

Paula Kłucińska, Dawid Sześciło

University of Warsaw

City participatory budget – towards governance or façade participation?

ABSTRACT: Participatory budget is a commonly used tool which reflects the basic assumptions of the governance. The aim of the article is to check how the procedures adopted in Polish municipalities correspond to the elaborated standard model of participatory budgeting and to what extent they fit in the rules of participatory governance at the local level. The article presents the results of the legal-dogmatic analysis carried out in 15 communes, located in different voivodships and varied in terms of population. The results point out that, despite the increased impact of the participatory budgeting, the full potential of participatory mechanisms, which are meant to serve to improve the quality of local governance, is still not being fully used.

KEYWORDS: Participatory budget, governance, participatory governance.

Introduction

The participatory budget (PB) is one of the basic tools characterizing contemporary trends of deliberative democracy and co-management of public administration, based on direct involvement of citizens in the process of planning and spending public funds. Although the first experiments with participatory budgeting took place as early as in the 1990s in Brazil (Wampler 2007), the lively discussion on a new method of formulating the local budget in Poland began only a few years ago. Beginning in 2011, when the first participatory budget was implemented in Sopot, both media and literature have consistently pointed to weaknesses in the solutions adopted in Polish com-

munes¹. It turns out that the mechanism presented in the assumptions as an opportunity for civic co-deciding on the budget does not in practice always reflect a guarantee of real public participation.

The objective of this article is to critically analyze Polish local experiences in the implementation of the participatory budget and, above all, to determine to what extent the solutions applied in Polish communes use the potential of the participatory budget to popularize the model of co-management in the commune. This objective will be achieved through legal-dogmatic analysis of local law acts regulating the participatory budget procedure in selected communes in Poland. The selection of communes subject to analysis ensures territorial diversity and allows capturing a wide range of PB models used. The model, which will be used for the analysis of the solutions functioning in Polish communes, is the concept of co-management translated into a catalog of requirements, which should be met by participatory budget procedures. In other words, we are trying to check to what extent the PB model adopted in local practice fits into the logic of co-management.

The article does not provide a full diagnosis of the local PB model, which was established in Polish practice. Based on the legal-dogmatic method, it is not possible to naturally capture the elements of the PB process that are not entrenched in the regulations. It should be remembered, however, that legislation is the main determinant of the activities of self-government administration bodies, which like all other state bodies are obliged to act on the basis and within the limits of the law. Therefore, self-government activities must always be rooted in the legal system and the law also illustrates to a large extent the spectrum of self-government activities. However, in the alternative, the analysis will also use data on the practice of applying local regulations concerning the PBs.

¹ Practice shows that the PB institution is currently implemented in Poland at the level of communes and cities with poviats rights. It should also be noted that the sołectwo fund, which constitutes a separate part of the commune's budget allocated to the objectives indicated by the inhabitants of the village in the procedure regulated by a special law, can also be considered a form of the participatory budget. Taking this into account, in this article we focus on the "urban participatory budget", i. e. the form of PB implemented mainly in urban (or rural-urban) communes, which is not regulated by the act on the sołectwo funds.

Participatory budget as a tool of co-management Towards the reference model

From an administrative and public management perspective, recent years have been a period of evolution from local government to local governance, as Peter John put it. Co-management has become the dominant paradigm of government, which sets objectives and values such as:

- moving away from the vision of the state as a hierarchical pyramid of public institutions to an open model of a network of diverse public and private actors (Ost, Kerchova 2002);
- the focus of authorities on the role of a moderator rather than an autonomous creator of public policies (Newman, Barnes, Sullivan, Knops 2004; Izdebski 2007), accompanied by the treatment of citizens as co-decision makers (Boyte 2005).
- providing citizens with a direct and substantial contribution to the creation, implementation and evaluation of public services in a broadly understood co-production formula (Sześciło 2015a);
- insisting on a deliberative formula for public decision-making, i. e. not only enabling citizens to present their views and expectations, but also launching a process of exchange of views, arguments and evidence in support of specific positions (Osmani 2007).

