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The role of the participatory budget in shaping a common local space – educational potential and pedagogical inspirations

ABSTRACT: The authors show that even in seemingly non-pedagogical activities such as the participatory (civic) budget, educational values can be found. They see in it the potential mechanism of education in democracy – through dialogue and cooperation. Participatory budget is an opportunity to learn civic activity and participate in decision-making about the use of public funds to strengthen the civic competence of all participants in the process. The authors emphasize that participating budgets can be seen as a sphere of education in which different age groups learn from their own experiences. It is also important that it can perform the function of democratizing of the authorities – learning by officials, decision-makers, other leaders to open circle of representation. At the same time, the authors draw attention to the limitations and educational risks of this phenomenon. By analyzing the subject literature and public discussions on the strengths and weaknesses of participatory budgeting around the world, they conclude that successful implementation of the citizens has following conditions: 1) laws and other regulations enabling implementation of participatory budgets; 2) attitudes of the civil servants and other officials, i.e. the will of the administrative authorities to share their power; 3) knowledge of the decision-making processes, regulations and financial conditions of the municipality among citizens/inhabitants; 4) the motivation of the inhabitants to actively participate in participatory budgeting, for without active citizens, no initiative of the authorities will be accomplished. They encourage pedagogues to cooperate and support the emancipation of citizens in the exercise of the right to co-deciding on their local environment and building community.

KEYWORDS: Participatory budget, social pedagogy, democracy, participation, community, learning, commitment.

Introduction

The issue of educational possibilities of various types of initiatives and activities implemented in the social space, elaborated i.a. in discussions on traditions of citizenship, participation or on the ties of education to democracy, has existed for many decades both in Poland and worldwide. This issue is taken up by theorists and practitioners of social life: sociologists, pedagogues, psychologists, economists, politicians, social activists. It is presented from many perspectives, research points, in relation to various social and educational goals. It concerns both planned institutional activities and grassroots informal civic initiatives. It includes the concept and ideals of community and actions 'for others' as well as responds to individual needs for self-fulfillment and freedom to act 'for oneself'. When foreign and Polish (old and present) authorities in the fields of humanities and pedagogy describe the role of education for democracy, the importance of the social environment in education or the individual's active role in the transformation of the social world, they point to the constant task of building pedagogical theory and practice, faced again by every new generation. In our pedagogical mission, the present age – with its perspective of the future that is accelerating, full of educational ambitions and increasingly-globalized connections, and not necessarily an always balanced, just or safe 'presentness' – is a plane of confrontation and the need to update this task. Especially social pedagogy, being interested in the transformations of social-educational circles and their shaping, is constantly looking, in contemporary social, economic, educational, political and cultural phenomena, for signals pointing to new areas of pedagogues' opportunities to develop human developmental potential, and these signals are created and transformed today in the perspective of past achievements and future challenges.

The example of participatory budgeting as a pedagogical value hidden in social practice illustrates one of the many tasks faced by 21st-century teachers. This time is marked by important changes in the approach to learning and teaching as well as in the styles of practicing education. Because of: going beyond closed institutions to educational spaces, a more and more visible shift away from formal structures toward informal activities, the growing need to broaden the forms of education of various age groups, combined with the significant influence of modern mass communication devices on social behaviors – social pedagogues should significantly broaden the areas of their observation of social life. It is necessary to prepare professionals working in a multidimensional environment, who are ready to face the challenges

of education which is 'slipping away' from traditional educational institutions – people interested in pedagogical work 'in the field': in various roles and occupations, through thought and assessments conducted from the educational point of view, who analyze the effects of such activities, having an impact on the social awareness of the power of education existing in seemingly non-pedagogical activities.

