competition, tailored to the group of adult recipients, especially taking into account groups with the lowest civic competences.
- at the stage of creating district participatory budget teams: It is worth introducing randomness and rotation in selecting members of these teams, so that as many citizens as possible have a real chance to get involved in the work of such teams. What is more, I believe that it would be valuable to organize integration and information workshops for team members so that they can get to know each other, share tasks and develop inter-team methods of communication and solving potential problems in their work. I think that such a solution could reduce possible misunderstandings between members of the team, which in turn would cause them to leave the teams. Moreover, the integration of members may in future lead to other collective actions for the district.
- at the stage of conducting debates on district priorities: It would be a good idea to develop and prepare by the teams the educational and information materials on the priorities and directions of districts development, which could be distributed among the inhabitants. I think that such well-designed infographics could not only raise citizens' awareness of the needs of their district, but also encourage them to participate in debates.
- at the stage of preparation and submission of applications: I consider this stage a very important educational activity. Persons who are engaged in civic activities through the preparation of a participatory budget project should be substantively supported much more than before in the preparation of their applications. A good solution would be to engage in long-term cooperation with NGOs, e.g. within the framework of the *Warszawa Lokalnie* [Warsaw Locally Program], which would conduct obligatory workshops on writing projects for all people submitting applications. This would not only enhance the project providers' knowledge and skills in project preparation, but also allow them to build a network of contacts and cooperation among the inhabitants involved locally. I would also consider introducing a criterion that limits the possibility for the same people to submit applications every year.

- at the stage of open discussions on projects: It would be a good idea to organize many smaller debates, which would take place in many parts of the districts (district office, libraries, schools, cultural centers, city squares, parks) at a time convenient for the inhabitants, so that the most diverse group can be reached.
- at the stage of project promotion: For me, an interesting idea seems to be the organization of workshops for originators connected with promoting their own projects. Representatives of non-governmental organizations could share good practices related to image building and social communication with them.
- at the stage of voting on the projects: Voting on projects should have much less plebiscite nature than before. In addition to information on submitted projects, inhabitants should be provided with tools to critically analyze them. A well thought-out list of questions concerning projects located on the voting platform or on the cards⁹ would be sufficient for this purpose. I also think that it would be a good idea to allow voting with the use of paper cards not only in the district offices, but also to send volunteers (e.g. students of local schools) who, after prior notice, would collect the votes from interested inhabitants, e.g. senior citizens, to the sealed boxes. Such a solution would contribute to the activation of the youngest inhabitants and would make it possible to create local social tissue by intensifying contacts between the young people and representatives of various groups of the local community.

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⁹ Examples of questions for individual evaluation of the project: What benefits will the project implementation bring you personally? What benefits will the project implementation bring to other residents of your district? Does the project fit in with the district's long-term development strategy (a link to the strategy)? Why are you going to vote for this project?

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