Co-management is to particularly translate to reinforcement of the social capital, increase of the citizens' quality of life, as well as subjectivization of the community (Mannarini, Taló 2012). Co-management is also intended to shape civic attitudes in a way that John Stuart Mill wrote about more than a century ago. The British liberal thought classicist noticed: "In many cases, although individuals will not deal with a particular matter as good as civil servants on average, it is nevertheless desirable to refer the matter to them, not to the government, in the interests of their own mental education – in order to strengthen their ability to act, to exercise their judgment and to familiarize them with the issues that are left to them" (Mill, Polish edition: 2012, p. 220).

Dissemination of the participatory budget is nothing more than a form of co-management application in local management. It is emphasized that a PB not only ensures more effective civic control of local public affairs, but also teaches responsibility for the common good and encourages active citizenship, and it increases confidence in public authorities and supports efficiency and transparency in the spending of public funds (Cabannes 2004).

Initially, as a bottom-up initiative in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre, the PB has spread as a global phenomenon, the number of which has already exceeded hundreds or even thousands of cases. This is why it is so difficult to define the very concept of PBs, which in separate legal and social conditions of countries are often interpreted in a divergent way, emphasizing different reasons. (Ganuza, Baiocchi 2012). The most frequently presented meanings of the PB, however, include the definition created by Cabannes (2004), who defined the PB as a process in which the population makes decisions or influences decisions on allocating part or all of the public funds. In turn, according to Wampler (2007), this mechanism is based on discussion and negotiation of the distribution of these funds. In Poland, a PB is called² 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 (Kłębowski 2013).

The broad scope of the PB concept opens up the possibility of using various already developed institutional forms and techniques of civic participation. Examples include public hearings, opinion polls and surveys, civic panels and focus groups (Sześciło 2015b, Schimanek 2015, Ebdon 2002). At the same time, in the light of the considerations on the PB, of importance is the fact that public participation should include the stage of engagement in the implementation of PBs and then the entire budgeting process – starting from the stage of public expenditure planning for an appropriate budgeting period, through budget implementation monitoring (the so-called civic audit) to the control of the quality of services financed from public funds (Sześciło 2015b, Kraszewski, Mojkowski 2014).

Just as there is no uniform, precise definition of the PB, we cannot include individual mechanisms of applying this process into one universal model. However, the literature tries to systematize six types of models that exist in Europe (Sintomer et al. 2008). These were identified taking into account criteria such as the origin of the process, the form and organization of meetings, the type of deliberations and the position of civil society in the DB procedure. The results of the research showed that there were clear discrepancies between the European model modeled after Porto Alegre, in which residents were given real influence on the choice of specific investments, and the model of in-depth consultation on public finances, which was limited to the possibility of participating in public discussion.

² More often called the civic budget.

The original BP model in Porto Alegre was based on one-year cycles of open gatherings and meetings, which took place at the territorial level (16 subdivisions of the city) and thematic level (5 urban development areas). These cycles were divided into three stages, the first of which consisted in the determination of the city's investment priorities and the selection of delegates representing housing estates in thematic and territorial forums (which took place once a month), during the second, intermediate meetings took place (at the territorial level the needs of settlements were discussed, and at the thematic level the needs of general-city projects) and during the third one, the members of the Participating Budget Council were elected, whose task was to collect proposals from the entire city and to carry out the following tasks. The product was the urban budget project, discussed with the inhabitants and finally handed over for the implementation of the administration (Kębłowski 2013). Describing the characteristics of the above mentioned model (2001), Souza drew attention to visibility and satisfaction of the inhabitants with the PB process, as well as its indirect effects, such as an increase in transparency in government decision-making and the responsibility of the local government combined with a solid communication with the citizens.