Analysis of practice is also a task for theory. Researchers – trying to put their terms and concepts in order, to lay down and translate (by means of various models) the reality of participation directed towards pragmatic usability – give us a look at a fragment of social activity, from the perspective of phenomena and processes that show its deeper sense. Thus, every participation of people in social activities becomes an opportunity to reflect on the social creation of a world of multifaceted education, on their essence and possible meanings. Social educators taking up this challenge draw inspiration from both Polish and foreign theories of social activity, human philosophy, sociology and psychology of interpersonal relations as well as environmental concepts. In the case of participatory budgeting, many of them can certainly be applied to show how this practice can be presented by theory, in what areas of generalizations the theory sees its specific features and educational significance.

In this article, we will outline only some selected aspects of possible approaches from the standpoint of social pedagogy theory and practice, especially in relation to local communities. In the future, this issue will certainly require a more comprehensive review of possible interpretations valuable to education. Due to the lack of systematized research on participatory budgeting in connection with education, presently it is also impossible to carry out sufficiently in-depth analyses. Participatory budgets are currently seen primarily as methods/tools that do not belong to the traditional canon of educational forms, but are pedagogical inspirations to undertake studies on various heralds of educational potentials that emerge in the local space.

Participatory budgeting as a mechanism for education in democracy

The multitude of slogans and concepts of democracy means that we are dealing with a situation where the concept of 'democracy' does not function as a coherent or homogeneous term, and if it is read in this way, it becomes a demagogic slogan, an attempt to give a generalized norm to one's own understanding, a doctrine, sometimes an instrument of power, under which various and different interpretations are hidden. In political and legal theory it is obvious that it has its varieties (Justyński 1997, Barber 1999,

Juchacz 2006, Held 2010). An example of an attempt to communicate, but also of various 'understandings', is the phenomenon of adding an adjective to the noun 'democracy': e.g. 'socialist', 'pluralist', 'deliberative' (Diamond 1999). Misunderstandings and conflicts also arise from different needs and expectations of what democracy 'should be' – in terms of how democratic societies should be organized and represented, governed, in terms of setting objectives and forms of implementation, and in terms of development plans. Taking into account the delayed experiences of citizenship in post-war Poland (Broda-Wysocki 2003, Grabowska, Szawiel 2001) and, at the same time, the rich tradition of Polish social participation and public activity (Bartkowski 2011), in social pedagogy it is necessary to continue to deepen pedagogues' reflections on inspiring and activating people to social activity (Żukiewicz 2009, Modrzewski 2007), also in the context of new challenges of a reality that is even called post-democratic (Mendel 2015). It is worth considering, among others, creation of specific solutions which would give this involvement and activation direction, form, content and social sense. They are an area of a constantly developing and changing social imagination and symbolic reality of collective actions (Drozdowski, Krajewski 2008, Hałas, Konecki 2005), connected with the shaping of aspects of democratic identity in people and social groups, and thus also an area of proposing specific concepts of education toward democracy. With the now mass development of civic initiatives in Poland, it should be assumed that citizens are becoming more and more aware of the possibilities offered to them by the right to self-determination, also in the non-private sphere, and are increasingly willing to take advantage of these opportunities. Local communities' efforts to regain decision-making and agency, often start with small things (Goldfarb 2012), and the participation of inhabitants and their involvement in these activities is a touchstone of knowledge, awareness, trust and willingness to cooperate (Ostałkiewicz 2015). Cooperation between local authorities and citizens often leads to confrontation, negotiations and the mixing of the 'practices' of democratic action. The idea of public/local governance (Izdebski 2007, Hausner 2008, Jessop, Mazur 2017) has in activities such as participation of citizens/residents in local budget expenditure (participative budgeting) more and more often their specific implementations, which can and should be subject to pedagogical analysis. Principles established with regard to the participatory rights of the parties; the characteristics of the participants in the process and their motivations, emotions, competences (of managers, applicants, voters, evaluators); mechanisms for submitting, accepting, preparing and voting on projects; resources allocated to local objectives within the framework of the participatory budget; acceptable substantive con-

