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Participatory Budget as a Tool Supporting the Development of Civil Society in Poland

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Abstract

Although three decades have passed since the fall of communism in Poland, the observed level of social activity in the country is relatively low. Participatory budget emerged as an idea to increase the involvement of citizens in decision-making processes concerning their immediate surroundings. In addition to their inclusion in the activity of local government, this form of citizen participation is expected to have a positive impact on residents' involvement in activities for the benefit of the local community. The aim of this article is to indicate the conditions that influenced the implementation of the idea of the first participatory budget in Poland and emphasizing the importance of the civic budget in managing public administration through partial decentralization involving local communities in social dialogue for local investment initiatives, especially in large provincial cities in Poland. The following research question was adopted in the paper: has the introduction of a participatory budget in Poland increased social activity and has it been conducive to the development of civil society. In Poland, the initiative to create a civic budget met good political conditions in the relatively small city of Sopot, which had the resources to implement the project. After successful implementation, this initiative was relatively quickly adopted by other Polish local governments, which then on their own introduced social consultations called the civic budget. Not all poviats introduced the civic budget of their own volition. The government, seeing the possibility of political discounting of this new solution, decided to introduce a mandatory participatory budget in town counties and ordered the allocation of funds from their budgets, no less than 1 % of budget expenditure. The article relies on the case-study method, comparative analysis and trend analysis, qualitative and quantitative methods of description, document analysis and statistical data. The analysis focuses on the town of Sopot and provincial capitals. Local conditions are important for un-

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derstanding the processes of shaping active civic attitudes in Poland, because cities are the poles of development of civil society and give impetus to innovative changes in the entire socio-economic system. The materials used in the article include reports, documents and legal acts regarding the functioning of the town of Sopot.

The study showed that the participatory budget indeed activates the local community around various projects. At the same time, the question of directly translating this activity into an increase in the number of organizations, associations and foundations remains debatable. The introduction of the participatory budget to administrative management practice in local-government units in Poland should be considered in terms of the soft power impact of administration on the shaping and development of civil society, which is still in the development stage in Poland.

Keywords:
participatory budget, public administration management, Sopot, civil society, cities, democracy, Poland, JEL: R51, H72, H79

Introduction

Three decades have passed since the countries of Central and Eastern Europe broke free from the Soviet yoke and entered the path of political transformation. This was largely possible thanks to the mobilization of society against the oppressive state. It was the anti-regime resistance of societies dreaming of subjective citizenship that lay at the foundation of political changes in this part of Europe. In the Polish context, it is important to note the anti-communist Workers' Defence Committee (KOR), founded in 1976 and reorganized as the Social Self-defence Committee (KSS-KOR) in 1978, which proclaimed the need to build a civil society. Another significant step on the path of building anti-communist social awareness was the ten-million Solidarity movement, an independent trade union established in 1980. The pursuit of the demand of civil liberties collided with the brutal reality of martial law, introduced on 13 December 1981, which aggravated the division between citizens and the state.

The emerging idea, or rather dream, of a civil society awakened the imagination and integrated opponents of the communist regime. The year 1989 brought a breakthrough for Poles: the collapse of the old order and the change of the political system, as well as the introduction of liberal market economy. The pace and dynamics of new processes quickly changed the political and economic reality of the country and shaped a new social order. No longer constrained by political restrictions, civil society could now develop freely. However, despite positive signs – the emergence of non-governmental organizations, exceptionally high turnout at key parliamentary or presidential elections and in the EU accession referendum – it became increasingly apparent that the idea of civil society following Western patterns did not really take root in Poland.

As it is today, considerable attention is drawn to the crisis of liberal democracy in Central and Eastern Europe, apparent in taking a distance from democracy, in apathy towards actions that do not comply with the rule of law, in a relatively low turnout in elections at various levels, or in a low level of trust in government institutions. Scholars and commentators point out that political and economic transformation has not been accompanied by deep social change. This kind of change, however, is the hardest to make and takes the longest: it requires above all a change in the awareness and character of people – a focus on cooperation, participation and commitment rather than negation, distance and criticism; it also requires respect for law and new institutions, and, finally, civic culture (Pietrzyk-Reeves 2004, 320).

Such conditions, though not excessive, seem too idealistic in Poland as it is today. Social activity has become focused on mundane matters such as work, business or daily struggles with reality, and higher community needs have become a secondary concern. Although occasional social actions, such as the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity, still attract the attention of citizens, the involvement of Poles in social life should be assessed as low.[3] Hence, any initiatives that can change this state of affairs should be considered valuable, because they can rebuild social bonds.

