## Mariusz Popławski

Nicolaus Copernicus University (Poland)

ORCID: 0000-0002-5563-5308 e-mail: mpoplawski@umk.pl

# University Participatory Budgets. From Municipalities to Higher Education?

**Abstract:** The participatory budget is an important element of the catalogue of tools for involving residents in the local decision-making. The positive effects of involving many citizens in the decision-making process slowly bear fruit in attempts to transfer p.b. into other spheres. This article analyses how these well-known patterns are adapted to new conditions – at universities. Several of them decided to introduce their own participatory budget. A comparative analysis of the local government model and solutions adopted by three universities provides the answer to this question. The hypothesis assumes that the civic budget at universities and polytechnics is, for the most part, a modification of the model used in cities with district status. As shown, the municipal participatory budget is a proven basis for creating its own regulations. However, the available schemes should be modified.

**Keywords:** municipality, civil society, participation, participatory budget, university, research institution

## Introduction

In the Polish local government, the second decade of the twenty-first century will be remembered as a time of intense work to increase the direct participation of residents in the decision-making process. The participatory budget is the mechanism by which local communities can more actively participate in the administration of public funds (further – p.b.). By the concept of the p.b. we understand the democratised mechanism of sharing public funds, which assumes that decisions are made directly by citizens in a cyclical manner, most often every year (Osmólska, 2014, p. 262). The first Polish solutions appeared in Płock in 2003, but it is believed that this Grant Fund was not a real p.b. (Pytlik, 2017, p. 115). Therefore, the mechanism developed in Płock is assessed quite critically, primarily in terms of the idea behind the implemented scheme (Sintomer et al., 2008, p. 169). P.b. launched in Sopot in 2011 is considered the first fully-fledged mechanism in Poland (Rachwał, 2013, p. 180).

A better understanding of the p.b. demands a closer look at its history. It was first implemented in Brazilian Porto Alegre in 1989. Its initial purpose was better distribution of resources since it was a response to the needs of the communities living in the city's poor neighbourhoods. Some citizens suffered from neglect because funds were allocated unevenly (Avritzer, 2010, p. 167). Nowadays, the Brazilian introduction of the mechanism is perceived as a strive for egalitarianism in urban policy, including management of the municipal space itself (Hernández-Medina, 2010, p. 512). Some even claim that citizens did not care about the amount of funds invested in these parts of the city as much as their other, more productive use (Baiocchi, 2003, p. 53). Due to the positive results, the mechanism quickly spread in Brazil and then in the whole of South America, finally becoming permanent in many regions of the world (Novy & Leubolt, 2005, p. 2023).

Nowadays, p.b. performs various functions. Certainly, one of the most important is broadly understood education, addressed to various recipients. Rios and Insua (2008, p. 205) note that when using it, citizens learn that their desires have a price. According to Streck (2007, p. 118), p.b. "is a school where citizens are educated about the role of government, local and national policies and their own rights and responsibilities". Moreover, the effect of such participation is knowledge, the ability to create good relationships and competencies that allow interference in social processes (Weyh & Streck, 2003, p. 31; Marszałek-Kawa & Plecka, 2019; Marszałek-Kawa et al., 2019). Due to increased participation, sectoral policies are more closely related to the preferences of residents (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004, pp. 58–62). Public opinion more favourably assesses the actions of persons exercising representative power, and the society is less divided and thus easier to govern. Increasing participation is accompanied by a closer link between the implementation of sectoral policies and the preferences of community members (Patsias et al., 2013, p. 2226). In involved communities, the public opinion more favourably evaluates the directions of activities of their representatives (Rios & Insua, 2008, p. 205). According to Lerner (2011, p. 31), benefits from the implementation of p.b. can be summed as follows:

- (a) democratisation: decision-making is moved to citizens. Ordinary people now have a real say;
- (b) transparency: the more citizens decide upon spending through a public vote, the less likely are corruption, waste or costly backlash;
- (c) *education*: participants learn about democracy by experience, so they better understand how it works. They become more active and informed;
- (d) efficiency: budgets are better tailored to actual needs since they draw on citizens' knowledge and oversight;
- (e) social justice: each citizen has access to the local decision-making process, and traditionally less represented groups are better heard;
- (f) community: through regular meetings and assemblies, people get to know their neighbours and feel more connected to their village, town or city.