tent of projects; the style and way in which local government communicates with citizens and in which citizens communicate with each other; the degree of trust of the parties – these are indicators that give an initial image of the field of research on the community and ongoing social relations, including existing forms of influence of educational nature. Local participation in the perspective of local-government authorities and in social experience has so far largely been based on the principle of formal contacts of officials with citizens – through social consultations, civic legislative initiatives, the possibility of participating in council meetings, council member elections or local referendums (Krajewska 2015). Participatory budgeting seems to be another local-government idea of strengthening of civic competences and encouraging citizens to participate in local decision-making. Although it provides an opportunity to learn civic activity, it is based on decision-making inequality resulting from the specificity of the local administration's functioning and understanding its role as 'leading' and the role of inhabitants as quite loosely treated partners in managing the common space. Much greater opportunities for citizens to participate in social change, including citizens as co-producers, are written about by e.g. Tomasz Kazimierczak (Kazimierczak 2011).

In social pedagogy, however, it is possible to extend this perspective to the sphere of mutual educational influences which, apart from political, economic and managerial dimensions, show the values existing in civil budgeting of local education as an opportunity to build local bonds, develop a culture of dialog and mutual assistance for solving social and educational needs of different groups (cf. Lewenstein 1999, Murawska 2013, Leszkowicz-Baczyński 2016), as well as to create local identities or even city citizenship (Kowalewski 2016).

Participatory budgeting can only partially be considered to reflect the needs and interests of the inhabitants. Statistics in Poland still show a small (several per cent) share of inhabitants in deciding on the funds of participatory budgeting, although it is worth noting its growing popularity from year to year. In addition to educating citizens, it also plays an important role in democratizing the authorities – public servants, decision-makers, local government officials learning to open up the closed circle of representation, to adapt the language and the style of communication of offices to the needs and style of reception of these communications by the local community, and, perhaps even more importantly, to listen to and analyze what the inhabitants are saying and signaling. So far, democracy has been 'professionalized': politicians, local government officials, professional social activists (the so-called 3rd sector, sometimes called the civic sector) felt like representatives of citizens. In Poland, citizens-inhabitants are still looking for ways to participate in and build

a civil society. They are encouraged to do so in many ways. Importantly, also in the case of participatory budgeting, education for democracy or civic education will remain slogans if they are not practiced in democracy and the very awareness of the possibility of participation will not replace learning from real participation. It should be emphasized that nowadays we are more and more clearly experiencing new forms, which should be taken into account in discussions on citizenship of the future using modern technologies and educators should discuss the significance of pedagogical consequences of the so-called e-democracy.

Participatory budgeting as building a community of experience

The concept of sustainable development has recently been subject to pedagogical criticism for too Utopian assumptions about the ability to act fairly and responsibly for the good of ‘all beings’ and to preserve resources for future generations, in the face of constantly increasing social and economic disparities, and also in light of the shortcomings of ethical and moral thought (Ciążela 2005, Mendel, Puchowska, Zielka 2008). However, it seems that in social practice the intuition of a person seeking rules for balance in personal and social development, deprived of ideological masks, is reflected in implemented social projects, which are approved by the society and accepted for implementation by local governments. In the concept of a community which strives for equilibrium and a kind of social ecology, they are particularly visible as an alternative approach to urban chaos that dooms a person thirsty of living in harmony with his/her own needs, developing bonds with others, who is more and more crowded together and stressed in the thicket of concrete buildings, highways and absence of greenery. Participatory budgeting plays a role balancing the social ecology of cities, not only in the infrastructural but also educational dimension, which can be seen from the projects implemented within the framework of participatory budgets in Poland:

“Among the investments most frequently selected for financing, four main groups can be identified:

- sports and recreational investments, which mainly involve sports fields, gyms, sports halls, bicycle paths, health trails, skateparks,
- road investments, such as reconstructions of roads, modernizations of pavements, road lighting, extension of bus lines, parking spaces (parking lots),
- educational investments – multimedia studios and libraries, digital school programs,

