

# Social activity in shaping the participatory budget

Małgorzata Dąbrowska

---

## ABSTRACT

In civil society, self-government as a form of social organisation occupies one of the central positions. The condition for the implementation of the development mission of local government is the participation of citizens and their co-responsibility for the shape of local social life. Recently, the participatory budget has become one of the most popular forms of participation. Its aim is to directly involve residents in the decision-making process regarding the choice of the scope of public tasks within the designated pool of funds and to take over part of the responsibility. The aim of the presented analysis is to show the dynamics of citizen involvement in consultations on spending part of the city budget on local tasks falling within the competence of local government – The civic budget. The adopted research hypothesis assumes that the participatory budget is the most popular form of consultation because in its formula it gives residents a sense of agency and subjectivity in expressing one's opinions and preferences and also gives tangible results of social engagement visible in the short term. The empirical basis for the analysis are reports on the implementation of the participatory budget of the city of Radom from the beginning of its creation, and literature on the subject. A participatory budget is an excellent tool for education about self-government – it is an element of a specific philosophy of functioning of self-government – as a community of authorities and residents of a given territorial unit, cooperating for its development. The example of the city of Radom indicates that the participatory budget supports, complements, and often replaces or increases the efficiency of public administration. The analyses carried out can be an indication when improving the implementation of the budget of Mazovia.

**Key words:** civil society, participation, self-government, participatory budget

---

## Introduction

Changes taking place within contemporary public management are the effect of the evolution of both state and public administration [Hausner 2008, p. 32]. These changes are accompanied by the changing role of the individual (citizen) – he or she is not only a voter, supplicant or consumer but more and more often a co-decision maker in the new model of governance. The changing role of the citizen, the increase of his or her subjectivity and aspirations to participate in the life of the community and decision-making processes have led to the formation of a new approach to the functioning of public administration in civil society referred to as *Public Governance* (*Zarządzanie Publiczne*). In line with assumptions of this paradigm – public administration is one of the entities that constitute and influence the shape of the life of the society, participating in solving

collective problems with active involvement on the part of concerned groups and individuals [Gagacka 2016, pp. 225–244]. An important aspect of governance is the accentuation of the role of ethics, integrity and plain honesty in carrying out public service. This new logic of governance, based on dialogue and community involvement, is most clearly visible at the local level, which is the domain where local government operates.

In civil society, self-government as a form of social organisation occupies one of the central positions. The fulfilment of social and individual needs, corresponding to the objective requirements and aspirations of the members of the community, requires the creation of institutional prerequisites [Izdebski 2001]. The condition for the implementation of the development mission of local government is the participation of citizens and their co-responsibility for the shape of local social life.

Civic participation, as a form of involvement in public life, has three basic meanings.

- Social participation – also referred to as *community participation*, is a form of involvement of individuals in collective behaviours and actions taken within the community in which these individuals function on a daily basis. In this case, the emphasis is particularly placed on the initiation and maintenance of group activities, the creation of NGOs and associations and the fulfilment of volunteer roles in a more or less sustainable manner.
- The second meaning of participation revolves around public participation as the area of involvement of individuals in the activities of the structures, bodies and institutions of a democratic state. Thus, it touches on the subject of public authority and the public sector entities and organisations governed by the public authority or its subordinates.
- The third meaning focuses on individual participation as the area of everyday choices and actions taken by individuals. These choices determine both, their ideas and expectations about the nature of the society of which they wish to be a part. This type of participation is exemplified by involvement in social movements, supporting various forms of philanthropy, etc. It is also exemplified by contribution and support for group initiatives such as the civic budget.

Even though the phenomenon of social participation has many definitions, it is consequently defined as the involvement of citizens in decision-making processes that directly affect them. Social participation is the basis of democratic societies and part of the governance of the public domain [Smarż 2016, pp. 213–214].

One of the forms of public participation are public consultations. Social consultation is a legally regulated way of including citizens in the decision-making processes by public authorities. The purpose of social consultations is to reach as many citizens as possible and engage them in cooperation with representatives of public administration. Getting an insight into the position, reasons, arguments, as well as claims of various parties in the discourse may lead to the development of a more reasonable and balanced solution that takes into account the needs of both residents and the authorities.

Implementation of such governance methods contributes to making optimal decisions that gain social acceptance. As a result of civic activity, local authorities assume

a different role. In this new role, authorities provide support for the social competencies of citizens who define and articulate their problems and needs, develop action plans and acquire the resources necessary to solve these issues. Public participation is mutually beneficial. It greatly increases the effectiveness of statutory bodies responsible for providing public services. On the other hand, active citizens fulfil their needs more effectively.

However, the key area of public participation is citizen involvement. Assigning a significant role to public consultations is not only the result of changes occurring in the model of public governance but also of the ever-growing complexity of social issues, the solution of which requires citizen participation. It is worth emphasizing that the reason for the increase of interest in this form of public activity stems not only from the expectations of citizens, increase in the level of cultural competence, development of new forms of communication opening opportunities for fast and interactive communication, but also from formal and legal conditions imposed on public authorities of different levels in this regard. Regardless of the reasons, the purpose of citizen involvement in consultative activities is simple – the better the quality of decisions made by the governing authorities, the greater the support for them, higher the degree of legitimacy of the public authority [Gagacka 2016, pp. 225–244].

Recently, the participatory budget has gained in popularity as a form of participation resulting in the direct involvement of residents in the decision-making process regarding the selection of the scope of public tasks within the designated pool of funds, as well as assuming shared responsibility.

## Methodological assumptions of this analysis

The analysis presented herein aims to show the dynamics of involvement of residents in consultations on spending part of the city budget on local tasks falling within the competence of local government such as the civic budget

### **The specific objectives of the analysis are:**

- presentation of the concept of a participatory budget,
- analysis of the assumptions and acceptance procedure for projects to be included in the civic budget,
- pinpointing the direction and dynamics of this form of social consultations,
- determining the form of these consultations corresponding to the needs and preferences of the residents,
- pointing out the needs of residents reflected in submitted applications,
- analysis of residents' preferences expressed in the selection of applications accepted for implementation.

The author adopted a research hypothesis, which she intends to verify through a thorough analysis of existing documents, which is that the participatory budget is the most popular form of consultation because in its formula it gives residents a sense of agency and subjectivity in expressing their opinions and preferences.

