

13. Participatory budgeting: a methodological approach to address sustainability challenges

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INTRODUCTION

Sustainability, as defined here, is a dynamic balance between environmental, social/cultural, economic and governance factors to optimize the well-being of current and future generations, within the world's ecological bounds. However, achieving this is highly problematic given the world's disproportionate privileging of economic factors over others. Rather than lamenting this focus, the chapter explores how an aspect of the economy – the budgetary allocation – can be designed differently via participatory budgeting to achieve more sustainable outcomes. Participatory budgeting (PB) is 'a process through which citizens can contribute to decision-making over at least part of the governmental budget' (Goldfrank, 2007, p. 92). It is neither new nor uncommon; however, its potential as a method to achieve sustainability is largely unexplored. This chapter focuses on how PB, as a participatory form of governance, has helped and could foster more sustainable outcomes; and how it could achieve sufficient take-up and resilience to be a potential force for change.

Participatory budgeting can be described best as a family of participatory experiences, often a hybrid with other participatory practices. It has spread rapidly around the planet, with experiments reaching more than 3,000 local institutions and some supra-municipalities (Sintomer et al., 2013). This chapter describes PB as a methodology, outlining the different forms it has taken. The chapter also illustrates how PB methods have addressed sustainability challenges and achieved more sustainable outcomes including: sustainable governance, social justice, continuity, resilience, sustainable outcomes and holistic future planning. Finally, we suggest how PB's sustainability impact could be increased by 'scaling out' to broader participation, and 'scaling up' to address greater complexity.

PUBLICATORY BUDGETING AS METHODOLOGY

Even defining PB is difficult,¹ given the prolific PB families developed in different countries.² We describe PB as a typology of democratic innovations that intervene in the formulation of institutional budgets through repeated negotiations between the local government and/or their agencies and participants – citizens and often non-citizens or at least inhabitants of a place yet not entitled to vote (for example commuters, migrants and children). In rare instances, PB participants are restricted to members of civic associations, taxpayers, or those chosen through stratified random selection.

Given this broad definition, PB designs are highly variable, often combining various elements of deliberative, participatory and representative democracy. Likewise, their functions vary: some only recommending budget allocations, others co-deciding them, and still others having elected citizen delegates doing the detailed planning and monitoring. Most PB designs focus on expenditures, although some also deal with revenues – for example, Canoas in Brazil allows citizens to direct part of their local taxes to specific neighbourhood projects.

The most prevalent PB model grew from the well-articulated and more radical Brazilian experiments (Porto Alegre, Belo Horizonte, Recife, Fortaleza, Guarulhos and Canoas), as well as scattered experiences in other countries (Sintomer et al., 2012).³ A consolidated model can be described as having two interlinking sub-cycles. The first focuses on sharing the decision-making process with citizens by collecting proposals that address specific problems and present possible solutions. Their feasibility is verified, then ranked, and integrated into official budget drafts, which are then formally approved by elected officials. The second sub-cycle involves the implementation of joint decisions, with a focus on an institution's ability to respond to participant satisfaction, preventing public frustration from politically backfiring.

Participatory budgeting processes involve four basic steps: collecting ideas, developing proposals, voting and implementing prioritized projects, and monitoring performance. Idea collection is usually done at community assemblies where local people learn about the process, roles and budget, then, following discussion of broad community needs, budget delegate volunteers are elicited. Ideas which have gathered interest are developed into proposals, sometimes by civil servants, though usually by budget delegates together with interested community members and other experts. These proposals need to meet the local government's feasibility standards and are then costed. The final proposals are broadly disseminated and the community votes. After calculating the total number of votes, the top proposals

that fit within the PB budget are funded. Those projects are then implemented, the process is evaluated and all steps get repeated in the next cycle.

A deviation from this PB model, known as the 'Australian model', focuses on allocating 100 percent of a city-region's budget rather than the usual small proportion allocated (often around 10 percent). To deal with the complexity of a whole city-region budget, rather than enabling a popular vote on civic groups' proposals, the Australian PB uses stratified, randomly sampled participants (between 30–40), descriptively representative of the population, to deliberate for 4–8 days over several months to understand the local government's budget and process, carefully consider the perspectives of experts and other community members, think through the trade-offs involved in balancing a budget, and arrive at a coherent and defensible voice about how to allocate the city-region's operational or capital works budget. Deliberated outcomes are co-decisional rather than consultative and have so far been accepted by constituents without public rancour. The latter is routinely the result from elected member decisions deemed to be not in the interests of at least some community members (Weymouth & Hartz-Karp, 2015).