- aesthetic investments – urban greenery, parks, residential gardens”. (Korolewska, Marchewka-Bartkowiak 2015, p. 135)

The ideas of contemporary socio-economic and cultural communities seem to respond to these needs. However, the tendency to unify and standardize lifestyles in a planned way, in line with macro-directives, does not always correspond to the natural needs of development that is shared in a global dimension but that also differentiates in the local space. Hence the growing interest in the concept of glocalization (Miszczyk 2013, p. 20) – an idea combining local and global dimensions. Participatory budgets can be interpreted as realizations of local participation of citizens and, at the same time, seen as a construct with some supra-local common features. It is significant that the community, in spite of attempts to present this concept in a statistical way, is above all dynamically shaped by social relations, culture, law, as well as by individual interpretations and actions, performing important roles that protect, build the identity and a sense of rootedness (Mikołajewska 1999, Madurowicz 2008). Despite its economic nature, participatory budgeting is an opportunity to talk about the community, about individual ideas of what, at what cost, why, is to be created in the area shared by the inhabitants. It is also an opportunity to recall the memories of past places. The question: a playground or a parking space? may become an opportunity to reveal whether and how much the well-being of individuals or specific groups dominates over the well-being of others, and to what extent a dialog about the place and people is needed – for the place and the people, working out solutions that are not confrontational. Participatory budgeting in itself would not be a full tool for community building if interest in it was limited to a kind of local opinion poll of ‘likes’. When you follow the results of votes, you can ask yourself what kind of community citizens strive for, what they want the most and what they want the least, what they need. Is local space, through implementation of participatory budgeting, appropriated or negotiated; by whom, how and why? Is it more of an expression of identity emotions of the ‘Small Homeland’ type; a formula of the local community which is learning community life, or is it merely an economic and urban experiment of the local government? It is doubtful that citizens in Poland would be guided by an idea derived directly from the experiences of Porto Alegre. Despite borrowing the concept, the idea of participatory budgeting for a particular city, district, gmina [=municipality or commune] gets closely linked to the specific territory and its inhabitants – including their history, tradition, needs and everyday life. The role of a pedagogue who animates this space and supports people in giving their own meanings and ‘taming’ places is not only the introduction of educational contexts and pedagogical work

with the place and in the place (Mendel 2006), but also the pedagogical concern for the subjectivity of man connected with the place(s), not only in the context of project implementation within the framework of the participatory budgeting, but also in the area of supporting the whole process of shaping local co-decisions, which create a character appropriate for social pedagogy – inclusive, accompanying and revealing axiological aspects of human rights in the spheres of implementation of micro-practices (Naumiuk 2014).

Participatory budgeting can be seen as an educational sphere in which different age groups learn from their own experiences. It is also a specific dimension of learning by doing, learning by experience, and action learning. Its traditions are part of the learning style of adults, and projects to activate local communities. The practice of learning self-government, responsibility for the community or self-organization in Poland has a long social and pedagogical tradition in Poland inspired, among others, by the writings of such authorities as Stanisław Staszic, Janusz Korczak and Aleksander Kamiński, but also by the actions of many hundreds of community workers and social activists of various epochs. It is these traditions, combined with international inspirations and slogans of a glocal community, that form the fabric of local citizenship in Poland. In Poland, according to many critics, social capital is still modest, and civic activity is far from sufficient. Creating of such capital requires not only time, but first and foremost experience, a kind of generational wisdom in which citizens are raised since childhood. The so-called schools of citizenship, civic activation projects try to create such a world of social participation again in the 21st century. It can be said that participation in participatory budget seems to be the simplest of the proposed mechanisms because it takes relatively little personal effort, and participation in it may prove to be extremely beneficial from the standpoint of practicing everyday life as material well-being (leading to the creation of a playground, parking lot, etc.), but also a no less important change that occurs in people who have experienced their own agency (satisfaction, increase of self-esteem, joy, well-being).