The paper adopts the interpretation of civil society based on the perspective of political philosophy expressed, inter alia, by Fukuyama (2005) and Barber (2001) but also on the study of the state of civil society by Kłos and Marchewka-Bartkowiak (2015). Fukuyama perceives as civil a society which is organized into coherent groups – e.g. parent-teacher organizations, standards control organizations in public life called watchdog groups, or advocacy organizations representing the interests of particular environments (Fukuyama 2005, 46). For Barber, it is the civic space which occupies the space between the state authority and the privacy system (Barber 2001, 360–361). Polish authors define them as the activity and ability of such society to self-organize independently of the state institutions, and its members are characterized by an awareness of the needs of the community, striving to satisfy them and a sense of responsibility for its welfare (Kłos and Marchewka-Bartkowiak 2015, 5). The authors in this study consider civil society to be the one in which the space between the private system and the system of power is fulfilled with social activeness. Organizational formalization of civil society is not a *sine qua non* for its occurrence as long as this activity is accompanied by community awareness and the desire to improve its functioning.

This article aims to identify and analyze conditions which had an impact on the implementation of participatory budget in Poland, and to investigate its influence on the development of civil society. While designing the methodological

3 There are 124,000 NGOs (Non-government organizations) in Poland. For comparison, in Sweden there are 232,000, in Norway 115,000, in Germany 616,000, in the USA 950,000, in the Czech Republic 129,000, in Hungary 62,000. There are over 200 NGOs per 10,000 inhabitants in the Scandinavian countries, in Germany 76 NGOs, in the USA 45 NGOs, 125 NGOs in the Czech Republic, 63 NGOs in Hungary and only 32 NGOs in Poland (Gumkowska 2017).

model, a universal three-phase abstraction – gradual concretization – verification scheme was adopted. The task at hand requires a multi-stage study procedure. The first part of the article presents a review of the literature on the functioning of participatory budget. In the next step, we identify key factors that shaped the process of systemic transformation in Poland after the fall of the monopolist state system. In the following section, we characterize the functioning of participatory budget abroad, the early stage of its implementation in Poland, and the functions of this tool in local policy. From there, the study proceeds to analyze practical aspects of introducing participatory budget and its management in the case of Sopot, the first Polish town where this has been done. The Sopot model is then compared to that of selected Polish cities which also introduced this tool in their local policy. What follows is a description of participatory budget in Poland in terms of legislative solutions, voter turnout, and the development of non-governmental organizations as an important element of the foundations of civil society. On the basis of these measurements, the authors endeavour to make a preliminary assessment of the impact of introducing the participatory budget on the social activities of the residents. The quantitative measurement is supplemented with the author's own observations. The authors themselves are aware of the cultural and procedural limitations with regard to formalizing social activities and filtering them into the formal structures in Poland. Subsequently, the authors formulate conclusions using the method of deduction and mental experimentation. The expected increase in activity on the level of social interactions aimed at improving the social functioning of a given community will be interpreted as leaving the private comfort zone, thus filling the space between the private system and the system of power with activity.

The article relies on the case-study method, comparative analysis and trend analysis, qualitative and quantitative methods of description, document analysis and statistical data. The materials used in the study include reports, documents and legal acts which concern the functioning of participatory budget.

1. Literature

The literature on the subject includes studies concerning cases of participatory budget in different urban centres, such as the city of Porto Alegre, where it was first introduced (Sousa Santos 1998; Aragonès and Sánchez-Pagés 2019), and other locations in Brazil (Cabannes 2004; Wampler 2007; Shah 2007), as well as in Europe (Sintomer et al. 2008; Pytlik 2016; Rocha Franco and Ficher 2019; Boc 2019). As it is today, there is also an extensive body of studies on participatory budget in Poland, analyzing particular cities, e.g. Wrocław (Ładysz 2009; Rynio and Adamiczka 2019), Łódź (Brzeziński and Michalska-Żyła 2018), Katowice (Sobol 2009), Lublin (Kociuba and Rabczewska 2019); adopting a regional perspective (e.g. Wiśniewska 2018; Węglarz 2018; Grzebyk et al. 2019); or focusing on particular aspects, such as legal, economic, social issues as well as issues of the political system (Gajewski 2018;

Kębłowski 2013; Szuber-Bednarz 2015). Interesting analyses can also be found in the *NISPAcee Journal of Public Administration and Policy* (Džinić et al. 2016); they compare issues of participatory budget in Croatia, Poland and Slovakia (including the example of Sopot), as well as in the Czech Republic (Kukučkova and Bakoš 2019).

