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## Participatory budgeting – case study of the city of Szczecin

### Abstract

A growing awareness of civic participation resulted in the fact that, at the turn of the 20th and 21st century, local authorities of the world's countries decided to hand over some social tools to citizens. This article presents one of the most important participatory tools – participatory budgeting. A detailed analysis of the process was made on the example of the City of Szczecin, including the provisions of the Szczecin Participatory Budgeting Regulations, in force since 2019. The changes, which were introduced as a result of legal regulations of the legislator, made it necessary to update the rules of conducting this procedure in Szczecin. Three main elements on which participatory budgeting should be based are identified and, on this basis, the provisions of the Szczecin Participatory Budgeting Regulations are analysed. An attempt has been made to compare and identify significant differences between the usual way of conducting public consultations and the participatory budgeting process. The deliberations close with an assessment of the direction and manner of introducing changes in participatory budgeting in Szczecin.

### Key words:

social participation, participatory budgeting, local government

## Introduction

The phenomenon of participation is undoubtedly extremely complex, multidimensional and interdisciplinary. It cannot be comprehensively incorporated into the legal framework alone. Sociological, political, economic, legal, organisational and managerial elements intertwine in this phenomenon. The position that “today’s citizens are guaranteed a wide range of forms of involvement in the exercise of public authority, not limiting them only to statutory institutions (i.e. referendums, elections or public consultations), as in practice their presence is much wider” should be shared.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, creating legal regulations is only one of the means (instruments) for implementing the idea of participation in practice.<sup>2</sup>

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1 A. Kuriata, *Budżet partycypacyjny jako przejaw demokracji uczestniczącej w samorządzie lokalnym*, in: *Województwo – region – regionalizacja 15 lat po reformie terytorialnej i administracyjnej*, J. Korczak (ed.), Wrocław 2013, p. 33.

2 Cf. D. Wacinkiewicz, *Partycypacja mieszkańców miast w lokalnym życiu publicznym*, in: *Kierunki przekształceń struktury gospodarczej i społeczno-demograficznej miast*, J. Słodczyk, E. Szafranek (eds.), Opole 2006, pp. 53ff. Cf. *Europejskie standardy uczestnictwa obywateli w życiu publicznym – wybrane zagadnienia*, in: *Prawa podmiotowe. Pojmowanie w naukach prawnych*, J. Ciapała, K. Flaga-Gieruszyńska (eds.), Szczecin 2006, pp. 97–104.

In my opinion, participatory budgeting should be considered an increasingly important participatory tool. As it is noted in the literature, “the idea of a participatory budgeting comes down to providing members of the local community with the right to co-determine the needs and directions of managing public space”.<sup>3</sup> As regards the way participatory budgeting is defined, it should be noted that it is most often presented in functional terms, i.e. as a form of participation of the residents of a given local community in decisions on the allocation of a specific financial envelope or as a form of participation of the residents in designing local expenditure.<sup>4</sup>

The construction of participatory budgeting is based on three pillars: firstly, on citizens submitting projects to be implemented (from the funds of a given local government unit), secondly, on citizens’ voting for selected projects and thirdly, on the implementation of the winning projects by the self-government.<sup>5</sup> In this way, the residents are involved in the decision-making process, which results in the indication of public tasks to be performed in a given financial year.<sup>6</sup> An element that needs special prominence in the case of participatory budgeting involves ensuring that residents have the right to make binding decisions on the creation of a certain part of the budget. It is precisely this element of power (“binding decisions”) that is often pointed to as the element<sup>7</sup> specifying participatory budgeting in relation to classical public consultations. This enables the conclusion that the real opportunity given to residents to decide on spending public money on priority investments and projects brings many benefits – both for local authorities and residents.<sup>8</sup>

For the above reasons, out of a wide range of different types of participatory instruments, the very problem matter of participatory budgeting has been analysed in this study.<sup>9</sup> The basic aim of these analyses is to characterise and evaluate the way in which participatory budgeting in the Municipality of the City of Szczecin (hereinafter referred to as the City) is organised and implemented.