The empirical basis for the analysis are reports on the implementation of the participatory budget of the city of Radom from the beginning of its creation, and literature on the subject. Due to the lack of a report on the implementation of the participatory budget for the year 2021, the author based her analysis of the budget on available data for the 2014–2020 period.

The method of critical analysis of texts and documents was used in this study.

## Participatory budget in Poland and other countries

From the World Bank's perspective, a participatory budget is a way for the citizens to articulate their demands and present their projects, which in turn affect the structure of budget expenditure through discussions and negotiations [World Bank 2015]. The following components are considered to be essential to the formation of a participatory budget:

- an area or issue of importance to the residents that demands their involvement,
- regular meetings of residents,
- a cycle of activities that correspond directly to the budget cycle,
- a network of organisations (units) acting for the engagement of residents [Wampler 2007, p. 21].

The implementation of participatory solutions by local governments does not meet the model criteria. According to W. Kłębowski, the criteria for identifying a participatory budget are as follows:

- setting the rules of participation,
- binding decisions made during meetings,
- various territorial scales,
- competences – “hard” and “soft” skills and projects
- projects and priorities,
- new decision-making bodies open to residents,
- joint verification, pre-selection, monitoring of implementation and evaluation,
- shared responsibility and tangible results [Kłębowski 2014, pp. 13–20].

The first participatory budget was developed in South America, in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century (1989) in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre. In the first year after the introduction of the participatory budget in Porto Alegre, only 976 residents were involved in voting, and after several years this number increased by more than twenty times. Each year the residents of Porto Alegre decide on how the allocated part of the city budget should be spent. They pinpoint the city's priority needs to be subsidised and the level of that subsidy. The project has since expanded to other South American cities. Thanks to the adoption of the participatory budget in the countries of this continent, larger sums of money are allocated to aid districts that need the most support. The countries of the Americas – Peru, the Dominican Republic and Brazil – have set a good example for other countries on all continents: Asia (Sri Lanka), Africa (Cameroon), and North

America (Canada, United States). In Europe the first participatory budget was developed in France, followed by Italy, Germany, Spain, Great Britain, Belgium, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Portugal and Switzerland. In Poland, the participatory budget, later renamed to civic budget, was introduced 15 years after the American and European solutions. In the years 2003–2005 a so-called “grant fund” was established in the city of Płock, within the framework of which local NGOs applied for funding for their projects. A true participatory budget was introduced in Poland as late as 2011 in the city of Sopot. Currently, the participatory budget is implemented in many counties and voivodeships across Poland. The participatory budget for the Mazovia region has been in the works since October 2019. The premises listed below are considered to be the main reasons for the development of the participatory budget:

- growing ambitions and increased activity of residents,
- local government elections,
- development opportunities for a given unit,
- media interest,
- comparison with other units [Kraszewski, Mojkowski 2014, p. 4–5].

The participatory budget contributed to the growth of interest in social consultations and became an opportunity to involve citizens in the decision-making process regarding local expenditure.

## The participatory budget of the city of Radom

A participatory budget is a form of social consultation concerning the expenditure of the allocated part of the municipal budget of the city of Radom for the submitted proposals of tasks which are local in scope and nature that fall within its competence. Within the framework of the participatory budget, the residents can get directly involved in deciding on how the public funds are spent and how their town/city will develop, and at the same time, they can learn about the methods and inner workings of the local government.

In Poland, there is no single model of participatory budgeting. Individual cities and municipalities introduce their own rules, guidelines and criteria. The solutions implemented by individual municipalities are diverse and flexible, and their strong suit is the ability to adapt the solutions to local conditions. The pool of funds they allocate for the implementation of the participatory budget varies between cities and municipalities. No strict budget percentage allocation was ever defined for local governments concerning the participatory budget, the allocation of which was to be decided by the residents. In practice, the results varied greatly: from purely symbolic amounts, through 0.5% of total investment funds of a given local government/territorial unit, all the way up to 3%, and more. Comparing the situation of various Polish towns and cities is quite difficult due to their number and varied population and, as a result, the degree of civic involvement.

The table presented below contains data regarding the involvement of residents in participatory budgeting in cities with a comparable number of residents to the city of Radom.

As of January 1, 2022, there were 964 cities and towns in Poland. The smallest was the town of Opatowiec with a population of 338 residents, followed by Izbica – 478, and Wislica – 506. The most populated city was the capital city of Warsaw – 1,792,718 residents, followed by Cracow – 779,996, and Łódź – 667,923. Radom is among the nine cities with a population between 200,000 and 499,000 residents.

Table 1. Involvement of residents in participatory budgeting in selected cities with a comparable number of residents

Year	No. of projects approved for implementation	No. of eligible voters (thous.)	Funds allocated for project implementation (PLN MM)	No. of projects accepted for implementation	No. of eligible voters (thous.)	Funds allocated for project implementation (PLN MM)
Gdynia – 244,969 residents			Częstochowa – 217,530 residents			
2015	40	47.6	4.6	72	15.0	5.70
2016	32	44.2	5.2	120	36.6	6.70
2017	36	36.5	5.3	114	22.0	6.40
2018	30	30.3	5.9	112	30.6	8.70
2019	117	31.3	10.2	123	20.0	9.50
2020	130	28.9	10.6	127	17.0	9.50
Radom – 209,296 residents			Rzeszów – 197,863 residents			
2015	15	16.4	4.2	42	21.7	6.50
2016	20	ND	4.8	33	22.1	7.50
2017	25	11.2	4.8	34	36.8	7.65
2018	18	12.2	4.8	36	15.0	7.50
2019	22	12.5	4.8	36	19.7	7.65
2020	33	15.3	5.8	47	25.9	7.65

Source: own work based on JST (Local Government Unit) data

In the city of Radom, the decision-making process within the budget framework is divided into two stages. In the first stage, the residents of the city participate in public consultations. The consultations include a series of meetings of the Mayor of Radom with the residents and high school students. The overall goal of these meetings is to explain the principles, nature, meaning and benefits the implementation of the participatory budget can bring to the city and its residents. Then, those who are interested submit their proposals for the city budget by filling in a special application form

and sending it to the designated address at the City Hall/Town Hall. In the application form, the applicants specify, among things, the goals of the proposed project, give its brief description, justification for its implementation, the scope of activities and the cost estimate.