The positive effects of involving citizens in the decision-making process slowly bear fruit in attempts to transfer p.b. into other spheres. For example, in Warsaw, a unique offer was addressed to residents. They could decide on how to spend the funds of the Śródmieście Cultural Centre (*Mieszkańcy zadecydują*, 2012). In turn, in 2021, a pilot edition of school p.b. was launched in Lublin, thanks to which students have a chance to implement their own projects (*Ruszają szkolne*, 2021). The change has also reached higher education. At some universities, students, doctoral students and employees decide how to spend some funds.

If we look back at the positive impact identified in the case of local communities, summed up by Lerner, one may try to analyse such benefits when it comes to academic life. First of all - democratisation can also be achieved within universities. Lecturers, administration members and students may truly be part of the decision-making. Ideas of each of them may be brought to a public discussion. Secondly, when it comes to transparency, one shall assume that also on academia, it results in more careful spending since a well-informed academic community is a potential reviewer only if it has a chance to express its opinion. Thirdly, education is possibly the strongest argument in favour of introducing p.b. to universities. Especially when it comes to students. The mission of higher education is not only to provide knowledge within narrow, specialised courses but also to build future elites of the society, which will strongly contribute to social and political progress. Fourthly, spending efficiency should also be considered very beneficial to universities since public higher education works within a limited budget, and scarce money should be spent according to actual and real needs. Fifthly, even though social justice is not an explicit element of academic mission, it should still be considered a possible way to gain its other goals. Universities are usually hierarchical structures, meaning the higher one is, the more power it has. P.b. brings equality to decision-making, which may result in some unexpected benefits to the whole community since p.b. is oriented on good ideas, not on who presents them. The last aspect – community-building – is the same important in academia as in municipalities. P.b. procedures create an opportunity for academic community members to meet, get to know each other, and discuss their views on how their place of study or work should be organised. Not everywhere such opportunities are present and bringing one, which, like the p.b., is organised annually, makes a noticeable difference.

Even though the expansion of p.b. from local governments to higher education is so interesting, literature studies on the subject show a significant deficit of any analyses involving university students and employees in such decision-making processes. The implementation of p.b. in these institutions is inspiring, particularly the possible adoption of the existing schemes developed earlier in the scope of the local government.

# Hypothesis and Methods

In this analysis, the answer to the question about the potential transfer of p.b. solutions from Polish cities with district rights (hereinafter referred to as c.w.p.r.) to universities was adopted as the research problem. Policy-makers have always looked at others in search of knowledge and ideas concerning institutions, programmes or policies and how they work elsewhere (Dolowitz, Marsh, 2000, p. 7). The choice of c.w.p.r. from a group of 2477 municipalities is dictated by the introduction of obligatory p.b. in c.w.p.r. by the legislator. The adopted time perspective covers the second half of the decade in which p.b. appeared in Poland, i.e., the period from 2015 to 2020.

For the research problem outlined in this way, a research hypothesis was adopted according to which:

H1. Principles of p.b. introduced in Polish universities are, for the most part, a modification of the solutions present in the p.b. model used in c.w.p.r.

The following research questions were formulated for that hypothesis:

- Q1. Which of the solutions present in p.b. for c.w.p.r. have been duplicated in university p.b.?
- Q2. Which of the solutions present in p.b. for c.w.p.r. were adopted in a modified form in university p.b.?
- Q3. Which of the solutions present in p.b. for c.w.p.r. were omitted in university p.b.?

In order to verify the adopted research hypothesis, a qualitative analysis was used. The study covers the formal sphere, including procedural and, to a limited extent, financial spheres. In its implementation, the most important formal features of p.b. for c.w.p.r. were distinguished and then compiled and compared with the solutions used at the universities. Source documents were used for this purpose, including, in particular, the p.b. regulations and analysis of the available literature on the subject. The analysis considers general principles and individual stages of the procedure, including (1.) collection of ideas, (2.) verification of complex projects, (3.) voting, (4.) determination of results, (5.) implementation of winning projects.

