

KRAKOW'S PARTICIPATORY SCHOOL BUDGET AS AN EXAMPLE OF CIVIC EDUCATION

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Abstract. An example of civic education is the participatory school budget used in Poland. In the participatory budget training, students submit their own ideas, create projects, and then choose those that they think are the most attractive and important. The idea for a participatory school budget was born from the desire to adapt the classic participatory budget process to the needs of a small, local community, such as a school. Taking part in this type of project allows students to co-decide about matters in their immediate environment, i.e. the school. However, in the longer term, it is intended to prepare them to engage in the classic citizen budget, which is carried out in local government units in Poland.

The aim of the article is to briefly present the origins and idea of the classic participatory budget, but primarily to focus on the participatory school budget, in particular in relation to a specific example, which is the participatory school budget carried out in one of the Polish cities - Krakow. The article also includes information about the campaign of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education promoting participatory budgeting in schools. Document analysis and critical content analysis, as well as historical and comparative methods were used to write the article.

Keywords: civic education; participation; participatory budget; participatory school budget

Introduction

Modern societies face challenges that require active and conscious participation of citizens. In the face of increasingly complex social and political problems, civic education is becoming an essential value. Especially in the context of children and youth, shaping civic attitudes and social and political skills plays a key role in building a better society and, above all, a more aware of its rights. Citizenship education is defined as a learning process that aims to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable individuals to participate effectively in the social, political and cultural life of their society. It is not only the transfer of facts about the political system or civil rights, but also the development of critical

thinking skills, empathy, dialogue and active involvement in public affairs (Westheimer, Kahne 2004).

Important role of civic education for children and youth is confirmed by scientific research. According to a 2018 UNESCO report, civic education has a significant impact on the development of democracy, peaceful coexistence and the protection of human rights. The introduction of educational programs focused on civic values can contribute to reducing social inequalities, building social bonds and increasing civic engagement. Therefore, it is a good idea to prepare educational programs that promote active civic participation from an early age. In this way, we can build a society that not only understands its rights and obligations, but also actively co-creates a better future for all (UNESCO 2018).

An example of civic education is the participatory school budget used in Poland. In the participatory budget training, students submit their own ideas, create projects, and then choose those that they think are the most attractive and important. The idea for a participatory school budget was born from the desire to adapt the classic participatory budget process to the needs of a small, local community, such as a school. Taking part in this type of project allows students to co-decide about matters in their immediate environment, i.e. the school. However, in the longer term, it is intended to prepare them to engage in the classic citizen budget, which is carried out in local government units in Poland.

The aim of the article is to briefly present the origins and idea of the classic participatory budget, but primarily to focus on the participatory school budget, in particular in relation to a specific example, which is the participatory school budget carried out in one of the Polish cities – Krakow. The article also includes information about the campaign of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education promoting participatory budgeting in schools. Document analysis and critical content analysis, as well as historical and comparative methods were used to write the article.

Participatory budget in Poland

Despite the relatively short period of use of the participatory budget in Poland, it is a frequently and willingly used tool of direct democracy. This is a mechanism that allows residents to choose, by voting, one or more of the previously submitted tasks that will be financed from the budget of the local government unit. Although its current shape differs from the original, i.e. the participatory budget, which was first used in the Portuguese city of Porto Alegre, the idea remains the same. It is to increase citizens' involvement in local affairs.

The first Polish local government unit to use the participatory budget was Sopot (2011). In the following years, other large cities used this form of direct democracy: Bydgoszcz, Łódź, Radom, Wrocław, Warsaw, Poznań, Tarnów, Toruń, Kraków, Elbląg and Gdańsk (Żabka, Łapińska 2014). Due to the lack of statutory regulations, the councils of local government units made decisions whether it will be carried out in a given unit and on what terms. Most often, these regulations were adopted by way of a resolution of the commune council. The consequence of this solution was the inability to use the participatory budget

in many municipalities. Therefore, demands to include the institution of the participatory budget in the legal framework were increasingly common. This concerned especially the financial aspect, especially issues such as the amount of funds available to residents and the scope of the participatory budget.

