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Wrocław Civic Budget. Social Innovation Adapted in Polish Local Government

Abstract: The paper explores Wrocław Civic Budget in the context of procedures and impact. It reviews various data to present different aspects of this process: number of projects submitted and implemented, citizens' participation in the selection process, geographical distribution of the implemented projects and their contents, showing the significant fall in the citizens' interest in the process after two years of its implementation. The paper aims to analyze whether the project in its current form actually succeeds in activating the citizens' and involving them in the local decision-making on one hand, and changing the city on the other. The effectiveness of participatory budgeting in Wrocław is explored, considering such criteria as reliability, impact, activation and innovativeness. The data reveal both the successes and drawbacks of Wrocław Civic Budget, allowing for presentation of recommendations.

Keywords: *local government, participatory budgeting, local participation, Wrocław*

Introduction

Participatory budgeting has become a very popular tool all over the world and has gone a far distance not only geographically, but also in terms of its procedural organization, as well as objectives achieved by it within local communities. The same name carries very different meanings in various parts of the world. This is why exploration of various examples of participatory budgeting is an important insight, to avoid a pitfall of missing the fundamental differences. Most major cities in Poland apply participatory budgeting nowadays, presented as a means to empower citizens and redistribute decision-making competencies, although in the Polish setting, authorities rarely refer to participatory budgeting's potential of changing the municipality's strategic goals and investment objectives, an important impact mentioned in other countries.

The present article discusses the example of Wrocław participatory budget project (Wrocław Civic Budget, WCB), analyzing its previous editions. The objective was to verify

whether the process actually brings new quality in relations between the municipal authorities and the city's inhabitants, and therefore how it relates to the idea of social innovation. To do so, I analyze the authorities' policies on one hand: the procedure applied at different stages of WCB as well as the policies of its implementation in terms of reliability, impact, activation and innovativeness; while on the other hand I verify the residents' reaction to the process, evidenced by participation in two major phases aimed to activate citizens: project submission and selection vote. I compare these data with basic characteristics of WCB's practical impact, i.e. what categories projects fall in and in which regions of the city they are implemented in order to understand the meaning of participatory budgeting in this specific case and to develop recommendations to improve it in future. The paper is mainly focused on the latest closed edition of 2018, however it refers also to earlier editions to provide the relevant context.

Participatory Budgeting as a Social Innovation

Participatory budgeting is a concept developed at the turn of 1980s and 1990s in Porto Alegre, Brazil, where it served two basic objectives: firstly, to confront social issues, especially those related to poverty, and secondly, to empower the most marginalized groups within the society (Novy, Leubolt, 2005). It arose from the popular movements and was a mechanism of articulation of marginalized groups' interests: "Participatory budgeting also strengthens inclusive governance by giving marginalized and excluded groups the opportunity to have their voices heard and to influence public decision making vital to their interests. Done right, it has the potential to make governments more responsive to citizens' needs and preferences and more accountable to them for performance in resource allocation and service delivery. In doing so, participatory budgeting can improve government performance and enhance the quality of democratic participation" (Shah, 2007, p. 1). It made an important element of the Brazilian process of democratization (Piper, 2014) and it also changed within the process, depending to a large extent on which forces were in power. Teresa Melgar argues that the factors that contributed to the decline of participatory budgeting as the innovative tool in municipal management in Porto Alegre included the change of the dominating political party in the local authorities, monetary crisis and resulting austerity policies, as well as the authorities' failure to observe strictly decisions made during the process (Melgar, 2015, pp 38–45).

However, participatory budgeting maintained its image of a game-changing solution, introducing new quality in the organization of local communities and referred to as a social innovation (SI). SI may be defined as "attempt to adapt social policies to new spaces of vulnerability, linked to globalization, the digital revolution, demographic changes and the financial crisis, engaging a new formula that integrates greater economic efficiency and greater democratic participation at the same time" (Ramos, 2018), even though the term itself sometimes is perceived as unclear and equivocal. Logue defines it similarly as "concerned

with the process and pursuit of both economic and social progress and (…) underpinned by a fundamental relationship to values and morality, that is, understandings of 'doing good' and 'being good'" (Logue, 2019), stressing the non-quantifiable ethical impact of such initiatives. Although, as stressed by Anderson, Curtis and Wittig in their meta-analysis of various concepts of social innovation, there are some definitions focusing on parameters which are more easily verifiable (Anderson, Curtis, Wittig, 2014), the ethical context is frequently perceived as the basic feature of social innovation. It is also the context frequently raised in analyses of participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre (Novy, Leubolt, 2005), as well as outside Brasil (Svidroňová, Gondasova, 2016; Avagyan, 2019). This value is mentioned in the context of such impact of participatory budgeting as empowering citizens and encouraging of participation, especially among the excluded and marginalized groups. This involves transfer of the right to take decisions to citizens, but also responsibility for these decisions (Moir, Leyshon, 2013, p. 1018; Marszałek-Kawa, 2007). On one hand, participatory budgeting process requires a certain level of human capital, reflected in collective norms (Vincent, 2010) and communication between the citizens and authorities (Zhang, Liao, 2011), on the other – it enhances the process of shaping such shared values.