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING AS AN EFFECTIVE TOOL TO ADDRESS SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGES

It has been proposed that PB has greater potential to address sustainability challenges than other participatory devices (Pateman, 2012). In particular, PB is believed to be an effective tool for addressing issues in relation to governance, social justice, more sustainable outcomes and future planning. These are discussed in turn below.

Enabling More Sustainable Governance

Since PB is explicitly articulated around debates on the distribution of public resources, it represents a form of radical political thinking (Santos, 2005) that has the potential to bring about change. The 2007 global financial crisis catalyzed the proliferation of PBs by providing an innovative response to a critical problem – inadequate resources from state transfers to fund local needs. It changed political thinking because of the focus on inclusivity in governance, involving the disaffected, disempowered or those excluded by the political process. Social capital (i.e. social relations that have productive benefits) is accrued including through partnerships across diverse interest groups and government that support education, training

and technical assistance to improve participant capacity to develop proposals and to work together to achieve a result. In turn, this increases participants' sense of efficacy, and builds trust across social divides (Weymouth & Hartz-Karp, 2015).

Because of its focus on empowered inclusivity, PB has become a pivotal instrument in challenging the crisis of legitimacy affecting representative institutions. It is also providing a tool for reversing a widespread loss of communitarian values, a result of societies' preoccupation with individualism – said to be a consequence of 'liquid modernity' (Beck, 2008). For these reasons, PB is considered to be one of the most successful democratic innovations of the last 25 years, especially at the local level (Ganuza & Francés, 2012). Experiments with PB have been shown to promote trust in representative institutions as well as stimulate participation and co-governance through the direct involvement of citizens in financial decision-making (Alves & Allegretti, 2012). Such capacities are facilitated through PB tools because they interrelate narratives and numbers and make the latter more accessible to citizens. Rather than assuming an immutable economy, PB sees it is a space for elaborating, comparing and choosing between alternative options and diverse scenarios, without being aligned with political ideology.

Similarly, PB is an effective way of addressing the 'democratic deficit' evidenced across the Western world (PBP, 2016). A key feature of this deficit is the lack of trust in elected officials and their decision-making. Participatory budgeting enables the public to more directly participate in decision-making. Notably, participation that is consultational rather than co-decisional rarely results in increased trust in governance (Alves & Allegretti, 2012). Though it is usually understood that a PB 'entrusts a given community the right to decide' on 'budgets of their interest' (PB Unit, 2009, p. 1), in practice this does not always lead to shared decision-making by non-elected participants. For example, in many German PBs, although people can freely rank suggested priorities, elected officers make and justify the final decisions. Such a consultative formula has been criticized as being based on 'selective listening' (Sintomer & Allegretti, 2009) or political authorities cherry-picking from citizen priorities. Hence, consultative PBs are being abolished in the United States, Poland and Portugal (Sintomer et al., 2013), and often are not supported by external consultants and academics since they are rarely politically reformative and are largely ineffective as learning by doing environments (Allegretti, 2014). Co-decisional PBs, on the other hand, create feelings of co-responsibility and ownership, a better balance between people's responsibilities and rights, and the enacted co-decisions reward participants' voluntary investment of time and energy (Abers, 2000).

Promoting Social Justice

The history of PB, originating in the late 1980s post-dictatorship period of Brazil, tells a deeper story than public empowerment – that of greater social justice for previously neglected, socially vulnerable groups (Allegretti, 2012). By the 1990s, PB experiments became the most visible flagship projects of new left-wing parties, aiming for greater egalitarianism (Cabannes & Delgado, 2015). In Brazil, PBs often aimed to invert priorities for marginalized urban groups living in informal settlements by using specific redistributive criteria (Marquetti et al., 2008). For example, in Porto Alegre, Fortaleza and Belo Horizonte, and some districts of Rome, multi-criteria indicators were used to challenge choices previously made by simple majority (Angeloni et al., 2013). Eventually, PBs became a tool for the struggle against inequalities and socio-spatial polarization in cities throughout Latin America and later, Africa and Europe.

Enabling the Implementation of More Sustainable Outcomes

Experiments with PB were originally aimed to enhance citizenship and to include traditionally silent voices in setting policy and making decisions that would have an impact on inhabitants' daily quality of life (Costa, 2009; FNPP, 2003). While this inevitably influenced more sustainable living in a number of ways, it was not a stated intention. The socio-economic dimension of sustainability was the sole focus, and in particular the creation of more egalitarian budgeting processes, especially since many cities had only recently emerged from long, undemocratic periods. This resulted in headway towards social integration through physical arrangements, such as the revitalization of slums, the provision of infrastructure and services, and the opening of public amenities (Cabannes, 2014).