In many countries, it is increasingly recognized that civil dialog is an important complement to representative democracy. The phenomenon called deliberative democracy stems from the belief that dialog can be a means of reducing segregation and social exclusion, by increasing citizens' participation in decision-making or contributing to their greater confidence in politicians and local government officials. According to Cohen (1997), deliberation is a public dialog aimed at jointly looking for arguments that would confirm or reject the discussed problems or formulated assessments. Equality of all participants is a prerequisite for the success of dialog. Dryzek (2002, p. VI) believes that di-

alog, public discussion, is a key element of democracy. Discussion is not only an exchange of opinions, but also a confrontation of arguments. However, the fundamental feature of deliberation is that its participants aspire to reach a consensus (Peisert 2010).

More than forty years ago, Dahl and Tufte (1973) also observed that in smaller administrative areas, where the links between residents and decision-makers are more direct, there is a higher degree of citizens' participation in politics. There, inhabitants have more frequent contact with politicians and are more interested in participating in local politics. These phenomena are recognized as the so-called good democracy. Analyses show that the smaller the size of the city/gmina/housing estate, the:

- more informal the contacts with local politicians and the more personal the relations;
- the greater the need, which local politicians may feel, to show interest and to support active citizens;
- the greater the transparency of administrative actions and the lower the risk of ignoring the voices of citizens/residents.

One of the possible applied forms of local participation is to invite citizens to participate in various types of committees. Sometimes, however, the main (sole?) goal of local governments is to 'educate' citizens so that they can become advocates of ideas and actions of administrative authorities. In such case, this participation only corresponds to the first level of the 'participation ladder' proposed by Arnstein (2012) that he defined as 'manipulation'. Information campaigns and consultations also do not yet meet the conditions for genuine citizen participation. What is needed is a prospect of greater mutual co-responsibility for joint decisions made in the common good. Learning what community we are and what community we want to build requires a completely different approach and style of conversation as well as respect for each other, appreciating the potential and competence and understanding the needs and capabilities of different parties, especially those who, for various reasons, are silent or absent, under-represented, less socially active.

Reality of social practices

– participatory budgeting as an element of learning democracy

Sintomer, Herzberg and Röcke (2008, p. 168) identified five conditions that should be met in order to be able to recognize as 'participatory budgeting' the initiative of letting citizens decide on the distribution of city funds. These conditions are:

- awareness that financial resources, usually limited, are available at one's disposal. They must be clearly separated from the entire budget of the city or gmina;
- attempt to ensure that the participatory budget applies to the whole area of the city or gmina (possibly a large housing estate in big cities), because projects that are too local may be at risk of influences of local interest groups;
- regularity so that the process of creating a participatory budget can be repeated;
- one-off or occasional admission of citizens/residents to take budgetary decisions is contrary to the idea of participatory budgeting. This process must be long-term;
- organizing of public discussions so that citizens can first discuss the proposals with representatives of administrative authorities and then with each other;
- assurance that decisions made by inhabitants are binding – projects that have been voted through are to be implemented by the authorities. (This, among other things, distinguishes participatory budgeting from public consultations). It is estimated that currently (2017) participatory budgeting is being implemented in almost three thousand towns and cities around the world. Introducing appropriate legal regulations and exchanging experiences between local governments and citizens is conducive to the dissemination of this phenomenon.

Two basic prerequisites are essential in attempting to organize participatory budgeting. Namely, the willingness of administrative authorities to share their powers, and an interest in the creation of a strong civil society in which citizens have an opinion, 'take the floor' and exercise their rights not only to discuss and recommend change, but also to carry out actions and control/evaluate them (cf. Pietrzyk-Reeves 2012).