All submitted applications are thoroughly examined by specialised units within the City Hall in terms of the legal feasibility of implementation of a given investment, cost-effectiveness, and the possibility of securing funds for handling a given project in the years to come. The cost of submitted projects cannot exceed the funds allocated in the budget for this initiative. The list of all submitted projects, both those that meet the criteria and those that do not, along with their justification, is made public.

In the second stage, the residents vote on the submitted and verified projects on specially designed ballots in designated venues around the city or via the Internet. The residents of Radom can cast their votes upon showing their IDs. Projects with the most votes will be implemented into the budget for the following year. The most voted projects are accepted until the allocated budget limit is reached.

Carrying out public consultations in the city on the so-called Participatory Budget for a given year is preceded by the ordinance of the Mayor of the city issued under Article 30 Section 2 item. 4 of the Act of 8 March 1990 on Local Self-Government i.e. Dz. U. (Journal of Laws) of 2013, item 594/ and § 8 item 2 of Appendix no. 1 to Resolution no. 472/2013 of the Radom City Council of 21 January 2013. This Ordinance contains guidelines and introduces principles of social consultations as well as the following appendices:

- Number and area restrictions/boundaries,
- Detailed rules of consultations regarding the participatory budget for a given year,
- Application form template for submitting projects to be implemented under the participatory budget,
- Voting card template,
- Voter's card template,
- Declaration of consent for the processing of personal data,
- Declaration of a legal guardian,
- Schedule of the participatory budget consultations for a given year,
- Rules regarding the establishment of mobile voting posts by the Office of the Mayor, Public Relations and City Promotion Office,
- Application form for establishing a mobile voting post,
- List of city departments, units and companies involved in works on the participatory budget.

The city was divided into six zones, numbered 0–5, and one general city area. Districts and streets of the city were assigned to each of the zones. The Evaluation Team made the final division of the submitted projects into categories of local (district) projects or city-wide projects and prepared the final project lists to be voted on by the residents.

## Analysis of the participatory budget for the 2014–2020 period

### Participatory budget for the year 2014

In 2013 Radom held the first social consultations on the so-called participatory budget for the year 2014 introduced by the Ordinance of the Mayor of Radom, on conducting social consultations on the so-called participatory budget of the city of Radom for 2014. The consultations were meant as a city-wide initiative addressed to the residents of Radom who were 16 and over.

The consultations included a series of meetings of the Mayor of Radom with the residents and high school students. The overall goal of these meetings is to explain the principles, nature, meaning and benefits the implementation of the participatory budget can bring to the city and its residents. Then, those who were interested submitted applications with their project proposals, which were subjected to thorough formal, substantive and financial verification. This concluded the first stage of the decision-making process within the budget. The second stage was centred around the residents voting for selected projects and choosing the ones that received the most votes. There were 279 projects submitted to the participatory budget of the city of Radom, out of which 44% (123 projects) received positive evaluation and were approved for voting.

The voting met with great interest and 8,350 residents of Radom cast their votes. The majority of people voted traditionally – using voting cards, and only a small percentage (about 5%) via the Internet. Out of 123 projects in total submitted for voting, 11 projects were selected for implementation in 2014. Most votes cast (11,428) with the highest number of points (48,592) went to city-wide projects. The resources allocated for projects under the participatory budget for 2014 amounted to PLN 3,000,000, with PLN 500,000 allocated for each area.

The most voted project was a proposal aimed at preventing food waste, called “Stop the waste pile”. Other projects with top votes included a proposal aimed at facilitating cycling in Radom as well as a project regarding health prevention among girls.

### Participatory budget for the year 2015

In 2015, the number of funds allocated for the participatory budget was increased to the amount of PLN 4.2 million, with PLN 700 thousand for each area. Compared to the previous year, it was an increase in allocated funds by PLN 1.2 million and PLN 200 thousand per area.

In addition to the traditional way of submitting applications on application forms, that year a specialised system was introduced called the Online Participatory Budgeting Voting System – where residents could fill in application forms for the participatory budget and send them digitally. In addition to the possibility of submitting forms, the system also allows, upon prior registration, to vote for selected projects.

A total of 143 applications were submitted to the participatory budget (significantly less than in 2014), of which 89 received positive evaluation and were approved



for voting. A total of 16,389 residents of Radom voted on the projects. 13,777 voters voted traditionally using voting cards, while interestingly the number of online voters increased compared to the previous year (15% of all voters).

Out of 89 applications with positive evaluation, 15 were chosen to be implemented.

The most voted project for implementation in the participatory budget for 2015 was the proposal for the establishment of an astronomical observatory and a small planetarium (a city-wide project) Other top-voted projects were mainly sports grounds, playgrounds, and recreational areas, as well as cycle paths.

### **Participatory budget for the year 2016**

In 2016, the funds allocated for the participatory budget of the city of Radom increased yet again from PLN 4.2 million to PLN 4.8 million. As a result, the funds granted for each area amounted to PLN 800 thousand. The residents submitted 190 applications, of which 91 applications received positive evaluation and were approved for voting. By votes of the residents, 20 projects were selected (a list of winning projects was drawn up). A total of 12,624 people participated in voting for the 2016 participatory budget (6,963 voted using voting cards, 5661 – voted online).

Most voters supported the construction of a new sports field for elementary school no. 13 in Radom. The most points for city-wide projects were awarded to the proposal submitted by Caritas Radom “A good home – the place of care for human psyche”. The beneficiary has created a place where people who require mental support can receive the necessary help provided by specialists in a very short time. The second most popular project among voters in the city-wide category was a proposal aimed at improving the safety of humans and animals alike – “Preventive spraying of city parks against mosquitoes and ticks”.

### **Participatory budget for the year 2017**

By the Ordinance of the Mayor of the city of Radom, the funds allocated for the implementation of projects submitted by residents under the 2017 city budget amounted to PLN 4.8 million. A total of 252 projects were submitted for the 2017 participatory budget, 117 received a positive evaluation and were approved for voting, out of which 25 projects were submitted for implementation. A total of 11,136 people cast their votes, 8,813 votes were valid. The gathered data show a year by year increase in the number of voters choosing the Online Voting System In 2017, 24.6% voted via the System. A total of 4,512 people voted via the Internet, and 6,624 voters traditionally cast their votes using voting cards.