2. Participatory budget

Participatory budget (also known as civic budget) is a relatively new tool of shaping local politics in Poland. The global forerunner of this form of budgeting was the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre (Aragonès and Sánchez-Pagés 2009, 56–72), and it is widely analyzed even in terms of its impact on changes in the local, national and global environment, e.g. on climate change (Cohen 2019, 18–35; Krenjova and Raudla 2013). In 2013, the introduction of this form of decision-making was reported in at least 795 cities (Kębłowski 2013, 9–10). As it is today, it is estimated that participatory budgets have been introduced in over 3,000 cities and towns worldwide (Rocha Franco and Ficher 2019). The idea boils down to giving the opportunity to shape part of urban policy, including budget policy, directly to local residents: they submit project proposals and then vote which of them should be approved or rejected. In other words, the mechanism is based on allocating a part of the budget to projects proposed and selected by residents themselves (Szuber-Bednarz 2015, 733).

Participatory budget is an important tool for the integration of residents of a given territorial unit and for building their identity, and it is probably the next step towards increasing their involvement in public affairs. This, in turn, affects the formation of civil society (Jaruga 2013, 41). It is assumed that participatory budget increases social capital, which is one of the factors of competitiveness of local government units (Ładysz 2009, 28). This instrument is also important as it provides excellent information about the situation of a particular local government unit, and the availability of a wide range of information affects the effectiveness of strategic planning in local government (Zalewski 2007, 40). Sebastian Gajewski classifies the basic roles of participatory budget as follows (Gajewski 2018 20–21):

(1) A shaping function, where participatory budget is viewed as a decision-making process in which residents shape a part of budget expenditures of a local government unit. Thus, the results of the process amount to co-shaping the budget resolution, and not just to expressing an opinion.

(2) A participatory function, which enables the involvement of interested residents in the decision-making process and their indirect participation in the management of local policies.

(3) An informative function, as a result of which the financial policy of a municipality is more transparent to residents.

(4) An educational function, thanks to which residents learn decision-making mechanisms applied by local government bodies and build a sense of shared responsibility for local issues, and thus become more aware of their rights and obligations.

All of the above functions of participatory budget enable filling a gap in the implementation of social innovations in towns and cities (Gondášová and Svidroňová 2016), which is a factor necessary for their dynamic development. It is noted that the issue of social innovation in civil society, in relation to local space, becomes an important means to draw on local potential, both social and intellectual (Buliński 2018, 71; Olejniczuk-Merta 2014, 18–26). Submitting proposals, debating them and participating in the vote encourages residents to take an active attitude towards the environment in which they live.

3. Identification of conditions for the introduction of the first participatory budget in Poland: the town of Sopot

Favourable conditions for the proposal and implementation of participatory budget stem from the socio-economic conditions of a particular municipality. In other words, if the implementation of such a project is to be successful, a town/city should be characterized by a high potential and a high level of activity on the part of its residents, who are familiar with local issues, who are able to take active part in submitting proposals, and who can guarantee appropriate voting turnout so that ideas that are put forward can be verified. Although these conditions do not have to be met when attempting to introduce such a budget, they are important for its successful implementation. Passive residents will not generate ideas, and low attendance will undermine the sense of participatory budget. Had the first such project in Poland been a failure, it could have cast a shadow over the whole idea in the country.

This approach is innovative if we look at the existing systemic solutions regarding local government in Poland. Danuta Hübner claims that the Polish system of governance is still dominated by a hierarchical approach that weakens effectiveness and does not strengthen the sense of responsibility. At the same time, hierarchy prevents us from understanding subsidiarity as cooperation (Hübner 2010, 6). This diagnosis aptly reveals one of the important sources of weakness in the building of a civil society.

The first participatory budget in Poland was adopted in the small but prosperous town of Sopot[4] (Džinić et al. 2016, 41), bordering the much larger cities of Gdynia and Gdańsk (the three urban centres are known as the Tri-city). It is a specific town, the smallest one in Poland with the status of a district (*powiat*), a health

4 The initiators of the participatory budget in Sopot were based on an initiative that had its origins in Porto Alegre.

resort located in the middle of a large metropolitan area. Some basic facts about Sopot include the following:

- the area of the town is only 17.28 km^2,
- it has about 33,000 residents and is the smallest municipality in Poland with the status of a district,
- the Tri-city, which includes Sopot, has a population of about 750,000,
- many buildings in the centre of Sopot are listed as protected,
- the main functions of the town: spa, tourist, cultural, business.