Authors of the Participatory Budgeting Worldwide report (2015) observed three global trends. The most intense of these is the combining of bottom-up initiatives with top-down activities and the growing role of grass-roots movements. Most often, these initiatives are aimed at achieving positive social change and improving the quality of life. The second trend of participatory budgeting in the world is the maintenance of the decisive role of local offices in planning of community development and in managing the budgeting process. The third trend is common cases of merely symbolic participation of citizens/residents in the budgeting process. Any conducted consultations are non-binding and often only validate decisions taken previously.

Polish experiences are among those observed trends. Critical observers of participatory budgeting usually emphasize that the majority of budgets resemble a plebiscite of ideas put forward by individual people, in which a discussion of ideas at the level of a housing estate, neighborhood or city is replaced with voting (Kajdanek 2015, p. 30). Skeptics draw attention to the unrepresentativeness of the proposals that are put forward. Supporters, on the other hand, willingly emphasize that participation in the budgeting process gives an opportunity to become experienced and autonomous citizens who are able and willing to participate in social life, understand their duties and rights and are able and willing to use them. Where attempts are made to implement participatory budgeting, sooner or later its supporters must deal with the problem of how to make local government officials aware that citizens often have a much greater knowledge of the conditions, needs and opportunities of the places where they live or work than officials who carry out any visits, inspections etc. only on working days during business hours, and who never get to some places. Another problem that many city/gmina authorities need to solve is to ensure that the dialog participants actually represent the majority of the inhabitants/citizens. After many years of experience with the implementation of participatory budgets, more and more cities/gminas are looking for a way to solve the commonly felt problem of motivating residents to participate more actively in participatory budgeting. This is all the more important given the growing dynamics of urban movements, local initiatives and social projects in cities. Activities are being followed more and more closely by scientists who see important pedagogical values (Mendel 2016) in cities as structures of social relations and dynamics of influence, therefore, for example, linking the potential of participatory budgeting with the idea of an urban laboratory (Golden, Czervinkowa 2016) could bring interesting solutions and inspirations for the pedagogy interested in researching in action or for involved pedagogy.

The so-called neighborhood funds, in addition to the traditional city budget, are a solutions which is gaining popularity. Given the relationship between the size of the administrative unit and the degree of the inhabitants' involvement (Dahl, Tuft 1973), neighborhood funds may indeed become an interesting extension of the 'offer' of the participatory budget. The main feature of this solution is the reversal of the top-down perspective i.e. initiation and full management by the authorities of bottom-up initiatives.

In Europe, promising examples of such initiatives can be seen in Germany. Attempts of Germans to introduce neighborhood funds are based primarily on the positive experience of the city of Recife (Brazil) and on the analysis

of advantages and disadvantages of implementations of participatory budgets to date (Neighborhood funds 2015).

Supporters of participatory budgeting look not only for effective legal and organizational solutions, but also for allies to their idea. In Germany, for example, it was recognized that journalists could be partners (cf. Participatory Budgeting and the Media 2015). The most obvious functions of media are: informing and opinion-forming. An event, about which there is no information in the media, does not attract people's attention. A participatory budget, which is only mentioned on the last page of a newspaper, will probably not even be noticed. Without knowing about the initiative, implementation of participatory budgeting is doomed to failure. The content, especially the form, of the information provided is also important. It is doubtful that the residents will consider participatory budgeting processes to be effective if they are described negatively. Few people will be willing to engage in activities that are subject to criticism. Journalists could also help to understand the essence and idea of citizens' budgetary participation. They could e.g. present expert knowledge in an accessible way: explain legal provisions and official information. Often, for officials in charge of carrying out participatory budgeting, the process ends with the implementation of planned projects. Journalists also tend to decide that the budgeting process has been completed at the end of the active participation phase. The description and evaluation of the results of this process often escape media interest, and in this aspect the role of the media could be crucial.