Seven city-wide projects were implemented that year under the participatory budget, including “First Aid for Everyone” – a project aimed at organizing first aid training courses for the residents of Radom, or “A mobile museum of vintage bicycles”.

Four projects were implemented in this area. A project which deserves special attention concerns “Highlighting the most valuable historical monument of Radom through its illumination” – regarding the illumination of the church of Bernardine Fathers.

### Participatory budget for the year 2018

By the Ordinance of the Mayor of the city of Radom, the number of funds allocated for the implementation of projects submitted by residents under the city budget for 2018 was the same as the year before – PLN 4,8 million. The residents of Radom submitted 357 projects, of which 185 projects were approved for voting upon verification. Most of the proposals are city-wide projects. Out of 185 projects submitted for voting, 18 projects were selected for implementation in 2018. A total of 12,206 people took part in the voting and 10,625 votes were deemed valid. The number of online voters increased and accounted for 30% of all valid cast votes.

Projects aimed at recreational and sports investments met with a great deal of support and interest. The most voted project regarded a sports field for students and the local community located in the vicinity of NFS (National Fire Service) school no. 25, an outdoor gym, a playground and a sports field in Jordan's game park, as well as the construction of a multifunctional playground at the Electronics School Complex. The project of building an all-year ice rink, the first such investment in Radom, also enjoyed great interest, which was reflected in the number of points received.

### Participatory budget for the year 2019

By the Ordinance of the Mayor of the city of Radom, the funds allocated for the implementation of projects submitted by residents under the city budget for 2019 amounted to PLN 4,8 million. However, the number of areas eligible for funding increased to seven. In addition to the already functioning six areas, a new institutional area was created. This was a novelty created with school projects in mind. Thus, the general city area received PLN 1.2 million, five local areas received PLN 600 thousand each, and the newly created institutional area also received PLN 600 thousand.

Submitted to the participatory budget for 2019 were 404 projects, eventually, 204 projects were approved for voting, and out of that number 22 projects were accepted for implementation.

A total of 12,473 residents voted, and 10,190 votes cast were deemed as valid, of which 23% can be attributed to online voting. The remaining 77% were cast traditionally, using voting cards.

Most voters cast their votes for the project of modernisation of the gym at the Major H. Dobrzański Vocational School Complex. Among the projects selected for implementation in 2019, similarly to previous years, there were also proposals for the organisation of cultural events, artistic workshops and recreational and sports activities. Voters also showed a great deal of interest in the proposals regarding the construction of playgrounds, sports fields and outdoor workout areas, but also projects concerning such topics as the construction of a parking lot in the vicinity of the reservoir in Borki, removal of architectural barriers, proposal to commemorate stars of the Radomiak football club or illumination of the lovers' bridge of in the Old Garden.

## Participatory budget for the year 2020

By the Ordinance of the Mayor of the city of Radom, several changes were introduced concerning social consultations within the scope of the participatory budget of the city of Radom for the year 2020. These budget adjustments regarded the increase of financial resources to the amount of PLN 5.8 million (an increase by PLN 1 million compared to the previous year) and changes in the procedure of allocation of funds for the submitted projects divided into categories by criteria. The main criterion for the division was the value of the submitted applications and the degree of institutionalisation of the proposed solutions.

In terms of value:

- up to PLN 50 thousand
- from PLN 50 thousand to PLN 400 thousand
- over PLN 400 thousand

and by the institutional character of the projects, i.e. those which concern municipal institutions.

Funds of PLN 5.8 million were distributed as follows: The amount of PLN 800 thousand was allocated from the global fund for projects up to PLN 50 thousand, PLN 2 million was granted to projects between PLN 50 thousand and 400 thousand, PLN 2 million was granted to projects over PLN 400 thousand, and PLN 1 million was granted towards institutional projects.

The first category included projects the implementation of which cost up to PLN 50 thousand. The winning projects included building shelters for stray cats.

In the category of projects worth PLN 50–400 thousand, the residents of Radom decided to give green light to the following proposals: The top project concerns “Purchase of two self-service machines for collecting PET bottles, aluminium cans and glass bottles”. The points earned for disposing of such items could be exchanged for a bus ticket, or entitle a given person to use the facilities of MOSIR Radom or could be used while parking in the paid zone in the city centre, or renting bicycles in the city. Another proposal was aimed at installing drinking troughs for animals in city parks, and for the Radom, shelter to provide sterilisation and aftercare for the animals upon conducting the procedure. The construction of a treatment and protection centre for wild animals was also approved. In the category of a project with the cost of over PLN 400 thousand, the residents of Radom decided on the purchase of an ambulance with equipment for the treatment of newborn babies as well as a project regarding the purchase of additional beds for patients of the city hospital located at Tochtermana Street.

Institutional projects were gathered and voted on as a separate category. The winning projects were: the construction of a multifunctional playground at the Public Elementary School no. 17 and a safe and children-friendly Jordan’s Game Park.

## Participatory budget for the year 2021 (schedule for the following year)

Participatory Budget 2021 is the VIII edition of public consultations on the participatory budget for the city of Radom. According to the draft resolution, in 2021 the funds

allocated for the implementation of winning projects will increase to the amount of PLN 6.2 million, i.e. 400 thousand more than in the year 2020. The city officials proposed to divide the submitted projects into four categories, as was done in the previous year. The funds for each category will increase by PLN 100 thousand for each of included projects. A total amount of PLN 900 thousand will be allocated for projects up to and including PLN 50 thousand. PLN 2.1 million will be allocated to the category of projects exceeding PLN 50 thousand and up to PLN 400 thousand. The same amount will be allocated for projects over PLN 400 thousand. The total amount allocated for institutional projects (concerning municipal institutions) is PLN 1.1 million. Among the winning projects with an estimated value of up to PLN 50 thousand, the top voted project was the proposal of support for the Shelter for Stray Animals in Radom. As part of the project, all boxes will be insulated and that way the animals will be protected against cold and humidity. Another project which can be found among the winners deals with "Houses for beneficial organisms" and is aimed at purchasing and setting up birdhouses and nesting boxes for various species of beneficial organisms: bats, birds, hedgehogs, bumblebees, bees and butterflies, which have a positive impact on the environment. In the category of projects worth over PLN 50 thousand and up to PLN 400 thousand, which were the most voted on, the proposals for setting up bicycle paths on Limanowskiego and Prażmowskiego streets were at the top of the list. The only project worth more than PLN 400 thousand is the one regarding the development of a cycling route (cost: PLN 500 thousand). Institutional projects concerned the renovation of gyms in the city, construction of multifunctional sports fields and a playground in the vicinity of one of the city's elementary schools. There were also miscellaneous educational projects developed with kids and youngsters in mind. These included workshops, lectures, film screenings, and music classes.