The lack of a universal PB model and its complexity do not prevent the construction of a specific model, which combines the general objectives and values of co-management with specific conditions of the budgetary process:

- The creation of PBs must be based on the clear will of all parties – it is therefore necessary to have a clear political will and the interest of the remaining recipients (Cabannes 2004),
- The implementation of PBs is based on clearly defined principles, including the definition of deadlines, bodies responsible for the process and project assessment, where the institutional framework of PBs should be developed with public participation and expressed in the form of legal instruments (Cabannes 2004);
- The participatory approach should be applied to the entire local budget (Sintomer et al. 2008), although the scope and forms of participation may vary. For example, part of the budget can be managed on a direct and binding basis by citizens, while the remainder can be managed on a non-binding basis through non-binding public consultation, which goes beyond the possibility of commenting and offers real influence on the shape of local spending;
- The PB is based on a consensus-oriented discourse – residents meet for this purpose at specially planned, open meetings and are provided with other participatory tools (Sintomer et al. 2008; Sześciło 2015b);

- The PB is not a one-off process; it should be subject to both a year-on-year and a long-term strategy (Sześciło 2015b);
- The PB is a transparent and open process – responsible entities are obliged to provide reliable information on all activities related to the planning, establishment and execution of municipal budget, no one should be restricted access to participation in the discourse on PBs;
- The PB requires evaluation with the participation of residents, both regarding the PB procedure itself and the implementation of projects financed under this mode.

The Method

Adopting the above criteria as a model model of the participatory budget, we have started to analyze the regulations governing the participatory budget in fifteen communes in Poland. The selection of the sample was random, but in order to ensure territorial and size diversity of the communes, we adopted two rules. Firstly, each of the 15 communes comes from a different voivodeship. Secondly, we qualified for the survey an equal number of communes (five communes each) falling into three categories in terms of population: a) small communes – up to 50,000 inhabitants; b) medium communes – from 50,000 to 200,000 inhabitants; c) large communes (voivodeship capital cities only) – over 200,000 inhabitants. The analysis covered two key elements for assessing the transformational potential of the PB implemented in these communes: 1) the extent of participation, measured by the proportion of budgetary resources allocated in the PB form by the inhabitants; 2) the forms of participation, i. e. the possibility for residents to participate in the process, starting with the creation of “rules of the game”, through the decision on the allocation of specific resources, and ending with the evaluation of the implementation of projects from the PB and the assessment of the process itself.

The legal-dogmatic method was used for the analysis, based on an examination of the provisions governing the participatory budget procedures. Given that the participatory budget is not regulated at the statutory level, its implementation is governed by the provisions of local law, in particular the resolutions of communal councils adopted pursuant to Article 5a of the Act on Communal Self-Government, which provides the authorities with a basis for establishing the principles and procedures for conducting social consultations in municipalities. The analysis of these acts was supplemented by a review of documents created in the course of participatory budget processes,

published in bulletins of public information of the communes (e. g. notices of public consultations).

The basic limitation of the analysis focused on regulations is to omit events or activities which have an impact on the overall assessment of the whole process and which have not been anchored in the regulations. In practice, however, the limitation is of minor importance, because according to the constitutional principle of legalism (Article 7 of the Constitution), all activities of self-government bodies should have a legal basis, whether in statutory regulations or local regulations issued on the basis of a statutory authorization. Thus, it can be assumed that legal analysis is a comprehensive tool for researching local public management, which only to a small extent “happens” outside the sphere of legal regulation.

Results and discussion

The table below presents the results of the analysis of local regulations of the participatory budget in terms of key elements of the PB model. The main emphasis was put on indicating how much of the money is allocated by the residents, and what tools are available to the residents in the participatory budget process. The presented data are then described on the basis of regulations passed in individual communes, according to the adopted division into the scope of participation and its form, where we focused on distinguishing solutions adopted analogously in at least a few cities or listing ideas of a unique and untypical nature.