Participatory budgeting has evolved in many respects, but it has also become a very popular – or even fashionable tool of decentralization and improvement of local governance, applied on all continents ("Participatory Budgeting Worlwide", 2013), not only in democratic states (He, 2011). With its introduction in other political systems, social contexts and procedural circumstances, participatory budgeting had to change, facing new challenges and consequently, leading to different results (Basset, 2016) and the evolution does not always correspond to the ambitious original framework, including the ethical aspect. As argued in a broad study of 2013, entitled "Participatory Budgeting Worldwide – Updated Version" (Sintomer, Herzberg, Allegretii, 2013), the process is now present on virtually all continents, however, the forms of its implementation are sometimes extremely far from the Porte Alegre objectives. The authors indicate several types of initiatives that have evolved from participatory budgeting and they showed processes implemented under this name to fall in such categories as participatory democracy, proximity democracy, participatory modernization, multi-stakeholder participation, neo-corporatism and community development. Out of these, the Polish model comes the closest to proximity democracy, with the central organizing role of the state (in the Polish model – the local government, although the central authorities have also intervened in this respect, introducing obligatory participatory budgeting in municipal communes with 2018 amendment of the act on communal government). The deliberative aspect of the process is visible at the early stage, when projects are developed by sub-local leaders and activists, before the most recognized stage of public vote. This also determines the social goal of "renewal of social relationships, solidarity without redistributive policies", as Sintomer et al. put it. Still, the process is managed by the local government, so the civil society does not appear as a new actor of power and the entire procedure is strictly top-down. Thus, the process is rather about combining conventional and

participative politics than about actual all empowerment of mobilized citizens. Even though it is still perceived as a tool of citizens' involvement in decision-making and a way to decrease the cleavage between the public and the elite (Demediuk et al., 2012), the practical aspect has become an important defining element. Nowadays, Polish NGOs define participatory budgeting as a "decision-making process allowing citizens to co-shape the given locality's budget by deciding on distribution of a particular amount of public funding" (Kębłowicki, 2013). It is thus noticeable that the scope of the project was significantly reduced in the European – including Polish – format of the process, however it is still about citizens' participation providing a space for discussion on the right to the city, investment strategies and political priorities.

In this framework, it has been argued that participatory budgeting has been applied as "a popular form of co-production intended to improve the quality of local governance" (Džinić et al., 2016, p. 31). Public governance is a concept of governing, characterized by focusing on communities and values. Gerry Stoker (2011) quoted the following defining features of networked community governance, as opposed to traditional public administration and new public management: effectiveness of tackling problems of social importance as its basic goal, managerial approach and localism, complex processes of interaction aimed at identifying individual and public preferences, involvement of public leaders, managers and all stakeholders in search for solutions and effective mechanisms of their implementation, pragmatic selection of alternatives and maintaining relationships through shared values. Thus, participation can be perceived as an indicator of quality in public administration, along with democratic rule of law, transparency, accountability, social inclusion, effectiveness and efficiency. Participatory budgeting is then a tool, which serves to encourage citizens' participation by offering them a role in shaping their closest environment.

Findings

Participatory Budgeting in Wrocław – Origins and History

When the municipality of Wrocław introduced its pilot participatory budgeting program in 2013, it was among seventy local governments in Poland implementing similar projects (Polko, 2015, p. 34). Most cases of participatory budgeting in Poland involve the lowest level of the self-government, i.e. communes: according to the internet platform specializing in monitoring of PB (*Budżety obywatelskie*, 2018), in 2017, PB was held in 80 units of local government, including only two on the medium level (district) and none in regions (province). Therefore, the most important legal act to refer to participatory budgeting in Poland is the Act of the March 8, 1990 on Commune Local Government (Ustawa, 1990). In the light of these provisions, PB is considered as consultation with citizens and therefore its outcomes do not have to be treated as obligatory for local authorities.

After the pilot edition, since 2014, the municipality of Wrocław has introduced and maintained a uniform scheme of participatory budgeting involving submissions, verification, consultations with project leaders, consultations with all inhabitants (Fig. 1). The latter stage is referred to in the municipal documents as consultations, even though in practice it is just a vote to select projects for implementation. The terms and conditions of organization of Wrocław Civic Budget have evolved through the six editions (Skrzypczyński, 2017), however, the basic principles remained unchanged.

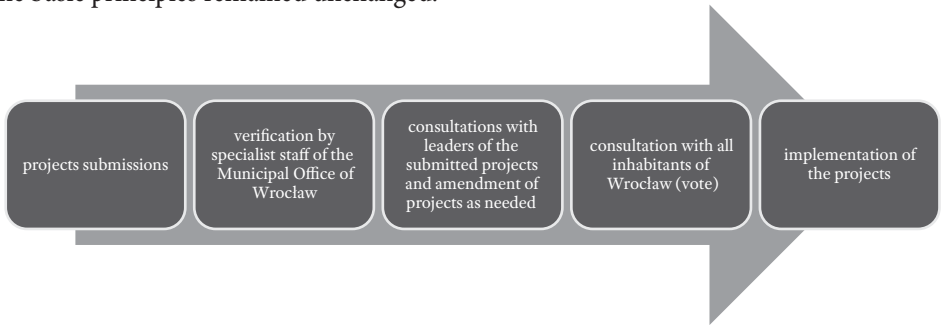

Fig. 1. Wrocław Participatory Budgeting Scheme

Since 2015 the process has been enriched by Civic Labs – workshops organized at the sub-municipality level of borough (*osiedle*) to promote inhabitants' activity and encourage them to submit projects. Even though they do not set priorities or define strategies for PB – let alone the city – Civic Labs may be perceived as a distant similarity of Porto Alegre's introductory discussions for the Council of Participatory Budgeting (Melgar, 2015, pp. 32–33).

The resources assigned for participatory budgeting in Wrocław grew through the six editions of the program from 2,000,000 PLN in 2013 to 20,000,000 PLN in 2014 and then to 25,000,000 PLN in 2016 (Fig. 2). This amount was maintained also in 2017, 2018 and 2019 (this latter edition is currently underway, so it is not a subject of analysis in the paper). The initiative was also complimented by smaller, similar programmes of narrower and more specialized nature:

- green participatory budget: organized in 2017, guaranteed support for 8 projects, all of which are currently being implemented;
- participatory budget for historic buildings to be organized for the first time in 2018 with an allocation of 250,000 PLN.