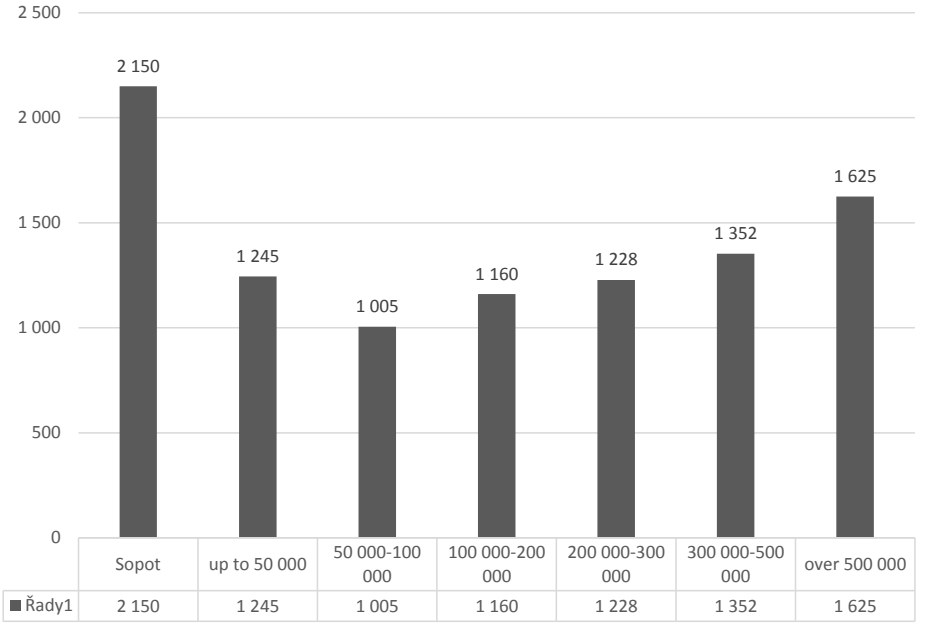
Sopot residents are highly active. There are 328 non-governmental organizations registered in the town, including 199 NGOs registered in the National Court Register, 29 ordinary associations and 100 non-governmental sports organizations.[5] Sopot has one of the highest turnouts in the country in elections and referendums. In the presidential election of 2010 (i.e. when making decisions on introducing participatory budget) the turnout was 73 %, and in the 2011 parliamentary election – 66 % (www.miasto.sopot.pl/). In the 2010 local elections, the turnout was 56.91 %, while the average for the municipalities in Poland was 41.81 %. Local residents are also active in the field of business (see Figure 1).

There are many companies in the tourism and hotel industry in Sopot. The economic activity of local residents is high, which is reflected in the town's high budget revenues (GUS, Local Data Bank, 2019). A significant number of NGOs, above-average voter turnout, high budget revenues and high entrepreneurship indicate high activity of the population. Thanks to this, there were favourable conditions for implementing the idea of participatory budget. It was quite likely that the voting turnout would be high enough to guarantee social consent to implementing this idea.

However, another important factor at play was local politics. For the first time since the introduction of local self-government in Poland, the town found itself in a political stalemate: the mayor and the majority of the town council stood in opposition to each other. Both local political forces looked for new ideas to win support and tip the scales of victory to their side in the next elections.

5 An ordinary association is a simplified organizational form for which it is sufficient to gather a minimum of three people. A registered association is an association in which its founders, a minimum of 7 people, decide to enter it in the register of associations, other social and professional organizations, and the foundation of the National Court Register. A foundation is a plant, so – unlike, for example, associations they have no members. A foundation is more independent from natural persons than a corporation – its creator decides about the purpose, property and operating principles.

Figure 1
The number of business entities in towns/cities per 10,000 of population



Source: the authors' own study based on Statistics Poland data (GUS, Local Data Bank, accessed 14 April 2019).

The initiative of a local participatory budget, however, did not come from the circles of local authorities: it was put forward by a representative of the Sopot Development Initiative (SIR), a local NGO, who turned to councillors with a request to accept the idea. As proposed, the initial amount allocated to the project could be as high as 1 % of the town's expenditures. A resolution on the principles of its implementation was drafted by a committee established for the purpose, working together with representatives of the SIR and the town hall. It is worth emphasizing once again that the incumbent mayor did not have a majority in the council at the time, and that the initiative was pursued by the opposition. However, the town hall prepared and conducted a vote among all the residents, an operation which would have been most likely impossible to organize by NGOs working on their own. In other words, without the support of the town hall and the mayor himself it would not have been possible to conduct a vote on such a large scale. It can therefore be said that a consensus has been reached over political divisions. It can even be argued that in this case political disagreement led to an extremely positive outcome.