#### Results

# Cities with District Rights

The main feature of p.b. distinguishing it from other forms of public consultation is its cyclical nature. The mechanism is implemented every year, and the closure of the entire procedure takes two years, as projects are selected in one year and implemented in the fol-

lowing. In addition to cyclicality, the basic feature is the ability to divide p.b. into territorial pools. In the vast majority of Polish c.w.p.r. there are two of them (Olejniczak & Bednarska-Olejniczak, 2018, p. 345; Madej, 2019, p. 263). Only a single city-wide pool was used in less than a third of the cases. In addition, sometimes profiled pools are used, divided into small and large projects or thematic pools, including, for example, culture, greenery, or education. Regarding the financial sphere of p.b., it should be noted first that the aspect of the monetary dimension of the mechanism has a dominant position among other aspects (Poniatowicz, 2014). There is no uniformity in the amounts allocated to p.b. *per capita* (Madej, 2019, pp. 262–263). There is no correlation between the size of the population and the amount of dedicated funds. Moreover, in two out of three c.w.p.r. a limitation of the value of a single project in the city-wide pool is introduced (Popławski, 2018, p. 154), i.e., the limit is lower than the entire pool. The opposite is true for the local pool – in most cases, no such limit is introduced.

Another fundamental feature of all p.b. in c.w.p.r. manifests itself in the next phase of the procedure, i.e., the call for projects. In all cases, it assumes the collection of proposals from residents, i.e., community members (Olejniczak & Bednarska-Olejniczak, 2018, p. 344). According to the current regulations, this approach is highly inclusive, as all residents, irrespective of their age, including minors, can participate in p.b. (Błaszak, 2019, p. 2019). The specific openness is also manifested by the lack of an upper limit on the number of applications that can be submitted. It is the case in more than half of Polish c.w.p.r. In others, it ranges from one to five. Nevertheless, the number of votes of support for a given application, which should be attached to the documentation, is also important. Often it is from 15 to 20, but there are also places where one has to get 40, 50 or even 100 votes (Popławski, 2018, p. 152). The verification of complex projects, broken down into formal and substantive parts, is a permanent element of the p.b. regulations (Sześciło, 2014, p. 382). During its duration, in the vast majority of cases, it is allowed to make necessary corrections to the project. The opposite is true concerning the submission of an appeal. They can only be made in about a quarter of c.w.p.r. (Popławski, 2018, p. 155). As in the case of project admission, the residents make the selection (Pytlik, 2017, p. 114). In almost half of the c.w.p.r., electronic and paper voting forms are used (Popławski, 2018, p. 159; Polko, 2015, p. 39). Only the electronic version is used in about a quarter of cities, and only the paper one in only two cases. In about half of c.w.p.r., voters have only one vote in the city-wide pool and one vote in the local pool (Popławski, 2018, pp. 160–161). Ideas that receive the greatest support are implemented until the funds in a given pool are exhausted. If two or more projects achieve the same result, a decision is often made by drawing lots (Popławski, 2018, p. 164). The designers of p.b. regulations in c.w.p.r. rarely relate to situations where selected projects conflict with each other. If such an issue is settled, the one with higher support is chosen (Popławski, 2018, p. 165).

#### Universities

Among the analysed universities, the p.b. of the Gdańsk University of Technology (PG) has the longest history, dating back to 2016. As declared by the rector of this university, he wanted to implement the analysed mechanism so that employees and students feel like co-hosts of the campus (Karendys, 2018). In the 2021 edition, PLN 500,000 was allocated for p.b., of which PLN 350,000 went to the pool for employees, and the remaining PLN 150,000 to the pool for students (*Pismo okólne nr 40*, 2020). An entity that essentially handles the p.b. procedure at PG is the Participatory Budget Committee. Employees, students, and doctoral students are entitled to submit projects – each to the pool for their group. Voting takes place electronically. The effects of the winning projects' implementation are assessed by employees and students, including PhD candidates.