The allocated amount of 25,000,000 PLN must be spent on investment projects. As smaller, soft projects can be funded by another municipal programme of Mikrogranty (*Mikrogranty*, 2018), this specialization seems logical and justified. To avoid legal uncertainty, all projects must fall within the limits of competencies defined by the Act on Commune Government, so they must concern the property of the Municipality of Wrocław or else objects or localities covered by an arrangement between the Municipality of Wrocław and the competent local government. Importantly, the regulations require submitted projects to

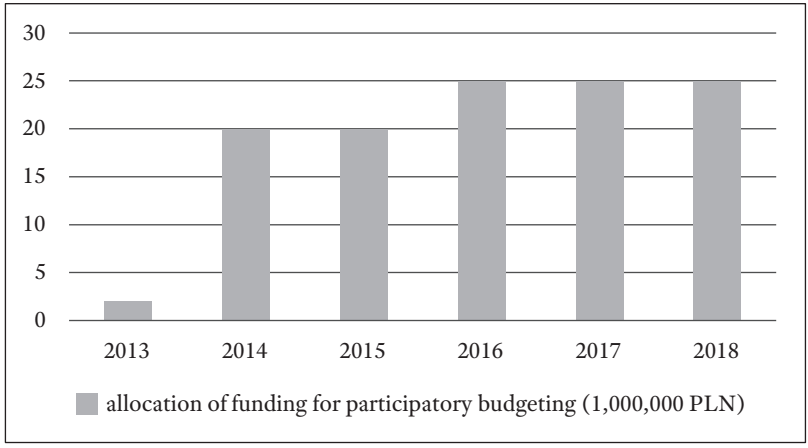

Fig. 2. Allocation of funding for participatory budgeting in Wrocław all data from: Wrocławski Budżet Obywatelski. Retrieved from https://www.wroclaw.pl/rozmawia/wroclawski-budzet-obywatelski

ensure accessibility for all inhabitants of Wrocław, highlighting participation not only at the stage of submitting and selecting the projects, but also in using the developed objects.

According to the general rule, projects may be submitted by any resident of Wrocław, who is of age. This is an important and inclusive provision, going beyond the official population of registered inhabitants of the city. The project leaders (or submitters) are not required to collect any signatures or present any support from other residents. Interestingly organizations or borough councils are not authorized to submit projects, although their members can do it as residents of the city. All submitted projects are verified by the respective units of the Municipal Office, however a negative verification doesn't result in rejection of a project: the officials organize meetings with project leaders to propose changes and corrections in the projects to improve them. Projects are rejected only, if the leader and representatives of the municipality cannot reach a compromise. If the project is sufficiently changed, it is approved and included in the list for the final vote.

Since 2016 until 2018, the PB in Wrocław was divided into two levels: municipal projects and district projects. This division of the city into the Civic Budget districts (Fig. 3) was developed based on population, prior experience with participatory budgeting and consultations with local activists. There are 14 regions, so each of them includes 2–6 boroughs (osiedle). With 3,000,000 PLN assigned to each region, regional projects consume 84% of the budget with 4,000,000 PLN left for municipal projects. In 2018 the authorities withdrew from dividing the city into districts, but kept the principle of dividing resources between projects of borough-level impact and projects affecting several boroughs.

However, organizing a consultation and voting process without implementation of the selected projects would be counter-effective in terms of citizens' empowerment and activation

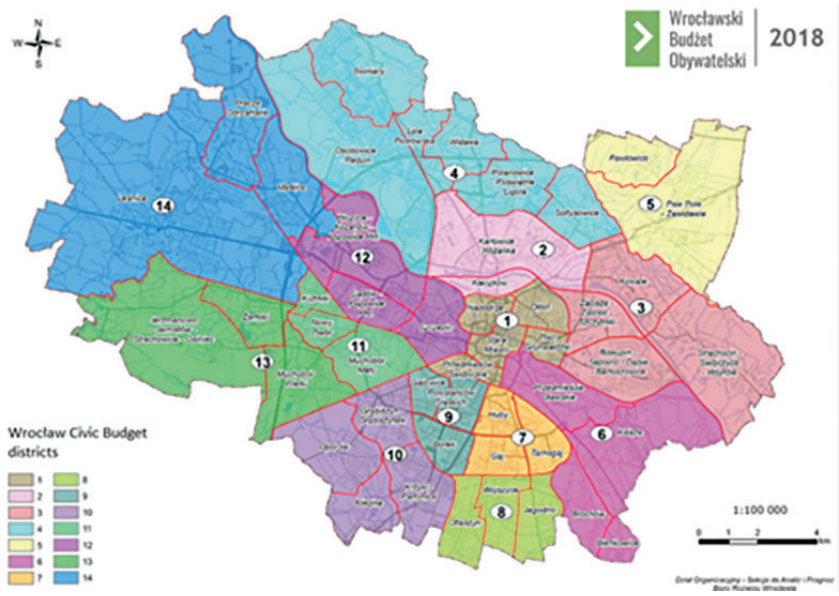

Fig. 3. Regions applied in Wrocław Civic Budget, source: Wrocławski Budżet Obywatelski 2018. Retrieved from: https://www.wroclaw.pl/rozmawia/wroclawski-dzet-obywatelski-2018-zasady

(Kębłowicki, 2014), so the municipality of Wrocław, like other local governments, not only strives to implement the chosen initiatives, but also provides citizens with current information on the projects' progress (situation as in September 2019 is presented in table 1).

Table 1. Progress in implementation of 2015, 2016 and 2017 Wrocław Participatory Budget projects.