## Participatory budgeting as a social participation tool

One of the most important instruments for creating space to try to involve citizens in the active implementation of tasks is participatory budgeting. It is a democratic procedure which

3 A. Błaszko, *Budżet obywatelski jst – zagadnienia finansowe*, System Informacji Prawnej LEX.

4 Cf. M. Augustyniak, R. Marchaj, *Komentarz do art. 5(a)*, in: *Ustawa o finansach publicznych. Komentarz*, II edition, B. Dolnicki (ed.), Warsaw 2018, System Informacji Prawnej LEX., R., See also the literature mentioned therein including, in particular, D. Sześciło, *Uwarunkowania prawne budżetu partycypacyjnego w Polsce*, FK 2012/12, p. 15; M. Baraniecki, *O swoich pieniądzach decydujemy sami – planowanie partycypacyjne budżetu gminy*, in: *Partycypacja społeczna w samorządzie terytorialnym*, B. Dolnicki (ed.), Warsaw 2014, p. 574; W. Kęłowski, *Budżet partycypacyjny. Krótka instrukcja obsługi*, Warsaw 2013, p. 8.

5 Cf. A. Misiejko, *Budżet obywatelski jst – istota i zasady*, System Informacji Prawnej LEX.

6 Cf. M. Augustyniak, R. Marchaj, op. cit.

7 Such a position is exposed not only in literature, but also among practitioners of participatory budgeting. An example may be the view expressed on the website: [budzetyobywatelskie.pl](http://budzetyobywatelskie.pl), according to which “as opposed to public consultations, in the case of participatory budgeting, decisions taken by residents are binding. There are many different models of such budgeting. In each of them the scope of direct influence of the residents is different. But the most important thing is to give the residents the opportunity to speak.” Cf. <http://budzetyobywatelskie.pl/>.

8 A. Kuriata, op. cit., p. 34.

9 In this text, I will use the names “participatory budgeting” and “PB” interchangeably.

enables each resident of a given local community to participate in the disposal of a part of public funds allocated from the unit's budget to carry out tasks which are considered important by citizens.<sup>10</sup> This creates an opportunity for real participation in the spending of a specific financial amount and is reflected in creating a platform for discussion on the shape of the local community.

PB is characterised by certain basic principles, which must be taken into account in order to ensure that citizens have a real opportunity to participate in the process.<sup>11</sup> This is a form of public consultation which, in a particular way, allows residents to decide directly on the allocation of appropriate financial resources to what they choose by voting. One important fact that defines this power is the obligation to include selected projects in the commune budget and their subsequent implementation.<sup>12</sup> The executive bodies, if a project is not carried out, must take into account the political and public image consequences.<sup>13</sup> In addition, residents are informed about the acceptance or rejection of their proposal during the process. At each stage of participatory budgeting, residents have the opportunity to control and monitor the procedure. Another important element distinguishing participatory budgeting from the regular consultation procedure is the recurring nature of its subsequent editions. It is extremely important that a given participatory tool is permanently inscribed into the participatory activities in the commune and is repeated annually.

The literature takes the view that PB is a tool for citizens' checks over the authorities.<sup>14</sup> While this view is correct when assuming that participatory budgeting is a platform for integration and activation of residents, these checks may be important at the last stage of participatory budgeting, when implementing selected tasks. It may involve public pressure for more efficient execution of tasks and faster commissioning of certain investments.

Legal scholars and commentators acknowledge that the first idea to involve residents in resolving important issues for the local community was already conceived at the end of the fifteenth century, when referenda on budgetary matters were held in Swiss cantons. Citizens, in carrying out this form of direct democracy, were able to decide on financial matters.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, the first official launch of a PB procedure took place in 1989 in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre. An important difference between the original way of deciding on financial issues during referenda in Switzerland and the attempt to introduce the institution of participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre was the fact that during the referenda the residents decided on the approval of the authorities' financial proposals, and during the PB procedure it was the residents themselves who made proposals on how public funds should be used. This was the first step to directly involve the local community in spending public funds by submitting their task proposals. In the following years, interest in participatory budgeting in this city

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10 A. Rytel-Warzocho, *Partycypacja społeczna w sprawach budżetowych. Model Porto Alegre jako pierwowzór rozwiązań europejskich*, p. 94; <https://marszalek.com.pl/przegladprawakonstytucyjnego/ppk1/07.pdf> (access: December 2019).

11 D. Rybińska, *Instytucja Budżetu Obywatelskiego jako narzędzia rozwoju samorządu lokalnego*, „Finanse i Prawo Finansowe”, 1(17), p. 52.