The statutory empowerment of the participatory budget took place with the entry into force of the Act of January 31, 2018 amending certain acts¹. The regulations contained in the Act are very general, but very important for residents, because they provide the basis for using this instrument of direct democracy and prevent local government authorities and administrative courts refused to carry out a participatory budget, which happened many times before the Act came into force. According to the legal act, the citizen budget is a special form of social consultations and can be carried out in all Polish local government units, i.e. in the voivodeship, poviast and commune. Its creation is obligatory only in communes that are cities with county rights, and the funds allocated to residents must amount to a minimum of 0.5% of the commune's expenditure included in the last submitted report on budget implementation². The Act imposes on the council the obligation to define the formal requirements that should be met by submitted projects and rules for assessing submitted projects in terms of their compliance with the law, technical feasibility, compliance with formal requirements and rules for appealing against decisions if the project is not admitted to voting. The rules of voting, determining the results and how they are made public must also be known. The required number of signatures of residents who support the project should also be provided, but it cannot be greater than 0.1% of residents entitled to vote³.

The consequence of very general statutory regulations is a large diversity of participatory budgets and the lack of a single budget model. The undoubted advantage of such a solution is the ability to adapt it to the needs and capabilities of both local government units and residents. However, it is possible to mention common features of participatory budgets in Poland. First of all, the idea of this form of direct democracy is common, i.e. deciding by voting about part of the funds from the commune budget and allocating them to the implementation of specific tasks. The common elements also include budget stages:

- the local government allocates an amount from the budget for the implementation of tasks reported by residents;
- preparation and adoption of regulations by the council of a local government unit, submitting projects by residents;
- project verification (usually carried out in terms of finances and compliance of the project with the law);
- campaign;
- voting for projects that have successfully passed formal verification;
- selection of projects that will be implemented from the budget of the local government unit (those projects that received the largest number of votes from residents and fit into the pool of funds allocated for the participatory budget in a given year are selected);
- implementation of projects by the authorities of a given local government unit.

Going through the above stages takes time, which is why the main part of the participatory budget, from the moment the possibility of submitting ideas is opened to the moment of selecting those that will be implemented, usually takes up to several months. In practice, this means that projects are selected in one year and their implementation in the next (or later), so the entire participatory budget cycle usually takes two years or longer⁴.

Research on the participatory budget in Poland indicates an increase in interest in this form of direct democracy. After the stagnation related to the COVID-19 epidemic, it is estimated that currently in approximately 72% of cities, residents have the opportunity to manage part of the budget of their local government unit and allocate funds for specific and important for them tasks. The problem is the small percentage of funds allocated by the authorities under the participatory budget. For example, the largest participatory budget in 2021 was in Warsaw, whose residents could choose to implement a task worth over PLN 93.5 million (around 21,5 million Euro). The next cities were: Kraków (over 8 million Euro); Łódź (around 6 million Euro); Wrocław (around 6 million Euro); Poznań (over 5 million Euro); Gdańsk (around 5 million Euro); Szczecin, Katowice and Bydgoszcz (around 4 million Euro). The amounts quoted may be impressive. However, if we refer them to the entire budget, it turns out that they usually constitute approximately 1% of the entire budget of a local government unit. Analysis of the tasks submitted and selected for implementation allows us to notice certain rules. In the case of votes in small communes, tasks related to the current needs of residents dominate, i.e. construction of a playground for children, construction of a sandbox, or road renovation. The categories of tasks change as the size of the local government unit changes. The larger the unit, the more tasks in the field of health, life and physical culture protection. The principle regarding the size of the unit also applies to the construction of citizen budget regulations. The larger the unit, the more detailed the provisions in the regulations⁵.

Campaign of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education promoting participatory budgeting in schools

In October 2022, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education started the implementation of the “Participatory school budgets” educational program. The program was prepared by the Center for Analysis and Development of Civic Education. The program is addressed in particular to students from grades VII – VIII of public and private primary schools, and can be implemented in one or two lesson units. As part of the campaign, a lesson plan was prepared, as well as an application form and a voting card. These materials are intended to enable students to gain knowledge about the functioning of participatory budgets.