Once implemented, participatory budget awakened social expectations, and there was no turning back from it. However, the framework developed in Sopot was

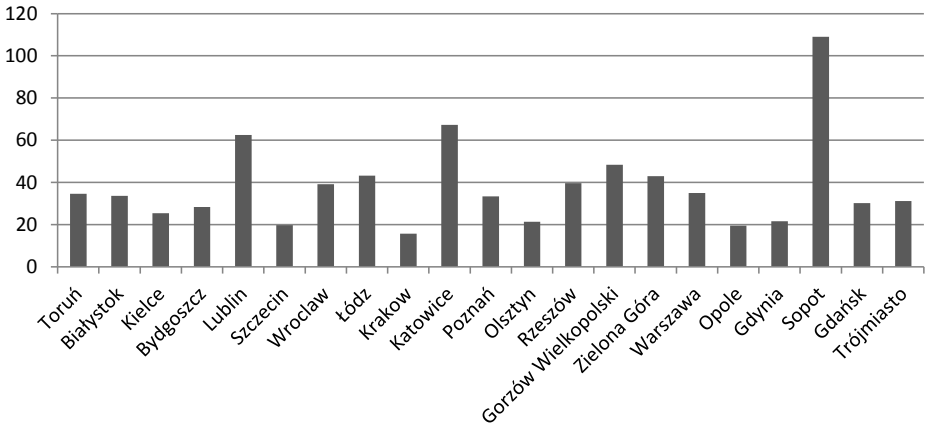
also criticized. As argued, one major fault was that very few local residents attended meetings devoted to the issue. There were also reservations about the procedure, which did not include discussion but was limited to submitting forms with proposals. The projects submitted by the residents were evaluated by a municipal commission consisting of councilors and officials. The goal of the commission is to block projects that do not fit into the sphere of activity of local government.

The role of local administration was to verify them and put them to vote. It was stressed that the system implemented in Sopot was unable to reverse investment priorities. In other words, it limited the possibility of creating discussion groups which would build relations and foster integration around ideas, and voting was limited to selecting particular projects. The participatory budget in Sopot was therefore important also because it indicated difficulties and risks that may arise in the process (Pytlik 2016, 120–121).

4. Participatory budget in Sopot against the background of selected provincial capitals

One of the key criteria to assess the importance of participatory budget in urban policy is the level of allocated financial resources.

Figure 2
Participatory-budget expenditures in provincial capitals and in Sopot, PLN per capita, 2018

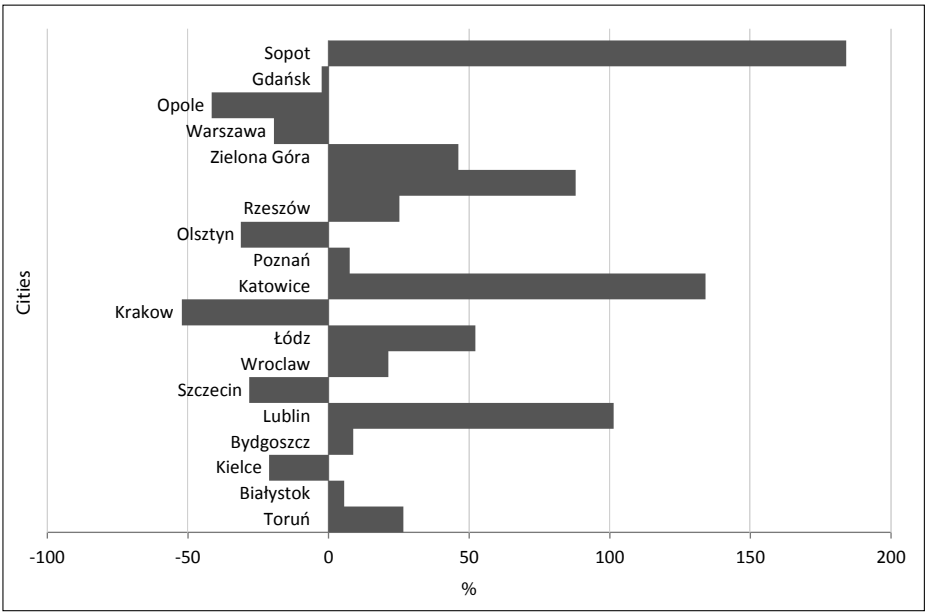


Source: the authors' own study based on data from http://urbnews.pl/budzety-obywatelskie-2018-podsumowanie/ (accessed 16 April 2019) (Urbnews 2019).

Figure 2 shows that eight years after Sopot first introduced its participatory budget, it still allocates much more funds to it in comparison to the richest cities in

Poland: in 2018 the average for provincial capitals per capita was PLN 35.5, while the corresponding figure for Sopot was PLN 108.

Figure 3
Percentage difference of participatory budget expenditures from the minimum statutory limit of 0.5 % in selected units of local government, 2018



Source: the authors' own study based on data from http://urbnews.pl/budzety-obywatelskie-2018-podsumowanie/ (accessed 16 April 2019) (Urbnews 2019).

In view of the problem of low financial involvement of local governments, the legislation introduced a statutory minimum limit: the allocated pool of funds may not be less than 0.5 % of the total expenditures of municipalities with the status of a district. Prior to this regulation, one in three provincial capitals did not meet this moderate limit (see Figure 3). In the town of Sopot, the figure has never been lower than 1 %.