Due to the pandemic, the implementation of projects is subject to various restrictions. At the time of development of this analysis, no report on the implementation of the budgeted projects had yet been adopted.

### **Social activity within the scope of the participatory budget**

Participation in voting for projects submitted under the participatory budget is an opportunity to be directly involved in deciding how the resources from the city budget will be spent. It is also a real opportunity to implement your ideas and change the image of your environment as well as contribute to the development of the city.

In the 2014–2020 period within the framework of the participatory budget of Radom, a total of 964 projects were positively evaluated and voted on, out of which 14,9% (144 projects) were approved for implementation.

During this period, most projects were submitted by the residents of Radom in 2019, and at the same time, the highest percentage of projects received positive evaluation and were approved for voting (Fig. 1).

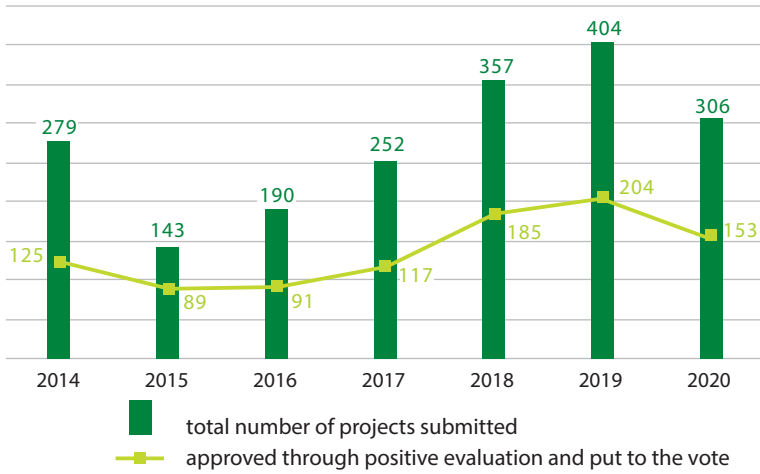


Fig. 1. Number of projects submitted in the 2014–2020 period – in total and approved through positive evaluation

Source: own work based on the reports from public consultations regarding the so-called participatory budget of the city of Radom for the 2014–2020 period

In the 2014–2020 period the number of eligible voters did not exceed 10%. This is not an impressive result. The highest attendance during voting among the residents of Radom was recorded in 2015 and most recently in 2020 (Fig. 2).

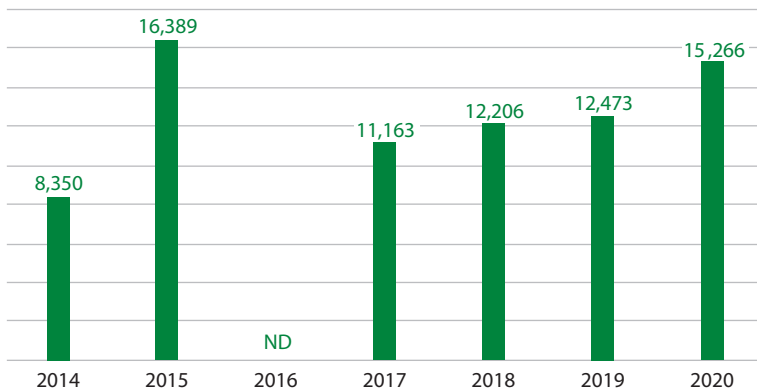


Fig. 2. Number of residents who voted for the participatory budget in the 2014–2020 period

Source: own work based on the reports from public consultations on the so-called participatory budget of the city of Radom in the 2014–2019 period (data for the year 2016 not available)

The majority of residents voted traditionally – using voting cards. Only 35% out of the total number of eligible voters (over the 2014–2020 period) voted online (Fig. 3, 4).

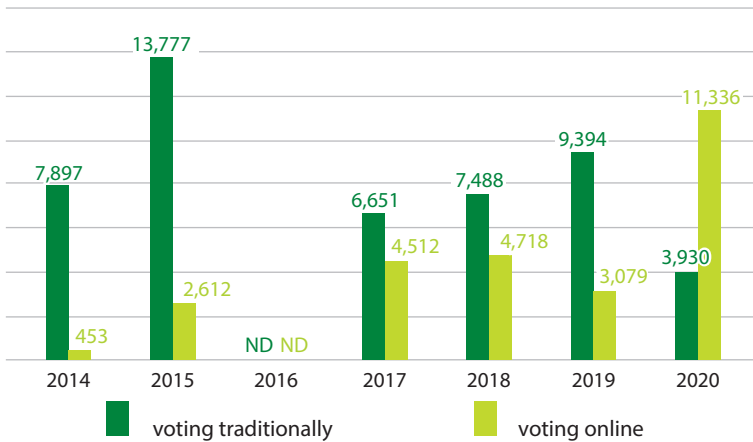


Fig. 3. Number of residents voting traditionally and online

Source: own work based on the reports from public consultations on the so-called participatory budget of the city of Radom in the 2014–2020 period (the year 2016 – no data available)

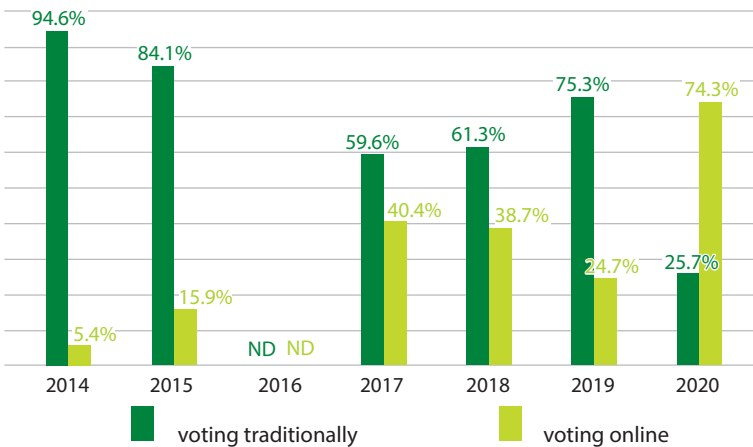


Fig. 4. Number of residents voting traditionally and online (%)

Source: own work based on the reports from public consultations on the so-called participatory budget of the city of Radom in the 2014–2020 period (2016 – no data available)

Based on the analysis of eligible voters among the residents of Radom, one can clearly see a significant increase in online voting in the year 2020. In 2019 about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of residents voted traditionally on voting cards. The underlying reason for this shift is undoubtedly the COVID-19 pandemic and the related restrictions on social activity and the change in the way the city office (city hall) operates.