The lesson, carried out according to the scenario, can be conducted during or outside school hours. The suggested basic methods that can be used during classes include: brainstorming, exchange of thoughts and working with the application form. According to the plan, the classes should begin with explaining basic concepts, e.g. participatory budget, participatory school budget, participation, local government, resolution, gross amount, net amount. The next stage is to explain the idea of a participatory budget, its concept and goals.

Then there should be a discussion led by the teacher, during which the teacher provides information about the ideas, concepts and principles regarding the participatory budget. At this stage, the students' task is to find answers, among others to the following questions: Is a participatory budget necessary? Is there a participatory budget in your city? Why is a citizen's budget created? Where could budgets be implemented? Where does the money for the participatory budget come from? The next step, in accordance with the lesson plan, is to present information on the participatory budget, especially its genesis and the legal provisions that constitute the basis for its implementation in Poland. Students also receive information about the possibilities of getting involved in the participatory budget project, i.e. project preparation, promotional campaign, verification of ideas, voting and implementation of winning tasks. In this part, they also gain the knowledge needed to conduct a participatory budget in their own school. Using the form, students working in groups also prepare their own project in which they must complete the following information:

- project title;
- short description of the project;
- full description of the project;
- main goals of the project;
- justification of the project implementation;
- project category (defining the thematic area of the project, e.g. health care);
- potential project beneficiaries;
- estimated cost of project implementation;
- signature of the initiator and persons supporting the project.

After completing the preparation of applications, group representatives present information about their projects to the remaining students and try to convince them to vote for their project. Then, students vote on ballots prepared by the teacher and throw them into the ballot box. After counting the votes, the winning task is announced. The authors of the lesson plan also suggest that if one of the proposed projects is considered interesting by the teacher, it is worth presenting it to the school management for implementation. According to the authors of the lesson plan, this will create a sense of agency among students and will have a positive impact on their involvement in school matters in the future⁶. We can partially agree with the authors of the scenario. But only if the winning design is presented to management. If, as the authors of the lesson plan suggest, it is any of the projects, the effect may be the opposite of the intended one. Students will feel a sense of harm and injustice if they chose a different project than the one presented to the management by the teacher.

The basic aim of the ministerial educational campaign is to develop activity and increase competences among students and young people in the field of social activities in the field of participatory budgets and participatory school budgets. The partial goals include:

- promoting the idea of participatory budget and participatory school budget;
- development and strengthening of social activity among children and youth;
- developing competences in the field of civic and social activities;

- encouraging students to take action for the school;
- popularizing innovation and entrepreneurship;
- developing competences in the field of finance, entrepreneurship and planning.

According to the assumptions of the program, the participatory school budget brings students closer to the idea of civil society in practice, because students submit projects, verify them and then vote for them⁷. In the opinion of the Minister for Civil Society, the initiative is extremely important because civic education should have a practical dimension, and not just theoretical. This criterion is met by the ministerial program because it is a tool that in practice shows people how important social involvement is, as well as how important it is to co-decide about their own space, for example school space⁸.

Participatory school budget in Krakow

The city where it was decided to introduce a participatory school budget even before the Ministry of Science and Higher Education initiated the campaign for participatory school budgets was Krakow. The pilot project was carried out in the 2020/2021 school year. The Department of Social Policy and Health of the Krakow City Hall was responsible for the implementation of the project. The goals of the pilot school participatory budget included:

- increasing students' sense of influence on their school's affairs;
- gaining knowledge about the functioning of a given school and involving young people in the decision-making process regarding school matters;
- increasing the role of student governments in schools;
- building a positive image of a school that is open to dialogue with students and partnership;
- acquiring knowledge about the idea and principles of conducting a classic participatory budget in local government units.