Scope of participation. Participation in the remaining part of the budget. In most municipalities, consultations on the remaining part of the budget are optional – they may be introduced (ordinance of the Mayor) on the basis of resolutions of the decision-making bodies concerning the rules and procedures for conducting public consultations. Consultations can be conducted i.a. at the request of a certain number of inhabitants (Białystok, Olkusz), non-governmental organizations (Białystok), youth city councils (Giżycko), district councils (Jarosław). In the case of most communes there are no restrictions on the participation of residents in consultations – exceptions include Ruda Śląska and Lublin, in which adults, permanent residents (or registered residents) of the commune are entitled to participate in consultations. At the same time, a high quantitative threshold was established in Ruda Śląska, i. e. the number of inhabitants who can submit a request for consultations (1500 people). In Włocławek, the application may be submitted by 300 residents representing an important interest in their professional, economic, scientific, cul-

tural, religious activity or other important social interest. After the analysis of official websites of offices and public information bulletins, it should be stated that municipalities do not use the possibility of consulting the draft budget – for example, in Jarosław the budget for 2017 raised many objections, while only officials participated in the discussion at the conference organized. As a result, only a minimal part of the budget is subject to consultation with residents – about 1% of the total expenditure of the local government unit.

Table. The scope and forms of civic participation in participation budget procedures in selected communes

Commune size (population)	Name of the commune	Scope of participation			Forms of participation			
		PB amount in relation to the total expenditure of the commune (%)	PB amount in relation to the property expenditure of the commune (%)	Participation in the allocation of the remaining part of the communal budget resources	Consultations	Submission of the project	Voting	Evaluation
< 50,000 inhabitants	Ośno Lubuskie	0.80	6.16	–	–	+	+	–
	Giżycko	0.33	1.93	–	–	+	+	–
	Sopot	1.32	6.23	–	–	+	+	–
	Jarosław	0.54	6.55	–	–	+	+	–
	Olkusz	0.70	6.91	–	+	+	+	–
50,000 –200, 000 inhabitants	Starachowice	0.66	4.49	+	–	+	+	–
	Głogów	0.80	4.46	–	–	+	+	–
	Włocławek	0.56	4.71	–	–	+	+	–
	Opole	0.28	1.41	–	–	+	+	–
	Ruda Śląska	0.37	1.70	–	+	+	+	+
> 200, 000 inhabitants	Białystok	0.49	1.66		+	+	+	+
	Lublin	0.71	3.53		–	+	+	–
	Szczecin	0.28	1.18		–	+	+	+
	Poznań	0.50	2.69		–	+	+	+
	Łódź	1.02	6.59		+	+	+	+

Source: Prepared on the basis of resolutions and orders issued by local government bodies.

Obligatory public consultations on the allocation of the remaining part of the budget resources were provided for by the City of Łódź, where, at the Mayor's own initiative, consultations are held, among others, on the city budg-

et and the multiannual financial forecast adopted with it (analogically Starachowice, similarly to Poznań). In Szczecin, despite the lack of a clear indication as to the necessity of conducting consultations on the City's draft budget, the budget for 2017 was subject to consultations on general principles (Order of the Mayor of Szczecin) in the form of two open meetings with residents.

Forms of participation. Consultations on the preparation of rules and mode of work on the PB 2017 and during the process. In most documents there is no explicit obligation to consult the rules of the PB procedure for the next edition. The Białystok Office's website indicated that the draft resolution on the PB was consulted with the Białystok Council for Public Benefit Activity, representatives of non-governmental organizations, city councilors and residents of Białystok, and the result of this consultation was the implementation of changes (e. g. exclusion of the possibility to implement projects in educational institutions). On the other hand, in accordance with the PB rules adopted in Białystok, consultations concerning the Civic Budget are a cyclical process, repeated in subsequent years. Additionally, in the light of the BP 2017 schedule, the application submission stage was to be preceded by informational and educational meetings with the inhabitants, and separate PLN 100 thousand was allocated for these activities. The resolution of the Białystok City Council on PB rules contains information according to which informational, educational and promotional activities are aimed primarily at bringing the idea of BP closer to the inhabitants (it emphasizes its direct, equal and open character), encouraging them to submit project proposals (minimum of 5 meetings with residents), vote on qualified projects (10 meetings) and disseminating information about the results of the process. Similar provisions were applied in Łódź (Ruda Śląska), where additionally, in accordance with the provisions of the Order of the Mayor of the City of Łódź, an Internet discussion forum was to be launched. In Włocławek, an announcement about the possibility of submitting comments on the previous PB edition was published on the City's social networking portal.