When analyzing the literature on the subject and the current discussions on the pros and cons of participatory budgeting around the world, one general conclusion can be drawn. In order for the community to reach the highest levels of the 'participation ladder' (Arnstein 2012) – social partnership, delegation of powers and greater civic control – the following must exist:

- laws and regulations allowing to implement participatory budgeting;
- attitude of the official corps of cities, gminas and housing estates;
- citizens' knowledge of the decision-making processes, regulations and financial conditions of the city/gmina/housing estate;
- residents' motivation to actively participate in participatory budgeting.

The presented thoughts show that the first participatory experiences seem to be important for building democratic civic structures, although they not widely applied at the beginning. They require development, dissemination, support and reflection on democratic learning in the aspect of not only ideas and the theory of democracy but, perhaps most of all, practice, everyday efforts to implement and interpret noble slogans, in a not always ideal

social reality. How to talk about participation and how to practice it? Should we teach people democracy or learn from them about democracy – what is it for them, how do they understand it, how do they implement it in their everyday lives? What influence do they have on the socio-political tissue of social change? (Skrzypczak 2016). Pedagogues should accompany, as they acquire their own participatory competences, in these different areas, not only to help but also to talk about mutual education, learning from each other and when/how/why this education is effective, fair, emancipating – in other words, how it teaches us to create learning communities and democracies (Gurnstein, Angeles 2007; Kurantovich 2007). An important aspect of this learning is to take into account the specifics of adult learning, who, through experience and critical reflection on it, constantly try to understand the world and themselves and to give sense and meaning to their own social practices. While doing so, they shape their ‘participatory biography’ by participating in local events. They choose what they believe is the best for them in a way that suits them best in the area of knowledge, emotions (experiences) and social relations (Mezirow 2000; Malewski 2009; Alheit 2011). This is also a form of shaping responsibility for one’s own education by assuming new roles that (de-/re-)construct one’s self-awareness in the social context and in relation to organizing the surroundings as one’s living environment, in the perspective of lifelong learning (Illeris 2009).

Conclusion

Economic, social and cultural conditions of local communities are of fundamental importance for development of a society. An important question is how sustainable this development is and how the processes of closing gaps, eliminating shortcomings and reducing social inequalities are being introduced. Participatory budgeting only seems to be an unimportant element of mini-participation. It has the power of example which, like in a lens, shows the current state of democratic consciousness of citizens, officials, politicians and their willingness to cooperate, co-decide and take responsibility for the local space. It is not only activity itself that is important, despite the great emphasis in many analyses on participation, but also its scope, content and objectives. Despite various interests involved, research into the scopes of available power or conflicts of reason, which are the experience of such processes, we can see in them an element of social impact. Social educators can and should analyze the functions of participatory budgeting on different planes: individual, group and collective, concerning aspects that people learn for the first time and that

they review, change in themselves under the influence of impulses coming from civic participation, linked to knowledge and skills, as well as social attitudes and values. Showing that participation in participatory budgeting is also a form of shaping identity by organizing the space around us, we pay attention to the important issue of the culture of co-existence and co-creation. The calls for the involvement of citizens in participation concerning local budgets include the message of inviting people to a symbolic 'common table'. The humanistic dimension is not about confrontation of expectations, although this is very often the case at the beginning, especially when the relations between local authorities and residents are not the best, but about the chance to get to know and learn from one another in order to be able to do something together. Communities of places and people cannot be 'created'. They are built in everyday learning, experience and actions. There is still a need for improvement, there is much inconvenience and frustration plus lack of appropriate research on this subject, but inspirational for educators may, among others, be the fact that some people see their role and importance in social participation, practice their own agency, self-reliance and independence in a local mini-area – in practice they exercise individual and collective rights as a person who is not indifferent to how everyone around lives. In this quest, they meet, learn from and influence others. Given the value of such meetings, it is worth talking more about their role. There are many professional efforts for the benefit of communities (community organizing, community development, community action) which could find a chance to achieve their goals in this mechanism, but there is also space for a direct, bottom-up and spontaneous style of formation of *communitas*, resembling building of good neighborly relations, when the individual good and the common good come together.

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