It is worth noting that the procedure of implementing projects within the framework of participatory budget is characterized by high transparency and social control. This is ensured by the decision-making process, which is subject to social control at every stage (Szuber-Bednarz 2015, 736). The transparency of public expenditure creates trust in local government bodies.

5. The implementation of participatory budget in Poland

Even before participatory budget became a statutory obligation, it had been introduced by almost all municipalities with the status of a district as well as many others. It can be said that public consultations follow a similar pattern. Dawid Sześciło writes that most communes adopted the model originally developed in Sopot, which involves a four-stage procedure: (1) a resolution of the council determines the size of the participatory budget and the procedure; (2) residents submit their proposals; (3) the proposed projects are verified in terms of feasibility and legal compliance; (4) residents decide on the final list of projects in a vote (Sześciło 2018, 2). The underlying features of this model are preserved in the new legislation (Ustawa z dnia 11 stycznia 2018); Gajewski identifies them as follows (Gajewski 2018, 19–20):

(1) Democracy: participatory-budget procedure enables each member of the local community to take part in the decision-making process.

(2) Formality: participatory budget is a procedure determined by legal regulations.

(3) Indirectness: participatory budget is an element of the decision-making process aimed at determining the budget of local government units. Although its decisions are binding, their inclusion in the draft budget resolution and in the resolution itself are the respective exclusive competences of the executive body and the resolution body.

(4) Repeatability: participatory budget should be part of each budgeting cycle.

(5) Specificity: participatory budget does not aim to evaluate all expenditures or the entire budget of a local government unit.

(6) Transparency: information on participatory budget is open to the public.

From 1 January 2019 (Act of 11 January 2018) participatory budget became a statutory obligation in municipalities with the status of a district. On the one hand, freedom in setting the rules of its implementation came to an end. On the other hand, the obligation means that this valuable initiative will be implemented regardless of the local political situation and that it cannot be abandoned even if the turnout is low and keeps falling. The new legislation also introduced the minimum limit of 0.5 % of expenditures that should be allocated to participatory budget. The above analysis indicates that this level is acceptable to local governments.

However, there are controversies over the provisions that limit the freedom of municipalities as to the substantive assessment of submitted proposals. The obligation to implement each project that has passed formal assessment may lead to investments which do not contribute to the development of the city (e.g. they are incompatible with its development strategy). Some municipalities which want to avoid this may decide to make the application procedure more complicated, for example by imposing additional requirements regarding substantive and financial

justification of proposed projects, which may discourage applicants (i.e. residents) from becoming involved in participatory budget altogether. There are also controversies over the ban on dividing districts into units that are smaller than auxiliary units. The experience of the participatory budget in Sopot and other municipalities indicates that delegating funds to smaller units is beneficial and integrates smaller urban communities. The analysis of urban districts indicates that city centres, housing estates and single-family housing areas which may belong to one larger unit are in fact very diverse in terms of population and the problems they face.

The above conditions clearly show that not all regulations established at the central level take into account the specificity of the local level. The lack of trust in the local government is reflected in restricting its freedom to shape participatory budget solutions. Although the legislator appreciated this important instrument of local policy, at the same time he decided that local governments of municipalities with the status of a district should somehow be forced to finance and implement proposals of their residents. In other words, the adopted statutory regulations have a prescriptive function, although the whole idea of social innovation, which includes the idea of participatory budget, is a concept based on the good will of residents and local government, and should remain so (Kozłowski and Kempa 2013). All municipalities are different: they have different potentials, and their residents have different expectations. The rules of implementing participatory budgets, then, may also be different.

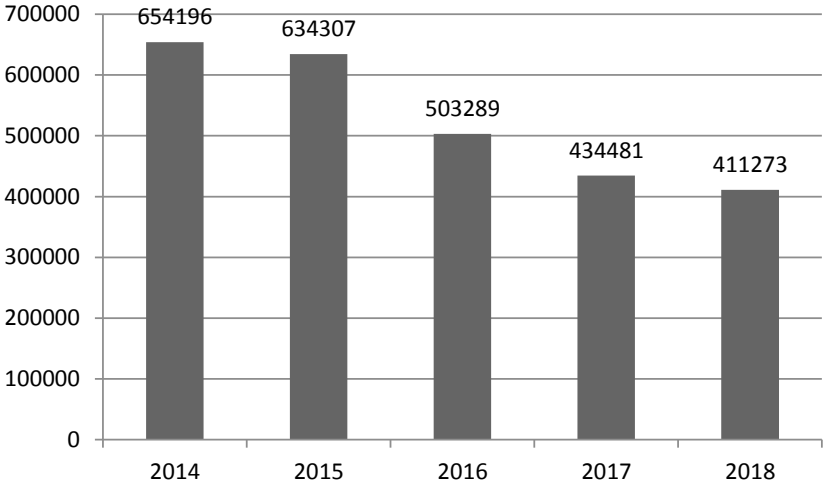
In order to be effective, i.e. to encourage residents to submit their proposals and vote, the budget procedure should be, above all, simple.[6] In the case of the Sopot model, in the initial phase (2011–2013) there was a discussion whether to introduce broader consultations – to create a forum where residents could discuss the town's problems in an organized way and propose solutions. This idea was abandoned, considering that it could complicate the decision-making process. The role of the initiator and organizer of meetings was taken over by the town hall, which limited the discussion and the voting process to a formalized procedure. This simplified procedure was adopted in most provincial capitals and other municipalities with the status of a district. However, the persistent problem is low turnout. This confirms Bogusław Pytlik's observation that "trust in democratic institutions and the participation of societies in the political life of states is weakening" (Pytlik 2016, 107).