Year	Number of projects	Completed	Under implementation
2014	89	86	0 (1 was withdrawn and 2 were waived)
2015	80	79	0 (1 was withdrawn)
2016	70	56	14
2017	63	57	26
2018	63	2	61

It can be clearly seen that the process of implementation is quite advanced and highly transparent. Delays in implementation of some projects are explained and citizens, as well as project leaders are informed on the regular basis on reasons for such delays and corrective measures taken. This transparency is an important factor to build reliability of the entire process.

Wrocław Civic Budget – Projects

The actual implementation of participatory budgeting in Poland shall be presented below through two aspects, firstly the submission and implementation of projects, and secondly through participation in the vote, called "consultations" by Wrocław authorities. The first important indicator to be analyzed here involves the number of submitted projects, as it reflects the potential of initiatives within the local community. It also depends on the inhabitants' trust in the entire process of participatory budgeting and their conviction that they can modify their local environment with this mechanism. The number of projects submitted to the vote from 2013 until 2018 is shown in figure 4. It includes only those projects which were accepted for the consultations. Projects rejected for formal reasons – such as missing signatures, exceeded deadlines or unfeasible propositions – were excluded.

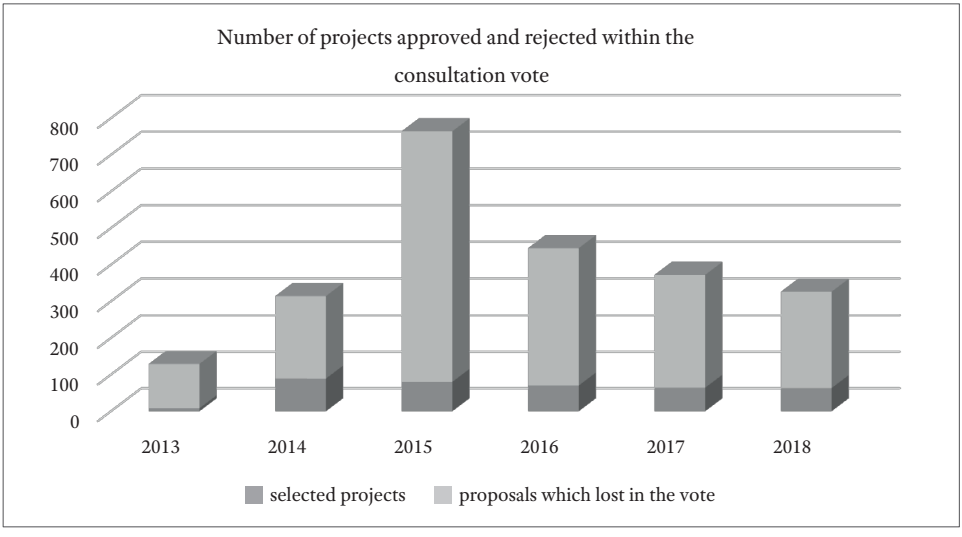

Fig. 4. Number of projects within the vote 2013–2018, source: Wrocławski Budżet Obywatelski. Retrieved from: https://www.wroclaw.pl/rozmawia/wroclawski-budzet-obywatelski

The trend perceptible in this case mirrors the one concerning participation in the vote, as discussed below. It started with a small number of projects in the pilot edition of 2013, when participatory budgeting was not a well-known and recognized process within the municipality, then it gained significant momentum to reach almost 800 formally approved proposals in 2015. In 2016, the number of submitted projects fell by more than 40% down to 445 projects. The further decrease in 2017 and 2018 was slight. Apart from the pilot edition, when only 8 projects were funded, the number of projects selected for implementation was slightly diminishing, while the average value per project grew. The fall is partially due to a process of concentration of the main activists and bottom-up movements around the

most valuable concepts, however the radicality of this drop indicates a fall in community leaders' activity and fewer ideas to reshape the city, as well as their disappointment in the process.

To reflect on the impact of participatory budgeting on the quality of life in Wrocław, I will also look at the areas involved in projects that were implemented. Out of the eight projects selected for implementation in the pilot edition of Wrocław Civic Budget in 2013, two concerned development of the local common space (surroundings of one school and one church), two involved playgrounds, three provided for renovation or revitalization of sport grounds in the city and the last one was about protection of historic tram carriages.

In 2014, the Municipality of Wrocław defined seven categories of projects (Fig. 5).

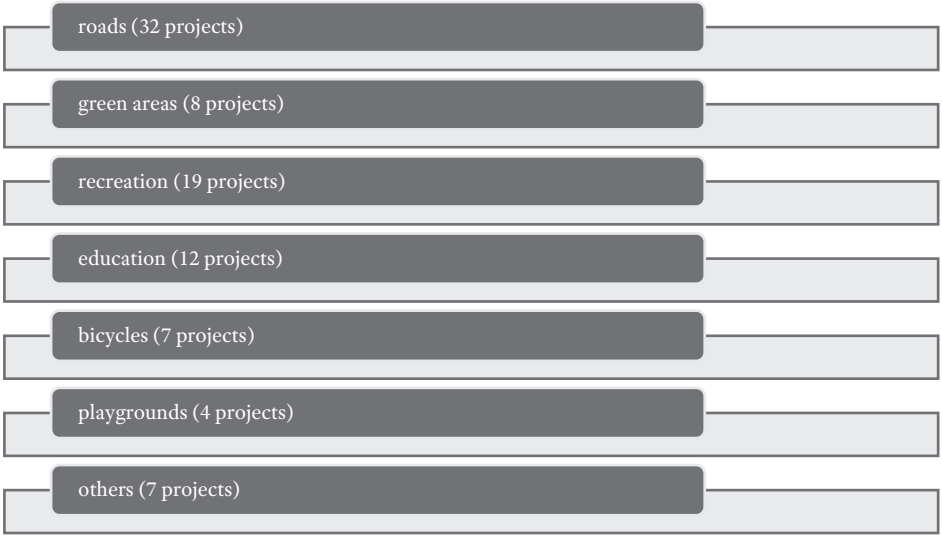

Fig. 5. Subject categories of projects in Wrocław Civic Budget in 2014

The division applied by the municipality in 2015 and 2016 differed slightly, including eight categories with two more added in 2017 and further on in 2018 (Tab. 1).