12 More on this further in the article, especially on legislative changes.

13 D. Tykwińska-Rutkowska, P. Glejt, *Prawna regulacja budżetu obywatelskiego a jego praktyczna realizacja – czyli o społecznianiu wykonywania zadań publicznych na przykładzie przyjętych w trójmieście*, „Gdańskie Studia Prawnicze” 2015, vol. XXXIV, p. 322.

14 A. Kuriata, op. cit., p. 39.

15 A. Rytel-Warzocho, op. cit., p. 96.

constantly grew. In the first two years of the project, about one thousand people from Porto Alegre took part in it, whereas already in 1992 the number increased to eight thousand – until it reached a constant number of about 50 thousand people.<sup>16</sup>

Before the idea of PB became a permanent feature of civic participation in Poland, it had been introduced in other European countries. The institution of participatory budgeting appeared in France as early as in 2000. It operates at community and borough level and is an example of direct democracy close to the citizen. The participatory budgeting mechanism in this country is closely based on the activities of borough councils, which are the entity that enables this participatory tool to function properly. The inhabitants of local communities are free to propose tasks, which is a way for them to express their expectations and needs concerning the quality of public life. Nevertheless, it is stressed that the resources allocated to the budget are, as for a wealthy country like France, small. For example, in 2003, in La Roche-sur Yon (53 thousand residents), the participatory budgeting edition took place, for which a total of EUR 365 000 was allocated, which was 1.5% of the commune investment budget.<sup>17</sup>

The first city in Poland that decided to introduce the idea of participatory budgeting was Sopot. In 2011, the Sopot City Council, by way of a resolution, launched the whole procedure of participatory budgeting. Other Polish cities followed the example of Sopot, including Gorzów Wielkopolski, Wrocław, Łódź, Zielona Góra, Warsaw and Szczecin.

Until 2018, there had been no regulations in force that directly addressed participatory budgeting. The legal and material basis for the implementation and functioning of this institution was the disposition of Article 5a of the Act on Commune Local Government.<sup>18</sup> The Act provided for two modes of public consultation – the so-called “obligatory” and “optional”. Until the amendment of the Act, participatory budgeting was an optional form of public consultation, yet of a binding nature.

## **Legal organization and functioning of the Szczecin Participatory Budgeting after legal changes of 2018**

The greatest impulse to revise the existing rules of the Szczecin Participatory Budgeting (SPB) were the changes introduced by the legislator in the Act. Through amendments to the legislation, the legislator added paragraphs 3–7 to Article 5a, which included an attempt to regulate the institution of participatory budgeting. The substantiation of the project of changes reads as follows: “It is proposed to regulate the institution of participatory budgeting as one of the forms of consultation with the residents of the commune, district and province respectively. Within the framework of participatory budgeting, the residents would decide each year in a direct vote on a part of the budget expenditure of a given local government unit. The tasks selected under this budget would be included in the budget resolution. The decision making

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<sup>16</sup> Ibidem, pp. 97–98.

<sup>17</sup> M. Augustyniak, *Partycypacja społeczna w samorządzie terytorialnym w Polsce i we Francji*, Warsaw 2017, pp. 374–377.

<sup>18</sup> Article 5a of the Act of 8 March 1990 on Commune Local Government (Journal of Laws of 2019 item 506 as amended) – further referred to as the Act.

body of the local government unit, in the year of work on the draft budget resolution, will not be allowed to remove or significantly change the tasks selected under participatory budgeting [...]”.

In fact, it was a legal regulation of the institution that had functioned for many years on different levels of local government units.

By introducing the above mentioned changes, the legislator decided to make a further split in public consultations. In addition to the previous division into mandatory and optional public consultations, a third type has been introduced – a specific form of consultations. Participatory budgeting has become the only regulated type of these consultations. Separating PB from other types of consultations was an obvious demonstration of how the idea of participation through participatory budgeting has developed at the level of local government in recent years.

In addition to the above mentioned reasons for introducing changes, the legislator indicated in which situations it is obligatory to carry out a participatory budgeting procedure. A commune which is a city with district rights is obliged to establish and carry out this process on an annual basis and additionally undertakes to spend for this purpose at least 0.5% of the commune expenses included in the last submitted budget execution report (Article 5a (5) of the Act).

This obligation applies only to a commune that is a city with district rights – other units that do not meet this criterion have retained the optionality of introducing this participation tool. In addition, the issue of the division of the financial envelope, which may include the whole commune and its part in the form of auxiliary units or groups of auxiliary units, is regulated.