In order to implement the project, cooperation was established with primary and secondary schools in Krakow, which were introduced to the ideas, principles and functioning of the participatory budget. Ultimately, only two primary schools and one high school joined the pilot project. A Team for the Participatory School Budget was established in each school and included: the management, representatives of the school self-government and employees of the Department of Social Policy and Health. The team's tasks included, in particular, developing budget regulations, verifying submitted projects, as well as organizing and conducting voting. The first stage was to explain to students the idea and goals of the participatory school budget, as well as the basic concepts related to the participatory budget (12/2020). In the next two months, online meetings were held between students and employees of the Faculty of Social Policy and Health, the aim of which was to develop the process of participation, deliberation and prepare projects. The latter were verified at the turn of February and March, and then the projects were promoted. Voting should have been conducted between March 24 – 31, 2021. The results had to be announced no later than April 16, 2021, and the implementation of the winning projects was to be completed by the end of the 2020/21 school year⁹. The most common reason

for rejection of the project was an incorrect cost estimate (not taking into account, e.g., the costs of carrying out the work) and lack of compliance of the tasks to be performed with applicable regulations. Each school had PLN 5,000 at its disposal and in each of them, students selected 5 tasks for financing by voting. The analysis of all projects, both those rejected by the verification committee and those approved for voting and selected for implementation by students, allows us to distinguish two basic categories of tasks: those aimed at equipping the school, e.g. with sports equipment or teaching aids, and those aimed at integrating students and making spending free time in the school area more attractive, in particular by preparing relaxation areas, i.e. patios or gardens with hammocks, benches or pouffes¹⁰.

The second edition of the program took place in the next school year (2021/22). Most of the rules from the pilot edition of the participatory school budget were maintained, including the amount of PLN 5,000 for one school. New solutions include:

- limit for the implementation of the task – the value of one project could not exceed PLN 2,500;
- changes in the composition of the Participatory School Budget Team, which included: a teacher, the head-teacher or the head teacher's representative, a student and, optionally, a representative of the parents' council;
- indication of the entity responsible for the implementation of tasks selected by students by way of voting – this entity was the school head-teacher, who indicated the coordinator for the participatory school budget who would supervise the work of the team and the correct course of the process in a given school;
- indication of a mandatory member of the team supervising the process in a given school, who was a representative of the student government;
- clarification of the issue of submitted projects, i.e. projects proposed by students could be submitted individually or in groups, students could submit them in person or online, and each project had to be accompanied by a list of support signed by at least ten students¹¹.

Thirty-one secondary schools took part in the second edition of the participatory school budget. A total of PLN 155,000 was allocated for the implementation of tasks, which was a significant increase compared to PLN 15,000 allocated for the pilot edition. According to the information provided by the Krakow City Hall, almost 6,000 students took part in training on the principles of organizing and implementing the participatory school budget, 231 projects were submitted, of which 187 passed formal verification, and 79 of them were selected for implementation by voting by over 5,500 students. Both among the submitted and voted projects, this edition was also dominated by those aimed at equipping the school with the necessary equipment and making the space where students spend their free time more attractive. Some of the more interesting ideas include: painting a mural on the wall of one of the high schools, creating a beach area on the school premises and a "secret garden"¹².

Thirty-four secondary schools took part in the third edition (school year 2022/2023) of

the participatory school budget, and 9,135 students took part in workshops introducing the idea of the participatory school budget and the participatory city budget. The regulations on the basis of which the initiative was carried out have not changed. This time, out of 233 submitted projects, 222 met the formal conditions. 840 students were involved in their preparation. In a vote in which over 7,000 students took part, 93 projects were selected for implementation. Each school participating in the process received PLN 6,000 for the implementation of the winning projects, with the value of one project not exceeding PLN 3,000. The amount the city allocated for the implementation of student projects also increased proportionally. In this edition, students had PLN 204,000 at their disposal¹³. In addition to the task categories typical of previous editions, we can observe the emergence of projects in the field of safety and health (self-defense course, purchase of a phantom for learning resuscitation), used to organize events (pizza festival, shooting competitions, billiard competitions), but also the so-called projects useful for a given category of school or class (purchase of a clothes dryer - construction school, or purchase of a shoe shine machine - military-police school). In some cases, students did not limit themselves only to preparing a project or participating in voting. They actively participated in the implementation of winning projects, including: in the preparation of a garden, a lavender apiary, or in the creation of a garden room that will be used to conduct lessons in a recreation area outside the classrooms¹⁴.