In order to encourage residents to become involved in participatory budget, cities lower the voting age limit (most often to sixteen), which means that minors can also take part in the process of submitting proposals and in the ballot. There is

6 There are no public deliberations in Sopot. Instead of that there are public information meetings only. It was recognized in Sopot that public discussions prolong the decision-making process. However, this does not detract from the civic nature of the civic budget, because discussion is not prohibited, anyone can discuss their project with their neighbours and convene their own meeting, and then submit the investment project to the budget.

also a possibility to vote via the internet. Another modification is the requirement of collecting a certain number of signatures in support of a particular proposal. This solution requires applicants to consult their projects and thus encourages active citizenship: families and neighbours exchange ideas about the development of their immediate area. As Leszek Buliński (2018) writes, the time perspective allows us to see that the social transformation towards democracy, subjectivity, economic efficiency and the rule of law has revealed a picture of civic obligations that need to be implemented. At the same time, it should be assumed that modern democracy is not possible without the active participation of citizens. This participation is not only a right that one may decide to exercise; it is also a civic duty of building a democratic state (Pytlik 2016, 9).

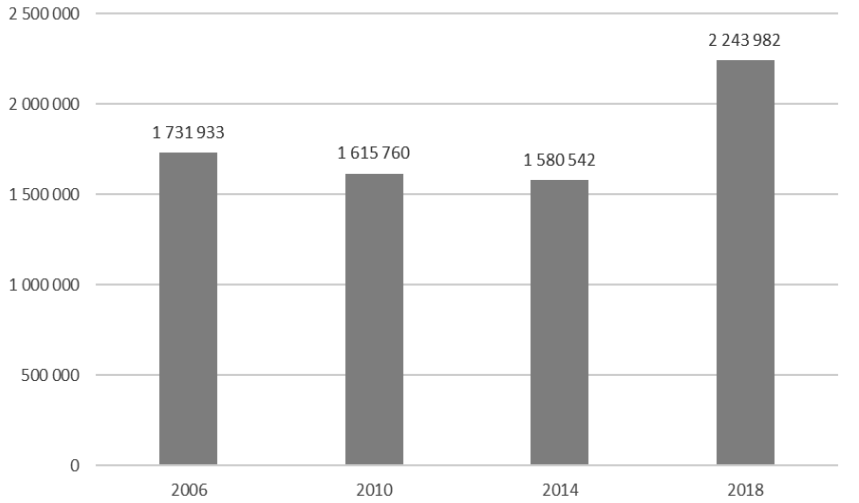
Figure 4
The number of votes in participatory budget ballots in the six largest cities in Poland, 2014–2018



Source: http://www.miasto2077.pl/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Raport-Budz%CC%87ety-Obywatelskie-w-polskich-townach.pdf (accessed 10 April 2019) (Miasto2077 2019).

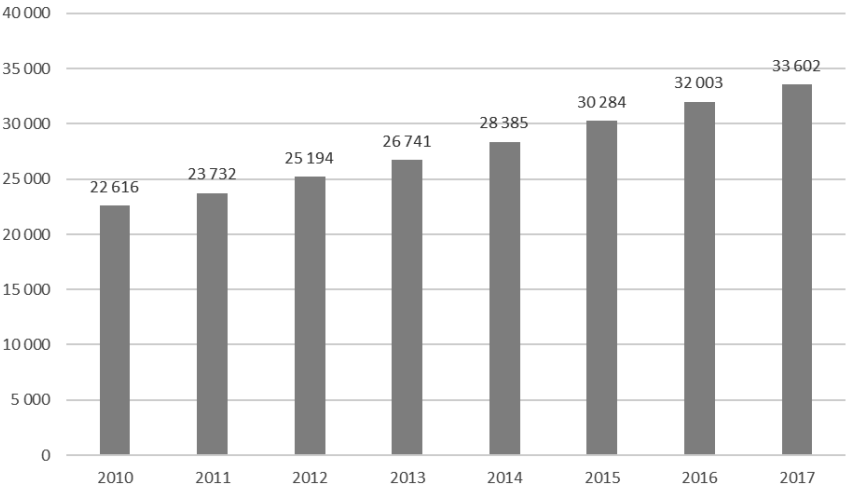
The level of participation in local elections is not stable. After a few elections in which the turnout decreased, there was a sharp increase in 2018 (see Figure 5). This increase, however, should not be viewed as a direct result of the activation of citizens occasioned by the introduction of participatory budget. Rather, it stems from national politics and a deep political division between supporters and opponents of the current government.