In Article 5a(7), the legislator introduces requirements to be met by the citizens’ draft budget. The catalogue of rules that an applicant must follow when designing an application for the budget is an open catalogue – it is the task of the Commune Council to define detailed criteria that must be met. First of all, the commune council must specify the formal requirements to which the submitted drafts must conform.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, the required number of signatures of residents supporting the project was introduced. The legislator specified that this number may not be greater than 0.1% of the population of the area covered by the participatory budgeting in which the project is submitted. It should be pointed out that the Supreme Audit Office, in its report on reviewing the functioning of participatory budgeting,<sup>20</sup> decided to indicate the *de lege ferenda* postulates to the Minister of the Interior and Administration, including, among others, the consideration of resignation from the required number of signatures of residents supporting the project. A resolution on participatory budgeting must obligatorily include rules for evaluating submitted projects as to their legality, technical feasibility, compliance with formal requirements, the procedure for appealing against the decision not to allow a project to be voted on and the rules for conducting the voting.

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19 The amendment to the Commune Local Government Act of 2019 also introduced the term “universal design”. The Commune Council may use this term, if possible.

20 The report is available at: <https://www.nik.gov.pl/plik/id,21186,vp,23818.pdf>.

## Public consultation on the new SPB

In view of the legislative changes introduced, the President of the City decided to hold public consultations on the SPB regulations.<sup>21</sup> Three open meetings with residents were planned in three different parts of the City as well as one focused group interview with the invited representatives of different local communities.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, the residents could submit their comments and proposals for changes to the regulations in an electronic<sup>23</sup> and paper form by submitting a form at designated points in the City.

The City designed the initial assumptions in the form of a draft of new regulations and introduced a new division of the City. The idea behind the consultations and discussions on the new regulations was to meet the residents' expectations regarding the SPB. The City had 6 years of experience in carrying out the process and the legislative changes obliged the City to introduce certain modifications.

During the consultations, a total of 146 comments and opinions on the draft SPB Regulations were registered.<sup>24</sup> Most of the proposals were included in the new SPB regulations, which should be considered a success of the residents who decided to take part in the consultations.

## New SPB rules

Following the conclusion of the above mentioned public consultations, the Council adopted the new SPB rules.<sup>25</sup> The first edition, during which the new rules were to apply, was SPB 2020. The new regulations meet the obligations imposed by the legislator in a very detailed way.

An important change, which has had influence on the stage of submitting applications and voting, was the indication of the definition of a City Resident. Until now, the person who could, e.g. vote within the SPB, was a resident who was registered for residence in the City. Now the legislator defines the resident as any natural person who is staying in the City with the intention of permanent residence without having to be registered at an address. In the course of individual stages of the SPB a resident is only obliged to make a relevant declaration of intent to reside on the territory of Szczecin. Any person who, in some way, feels attached to the City and, at the same time, expresses the will to settle permanently within its territory is considered a resident of the City under these regulations. This position is also emphasized by the judicature, including the Provincial Administrative Court in Opole, in its judgement of 17 April 2018,<sup>26</sup> which indicated that a resident is also an individual without full legal capacity,

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21 Ordinance no. 33/19 of the President of the City of Szczecin of 24 January 2019 on social consultations of the regulations of conducting social consultations concerning the Szczecin Participatory Budgeting.

22 These were representatives of non-governmental organizations, Housing Estate Councils, SPB applicants from previous editions and representatives of the city.

23 By sending them at: [regulaminsbo@um.szczecin.pl](mailto:regulaminsbo@um.szczecin.pl).

24 [http://konsultuj.szczecin.pl/konsultacje/files/51860441995E458391D3D1BF64C91D0C/Raport\\_konsultacji\\_projektu\\_Regulaminu\\_SBO.pdf](http://konsultuj.szczecin.pl/konsultacje/files/51860441995E458391D3D1BF64C91D0C/Raport_konsultacji_projektu_Regulaminu_SBO.pdf) – Report on consultations held.

25 Resolution no. V/154/19 of the Szczecin City Council of 26 March 2019 on the introduction of the rules and mode of conducting the Szczecin Participatory Budgeting procedure (further referred to as the Regulations).