Summary

Krakow is not the only Polish city where a participatory school budget is carried out, but it is undoubtedly an example of the growing interest in this initiative. This is evidenced by both the number of students who participate in training, submit applications and vote, as well as the growing number of schools that join the project. It is worth emphasizing that three schools took part in the pilot project (2020 – 2021), and fifty-two in the fourth edition (including special schools). Another goal was also achieved, i.e. increasing student activity. Apart from the participatory school budget, they are also involved in other city initiatives addressed to young residents, such as the Youth Ambassadors of the Participatory Budget, the Krakow Youth Council, the #SUWAK program, the Student Government Days and the YouthKraHack youth project hackathon, and many others.

The participatory school budget is a good tool for civic education, thanks to which the youngest members of the school community can see what it is like to have a real impact on their immediate surroundings. It gives students the opportunity to identify their needs and problems, and present specific solutions that will benefit the whole local community. Moreover, thanks to the participatory school budget, students will be able to effectively strengthen their social competences, acquire and develop knowledge of communication, the ability to convince people to accept their ideas, reach compromises, plan and implement actions. These are skills that would be difficult for them to acquire in any other way than practical.

From the very beginning, the creators of the participatory school budget had an

additional idea in mind. They wondered, among other things, how to make the mechanisms, roles and importance of the classic participatory budget process understood by younger city residents? How to arouse young people's sense of empowerment and willingness to co-decide about school matters and, consequently, about their city? They came to the conclusion that it would be most effective to show the mechanism of operation of this tool of direct democracy in the environment closest to students, i.e. at school. "The idea for this project was born from the desire to adapt the municipal participatory budget process to the needs of school communities. We assumed that the school could be considered a city on a micro scale."¹⁵

The initiative was undoubtedly a success as it achieved its aims. However, it would be worth implementing the participatory school budget not only in large cities. It would also be good to increase the number of schools where the school participatory budget is carried out, because while in Krakow the number of units actively participating in the implementation of the budget increases from year to year, in the case of Warsaw we are dealing with stagnation, because in the fourth edition of the program only eight primary schools participated. In many cases, the lack of financial support from local government authorities may be an obstacle. However, this does not seem to be a big problem, because most schools have a budget from which they are able to allocate a small amount of money. In addition to shaping civic attitudes and introducing the mechanism of the classic participatory budget, a tangible benefit would be an increase in students' identification with their school. Moreover, thanks to the projects submitted by students, the management could find out what the actual problems and needs of students are.

Krakow is undoubtedly a good example when it comes to the implementation and functioning of the participatory school budgets. The idea and project itself is well thought out and implemented. It is extremely important that participants can count on the support of experts at every stage. The city authorities are involved in organizing the project itself, and especially in the information campaign. Perhaps, when implementing the next stages, it would be worth paying attention not only to the mechanism of the school participatory budget itself, but also to the reasons for rejecting some projects. The analysis shows that, apart from poor preparation of the cost estimate, the second factor in not allowing the project to be voted on is its non-compliance with applicable law. This could be done as part of the last stage, i.e. a summary which, on the one hand, would show students what tasks were selected, and on the other hand, it would be worth indicating the basic reasons for rejecting some of the ideas. The lack of explanation may result in the authors of the rejected project being disappointed with the failure and not only not submitting another project, but also not taking part in the voting. Considering that even more than half of the submitted projects are rejected, the number of people who are discouraged from getting involved in the affairs of both the school and the city is a significant danger. Perhaps it would also be worth encouraging students to submit an idea as part of the city's participatory budget, because this is (or should be) the main goal of this initiative.

NOTES

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