However, the environmental quality of the terrain was peripheral (Allegretti, 2005) until the mushrooming of PBs on the European continent. Indeed, early South American training programmes to provide citizens and public officials with new skills specifically avoided the environment. The perception was that such a focus could unduly influence participant decisions – being a form of indoctrination.

Over time, PB's focus gradually broadened. An example is civic capacity building training for an early Asian experiment in Kerala State in India in 1996,⁴ where one of the world's largest regional-level PBs promoting citizen participation in decentralized planning involved the Total Literacy Campaign, the People's Science Movement and the People's Resource Mapping Programme. These became indispensable instruments to spread a culture of participation in complex decisions and to bring sustainability

issues to the centre of attention (Heller & Chaudhuri, 2003). As the inter-connectivity of socio-economic, cultural and environmental issues came to the forefront, broader sustainability capacity building became integral. This was aided by longer-term evaluations of some public priority areas selected, such as asphaltting streets, which revealed over time a reduction in quality and eventual loss of the investment (Allegretti, 2005). In such cases, quality criteria and technical minimum threshold were introduced into the governing documents of participatory budgeting. This gradually guided people's choices towards better and more sustainable solutions.

In Porto Alegre, the expansion of focus to incorporate sustainability was exemplified by the introduction of thematic PB assemblies, and the establishment of social and technical criteria for measuring the need for infrastructure, such as the low socio-economic profile of inhabitants or the lack of public investments in some areas (Marquetti et al., 2008). Citizens initially perceived this approach to be an artificial but clever way to re-bureaucratize the participatory process and expropriate the people's will. As the original idea of participation effectively limited rewards (from involvement in PB) to the most active inhabitants, some initially opposed such tools – as was the case with the Index of Quality of Life (or IQVU) of Belo Horizonte.⁵ It took time for citizens to accept criteria aimed towards defending and advocating for the most deprived groups, as well as criteria aimed towards defending nature for future generations. The PB learning-by-doing environment fostered the notion of common good enabling it to become a core decision-making reference (Wampler, 2015). This was exemplified in Porto Alegre when inhabitants repeatedly opposed the City Hall's proposal to approve anti-pollution measures to clean Lake Guaíba, where bathing had been forbidden for many years. After the effective introduction of a higher score apportioned to the clearance of slums located around the lake and its contributory streams eventually depolluted the water and enabled economically vulnerable people to access it safely, it opened the way towards greater public acceptance of a more proactive stance on environmental issues (Prestes, 2012). When environmental policies have become more acceptable to the citizenry, this has led to local development and micro-economies that have mutually benefitted vulnerable social groups and the environment (Teixeira, 2007). There are now a broad array of PB examples that have enabled greater sustainability in local territories through reducing the ecological footprint, making land and energy savings, protecting biodiversity and socio-diversity, while also addressing the socio-economic dimensions of sustainability.

Fostering a More Holistic Approach to Future Planning

Achieving a more sustainable future requires a more holistic approach to development. The gradual evolution of PB has reflected this. In Europe, there has been a growing tendency to establish connections between PB, cultural plans, master plans and environmental plans and policies, with the aim of rewarding PB choices that enable more holistic outcomes. For example, the Portuguese Municipality of Cascais incorporated PB into the framework of the Agenda XXI local plan (Dias, 2013). This approach reduced the risk of creating a broad list of unconnected proposals that could not be configured into a coherent vision for the area. In Borbona, Italy, PB participants made the decision to fund a programme to install solar panels in several public areas and on the streets of Borbona. The resulting savings were used to reinvest in the following year's PB (Allegretti, 2011). Every year, citizens of Caminha Municipality in Portugal discuss if and how much the local taxes must be increased to support the growth of funds devoted to PB. The PB of Marghera District, a huge industrial part of Venice, took citizens' concerns about environmental catastrophes seriously. As a result, laboratories dedicated to measuring industrial risk were created to increase the safety for the district's residents (Allegretti, 2010). Similarly, the XI District of Rome's PB funded a monitoring programme for radio and TV emissions that would allow its population to exert social control on the level of health risks created in the area by the installation of new aerials (Allegretti, 2015).