26 Judgement of the Provincial Administrative Court in Opole of 17 April 2018, II SA/Op 64/18, available in the website of the Central Base of Administrative Court Decisions [www.orzeczenia.nsa.gov.pl](http://www.orzeczenia.nsa.gov.pl) further as “CBACD”.

without Polish citizenship and deprived of public rights. This position was also shared by the Provincial Administrative Court in Łódź in its judgement of 7 July 2016.<sup>27</sup> Whereas the Provincial Administrative Court in Szczecin pointed out that a reservation, for the needs of conducting consultations associated with participatory budgeting, of a declaration about residing in a specific place under the pain of criminal liability for making false statements must be deemed wrong.<sup>28</sup>

Additionally, a novelty introduced to the SPB is the possibility to submit so-called non-investment projects. Introduction of this possibility is a kind of challenge for the City, while at the same time it allows the residents – apart from submitting projects such as building a park, renovating a pavement or a street – to submit proposals for football tournaments or even music concerts.

The regulations specify that the funds allocated for a given edition of the SPB may be used to finance a project belonging to the City's own tasks, which includes the implementation of a public task.<sup>29</sup> In addition, the subject of the project should be generally available and free of charge for the residents. By unambiguously continuing the policy of making tasks within the SPB accessible to the general public, the legislator decided to specify this definition precisely by delimiting the type of tasks.<sup>30</sup>

An investment submitted to the SPB may be implemented in the City. However, taking into consideration the residents' opinions, in view of the current property management policy, the residents are given the opportunity to submit investment proposals at locations not at the disposal of the City. There is a requirement to present a declaration of the owner of the real property about the willingness to lend the given area for investment for a period not shorter than the depreciation period of the planned expenditure on the area<sup>31</sup> and, at the moment of selecting such a task for implementation, the necessity to sign a real property lending agreement.

Direct indication by the legislator of the possibility to introduce such a territorial division of the commune, which would also include auxiliary units, was one of the reasons for the legislator to introduce a new division of the City. Currently, it is possible to submit projects of a city-wide and local nature – at the same time, dividing the City into 22 local areas.<sup>32</sup> The financial envelope allocated to the SPB is divided in the proportion of 30% of funds for projects in the whole city area and 70% of funds for projects in the local area.<sup>33</sup>

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27 Judgement of the Provincial Administrative Court in Łódź of 7 October 2010, III SA/Łd 364/16, CBACD. Cf. Judgement of the Supreme Administrative Court of 26th July 2002, II SA/Wr III6/02, not published.

28 Judgement of the Provincial Administrative Court in Szczecin of 17 May 2018, II SA/Sz 317/17, Legalis.

29 § 4 of the SPB Regulations.

30 In the case of infrastructure projects, fulfilment of the condition of public availability “means making the results of the project available to all interested residents at least six hours a day from Monday to Friday (time interval 8–22) and at least ten hours a day on Saturday and Sunday (time interval 8–22)”. On the other hand, in the case of non-infrastructure projects, “it means ensuring the possibility to benefit from the effects of the SPB investment on equal terms for all residents”.

31 § 6(2) of the SPB Regulations.

32 City division with resources – [https://sbo.szczecin.eu/sites/default/files/inline-files/SBO2019-pule\\_srodkow\\_obszarow\\_lokalnych.jpg](https://sbo.szczecin.eu/sites/default/files/inline-files/SBO2019-pule_srodkow_obszarow_lokalnych.jpg).

33 §11(2) of the SPB Regulations – “The distribution of funds for projects in local areas will be made by means of an algorithm based on a percentage distribution depending on the number of inhabitants of a given local area in 70% and on the land area of a given local area calculated in km<sup>2</sup> in 30”.

## Submission of projects and their verification by the City units

Each resident of the City may submit an unlimited number of projects. Submission of task proposals to the SPB takes place on a specially dedicated ICT platform, which is adapted to the realities of the City and through a paper project form, the model of which is specified by the President in the SPB Launching Ordinance.<sup>34</sup>

One of the necessary elements of any project submitted to the SPB is attachment of a support list. The list must be signed by at least 10 people in order to comply with formal and statutory requirements. Every City resident may support an unlimited number of projects, except when the Project Leaders<sup>35</sup> or co-authors support their own proposal.

The relevant City units verify the projects in formal and factual terms. When checking projects for compliance with the generally applicable law, among other things, employees may call on Leaders to make certain changes to the project within 5 working days from the day following the call. Additionally, until the process of substantive verification of projects is completed, Leaders may decide to merge projects, e.g. similarly sounding or covering a similar project theme, into one project.

