

Participatory budgeting (contexts, models and practical experience)

DANIEL KLIMOVSKÝ ET AL.

Participatívne rozpočtovanie (kontexty, modely a praktické skúsenosti)
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Book review by WOJCIECH SOŃTA*

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The budgetary procedure for local government units in Slovakia and Czechia is strictly defined in the legislation. Nevertheless, some local governments allocate earmarked funds as the basis for participatory budgeting. A participatory budget is the result of public consultations about how to spend part of a local government budget on proposals for local projects that have been put forward by the citizens and that are within the area of public services provided by the local government. Within the framework of the participatory budget, residents can personally contribute to the selection of investments that they think should be implemented within the portion of the local budget available to them. The textbook “Participatory budgeting (contexts, models and practical experience), 2nd extended edition” written by Klimovský et al., discusses the current issue of participatory budgeting from both theoretical and practical points of view. It builds upon the first edition of the same title published in 2021; both editions are the results of work on the research project “Innovations in Local Government Budgeting in Slovakia” (INLOGOB) supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency [APVV-19-0108].

Although the textbook is in Slovak and focuses on Czechia and Slovakia, the text is comprehensible for all Slavic language speakers (I am from Poland and had no problems reading the book). Given the importance of the topic and the relevance of participatory budgeting in other Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) countries, the book could be of interest to a wider audience than comprised by Slovaks and Czechs.

The introduction of the textbook shows that public sector economics is an inherent feature of democracy and pluralism in every sense. One of the most important features of postmodern culture is manifested in the individualisation of the product, participatory budgeting. To conclude the above arguments, it must be stated that participatory budgeting is a developing financial trend because it is an instrument of civic engagement. The introduction of this edition also describes the atmosphere in which the textbook was created (COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine). These crisis situations have affected local budgets, in which resources have been reallocated to purposes for which they were not originally planned. In this situation, participatory budgets are in many cases limited, but still work.

Particular attention should be paid to the three main pillars of public choice theory: (1) democracy, (2) political pluralism, and (3) economy of the public sector.

All three pillars are supported by participatory budgeting. If any one of the pillars is threatened, it will be difficult to design and implement a participatory budget. I would also add a fourth pillar, the rule of law, because it is often the case that democracy and political pluralism are generally respected, while respect for the law is deficient. However, there is no doubt that both the first and the second pillar have a decisive impact on the public sector economy.

The structure of the textbook consists of seven chapters. The first chapter, “Civil society and the third sector as drivers of public participation” written by Klimovský

and Murray Svidroňová, draws the reader's attention to the fact that, in general, everyone performs several roles in parallel throughout their lives, without always realising it. Understanding the phenomena is important in the context of the strengths and weaknesses of innovations promoting the quality of democracy as one of the pillars of participatory budgeting.

The second chapter is entitled "Public participation and selected contexts", written by Bakoš, Klimovský and Murray Svidroňová. The authors refer to the community in every sense of the word and also to the family, the commune, the state, religious organisations and civil associations. In the context of this approach, the aim of the chapter is to explain the importance of public participation in public finance and to define the concepts of co-creation and co-production.

The third chapter, "Participatory budgeting as a tool for public participation" written by Bakoš, Klimovský and Kukučková, presents the organisational, substantive and procedural challenges of participatory budgeting and explains the basic mechanisms of its implementation and operation.

In the fourth chapter entitled "Perceptions of participatory budgeting and its barriers" (by Balážová, Bakoš, Gašparík, Klimovský and Kukučková) the basic intention is not only to introduce the reader to the processes related to participatory budgeting, but also to reveal the barriers and limitations associated with its implementation.

The next chapter "Practical experience with participatory budgeting" written by Balážová, Bakoš, Murray Svidroňová and Klimovský, presents the development and diversity related to the implementation and further realisation of participatory budgeting in the world, with a focus on the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including Croatia, Germany, France and Poland. Through the presentation of different models and approaches, the reader has the opportunity to confront the practical experience with a more theoretical approach.

In the sixth chapter "Participatory Budgeting in Czechia and Slovakia" by Balážová, Bardovič, and Gašparík, the national (Slovak and Czech) experiences with participatory budgeting are evaluated. This chapter allows the reader not only to perceive how the theoretical definition of participatory budgeting is applied in national policies, but also to compare it with its development in other countries.

The last chapter, "Selected examples of participatory budget initiatives in Czechia and Slovakia", written by Balážová, Bardovič, and Gašparík, presents a closer observation of the implementation and use of participatory budgeting in selected regional and local governments.

Each chapter ends with questions and tasks that allow the reader (student) to review the material covered and, in case of any doubts about the correctness of the

answer, to re-familiarise themselves with it and dispel any doubts. This is a typical procedure for such editions.

Although the textbook is intended for students of various economics and administration courses and for those who deal with participatory budgeting in practice, it may be an asset for Czech and Slovak policy makers, worthy of further in-depth study because the two countries face similar socio-economic realities, are both in the aftermath of political transformation and were admitted to the EU at the same time and both must make effective use of the structural funds, while Czechia faces the particular challenge of joining the eurozone.

It is also worth noting that both countries can be classified as countries with moderate involvement in innovation projects, so the manifestation of any novelty deserves attention. A street survey showed that cities that had introduced participatory budgeting have changed their appearance for the better, resulting in a better quality of life and higher citizen satisfaction after the two countries joined the EU. The change has been driven by projects implemented with resources from both the EU funds and participatory budgets. However, significant parts of the projects implemented were related to education, which indirectly influences the image of the city. Spending on infrastructure, revitalisation, urban transport and water management has played a significant role in this process. This is important information that affects the functioning of any municipality.

Numerous tables, figures, graphs and examples in the textbook complement and illustrate the content of each chapter. The list of references has 489 entries. In most cases, these are articles published within a not very long time frame, given that the institution of participatory budgeting (and logically the literature covering the issue) is relatively young. It is noteworthy that most of the cited sources are listed in world databases (WOS, Scopus).

Finally, the book was prepared by a group of authors from academic centres in Czechia and Slovakia. They represent different scientific fields and differ in experience and length of professional experience, as well as in the rank attained in the scientific hierarchy, but they all have a wealth of experience in participatory budgeting research.

All of the above have resulted in a textbook that comprehensively and exhaustively highlights the development and current issues of participatory budgeting.