The year 2020 saw the most winning projects approved for implementation. This is in part due to increased funding, nearly twice the amount of resources available in 2014, allocated in the city budget for the implementation of projects submitted by the residents (Fig. 5).

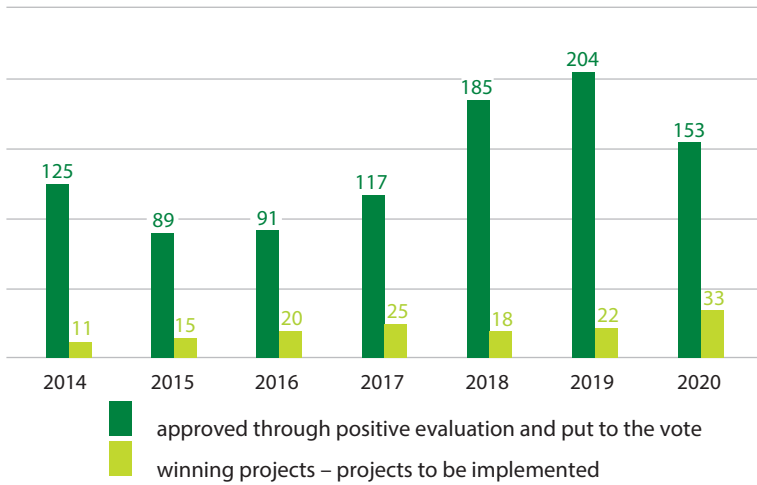


Fig. 5. Number of projects approved through positive evaluation and winning projects  
 Source: own work based on the reports from public consultations on the so-called participatory budget of the city of Radom in the 2014–2020 period

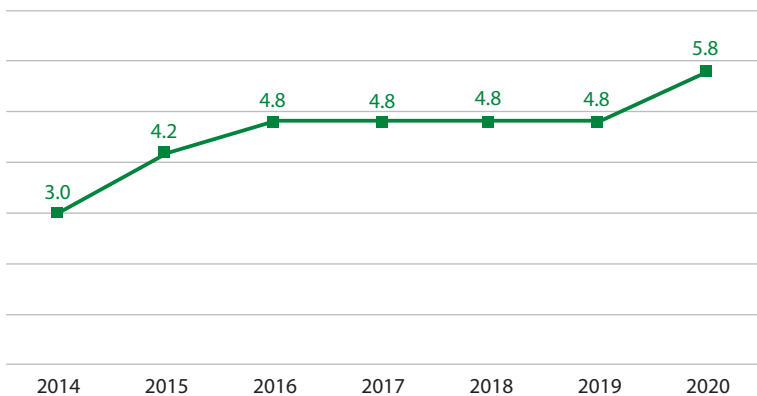


Fig. 6. Funds allocated for the participatory budget (PLN MM)  
 Source: own work based on the reports from public consultations on the so-called participatory budget of the city of Radom in the 2014–2020 period

In 2014, the city allocated PLN 3 million for projects under the participatory budget. In the following years, the pool of funds was increased. Thus, in 2015 it reached the amount of PLN 4.2 million, and in subsequent years from 2016 to 2019, the funds were increased yet again to the amount of PLN 4.8 million. Each subsequent year brings an additional contribution from the city for projects under the participatory budget. In 2020 the pool of funds reached PLN 5.8 million, and the planned budget for 2021 is set at PLN 6.2 million (Fig. 6).

### **Thematic scope of the winning projects**

The thematic scope of the winning projects is diverse and one can divide them into the following categories:

#### **Recreational and sports investments:**

- sports fields,
- fitness rooms,
- gyms/fitness parks,
- playgrounds,
- parklets,
- ice rink,
- Nordic walking classes and swimming pool classes.

#### **Transportation and roadway investments:**

- cycle paths and walkways,
- parking bays and parking lots,
- sidewalks,
- traffic lights,
- street lighting,
- LED displays at bus stops,
- purchase of accessible vans for transporting people with disabilities,
- improvement of bicycle paths – separate cycle lanes.

#### **Investments in ecology and the environment:**

- green areas,
- preventive spraying against mosquitoes and ticks,
- insulation,
- food sorting,
- bottle collection machines.

#### **Cultural investments:**

- summer stages,
- talent workshop,
- literary meetings and workshops,
- meetings with famous people.

#### **Historical investments and monuments:**

- monuments,



- meetings and workshops,
- mobile museum,
- heritage sites and historical venues,
- historical publications,
- the illumination of historic sites.

**Investments in health:**

- vaccinations,
- information and training courses: psychiatric care, cancer diseases,
- workshops and first aid courses,
- the purchase of an ambulance, and parent beds.

**Investments in learning and education:**

- purchase of books for libraries,
- propagating knowledge of patterns and behaviours,
- investment in the school connectors,
- construction and retrofitting of the “Astro-Base”.

**Investments in small architecture and revitalisation:**

- benches, baskets, flowerbeds,
- illuminations,
- facades.

**Other:**

- counteracting animal homelessness.

The majority, i.e. as much as 33.3% (48 projects), are proposals targeted at recreational and sports investments. They are aimed at the construction of sports fields located in close proximity to schools, outdoor gyms e.g. in housing estate parks, playgrounds for children, ice rinks but also activities promoting active leisure time – Nordic walking and water fitness classes. The project which was of great importance to the residents was the construction of an all-year ice rink, the first such investment in Radom. A significant percentage of projects (16.7%) dealt with road investments – construction of bicycle and pedestrian paths, parking bays and parking lots, sidewalk renovations, installation of lighting and traffic lights, etc. The construction of bicycle paths was an attempt to build a comprehensive and coherent network of bicycle routes, as well as to decrease traffic and improve air quality. Other investments: in culture, environment, ecology, health, history and monuments, etc. account for approximately 8.3% of each area. Cultural investments focus on the organisation of literary meetings and workshops, meetings with famous people, and the organisation of concerts.