The criteria of both formal<sup>36</sup> and content-related<sup>37</sup> verification presented by the legislator indicate in a detailed and exhaustive manner the basis for the evaluation of the project by the City's units. The evaluation process is always problematic because it clashes with the views of the citizen, as the author of the idea, and the evaluator, as the future implementer of the idea.

## The role of SPB Social Panels

The SPB Social Panels constitute an integral part of the whole process. They are a social factor and aim to verify the work done in the Office. The competences of the Panel have not been limited in the new regulations, so the most important changes will be presented.

First of all, the composition of the Panel has been changed.<sup>38</sup> The decision has been made to exclude Council representatives from the work of the Panel and, now, they can only perform advisory functions, without voting rights.

The Panel shall decide whether or not to admit a project to voting. The Regulations upheld the competences of the Panel to approve the final list of projects to be submitted to the residents for voting.

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34 In the Ordinance, the President determines the date of commencement of a given edition of the SPB, the amount allocated, including the division of the city, and determines the composition of the Evaluation Team and the composition of the Appeal Panel.

35 § 2(1)(9) of the SPB Regulations – author of the SPB project.

36 § 15 of the SPB Regulations.

37 § 16 of the SPB Regulations.

38 The Panel consists of the residents of Szczecin, representatives of non-governmental organizations, housing estate councils and the Youth City Council.



A new entity which was established in fulfilment of the obligation imposed by the legislator<sup>39</sup> is the Appeal Panel<sup>40</sup> (further referred to as the AP). The legislator pointed out that the AP shall be composed of the most experienced social workers who have knowledge and have led their SPB projects to win the public vote. It is, in principle, the last instance to which a resident can appeal after a negative decision of the Panel.<sup>41</sup> The AP examines these appeals and has the competence to refer the project for reassessment by the city units, or to finally reject the project. The AP may request changes to a negatively verified project only once. After the project has been re-evaluated by the city units, if they agree with the opinion of the AP, the project is approved for voting. In the case of an unfavourable decision, the project is finally rejected.

## Voting and selection of the winning projects

Voting within the SPB lasts for 14 calendar days. The order of projects on the voting lists shall be determined by a public draw. It takes fourteen days from the act of selecting the numbers and order of projects to the formal start of the selection procedure. This is a time for residents to effectively promote their proposal and convince other citizens to do so. During this period, public presentations of projects may take place, a marketing campaign may be conducted to encourage participation in the participatory budgeting process itself as well as voting for specific projects.

Voting is carried out by means of an ICT system and paper voting cards. Votes can be cast via the electronic system from any place at any time, while by means of paper cards – in places specially designated for this purpose by the City. The voting is a one-off act. A resident may cast a maximum of 5 votes – 2 for city-wide projects and 3 for local projects. However, a maximum of two votes may be cast per project.

Every resident of the City may take part in the vote, regardless of age. It is a solution which does not block anyone from the opportunity of participating in this particular form of social consultation. The Provincial Administrative Court in Gliwice<sup>42</sup> concluded that a commune is not authorised to limit the personal scope of persons entitled to participation in social consultations, and additionally such a solution includes a pedagogical aspect by which persons who in the future will have the right to active participation in local community life are given a chance to express their opinions.

The projects to be implemented are those which obtain the highest number of votes in a given territorial area of the city. The amounts not used in a given area constitute a reserve to be used in the implementation of projects in a given year of the SPB allocated beginning from the project with the highest deficit of funds for implementation until the reserve is exhausted. If several projects receive the same highest number of votes and the amount in the area makes it impossible to implement them all, then, by drawing lots at a meeting of the Opinion Panel, one project is selected for implementation.

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39 Obligation pursuant to Article 5a(7)(3) of the Act.

40 The AP, according to the definition, is “a group of persons selected from among the authors of the winning SPB investments and persons being Panel members in previous SPB editions”.

41 Pursuant to §20(2) of the Regulations, within 7 working days from the date of sending an e-mail with a notification of negative verification of the project.

42 Judgment of the Provincial Administrative Court in Gliwice of 8 March 2016, IV SA/GI 1129/15.

## Conclusions

The initial attempt to carry out the SPB process, which was undoubtedly successful for the City, has gradually made the activities related to this participatory tool more professional.

