

Local Democratic Renewal by Deliberative Participatory Instruments: Participatory Budgeting in Comparative Study

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INTRODUCTION

The crisis of local representative democracy can be seen, on the one hand, in growing political apathy, cynicism, and a decline of voter turnout as well as political party membership (invited space) in a number of cities; and, on the other hand, in growing political protest and violent and non-violent demonstrations (invented space) (see Kersting et al. 2009, 2013a). Both

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phenomena are influenced by the financial restrictions and an omnipresent financial crisis at the local, regional, and national levels (see Denters et al., Chap. 19 in this volume). Democratic innovation focusing on local representative democracy and direct-democratic democracy seem to have little effect (see Vetter et al., Chap. 15 in this volume). New forms of talk-centric deliberative democracies are implemented in some cities (Kersting 2008; see “deliberative turn”). Most of these new participatory instruments are implemented at the local level by local administration and in the 2010s Participatory Budgeting (PB) processes became one of the most important instruments (see Sintomer et al. 2008; Diaz 2014).

We focus on three questions, which include an analysis of implementations, actors, and goals as well as results. Who are the driving and promoting actors supporting these instruments? It is hypothesized that local administration and directly elected mayors are key actors, while the councils are more hesitant in implementing these instruments (see Kersting 2008). What kinds of instruments are implemented and for what purposes (goals)? We argue that despite a broad variety in different countries, PB in Europe focuses more on public brainstorming and less on planning, conflict resolution, social capital generation, and pro-poor welfare policies. What is the influence of new information and communication technologies (ICT) on the development of new instruments and local governance strategies (the online component)? We argue that in most PB processes the online component becomes more important, which may reduce the quality of discourse and the possibilities of increasing social capital (see Kersting 1995, 2013a).

Owing to its informal, non-constitutionalized character, local deliberative democracy is facing a lack of comparative research and data. Consequently, other questions such as the level of integration (who is included and who is excluded?), and the impacts on local groups (what are the reactions by citizens, politicians, and administration?) cannot be covered here, and need further comparative research (see also Gabriel and Kersting 2014). Here typical case studies from Spain and Germany as well as Estonia and Slovakia will be analyzed. These countries differ in the local political and administrative culture (Eastern, Central, and Southern European), socialist past (Slovakia, Estonia), size, level of decentralization, and federalism. Some countries were early adopters of the new participatory instruments (Spain) and others are latecomers such as Germany, Slovakia, and Estonia (see Kersting and Vetter 2003; Kersting et al. 2009).

of political leaders in most local governments that had PB in operation, which has essentially resulted in a shutting down of these experiments. Finally, the 2013 Local Government Act was passed by the Spanish central government, promoting a recentralization process and the privatization of local public services which have, with democratic issues being absent, had a negative impact on participatory policies including, but not limited to, PB.

Slovakia

After the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia in 1989 and the founding of the independent Slovak Republic in 1992, one of the most important manifestations of participatory democracy has been PB, in operation since 2012.

It is necessary to understand that PB is a new instrument included within previous political instruments that have influenced the political culture of Slovak public officials regarding decision-making processes concerning municipal budgets and also their level of acceptance of active citizen participation in these decision-making processes.

Interest among citizens in full participation in the public arena was increased after the accelerated development of municipal policy, especially in various locations over the last several years in both small villages and also in larger towns, where active citizens started organizing themselves into various community and non-profit organizations. This interest in involvement in public issues has been manifested in several cities such as Banská Bystrica (population 78,000), Bratislava and Ružomberok (population 27,000).

A common thread in these three cases that has influenced the concept of PB has been the special interest of many citizens in the restoration of community life, which had been partly destroyed during the long socialist era of industrialization. The interest in PB represents desire for the restoration of their community in general, for better planning so as to support adequate municipal projects, as well as dedication to local needs in their communities. The local actors in these three cities have mostly been various civic associations that are interested in participation in budgeting and the implementation of local projects. One of the most important national civic associations has been pushing for the implementation of the PB process in Bratislava and has backed various participatory projects in the Slovak Republic. The other type of actors are those who normally gather

together in participatory activities based on local interests groups, professional groups, students and neighborhoods and their activity is often more targeted and brings better results.