In Szczecin, the Mayor appointed a team responsible for developing the rules of operation and implementation of Szczecin's civic budget for 2017, composed of the residents' representatives (selected by way of an open call and then a public draw), representatives of the Szczecin's council of public benefit activities and councilors (assumptions similar to those in Poznań, where the team's work was subject to disclosure). In March, a meeting of the above mentioned Team with residents took place (the record of the meeting was made available on the City's website). On the other hand, consultations on the rules for the organization of the next edition of PB (in the form of question-

naires and open meetings) were ordered in the City and Commune of Olkusz. As far as the PB procedure is concerned, it is worth mentioning that Szczecin's City Hall website invited to submit comments on the published but not yet approved projects received within the framework of the PB 2017 edition. In Giżycko, the incoming projects were discussed as part of the Local Meetings of the Residents (similarly in Poznań) convened by the Mayor. The process preceding the PB procedure in Opole started with a meeting, during which the current results were presented and a lecture was organized – social dialog from a sociological perspective.

However, in the vast majority of communes, the process of public consultations concerning BP was – as per the Mayor of Głogów's Ordinance – based on submitting and voting on projects. Other regulations establish only the right to conduct an informational (promotional) campaign concerning projects admitted to voting (Jarosław, Ruda Śląska). Although the regulations often stress that consultations within PBs are conducted in the form of social dialogue and informational meetings (see, for example, Włocławek), such meetings often do not take the form of procedural clarifications only.

Submission of projects. In the majority of communes, projects can be submitted by residents or NGOs. The most frequent limitations in this respect are age limits (16/18 years of age) – this is the case i.a. in Łódź, Giżycko, Opole, Osień Lubuski. In most communes, the submission of the project had to be supported by a sufficient number of signatures of the inhabitants (Białystok, Głogów, Lublin). In some communes, however, restrictions have been introduced in the form of holding an active right to vote (Jarosław) or registered residence in the commune/district (Ruda Śląska, Starchowice). As a rule, more than one project (Szczecin) can be implemented, but there are exceptions to this rule (Jarosław, Olkusz, Poznań). Interestingly, the last of the aforementioned limitations in the summary of the works of the PB Team was recommended to be changed in Poznań – it was claimed that the opposite effect was achieved, in the form of projects submitted by family members, which at a later stage of the PB procedure made contact difficult (persons indicated for contact were not the real creators of the projects). In all cases, the project had to be submitted using a form (different formats). In all cases the costs had to be estimated, but only in Sopot was the responsibility transferred to the authority.

In the context of age restrictions on participation in the PB process or other reservations, doubts as to their admissibility should be stressed in the light of the case law of administrative courts. As indicated by the Supreme Administrative Court in the ruling of December 8, 2011 (II OSK 1562/11): “The

competence of a commune authority, as defined in Article 5a of the Act on Communal Self-Government, does not include the determination of subjective rights that condition the entitlement of commune residents to participate in consultations. It is important that the circle of persons entitled to participate in social consultations was defined by the legislator itself. They are inhabitants of the commune, i. e. people living in a locality located on its territory with the intention of permanent residence. The concept of an inhabitant is not the same as that of a person who has an active right to vote. The fact of depriving of public rights, voting rights or incapacitation of a commune resident is not tantamount to depriving them of the right to participate in consultations. As the Court noted, the delegation referred to in Article 5a (2) of the Act on Communal Self-Government does not include establishing the categories of entities entitled to participate in consultations. The competence contained in this provision authorizes the communal councils only to define the rules and procedures for carrying out consultations.” In this light, local provisions should not apply at all to the issue of entities entitled to participate in the procedure.