Tab. 1. Subject categories of projects in Wrocław Civic Budget in 2015–2018

subject area	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**
revitalization	7	2	1	n/a
education	14	9	0	n/a
green areas/recreation	21	20	22	35
sports	7	6	16	7
playgrounds	5	7	4	7

subject area	2015	2016	2017	2018
roads	10	8	4	n/a
projects for pedestrians and cyclists	10	13	13	6
others	6	5	1	3
public communication	n/a	n/a	0	1
backyards	n/a	n/a	3	2
historic buildings	n/a	n/a	n/a	2

The data reveal a characteristic trend of significant domination of lifestyle-related projects. Only in 2014 the largest group of projects concerned road investments – at that stage the Civic Budget was used by the citizens to eliminate the most problematic issues within the public space, spots where insufficient infrastructure caused the most inconveniencies and controversies. However, from 2015 until 2018 the dominating category was green areas and recreation, involving maintenance and development works at green areas, establishment of outdoor equipment for exercises or playing etc. – in 2018 it exceeded 50% of selected projects. The most dynamically growing category was sports (although one should note that in the pilot edition sport-related projects made up 37,5% of all the ideas chosen for implementation), only to fall significantly in 2018. These two categories are closely followed by the group of projects concerning infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists. These latter projects, although they affect environment protection and transport policies, are strongly connected to the modern changes of the way people in big Polish cities live, spend their time and move through the city.

Contrary to the concept of participatory budgeting as a tool of empowering the marginalized and making the city friendlier to its disadvantaged inhabitants, there are strikingly few revitalization projects and their number is gradually decreasing, with the category ultimately waived in 2018. This reflects the actual meaning and social function of the civic budget in Poland, where it responds rather to the needs of the middle class. Activation of the marginalized groups would require further commitment from the city authorities and more specific measures to involve citizens from other groups, identify their need and ensure inclusion of these needs in the entire process. This cannot be achieved by submission of projects which requires knowledge and skills held rather by better educated citizens.

Characteristically for modern metropolises, Wrocław also observes a significant cleavage between central and peripheral boroughs. This is why the analysis should refer to the geographical distribution of implemented projects. The results for 2015, before the introduction of division into sectors, show significant concentration of projects in the city center with especially low number of initiatives in the north-western part of the city. Even though the division and assignment of a set amount to each sector did improve the situation, still in most peripheral sectors projects were implemented close to the sectors' central borders. Similar findings were reported by Tatarowska and Furmankiewicz for Wrocław Civic Budget in 2014 (2018, pp. 131–132). This is due mainly to the fact that projects implemented in the

city-center are useful and attractive for inhabitants of the suburbs as well and thus, they can attract more votes. However, this cannot be perceived as an efficient tool of levelling differences in quality of life inside the city. The regulatory solution applied in 2019 – allocation of funding to municipal and borough levels separately – may be efficient for bigger peripheral boroughs, but it leaves small peripheral boroughs (e.g. Bieńkowice, Świniary) with scarce chance of attractive enough votes to profit from participatory budgeting.

On the other hand, the Municipality has identified boroughs with the problems in application of WCB, two of which (Psie Pole-Zawidawie, Jerzmanowo-Jarnołtów-Strachowice-Osiniec) were located on the city borders, one (Kleczków) was situated in a more central area of the peripheral Psie Pole quarter, while the other two (Ołbin, Muchobór Mały) were in Śródmieście and Fabryczna, proving that inability to use participatory budgeting for sub-local investment is determined not only by peripheral location, but also by other characteristics, such as social and human capital – Kleczków and Ołbin being among those boroughs for which revitalization is a basic need. Anyhow, it is also clearly visible that the impact of this participatory initiative differs from one borough to another, which may exacerbate the unequal development of different parts of the city. It may also enhance social participation in more active boroughs, while discouraging activism in marginalized areas. It should be noted that the Municipality addresses this risk and takes effort to stimulate the least active boroughs by organizing Civic Labs there.

Wrocław Civic Budget – Participation

Inhabitants' participation in consultation votes is shown in Fig. 6 and Tab. 2.

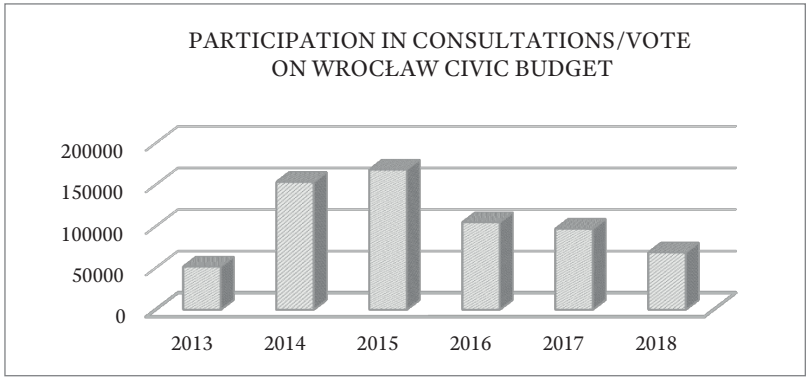

Fig. 6. Participation in the consultations/vote on Wrocław Civic Budget, source: Wrocławski Budżet Obywatelski. Retrieved from: https://www.wroclaw.pl/rozmawia/wroclawski-budzet-obywatelski