Collegium Medicum of the Jagiellonian University (CM UJ) declared that the introduction of p.b. was aimed at the greatest possible involvement of students and doctoral students in the life of the university. Moreover, as Vice-Rector Tomasz Grodzki highlighted, it was supposed to be a good way to get to know the expectations and needs of students and doctoral students (Kot, 2018). The amount of PLN 100,000 was assigned for the first edition of p.b., and PLN 20,000 more for the second. In both cases, the value of individual projects had to be between PLN 1000 and PLN 50,000 (Decision No. 22, 2018). Some interesting solutions that were implemented in the Kraków procedure are worth noting. Including a bonus awarded to projects submitted by teams of students from different faculties. The obtained number of votes is then increased by 10%. Another noteworthy solution is the additional competence of the competent vice-rector. They can subsidise a project that has lost with others but is considered valuable. In 2019, this option was used in the case of the project "Students for the Heart" (Magnificent, 2019).

The first p.b. at the Warsaw School of Economics (SGH) was carried out in 2020. Interestingly, both student-doctoral editions had the slogan – "Ecological innovations", which means that the projects were to cover tasks in the field of broadly understood ecology (*Rusza pierwsza edycja*, 2020). In addition to the student-doctoral p.b. there is also one for SGH employees, with the latter having much greater potential. It is because the amount assigned to the former is only PLN 25,000. In the case of employees, it is PLN 100,000. Detailed p.b. solutions at PG, CM UJ, SGH and c.w.p.r. are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.	Civic budget in	cities with	district rights	and universities

entity procedure element	c.w.p.r.	CM UJ	SGH	PG	
interval	cyclical annual	cyclical annual	cyclical annual	cyclical annual	

entity procedure element	c.w.p.r.	CM UJ	SGH	PG
proposition makers	citizens	Project team (stu- dents and doctoral students)	individually or in groups students and doctoral students, employees	individually students and doctoral students, employees
voters	citizens	students and doctoral students	students and doctoral students, employees	students and doctoral students, employees
verification	formal substantial	formal substantial	uniform	uniform
pools	varied usually two ter- ritorial	one	two student-doctoral, employee	two student-doctoral, employee
additional division of projects	usually none	none	none	none
application number limit	usually none	no limit	students and doc- toral students – up to 3 employees – no limit	not regulated
support list	obligatory	obligatory	none	obligatory
project value limit below the pool	usually yes	yes, from PLN 1000 to PLN 50 000	Student-doctoral – limit equal to the pool employee – PLN 35 000	no
application corrections	usually yes	possible	possible	not regulated
appeal after verification	usually impossible	possible	impossible	possible
voting form	electronic paper	electronic	electronic	electronic
minimum support threshold	very rarely	none	none	none
tie-breaking	usually randomisation	randomisation	not regulated	not regulated
project collision	very rarely regu- lated more support	more support	not regulated	not regulated

Sources. Popławski (2018), Decyzja nr 22 (2018), Regulamin (2020), Załącznik nr 1 (2018), Zarządzenie nr 139 (2017), Zarządzenie nr 36 (2016).

### Discussion on Results

## **Copied Solutions**

As a result of the analysis carried out, it can be seen which solutions have been directly copied in the university p.b. One of the features is the cyclical nature of the mechanism. At universities and polytechnics, it is carried out every year. Likewise, as in most c.w.p.r., projects are not divided into additional categories, although it is very rare that small and large projects are separated in municipalities. At the analysed universities, all ideas are treated identically, regardless of the scale or subject of the project.

The duplicated solutions also include those where the situation is less obvious due to small differences. For example, presenting a list of support for a submitted project is obligatory in all c.w.p.r. This requirement results directly from the statutory provisions. The solution was duplicated in two of the three analysed university p.b. In most c.w.p.r., it is also permissible to correct, amend and supplement the already verified application, and this is also the case in two out of three of the researched universities. On the other hand, in the vast majority of local government entities, there is no minimum threshold of support for the idea to be implemented, while in the c.w.p.r., it is nowhere to be found.