From the very first edition of the participatory budget for the city of Radom, among the projects submitted for implementation were proposals promoting investments in health. Thus, in 2014, thanks to the project “Vaccination of girls and women against cervical cancer”, an action of free vaccination against HPV was conducted. Every year in Poland, about 1.8 thousand women die from cervical cancer. The most effective method of preventing this dangerous disease is vaccination. In the following years in terms

of protection and promotion of health for residents are – information and support campaigns, such as “Cancer in retreat”, implemented in 2017 and 2020, or “Early detection of type 2 diabetes” (the year 2020). Type 2 diabetes is milder than type 1 diabetes and is often asymptomatic, which is the reason for the late diagnosis of the disease when the patient already suffers from disease complications.

One of the most interesting projects and worthy of attention in the opinion of the residents of Radom, was the proposal “Highlighting the most valuable historical monument of Radom through its illumination”. The façade of the 15<sup>th</sup>-century monastery of the Bernardine Fathers was illuminated. Thanks to the illumination one can see many interesting architectural details which were difficult to notice in broad daylight.

Another project is devoted to the history of the war period – Renovation of the “Mass grave” and “Individual grave” monument was a project implemented in the municipal cemetery in Radom.

“Astro-Base” astronomical observatory + mini planetarium – a city-wide project thanks to which preschoolers and primary school children, as well as high school, university students and adults can participate in lectures on astronomy and stargazing.

In the year 2020 five out of 33 winning projects were aimed at the needs of animals. In 2021 there were two such projects This shows how sensible the residents of Radom are to the problem of homelessness and harm done to animals. The winning projects include: “Shelters for stray cats”, “Free sterilisation and neutering of dogs and cats”, “Drinking troughs for animals”, “Centre for treatment and protection of wild animals”, “Stop animal homelessness”, “People of Radom for the Shelter for stray animals – providing insulation, securing and preparing boxes for stray animals for the winter season”, “Houses for beneficial organisms”. These projects prove the people of Radom are not indifferent to the fate of our “lesser brothers and sisters”.

## Summary

The conducted analysis allows one to draw the following conclusions:

1. The involvement of residents in the formation of the participatory budget, which is a relatively new instrument of social consultation, is steadily increasing. As shown by the figures presented herein, residents who have been able to observe the implemented activities remain interested in this form of participation. However, it should be pointed out that the civic engagement in Radom is less than 10% when compared to the population of the city and this value is similar on the scale of the entire country.
2. The manner of conducting the consultation of budget projects points to the necessity of maintaining its hybrid form. Although the interest in consultations carried out with the use of electronic means of communication is increasing, the traditional form is still very popular. Reducing consultations and their promotion to new media would exclude a significant number of residents, especially seniors, from participation.

3. The dynamics of the funds allocated to this initiative are slightly increasing. However, this does not compensate for the cost of conducted actions. Therefore, there is a risk that the actual share of residents' initiatives will steadily decline if the current level of funding is maintained.
4. The projects proposed in subsequent budgets indicate the deep axiological roots of socially active residents. This is reflected by the prevalence of city-wide projects over district particularities.
5. The presented scope of needs indicates people's concern for the most important contemporary needs such as health care, ecology, including care for the well-being of abandoned and stray animals, education, safety and possibilities of active leisure.
6. The residents are also concerned about but also proud of their city's cultural heritage. The proposed and accepted projects which were later approved for implementation contribute to the development of culture and strengthen local identity.
7. The sceptics' predictions that this form of involvement would result in the development of local particularities and conflicts arising in this context did not come true. The selection of projects approved for implementation does not only concern the infrastructure and its deficiencies but indicates the dominance of higher-order needs and the development of metropolitan culture.

## Conclusion

An important feature of various forms of social participation is the interest of a given person in the affairs of the community that surrounds him or her and in which he or she lives. Residents' activity may take various forms, including volunteer work, active involvement in social organisations, or engaging in the management of communal affairs.

A participatory budget is a process in which residents not only decide about the allocation of a part of Radom's city budget. It is the process thanks to which they can directly influence the city by fulfilling the needs of their local communities. The residents know their needs best and the participatory budget is a way for them to satisfy their needs. It is a tool that supports the building of local social capital and the search for social innovation.

The most crucial element of the participatory budget is the active participation of residents in the process. With their combined activity and experience they create a field for common interest and compromise for local communities by shaping local leaders and building local identity.

The main objective of the analysed concept is to provide a way to open to the voice of the residents by including them in the discussion on the priorities of the local community from the perspective of its common good. This ultimate goal is expected to lead to active involvement in the process of development of the participatory budget as well as to efficient and effective spending of common funds from the local budget and building bonds in the local community.

A participatory budget is an excellent tool for education about self-governance, it is an element of an entire philosophy of local government functioning as a community of authorities and residents of a given territorial unit working together for its development.

The example of the city of Radom shows that the participatory budget supports, complements and oftentimes replaces or increases the effectiveness of public administration. The conducted analysis can serve as a guideline for the improvement of budget implementation in the Mazovia region.

## References

- Gagacka M., 2016, *Standaryzacja współpracy samorządów z organizacjami pozarządowymi* [in:] K. Głabicka, P. Śwital (eds.), *Partycypacja społeczna w samorządzie terytorialnym – aspekty prawne, ekonomiczne, społeczne*, Instytut Naukowo-Wydawniczy „Spatium” Sp. z o.o., Radom, 225–244.
- Hausner J., 2008, *Zarządzanie publiczne*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warszawa.
- Izdebski H., 2001, *Samorząd terytorialny. Podstawy rozwoju i działalności*, Wydawnictwo LexisNexis, Warszawa.
- Kłębowski W., 2014, *Budżet partycypacyjny. Ewaluacja*, Instytut Obywatelski, Warszawa.
- Kraszewski D., Mojkowski K., 2014, *Budżet obywatelski w Polsce*, Fundacja im. Stefana Batorego, Warszawa.
- Smarż J., 2016, *Znaczenie konsultacji jako formy partycypacji społecznej* [in:] K. Głabicka, P. Śwital (eds.) *Partycypacja społeczna w samorządzie terytorialnym – aspekty prawne, ekonomiczne, społeczne*, Instytut Naukowo-Wydawniczy „Spatium” Sp. z o.o., Radom, 213–214.
- Wampler B., 2007, *A Guide to participatory budgeting* [in:] A. Shah (ed.), *Participatory Budgeting*, World Bank, Washington, D.C.
- World Bank, 2015, *Empowerment Case Studies: Participatory Budgeting in Brazil*, Worldbank.org/INTEMPowerment/Resources/14657\_Particip-Bdg-Brazil-web.pdf [access: 28.02.2022].