Tab. 2. Participants of the vote by form of voting and gender. source: Wrocławski Budżet Obywatelski, Retrieved from: https://www.wroclaw.pl/rozmawia/wroclawski-budzet-obywatelski (nd – no data)

Year	Total number of participants	Valid votes	Online votes	Traditional votes	Women	Men
2013	51,708	51,593	49,849	1,859	nd	nd
2014	153,366	149,063	128,637	24,729	nd	nd
2015	168,278	160,176	127,648	40,630	88,937	71,239
2016	104,884	93,303	54,453	38,850	52,798	40,505
2017	97,043	88,729	55,028	33,701	49,910	38,819
2018	68,670	64,368	49,414	14,954	36,639	27,729

The data, published by the Municipality at the dedicated Wrocław Civic Budget website indicate several clear trends. Firstly, the first civic budgets after the pilot edition had very high activating potential. Considering that according to the Chief Statistical Office, Wrocław had about 640,000 inhabitants in 2014–2016 (*Raport*, 2016), it may be assumed that at the peak of its popularity, the Civic Budget attracted more than 25% of the city's official population. This suggests that there was a big potential of local inhabitants' activity and a strong will on their part to impact their boroughs and the city. The high level of interest in the early years of the participatory process suggests that this form – possibility to offer and support specific investment projects – was appreciated and liked by the citizens. However, this boom popularity in the first year is explained also by the innovative character of participatory budgeting and its reputation, as suggested by the drastic fall in participation in the third year the process (by more than 40%). The tendency (participation of around 15% of the city's official population) continued in 2017 and 2018 with a slight fall. It suggests that the participatory budgeting was an interesting tool for the city's inhabitants, but an insufficient one. Even though this fall coincided with one serious modification of the terms of the project: the division of the city in districts for participatory budgeting, there is no reason to treat this change as a reason for the decreased participation. It was due rather to the citizens' conviction that the process didn't have enough impact on the city's strategies for the inhabitants. To change the trend, the municipality should either improve the quality of participation by shifting the focus from project selection to prior consultations concerning priorities, or enhance the forms of participating focusing on meetings and discussions rather than voting.

The statistical data concerning the age of participants of the consultation stage of WCB are published by the municipality at the participatory budget website since 2015. Year-to-year, similar proportions are recorded. The group of participants of the voting population is dominated by city inhabitants aged 18–40 and this tendency does not change with introduction of the voting rights for minors of 16 and more. Very few teenagers decided

to take part in the consultation process in 2016 and 2017. This may be due to insufficient communication about the new rules or else the form of consultations offered by the municipality of Wrocław was not attractive enough for the youngest participants. However, a major reason for the youngest voters' absence in the consultation stage involved lack of project proposals that would be actually and sufficiently adapted to this group and would respond to their needs, because, while allowed to vote in the consultation stage, teenagers could not act as project leaders and thus, proposals could be submitted exclusively by major citizens. The problem of the youngest population's passive attitude can be solved exclusively by encouraging teenagers to participate in development of project proposals submitted by elder citizens. This is an important role for schools, especially with respect to the overall need for education for democracy. An interesting modification of rules in 2018 allowed for participation of all residents of Wrocław in the consultation vote, including children below 16. The effect of this provision is yet to be observed, however, it is certain to empower once again the already most active group of young and middle-aged parents whose children will most likely support the same or similar projects as themselves.

One should not fail to notice that also middle-aged and elderly inhabitants of Wrocław participated in the vote to a much lesser extent that people aged below 40. This outcome is consistent in all editions of Wrocław Civic Budget for which age statistics are provided by the municipality, while differences between age groups 40–50, 50–60 and 60–70 are low. One cannot associate this fact with the middle-aged inhabitants' digital marginalization, as the municipality provided for the possibility to submitted votes on paper and the fall in traditional votes after 2015 was not nearly as significant as among online voters. This trend is rather due to two factors. Firstly, the municipality should introduce specific communication with residents from higher-age groups, maybe even offering specific project categories for them. Secondly, on the other hand, the city authorities already offer quite a lot of initiatives for elderly residents ("Seniors' Clubs", third-age universities, workshops etc.) and therefore their activity may be channeled elsewhere. Still, their absence from the consultation vote in the participatory budgeting once again undermines the process's role in community building and levelling inequalities inside the city.

Wrocław Civic Budget Policies

Efficiency of participatory budgeting – both in terms of shaping the city and in terms of committing citizens to take active part in local decision-making processes – depends on different factors, but the way it is managed is also an important issue. One may consider the following criteria in assessing a participatory budget:

- reliability, defined as predictability of terms of implementation of the process, consistency in their application and respect for decisions made by the citizens,
- impact, defined as the results visible and perceptible for the citizens or the change arising from implementation of the selected projects;

- activation, or the capacity not only to attract and maintain citizens' attention, but to encourage bottom-up actions and initiatives;
- two aspects of innovativeness:
  - formal innovativeness, defined as ability to develop the participatory budgeting process itself, to change its form in view of citizen participation and citizen needs;
  - innovativeness in terms of projects submitted, selected and implemented within the PB process.

In the case of the first criterion, Wrocław Civic Budget should be perceived as a success, its regulations and terms being quite stable, even though the process is approved anew for each budgetary year by relevant resolutions by the Municipal Council (Świerczewski, 2016, p. 106). The local authorities were criticized for increasing the budget for the pilot edition during the process (Kębłowicki, 2014), however, since then all the major changes (especially introduction of divisions within the projects) have been proceeded through a consultation process, thus ensuring predictability, even if not always full approval of the implemented modifications. It is important to note that all selected projects are implemented within 2–3 years and in the case of delayed projects, the authorities communicate with the project leaders and with citizens. This stability builds up trust within the local community.