The lack of uniformity concerning the number of applications one person can submit in the c.w.p.r. and at universities can be perceived as a duplication. There is no such limit at the CM UJ. The issue has not been settled at all at PG. While at SGH, students and doctoral students are allowed to submit a maximum of three projects, but there is no limit for employees. The duplication results from the lack of uniformity in both groups, not from the literal transfer of the solution.

# **Modified Solutions**

In addition to the transfer of solutions, the effect of the comparative analysis is to indicate which solutions from c.w.p.r. were taken over to university p.b. after modification. On the borderline between duplication and adaptation lies the issue of the people entitled to pick eligible projects. In c.w.p.r. all members of the community are included in this group. The university p.b. also includes everyone but with a different status, with division into students, doctoral students and employees. In other words, university p.b. covers everyone, but only within a given group. It is worth emphasising that if students and doctoral students, as well as employees, have their own p.b., everyone participates in the p.b. procedure, although separately. A similar situation concerns the verification of submitted ideas. It is present in all analysed entities. However, in c.w.p.r. it is divided into formal and substantive parts. It contributes to the transparency of the process. One can even assume that it is a kind of instruction for the authors of applications on what to pay attention to when preparing documentation. At universities, such a division can be found only at CM UJ. In the other two universities, verification is homogeneous.

We are dealing with an apparent modification in the case of the entity submitting projects. In c.w.p.r. these are essentially all residents acting individually. At universities, it is still a member of the community, but this time working (1.) collegially – within a group, (2.) within the group or individually, or (3.) only individually. The division into pools is also the result of the adjustment of p.b. to university conditions, i.e., to relatively small communities. While in c.w.p.r. two pools were most often introduced considering territorial units, at universities, there is one pool, and if there are two, they are subjective, i.e., one is directed to students and the other to employees. The adaptation can also be seen in terms of the technical aspect of voting. While in c.w.p.r. voting is done in various ways, at universities, all respondents can express their support for the projects only electronically. Understandably, universities will only use the available electronic tools. Working without paper documents saves much time. It is possible thanks to efficient electronic databases and student service systems.

#### **Omitted Solutions**

An issue on the borderline between reception and omission in the p.b. mechanism is a limit on the value of a single project that is lower than the amount of the pool available. Its application is to prevent all the available money from being spent on a single project. At CM JU, the limit applies to all projects. In the case of SGH, it covers student and doctoral proposals, but not employee proposals. At PG, the limit of the value of a single project, lower than the available pool, was not applied at all. However, some elements of the procedure are missing at universities. When two or more projects obtain the same result in c.w.p.r. the selection for implementation is usually made by a random draw or valuation. The same case applies at CM UJ, but the regulations of SGH and PG do not provide for this situation.

Some elements rarely appear in the regulations in c.w.p.r. while are present at universities. It is the case with the collision of the winning projects and the possibility of appealing against the negative result of the formal evaluation. The second occurs very rarely in the analysed local government entities but is possible in two of the three universities p.b. compared here.

## **Conclusions**

The participatory budget is certainly an interesting research subject, if only due to the relatively short history and the rapid spread to subsequent local government entities, and finally – its effects, which are more and more noticeable in Polish municipalities. Attempts to adapt it to the needs of other entities that want to actively involve members of their communities in the design of the space where they learn or work should be observed with great interest. This study aimed to answer the question about transferring p.b. solutions from c.w.p.r. to academia. The adopted hypothesis was partially confirmed, but regarding

research questions, one shall be more precise while emphasising that it is not just a simple modification. The common feature of applying p.b. in all studied cases is the adjustment of details, while fundamental elements remain the same. P.b. is a product applied within decentralised freedom patterns, tailored to local vision and conditions. Moreover, its specific form is not unchangeable since it can be modified according to observed needs and challenges. Another observation proves this relationship even more. Academia does not copy from each other. They would rather work on their regulations separately, based on their traditions and local experience.

Academic participatory budgets remain an interesting subject for further studies. For example, it would be interesting to see whether there is a point in developing the mechanism since community members stop submitting and voting on infrastructural projects and start supporting social programmes, courses, events, etc. Another aspect is whether academic p.b. will evolve in the same or different directions. A deeper study comparing submitted and winning projects would also be very interesting, the same as which proposals are found eligible and which are not.

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