Figure 5
The number of votes in local elections in the six largest cities in Poland, 2006–2018



Source: the authors' own study based on Statistics Poland data (GUS, accessed 20 May 2019).

Figure 6
The number of non-governmental organizations (foundations, associations) in the six largest cities in Poland, 2010–2017



Source: the authors' own study based on Statistics Poland data (GUS, accessed 25 May 2019).

At the same time, one can notice a steady increase in the number of NGOs in the six largest Polish cities (see Figure 6). While the turnout in local elections can often result from fluctuations of sympathies in national politics, the growing number of NGOs is the foundation of civil society. Participatory budgets have stimulated interest in the development of residents' immediate surroundings, which could have translated into the creation of new associations and foundations in cities.

Conclusion

Sopot was the first town in Poland to introduce a participatory budget in the form of consultations, enabling residents to submit proposals for investment projects and vote on them. At the same time, the town allocated funds amounting to 1 % of its expenditures to their implementation. The participatory budget in Sopot was introduced in 2011; by the end of 2013 about 70 local governments around the country had made the same decision (Kraszewski and Mojkowski 2014, 8), and the figure for 2018 was over 200[7], including all municipalities with the status of a district and three provincial self-governments. This means that the former introduced participatory budget before it became a statutory obligation.

The participatory budget in Sopot was an impulse that sparked civic activity throughout Poland, which certainly represents a success of local grass-roots democracy. It was not only noticed at the central level but also inspired statutory regulations. The number of projects around the country can be counted in thousands. However, residents cannot be forced to participate in democratic procedures. Participatory budget should be a flexible tool adapted to changing expectations. Although it efficiently complements municipal budget policy, it is not without its flaws. The main question is whether in the coming years, when the number of infrastructure projects will decline, participatory budget can be transformed into a forum for the exchange of ideas about the city, which could be institutionalized in the form of associations and foundations for local development.

Thanks to participatory budget, local residents, as stakeholders, can shape the sustainable development of their towns and cities in a way that is more thorough and varied. This means that it is a powerful tool. Civic budgets are a source of many interesting ideas and projects for urban development and increase opportunities of participation for many residents in the development of the towns and cities in which they live. Although they are broadly advertised, participation of residents in this form of decision-making is still lower than the turnout in local elections.

Local communities have noticed the enormous potential of this tool, but this observation has been made mostly by those residents who have been involved or interested in local issues. It cannot be denied that the implementation of participa-

7 There are 2807 self-governments at all three administrative levels in Poland.

tory budget in such a large number of municipalities without a statutory obligation is a significant success of the development of local government and civil society in Poland. Based on the above data, it can be concluded that Poland is a country that is in a transitional phase between non-participatory and participatory democracy. Participatory budget has strengthened the involvement of a particularly active part of local communities. The number of registered NGOs is steadily growing. The idea of this budget should undoubtedly be strengthened, as evidenced by statutory provisions obliging the largest cities in Poland to implement it each year.

It is reasonable to state that the introduction of participatory budgets in Polish cities has contributed to increasing the activity of residents in relation to local government and local issues. However, it is difficult to say unequivocally to what extent this tool will have a lasting impact on the development of civil society in Poland. For this to happen, this project still needs to be improved. Considerable attention is drawn to urban centres and their positive role in shaping civil society. Municipal authorities actively look for instruments which would activate residents; they also cooperate with non-governmental organizations and strive to get citizens involved in public issues. They are aware that without this involvement they will not fully develop the potentials of their towns and cities. One of the tools aimed at involving residents in decision-making processes, and thus positively influencing their civic participation, is participatory budget.

The effect of the functioning of participatory budgets in Poland is an impact on the life attitudes of residents, changing their often socially passive attitude into an active one. This in turn may not always translate into the emergence of harder and more institutionalized forms of civic activity because, as was stated in the study, participatory budget is one of a number of factors affecting local communities in their activation. Undoubtedly, next to the organized integration impact on local social environments, the participatory budget has great soft-power potential for the impact on these communities which are included in the decision-making process regarding local expenses or investments, which, in turn, is conducive to the development of civil society and which is still in the transformational stage in Poland.

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