Case Study of Bratislava

In Bratislava (population 450,000) PB was defined as civil budgeting because acceptance of PB has been supported by citizens and activists in accord with their interest in upgrading Bratislava's public, community space. Citizens' different ideas about the implementation of various public projects culminated in the development of an online instrument labeled the "public stock exchange." This was internet-based and its web address was advertised on Bratislava's city council webpage. All citizens over 18 years old could contribute their ideas and projects and post information on the website.

Finances allocated for PB were not distributed via various public grants but were and have remained part of the municipal budget. Locally elected officials decided how much financial support should be allocated for different projects based on what they considered the primary public interest. The sum of money allocated for public projects was between 0.2 and 1 percent of the municipal budget. In Bratislava, the PB in 2014 for six public agendas was €46,000 (of the total €370 million city budget). Bratislava's PB has several agendas such as for traffic and roadways, environment, culture, sport, social aid, and social assistance.

The primary public interest in PB is concentrated on a selection of appropriate projects from within the abovementioned agenda. All projects that are selected by the public must be executed according to the regulations for public procurement and a municipality's internal budgetary regulations. This process has to be controlled by the public, particularly by participatory civic forums that are expected to be very active in the process.

The primary interest of these forums is solidarity and cooperation based on rational support of real spontaneous activities, support of various participatory networks, and participatory communities. Bratislava's PB was subject to severe criticism in 2014 by the general public, especially concerning the legality of the decision-making processes developing from cooperation between public forums and public officials, resulting in ignorance on the part of public officials from the municipality of Bratislava. This ignorance damaged the true functionality of PB in Bratislava, because active participation of citizens on a local level was not supported by positive and

transparent interest on the part of municipal officials. Paradoxically the possibility of strengthening public participatory measures owing to the political culture of municipal officials was reduced in Bratislava.

In Slovakia, the online component and the strong role of the civil society become obvious. The true functionality of PB depends not only on the active participation of citizens at the local level but also on real supportive interest on the part of the municipal officials. Support for PB at the local political level (invited space) is, perhaps somewhat paradoxically, one of the prerequisites for strengthening public participatory space (invented space) in Slovakia.

Estonia

Estonia, like other Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) countries, experienced the change from an undemocratic to a democratic regime (Mishler and Rose 2001; and Titma Rämmer 2006). This has had a definite impact on the formation of the political culture as well as on the perception of the state in general. The same can be argued about the local government level, as the prevailing culture of the public's mistrust of politicians is contributing to the perception of the citizen's role in a "legal" manner, that is, as a legal status and the opportunity to guarantee oneself civil and political rights, rather than presuming social obligation to participate in the governing of one's own state/municipality (Kalev et al. 2009). Hence, the experience of local administrations in Estonia in the field of citizens' participation is rather limited. In view of the rapid growth of ICT, e-participation has received much attention in Estonia. At the local level, however, it has not developed as much as at the national level, not least perhaps because cities mainly use ICT for information dissemination rather than for the genuine inclusion of their citizens (Hänni 2009).

Hence, Tartu was the first city in Estonia to try PB during the pilot project in autumn 2013. By autumn 2014 four cities in Estonia had already implemented PB initiatives. Tartu, with a population of 95,600, is by far the largest of these; the other municipalities are rather small, Viljandi counting 17,600 residents, Kuressaare 14,000, and Elva 5800. All four PB cases have minor differences but the same overall structure, involving initially the gathering citizens' input followed by the selection of proposals by the experts; the process is finalized by citizens voting. All cities have the obligation to bring to fulfillment the idea that has gathered most votes.