Verification of the submitted projects. There are different views on this issue, but most often the verification is multi-level. Often called formal and legal, in reality it turns out to be substantive. Białystok distinguishes 3 types of verifications – general (undertaken by the City Hall, of a formal nature), detailed (run by organizational units of the City Hall, substantive) and final (conducted by the PB Team – in equal proportion, representatives of the President, the City Council and non-governmental organizations; including consulting projects, preparing a list, meeting at meetings where residents may attend). In Łódź, verification is carried out by the Office for Social Participation, which then sends the projects to the organizational units of the City Hall, and finally to the Commission for the Public Participation Committee (which means that all verifications are carried out by officials – official verification is also present in Olkusz and Starachowice). A frequent rule is that modifications in projects require the consent of the applicant (for example Szczecin, Lublin).

Lublin has also established a worrying – and one that may lead to abuses – principle according to which in justified cases, after obtaining the opinion of the district council and the relevant committee of the city council, the Mayor of Lublin may decide not to vote on the project for reasons other than formal ones. A definitely better solution is proposed in Opole, where, in case of reservations about the possibility of accomplishing the task, an appropriate organizational unit indicates a possible alternative solution (it requires an explicit acceptance of the applicant). What is more, in Opole, there is a possi-

bility to appeal against a negative decision (to the Mayor). An appeal may also be filed in Poznań and it shall be considered at a scheduled meeting with the Applicant (however, it is finally approved by the Mayor/Deputy Mayor). In Włocławek, the PB Team reserves the right to modify the proposed proposal in order for it to comply with the applicable laws and regulations as well as the rules for the targeted and rational spending of public funds (as notified to the Applicant, and they may withdraw the project).

Voting. In Jarosław there was no vote in the PB 2017 edition (which was presented as a positive phenomenon on the UM website). In that commune there is also a regulation according to which, if the sum of costs of the project that received the largest number of votes, exhausts the PB pool for a given year, and selected projects are significant from the point of view of the interests of the City's residents, the CB amount for a given year may be increased by the Mayor of the City to 10% of the amount of the PB established for a given year. In Olkusz alone, their order was important during the vote (place 1,2,3 and importance 1,2,3 respectively). In Poznań, in the 2017 edition, only electronic voting was introduced, which was assessed positively. A Communal Voting Commission was established in Starachowice.

Monitoring and evaluation. In Białystok, the process is subject to monitoring and evaluation (according to the regulations). The results of the evaluation will be used to introduce changes aimed at improving the PB implementation process (similarly in Łódź, Ruda Śląska). In Białystok, three evaluation surveys were aimed at residents (during an information meeting, during a promotional campaign and during a vote). 1378 questionnaires were submitted and recommendations were developed on the basis of them. Additionally, appendices with the status of execution of PB projects from 2016 and earlier projects are made available on the website of the City Hall. In Łódź, an evaluation survey was sent out, which was filled in by over 100 people (among other things, a ban on companies promoting projects by companies interested in their implementation was postulated; only the voting on one district was negatively received).

In Szczecin, each time after the publication of voting results, until the beginning of the next edition of PB, the conducted public consultations are evaluated, in particular with regard to adoption of appropriate forms, methods of consultation, comprehensibility of the information provided, reaching out to the relevant target groups, obtaining appropriate quantity and quality of comments, allocation of appropriate amount of time for consultations, results, taking into account the obtained comments in the consulted subject matter, as well as tasks already carried out within PB. The evaluation shall be

prepared using the tools developed by specialists independent of the Office or a specialized body independent of the Office and shall be published in a document published in the Office's BIP.

In Lublin, a deadline was set for commenting on the PB procedure (full comments submitted by the Freedom Foundation, published on the website of the City Hall). The Opole website informed that comments were received at numerous meetings, by e-mail and on the basis of an evaluation survey, which was filled in by nearly 100 people. On this basis, the PB Team will debate and the final decision on the shape of the PB rules will be made by the Mayor of the City. In Poznań, the PB process is subject to evaluation, which results in a report with recommendations for changes in procedure, description of organizational effectiveness, including the course and appropriateness of procedures, methods and tools (the results will be published – in accordance with the assumptions – by the end of March 2017).