The Australian PB initiatives have exemplified holistic budgeting and planning. In each PB, the allocation of 100 percent of the budget has shown participants' preference for sustainable, long-term outcomes. In Canada Bay (NSW), the PB advocated an increased tax to pay for the services they deemed necessary for a sustainable future (Thompson, 2012). The Melbourne (Victoria) PB prioritized city greening initiatives (Reece, 2015). In Greater Geraldton (Western Australia), the two PBs conducted (one on 100 percent of the operational budget and the other on 100 percent of the ten-year infrastructure budget) were preceded by nearly four years of co-decisional participation – otherwise known as deliberative democracy (Weymouth & Hartz-Karp, 2015). These included the city-region's strategic plans, statutory plans, future digital and energy plans as well as short-term projects. Each deliberative democracy initiative, including the two PBs, was built on the co-decisional initiatives preceding it. Both PBs developed criteria to allocate the budgets that were underpinned by sustainability principles. They prioritized sustainability projects that the city administration previously had not ranked highly.

MAINTAINING PUBLICATIONARY BUDGETING SUCCESS

Ad hoc processes rarely achieve the long-term change needed for sustainability. Hence, an initiative's survival over time and its resilience are important. These are discussed below.

Engendering Continuity over Time

A key to comprehending a PB's survival and growth is an understanding of the success factors that have kept it afloat, despite external turbulence. Comparative PB studies have consistently concluded that success depends on a balanced mixture of: institutional political will to open part of their budget to public discussion, social actors' self-organizing capacities, rigorous participatory organizational design and financial commitment (and autonomy) of the institutions experimenting with PB (FNPP, 2003). Success is also contingent upon the existence of clearly defined goals and motivation behind the participatory process, particularly by aligning goals with the means to achieve them (Allegratti & Dias, 2015).

A study by one of the authors (Allegratti, 2014) on why some PBs fail added the following success factors: maintaining a permanent evolutionary spirit of PB, changing annually rather than allowing it to become a series of annual participatory rituals, and constantly ensuring the collaboration of representative institutions in the process by making the PB's advantages, outcomes and unexpected surprises visible to representatives. In addition the centrality of citizens' roles must be guaranteed in every stage and phase of the process to avoid a decline in citizens' participation when their expectations are not met, and their confidence in the PB's legitimacy decreases.⁶ As Norris (2011) suggests, success relies also on understanding the feelings of all actors involved in the participatory dynamic and their perceptions of the process. Accordingly, careful attention needs to be given to building, monitoring and evaluating procedures so that their design is constantly adapted according to changes in all parties' satisfaction with the process and in its perceived legitimacy. Without such success factors, PBs are unlikely to be sufficiently adaptive and malleable to be able to survive over time.

Fostering Resilience

To survive the inevitable unpredictability of political, social and economic contingencies, an initiative's resilience is critical. Ad hoc processes are highly unlikely to achieve the long-term change needed for sustainability. Experience has demonstrated that a PB's self-sustainability depends on its ongoing capacity to respond to evaluation and feedback loops, which

enables the process to be sufficiently self-reliant and resilient to react to inevitable and sometimes abrupt changes to the community, environment, economy, political, institutional and legal arrangements. The following factors underpin the resilience of a PB:

1. The legal framework needs to grant citizens involved in a PB the right to participate in constructing the budget independently from the political majorities supporting the process. Hence, when European countries introducing PB tended to hyper-formalize their approach, they introduced rigidity that threatened resilience. Over time, better balance between legal protection and the capacity to adapt to contingent circumstances engendered greater success. Notably, Portugal introduced a PB constitutionalization process, which later evolved into charters of principles – a shared view of PB’s foundational values that are difficult to change. However, there is a separate document of internal rules, which can be modified yearly to provide new rules that do not violate the basic charter principles.⁷
2. Rules of the game, including evaluation and monitoring, need to be set by participatory processes, and be responsive to learning. The growing number of municipal observatories on participatory practices (Observapoa of Porto Alegre being the prototype), which produce and publicly release data related to participatory practices, reflects this practice (Fedozzi, 2007).
3. Participatory processes need to create and foster new spaces for different actors to meet, interact and celebrate, encouraging ever-broadening PB participation.
4. Inclusiveness and empowerment based on PB can enable culture change, which in turn can enhance resilience. For example, initially the young people of Seville, trained to create and justify good PB processes, were not entitled to vote for them. Later they helped to overturn the PB rules, becoming ‘complete citizens’ within the participatory institution (Allegretti, Antunes & Silva, 2012; Allegretti, Silva & Freitas, 2012). Conversely, a PB process in Condeixa, Portugal which was created solely for youth soon developed a new sidepath open to all citizens’ contributions.⁸
5. If the PB is integrated with other participatory decision-making processes, it helps to address structural limits of PBs, which tend to be fragmented, limited and immediate budgetary choices (Allegretti & Spada, 2014). This has occurred in PBs in some South African, Mozambican and Australian cities. The Geraldton Australian PB enabled the budgetary decisions to become a means of achieving the city-region’s long-term goals (Weymouth & Hartz-Karp, 2015). In

Brazil, both at municipal (PMSBC, 2014) and at regional level,⁹ PB is aimed at influencing the Multiyear Budget Plans – fundamental orientation documents for future yearly budgets.