The impact of the process is much more questionable. Even though the absolute value of WCB may be impressive, it still accounts for less than 1% of the total budget of the municipality (*Budget of the Municipality of Wrocław*, 2018). The most important issues for the citizens are decided by the Municipal Council itself and although citizens have a right to participate in the Council's meetings as well as submit petitions (*Statut Wrocławia*, 2017), the process is hardly participatory. Neither the overall value of the participatory budget, nor particular projects (even the largest ones) are of strategic character or impact. Therefore, Wrocław Civic Budget cannot be perceived – by the authorities or citizens – as a method to shape the city, rather as an addition to the regular methods of local democratic decision-making. This way, the municipal authorities' risk that the participatory budget may be considered by citizens as a façade or pretense. Obviously, for some citizens the selected projects, repaired pavements, outdoor fitness or playgrounds are very important and have a significant effect on their quality of life, however, major investments are much more expensive, however they do not determine major trends in municipal governance.

This criterion may therefore have an opposite impact on the third one, i.e. citizen activation. The low significance of the budget and its concentration around a specific type of projects may be discouraging for people who are not involved activists, but who may take an initiative in their borough, especially if their project does not fall into the most popular categories. The municipal authorities have taken important measures to improve participation. Without forgetting the most prominent ones (ensuring possibility of either online or traditional voting, inclusion of minors from 16 of age or even younger in the consultation

process), one should mention the important stage of consultation with project leaders. Firstly, it is a possibility to support weaker milieus, groups of lower social and human capital. Projects which might be rejected for formal reasons can be improved at this stage to meet the eligibility criteria. It is important in terms of inclusion of projects within a single vote, but also in terms of sharing knowledge and practices that may allow the leaders develop better initiatives for the next editions. Secondly, this may be used as an opportunity to strengthen leadership on the borough level and enhance cooperation. Representatives of the Municipal Office may also use this stage to encourage cooperation between various leaders or teams, especially in the case of competing project (e.g. propositions concerning the same place inside the city).

Innovativeness of the process itself is very difficult to achieve. The most important factor to shape it involves the scope and impact of consultations concerning the process terms and organization. Despite the taken attempts including discussions of WCB districts within the city, as well as Civic Labs, involving inhabitants and making them feel responsible as a part of the process is a big challenge, still insufficiently addressed by Wrocław municipality. The process is still focused on the sheer act of voting on submitted projects and even though in Wrocław Civic Budget this stage is called "consultations", its activation potential is insufficient.

As for the innovativeness of the projects themselves, many highly original initiatives have been qualified for implementation (e.g. acoustic mirrors in Nadodrze district in 2017, green beach on the Oder in 2016, 'WROCLOVE – big letters in interesting tourist point(s) of the city as a site for a souvenir photo from Wrocław. Call for letter design and production offers' in 2015; chess tables at the main square of Psie Pole district in 2014). Quite importantly, many projects respond to modern social (multi-generation recreation center in Psie Pole in 2017) or environmental challenges (removal of parasite mistletoe from 100 trees in Borek District in 2015; nesting boxes in parks in 2015). However, undoubtedly a large majority of the allocated money is spent on recurring initiatives related to lifestyle and improved infrastructure. It should be also highlighted that many projects (e.g. repairs or modernizations of roads and parking lots) fall actually within the regular responsibilities of the local government. Thus, only a fraction of the funding (which in itself is a fraction of the municipal budget) goes to undertakings significantly beyond the scope of regular budgetary expenses. It may be somewhat discouraging for participants and organizers themselves, however, it may result from backwardness of the current municipal infrastructure. When those 'basic' projects are implemented, the potential for original, trendsetting initiatives may flourish, unless by then, the citizens perceive participatory budgeting as a façade process with no major impact.

Discussion

The analysis of the case of Wrocław Civic Budget has shown the objectives served by this process. Contrary to the original concept, in Wrocław, the process initiated by the municipal authorities, has become a tool for the middle class, allowing them to make the city more inhabitant-friendly by adjusting it to their lifestyle needs. This is evidenced by the selection of projects for implementation, including mainly those related to greens, recreation, sports with playgrounds as quite a frequent category, contrary to revitalization projects and backyards, which in Wrocław concern backyards in underdeveloped boroughs just outside the city-center, at high risk of marginalization. The funding was used for revitalization of some districts (e.g. Nadodrze), however considering the gentrification trend observed in this particular borough. The participation data, reflecting activity of mainly young and middle-aged adults, are also a sign that less privileged groups have not recognized this mechanism as a chance to achieve their own goals and change their own situation.

Despite significant effort by the authorities, the process is much less used by the marginalized and worse-off groups of inhabitants. However, it is not a peculiar feature of Wrocław Civic Budget: in a study concerning participatory budgeting in Chicago, John Lerner concluded: "*The biggest challenge is a familiar one: How do you attract diverse participants, beyond the usual suspects?*" (2011, p. 34). When implementing a participatory initiative, authorities need to face the important question how to broaden participation and especially how to encourage the discouraged: how to attract the groups usually characterized by low participation due to low trust in institutions – this challenge may concern minorities, marginalized districts or social groups at threat of exclusion, but if the puzzle of how to stimulate their participation is not solved, participatory processes risk enhancing inequalities inside the communities instead of levelling them. In further editions of Wrocław Civic Budget, the municipal authorities have taken measures to avoid the risk, at least in its geographical aspect: allocation of funds to districts or boroughs may serve to amend privileges of the city-center, while Civic Labs were focused on the most passive parts of the city.