The introduction of participatory budgeting in the City has undoubtedly strengthened communication between citizens and local government administration. The main objective of introducing the SPB was to directly involve the residents in the City's activities and to identify the most important needs of the local community. In addition, the aim of implementing this mechanism was to show the residents the efficiency of their actions – to indicate a tool on the basis of which they will decide which projects will be submitted to the SPB and which projects will be selected. A much greater involvement of the residents in the City's activities was achieved and the inhabitants of Szczecin were given a strong and effective tool to change the reality around them.

The three pillars on which the PB is based presented in the introduction are an ideal field for interpreting the changes that have taken place in the whole process in the City over the years. Firstly, the project submission process has undergone profound changes during the six years of the SPB functioning. Currently, there are strict verification criteria, both formal and substantive, on the basis of which the City checks the feasibility of a given idea. In addition to the employees who check a given task, there are SPB Social Panels. Their role is also extremely important – it shows the cooperation between the representatives of the administration and the community directly involved in the process.

The stage of voting for projects which have been positively verified by the City's units and Social Panels shows that the City meets the expectations of various social groups. The implementation of an ICT system is a step towards making participation in the process available to people who use the Internet.<sup>43</sup> Maintaining the paper form, on the other hand, enables participation in the SPB mainly for elderly people who do not want to use the ICT system.

The implementation of projects, which is one of the most exposed elements of the SPB, is at a good level.<sup>44</sup> It should be taken into account that various proposals are submitted to the SPB – from building a pavement or renovating a street, to simple investment purchases.<sup>45</sup> The multitude and diversity of ideas leads to the fact that some investments need a certain amount of time to be implemented. However, the vast majority of investments have either already been accomplished or will soon be completed.

The changes that were introduced in 2019 have had a very positive impact on the operation of the SPB. In addition to legislative changes that have required the City to change its procedures for conducting the SPB, the experience of the previous editions and the decline in the interest in participatory budgeting have led to a desire for more discussion on the future and the direction of the changes the City wanted to take. The consultations that took place before the amendments to the regulations were made caused the residents to become more interested in the process and take an active part in public consultations by submitting

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43 As the research shows, in Poland as much as 84% of the society has access to the Internet, <https://www.wirtualnemedi.pl/arttykul/84-procent-polakow-ma-dostep-do-internetu-najpopularniejsze-wyszukiwanie-informacji-i-poczta-elektroniczna>.

44 The effects of the projects can be seen on the SPB website: <https://sbo.szczecin.eu/realizacje-projektow>.

45 Example: buying and setting up waste bins.

proposals for changes. Valuable comments and observations from all active residents have led to the new SPB regulations being discussed democratically and taking into account the majority of residents' comments.

In further SPB editions attention should be paid to the developing trend in shaping structures of tasks in participatory budgeting of other Polish cities. In Gdańsk<sup>46</sup> a category of the so-called green participatory budgeting was introduced. Pursuant to the legislator's assumptions funds for the green participatory budgeting will be allocated from the existing pool of the Gdańsk Participatory Budgeting. Residents will be able to submit proposals of tasks in five thematic areas.<sup>47</sup> Proposals of identifying categories of tasks provides an interesting perspective which results from residents' great interest in ecological projects. One may assume that the growing interest in the so-called "green" category will result in the future in creating separate participatory budgeting allocated only for such projects. In Lublin, the green participatory budgeting has been operating since 2017 and subsequent editions bring an increase in residents' interests in such projects. In Szczecin a proposal to create green participatory budgeting has emerged too.<sup>48</sup> Considering a change in the formula of proceeding with the SPB seem an interesting proposal, yet it needs to be remembered that the SPB Regulations are a relatively young legal act. Making changes in the regulations after a year of their functioning requires a consensus, both political and social. It seems optimal to adopt a solution that will allow conducting another SPB edition without legal changes and after carrying out broad evaluation of the edition – making changes in the rules. Participation in the City is still developing and maximum use of the participatory budgeting tool brings measurable benefits to each side of the process. Undoubtedly, future editions of the SPB or possible legislative changes with a view to full regulation of the participatory budgeting institution<sup>49</sup> will further improve the SPB and will be followed by further changes to the rules improving the whole process.

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47 1) Plantings in urban green areas; 2) Recreation areas; 3) Pocket parks; 4) Rain gardens; 5) Renovation of existing green areas.

48 <https://szczecin.wyborcza.pl/szczecin/7,34939,25661335,chca-osobnego-budzetu-na-ratowanie-zieloni-w-miescie-tak-robia.html>.

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