What is interesting, Giżycko saw the formulation of the regulations on evaluation based on a questionnaire in electronic or paper form; evaluation at a summary meeting organized by the Mayor) – however, these provisions were invalidated by the Voivode: “However, in § 7 of the appendix to the resolution, the Giżycko City Council included provisions relating to monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the adopted Civic Budget. In the view of the supervisory authority, the scope of this provision goes beyond the concept of consultation with the municipality's inhabitants referred to in Article 5a (1) of the above Act. This is because monitoring of the implementation of the aforementioned budget takes place after the inhabitants have selected projects to be implemented and publication of the list of recommended projects, i. e. after the consultations have been completed. In this situation, the provisions of the appendix to the resolution under examination should be considered redundant” (Supervisory resolution no. PN.4131.124.2015 dated May 29, 2015). The evaluation meeting took place.

Conclusions

The participatory budget has been one of the most important and best accepted innovations in local public management in Poland over the last several years. It proved that the reinforcement of the residents' empowerment in managing the commune does not require any statutory changes, but can be stimulated and introduced from the bottom up, mainly due to pressure from active local groups and drawing on the experience of other self-governments. However, the positive assessment of the return on local governance achieved

through the participatory budget cannot exclude a critical look at the detailed aspects of the use of this tool in the Polish self-government.

In this context, it should be noted that the participatory budget in the Polish self-government is implemented in a uniform way (according to the almost uniform model). According to the presented data, the solutions adopted by the cities do not differ in terms of basic rules governing the PBs (mainly concerning the procedure of submitting projects, their verification and voting), so that they can have a significant (and at the same time positive) impact on the implementation of the whole process, as well as on the activation of the passive part of the community. Therefore, there is no use whatsoever for the space for shaping the original, "author's" approach to PBs by the communes, resulting in a variety of local practices, which may block the development of the whole PB process. A certain explanation is the hasty procedure of introducing BPs in many communes, which in a way forced simple copying of the patterns previously introduced in other communes. However, it seems that more diversity in the approach to PBs could already be expected.

However, an even more serious problem is the very limited formula of participation functioning in many communes. Firstly, apart from a small part of the funds allocated as a participatory (citizens') budget, the inhabitants are not directly involved in the decision on the shape of the local budget – only four of the fifteen communes surveyed have provided for direct consultations with the inhabitants in relation to the rest of the communal budget. In this case, the participatory budget becomes a fig leaf covering the non-participatory pattern of managing an essential part of the commune budget. Secondly, in the predominant PB model, the scope of participation is not conducive to building a new type of relationship between residents and local authorities, based on deliberation and agreement on the directions of the commune's activities. As a rule, during the preparation of the participatory budget procedure, provision of space for consultation, debate and exchange of views is usually "forgotten about". The process is more of a quasi-election campaign, which is best reflected in the example of regulations implemented directly in Osień Lubuski or Głogów, which devolve the PB to the mere submission of projects and participation in the vote on them. The presented data also allow us to claim that there are serious shortcomings in establishing transparent standards for the evaluation of PBs. The schedules and web pages of the communes willingly emphasize that the PB process focuses on various forms of discussion with citizens and taking their opinions into account, among other things, when laying down the rules for its subsequent editions, while only in five of them are specific regulations behind the assurances. The

possibility of verifying the soft assumptions presented by the communes is also becoming a real problem. Not all of them, like Giżycko and Poznań, for example, publish reports from consultation meetings and evaluation reports, respectively, thus raising concerns about the transparency of the PB process.

Taking these main reservations into account, we can state that the current pattern of implementation of the participatory budget in Polish communes does not allow us to take full advantage of the opportunity that this tool offers for building a culture of co-management in local government. Although it is not possible to consider the PB as an example of facade participation, a critical reflection on the way in which it is practiced in Polish municipalities is necessary so that the civic activity launched thanks to the PB is fully exploited in order to improve the quality of local government.

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