## Other documents

Uchwała Nr XII/128/2019 Rady Miejskiej w Radomiu z dnia 25 marca 2019 r. w sprawie wymagań, jakie powinien spełniać projekt Budżetu Obywatelskiego Miasta Radomia na rok 2020.

Uchwała Nr XXXIV/300/2020 Rady Miejskiej w Radomiu z dnia 27 stycznia 2020 r. w sprawie wymagań, jakie powinien spełniać projekt Budżetu Obywatelskiego Miasta Radomia na rok 2021.

Zarządzenie Nr 3541/2013 Prezydenta Miasta Radomia z dnia 7 marca 2013 roku, w sprawie przeprowadzenia konsultacji społecznych dotyczących tzw. Budżetu Obywatelskiego Miasta Radomia na 2014 rok.

Zarządzenie Nr 4677/2014 Prezydenta Miasta Radomia z dnia 21 stycznia 2014 roku, w sprawie przeprowadzenia konsultacji społecznych dotyczących tzw. Budżetu Obywatelskiego Miasta Radomia na 2015 rok.

Zarządzenie Nr 77/2015 Prezydenta Miasta Radomia z dnia 7 stycznia 2015 roku, w sprawie przeprowadzenia konsultacji społecznych dotyczących tzw. Budżetu Obywatelskiego Miasta Radomia na 2016 rok.

Zarządzenie Nr 1026/2016 Prezydenta Miasta Radomia z dnia 5 stycznia 2016 roku, w sprawie przeprowadzenia konsultacji społecznych dotyczących tzw. Budżetu Obywatelskiego Miasta Radomia na 2017 rok.

Zarządzenie Nr 840/2016 Prezydenta Miasta Radomia z dnia 13 grudnia 2016 roku, w sprawie przeprowadzenia konsultacji społecznych dotyczących tzw. Budżetu Obywatelskiego Miasta Radomia na 2018 rok.

Zarządzenie Nr 229/2019 Prezydenta Miasta Radomia z dnia 8 lutego 2019 roku, w sprawie przeprowadzenia konsultacji społecznych dotyczących tzw. Budżetu Obywatelskiego Miasta Radomia na 2020 rok.

## **Reports**

Sprawozdanie z konsultacji społecznych dotyczących tzw. Budżetu Obywatelskiego Miasta Radomia na rok 2014.

Sprawozdanie z konsultacji społecznych dotyczących tzw. Budżetu Obywatelskiego Miasta Radomia na rok 2015.

Sprawozdanie z konsultacji społecznych dotyczących tzw. Budżetu Obywatelskiego Miasta Radomia na rok 2016.

Sprawozdanie z konsultacji społecznych dotyczących tzw. Budżetu Obywatelskiego Miasta Radomia na rok 2017.

Sprawozdanie z konsultacji społecznych dotyczących tzw. Budżetu Obywatelskiego Miasta Radomia na rok 2018.

Sprawozdanie z konsultacji społecznych dotyczących tzw. Budżetu Obywatelskiego Miasta Radomia na rok 2019.

---

## Aktywność społeczna w kształtowaniu budżetu obywatelskiego

### STRESZCZENIE

W społeczeństwie obywatelskim, samorządność jako forma organizacji społecznej zajmuje jedną z centralnych pozycji. Warunkiem realizacji misji rozwojowej samorządu jest uczestnictwo obywateli i ich współodpowiedzialność za kształt lokalnego życia społecznego.

Ostatnio coraz popularniejszą formą partycypacji staje się budżet obywatelski, powodujący bezpośrednio zaangażowanie mieszkańców w proces podejmowania decyzji dotyczących wyboru zakresu zadań publicznych w ramach wyznaczonej puli środków i przejęcia części odpowiedzialności. Celem prezentowanej analizy jest ukazanie dynamiki zaangażowania obywateli w konsultacje, w sprawie kształtowania tej części budżetu miasta na zadania lokalne mieszczące się w kompetencjach samorządu lokalnego, jaką jest budżet obywatelski. Przyjęta hipoteza badawcza zakłada, że budżet obywatelski jest coraz bardziej popularną formą konsultacji, bowiem w swej formule daje mieszkańcom poczucie sprawstwa i podmiotowości w wyrażaniu swoich opinii i preferencji. Empiryczną podstawą analizy są sprawozdania z realizacji budżetu obywatelskiego miasta Radomia od początku jego powstania oraz literatura przedmiotu. Budżet obywatelski jest znakomitym narzędziem edukacji o samorządności, jest elementem konkretnej filozofii funkcjonowania samorządu jako wspólnoty władz i mieszkańców danej jednostki terytorialnej, współdziałających na rzecz jej rozwoju. Przykład miasta Radomia wskazuje, że budżet obywatelski wspomaga, uzupełnia, a niejednokrotnie zastępuje lub zwiększa skuteczność działania administracji publicznej. Przeprowadzone analizy mogą być wskazówką przy doskonaleniu realizacji budżetu Mazowsza.

**Słowa kluczowe:** budżet obywatelski, społeczeństwo obywatelskie, partycypacja, współzarządzanie

---

*Translated by Wojciech Dąbrowski*

---

#### Małgorzata Dąbrowska

Mazovian Office for Regional Planning in Warsaw, Branch Office in Radom /

Mazowieckie Biuro Planowania Regionalnego w Warszawie, Oddział Terenowy w Radomiu

e-mail: mdabrowska@mbpr.pl



to cite:

Dąbrowska M., 2022, *Social activity in shaping the participatory budget*, MAZOVIA Regional Studies, Special Edition 2022, DOI: 10.21858/msr.se.2022.03, Mazovian Office for Regional Planning in Warsaw, Warsaw, pp. 57–78.