When PB decisions activate spin-offs that reinforce complementary participatory processes and outcomes, this can lead to greater overall resilience and sustainability. Such examples include: improving the nature and quality of previously approved PB policies or projects, e.g. in Grottammare in Italy (Allegretti & Frascaroli, 2006) and better integrating budget proposals into wider city-plans, policies and sustainability initiatives, which enhances the city-region's resilience, e.g. in Geraldton, Australia (Weymouth & Hartz-Karp, 2015).

CONCLUSION – THE FUTURE OF PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

The PB methodology gives rise to the potential for decision-making that is more inclusive, transparent and accountable than the usual methods of allocating budgets. Its 'rules of the game' are more malleable while being transparent and accountable to the people. Hence, PB has the capacity to achieve more equitable and sustainable outcomes than more traditional budget allocation subject to political, short-term influences.

While PBs are particularly suited to address sustainability challenges as outlined here, they have yet to achieve the transformative status needed to make significant global impacts. Possibly, this could be achieved if PBs could be further scaled out from local interests to much broader regional, national, potentially global interests, and further scaled up to deal with the complexity of far more than a small proportion of a budget.

In terms of scaling-out, although supra-municipal PBs have developed (Sintomer & Talpin, 2011) progress is likely to be slow, given evidence from around the world that cultural change can only be fostered gradually (Allegretti, 2005). The learning-by-doing PB's environments have fostered convergence towards the valourization of sustainability principles and policies. However, to succeed, such efforts need to start by addressing people's direct concerns before they will accept addressing broader public policies. The level of tolerance of social actors at each stage of such a PB transformation needs to be respected. Concomitantly, local governments (or sensitive and innovative social actors) need to clarify how more abstract sustainability issues link with the concrete daily-life experience of citizens; in particular, how they can enable them, as well as future generations, to have a better quality of life.

With regard to scaling-up PB to address the greater complexity of entire budgets, this too is likely to be a fraught journey. Participatory budgeting was originally instituted to address immediate investments, which were often decided from a narrow, fragmented and short-term perspective. However, as outlined here, there is movement across the globe for PBs to hybridize with other participatory methods, and to evolve into different forms capable of addressing complexity while overcoming the risks of immediacy and self-interest.

Although co-decisional budget allocation could become more pervasive, this scenario is tentative at best. With spreading fears of globalization and resultant increases in nationalism and protectionism, together with fears of an increasingly unpredictable and uncontrollable world often resulting in increased conservatism, the appetite for experimentation and global well-being could well diminish. Alternatively, the need for urgent change could stimulate more radical thinking and action, particularly on cooperating more effectively together to address our sustainability challenges. Participatory budgeting is one methodology that could help to achieve this.

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NOTES

1. See the French Dictionary of Participation: www.participation-et-democratie.fr/fr/node/1035.
2. See the thematic issue n. 8/2012 of the *Journal of Public Deliberation*.
3. For instance: Villa el Salvador (Peru), Seville and Santa Cristina d'Aro, Madrid and Barcelona (Spain), Grottammare (Italy), Rosario and La Plata (Argentina), Chengdu and Zeguo (China).
4. See <http://www.kerala.gov.in/government/localself.htm>.
5. See http://portalpbh.pbh.gov.br/pbh/ecp/files.do?evento=download&urlArqPlc=Metodologia_calculo_IQVU_SH_01.pdf.
6. 'Filtering phases' (such as a perceived superimposition of bureaucratic logistics into the selection of citizens' proposals) typically demobilize participation. This risks a 'vicious circle' that demotivates politicians to invest in a process, reducing social dynamism, effective deliberation and media visibility.
7. See the rules of the Lisbon Charter of Principles of PB (Carta de Princípios do Orçamento Participativo do Município de Lisboa) approved with Municipal Bylaw no. 506/CM/2008 de 9/06/2008 and published on the Suplemento do Boletim Municipal no. 751 of 10/07/2008.

8. See <http://www.opcondeixa.pt/>.
9. In the case of regional level, the State of Bahia represents one of the most interesting cases. See <http://www.ppaparticipativo.ba.gov.br/>.

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