The initial response by the inhabitants – reflected mainly in the number and diversity of submitted projects, but also in participation in the vote, as observed in years 2014 and 2015 – indicates a large potential of social activation. It shows that inhabitants of Wrocław are ready and willing to take active responsibility for their surroundings and boroughs. Further developments, however, the significant – or even dramatic – fall in citizens' involvement at those two stages of the process suggest that, despite the mentioned potential of social activism, the framework offered by the municipal authorities is insufficient for the citizens in the longer term. The participation (reaching up to 20% of the official population of the city at a certain point) should be encouraged and invited, but probably maintaining it for longer would require several measures and processes within the city. These measures would need to make participation actually empowering, and therefore

they should involve bigger funding and more focus on actual consultation with residents at meetings or panels within a more complex framework of impact not only on small or medium investments, but basically on the city's strategic plans. In a longer term a vote itself, even called a consultation, is insufficiently rewarding for active citizens and insufficiently stimulating for inactive ones.

Participation in initiatives like participatory budgeting is strongly connected with overall activism of the local citizens. Judging by voter turnout in local elections (36,25% in 2014; 39,40% in 2010; 36.25% in 2014 – *Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza*, 2018), the potential is somewhat disappointing, but on the other hand Wrocław has quite many organizations which stimulate inhabitants to act and change their environment. This is a sign of possibilities that may be used by the city and its inhabitants to put greater focus on the human aspect of local development. The achievements of Wrocław Civic Budget along with urban activism and sub-local councils in Wrocław reveal a great and growing potential of the city's community. This potential should certainly be developed and used. The city could possibly use some of the recommendations developed by the UK-based non-profit social enterprise mySociety (Rumbul et al., 2018):

1. *Fund better targeted and comparative research into PB in areas of interest.*
2. *Fund specific research into citizen trust and attitudes toward governing bodies in areas where PB has failed or been withdrawn.*
3. *Establish (either through support of an existing organization, or creation of a new one) a dedicated PB organizing body.*
4. *Establish a senior expert PB forum/committee comprised of global PB stakeholders to attempt to build consensus on improving PB implementation and its outcomes through institutional change.*

However, several Wrocław-specific recommendations can be provided as well:

1. Focus on those, who do not come up with proposals instead of improving projects of those, who are already involved.
2. Focus on marginalized boroughs instead of those where residents have already achieved a lot in terms of sub-local environment and community.
3. Focus on the inactive groups (teenagers and elderly residents) by communicating with them about the process and encouraging them to participate at all stages.
4. Keep developing the tool and extending the scope of responsibility of citizens within the decision-making processes.

If the municipal authorities strive to encourage greater participation through increasing responsibility of citizens in the participatory budgeting processes, the first and most obvious way to achieve it would be through increasing the amount of money / percentage of the municipal budget covered in WCB, but one has to note, that judging by previous experience, this solution would be efficient only for a short term, too. Previous increases of the amount allocated to WCB did not bring a difference in citizen participation. A better result might be possibly achieved by activization of the leaders who have already initiated

projects, even those which were not selected for implementation in the case of some smaller and peripheral boroughs. The authorities should strive to include citizens in higher-level, even strategic decision making with respect to their boroughs. This could be done, applying experience of such initiatives of Civic Labs in Wrocław or Civic Panels in Gdańsk, but they might also rely on permanent and more institutionalized tools, such as Borough Councils. Such cooperation might bring interesting results at all stages of the decision-process, starting with identification of key issues and problems for the communities, creative problem-solving, but also implementation of chosen solutions and their evaluation. Shifting the highlight of Wrocław Civic Budget from the vote itself to the phases of consultation and discussion, organization of a larger number of events similar to Civil Labs and introduction of a more complex consultation framework might help encourage more original and innovative projects, especially in the sphere of social cooperation and inclusion, as participatory budgeting in its current form is clearly not enough.

Conclusions

Participatory budgeting in the 1980s was a social innovation that brought interesting and inspiring results. As it responded to some of the challenges of the modern times which are important nowadays as well – inequality, marginalization, difficulties in citizen mobilization, risk of alienation of political and decision-making elites – it has soon become very popular in many different settings all over the world. It was also introduced in Poland, mainly at the local level of communes, although there were also attempts to organize participatory budgeting processes on the regional (voivodeship) and sub-regional (district) levels).

Wrocław Civic Budget was first introduced in 2013 as a pilot project and then it has become a regular element of the municipal budgeting. It has certainly been successful in terms of encouraging citizen participation and also in stimulating leadership on the borough level. It has resulted in implementation of many interesting and useful projects, convenient or important for small communities within the city. At a certain point participation in the stage of the consultation vote reached 20% of the city's official population. The process served also to build trust between the municipal community and the authorities, as the implementation terms of the process were consistent and reliable and all projects selected within the vote were actually started and successfully implemented, most of them completed within 2–3 years after the decision.

However, the study revealed also drawbacks of the initiative, which contributed to the sudden fall of participation and number of projects submitted after two years of the process. The first failure is WCB's inability to respond to inequalities by mobilizing marginalized groups or residents of underdeveloped boroughs, evidenced by the selection of lifestyle-related projects over revitalization and by geographical distribution of projects that were actually implemented. The second drawback concerned failure to maintain the participation

and interest involved in the first two editions of participatory budgeting. This shows that there is a need and that citizens expect further development of participatory initiatives, new terms and opportunities. Possible paths to be taken by the local authorities may concern increased value of the budget, more highlight on debates and strategic discussions, extending the scope of participatory decision-making as well as encouraging more revitalization projects from less favorized boroughs and environments, possibly through spreading positive practices and experience from other neighborhoods.

Wrocław Civic Budget was proved to be an interesting and attractive initiative. With its prior achievements, it should be used by the local authorities, activists and civil society as a starting point for deeper transformation of the city and its community. Participatory budgeting in the form applied in Wrocław should be just a tool within a broader framework and not an objective in itself. Only then can it become an actual social innovation in its Polish environment.

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