

**De Vries, M. S., Nemec, J. and Špaček, D. (2022). *International Trends in Participatory Budgeting: Between Trivial Pursuits and Best Practices*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022. ISBN 978-3-030-79929-8.**

A decade ago, when many European countries were only commencing with participatory budgeting (PB), research literature remained fragmented and rather scarce. The book *International Trends in Participatory Budgeting: Between Trivial Pursuits and Best Practices* provides a unique report on the state of PB in Europe. In particular, it has a focus on Central Eastern European (CEE) cases in a comparative perspective. The book unveils to the reader the beginnings and first steps of PB implementation, and it opens a discussion on its development and durability.

In the first chapter of the book, the authors emphasize the specific nature of the spread of PB. “When the innovative practice spread [...] something strange happened. The main intended effects and the unintended side-effects of PB changed places. The main effects became secondary, and the unintended side-effects became major goals of PB” (p. 16). The book then in-depth details the practices and expected and unexpected results of PB implementation.

The reader is invited to set out on a discovery through thirteen countries: Germany, Italy, Sweden, Belarus, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovenia, and Slovakia. As acknowledged by the authors, these countries were still a “black box” (p. 21), where hardly anything was known regarding PB developments. The authors naturally identified some countries as “old democracies” (Germany, Italy, Sweden) and used them as benchmarks for analysing the PB in the CEE region. They opened this black box, with each chapter dedicated to one country. The book also provides reasons for implementing the PB in each country, information on the stage of its implementation, and concludes with a statement of outcomes, their acceptance, and overall satisfaction with PB among decision-makers and other participants in its implementation and sustention.

The editors of the book are well-known authors in terms of local government, public administration, and budgeting innovations in and outside the CEE region. Following the previously published book *Performance-based Budgeting in the Public Sector* (2019), the editors Michiel de Vries,

Juraj Nemec, and David Špaček have enriched the literature on further budgetary innovation and introduced a book closely oriented towards participatory budgeting, which was announced by Palgrave Macmillan for publication in 2022. Michiel de Vries is the only one of the editors who is mostly active at universities outside of the CEE region. He is a Professor of Public Administration at Radboud University Nijmegen and has been active as a distinguished and extraordinary professor at the Kaunas University of Technology and at the Free State University in Bloemfontein. By no means is he academically distant from the CEE region; indeed, de Vries has been in close cooperation with academic and knowledge expert networks such as NISPAcee (the Network of Institutes and Schools of Public Administration in Central and Eastern Europe). Juraj Nemec is a Professor of Public Finance and Public Management at the Faculty of Economics and Administration at Masaryk University in Brno and at the Faculty of Economics at Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica. David Špaček works at Masaryk University as an Associate Professor at the Department of Public Economics at the Faculty of Economics and Administration.

The editors collaborated with experts on public administration and budgeting innovations from each of the countries analyzed. The author list includes experts as Mstislav Afanasiev, Janina Apostolou, Francesco Badia, Eduard Bakoš, Jože Benčina, Slađana Benković, Arnold Bernaciak, Emil Boc, Jasmina Džinić, Martina Eckardt, Tarso Genro, Daniel Klimovský, Péter Klotz, Maja Klun, Artur Roland Kozłowski, Yuri V. Krivorotko, Soňa Kukučková, Dan-Tudor Lazăr, Miloš Milosavljević, Lucie Sedmihradská, Nataliya Shash, Iwona Sobis, Dmitriy V. Sokol, Željko Spasenić, and Mária Murray Svidroňová. All these authors bring unique insights into each case.

In the first chapter, entitled "*The Diffusion of Participatory Budgeting: An Introduction to this Volume – With an Intermezzo by Tarso Genro, the Mayor of Porto Alegre Between 1992 and 1996*", de Vries, Nemec, and Špaček, explain to the reader how PB was introduced to Europe. In the interview, Tarso Genro talks about the achievements and struggles of PB in Porto Alegre. The editors opened a discussion on the expected and accomplished achievement of objectives and began a discussion on the quality of the next steps and PB's influence on participation, thus granting a certain equilibration to the broader topic. The chapter concludes with key information for the reader in an explanation of a set of questions for each of the countries that are to be addressed in the following chapters.

As noted in the introduction, the first part of the book deals with "old democracies", whereas the second part is devoted to the CEE region with

significantly younger democracies on their path of consolidation. The authors Janina Apostolou and Martina Eckardt dedicated the second chapter to Germany (*“Participatory Budgeting in Germany: Increasing Transparency in Times of Fiscal Stress”*, where PB has evolved to a merely consultative type. The second “old democracy” under examination is Italy in Chapter 3 (*“Participatory Budgeting in Italy: A Phoenix Rising from the Ashes”*) by Francesco Badia. This chapter describes a development of PB from 2001 to 2008, followed by an analysis of rapid decline of its implementation from 2009 to 2014, and then the author debates its return back to a path of growth. The pace of the PB implementation increased steadily between 2015 and 2019. As proposed in the chapter’s name, PB was resurrected. The part of book dedicated to “old democracies” is concluded by the unique example of Sweden in Iwona Sobis’s chapter *“Participatory Budgeting in Sweden”*. After the example of the revival of the PB in Italy, this chapter presents the development of the PB in Sweden between 2007 and 2020. In this period, only 12 municipalities out of 290 had implemented the PB pilot projects, and none continued afterwards. The chapter contains a comprehensive overview of the municipalities that introduced the PB in Sweden, and concludes that, despite the support of the people to the PB, Swedish local authorities ultimately prefer representative democracy with a civil dialogue, which presumably provides sufficient support to decision-making on important local issues.

The part of the book dedicated to the CEE countries begins with chapter *“Participatory Budgeting in Belarus”* by Yuri V. Krivorotko and Dmitriy V. Sokol. This chapter may surprise the reader as it shows that despite the highly centralised local government system and the closed nature of the local budgeting in Belarus, the PB has been successfully implemented in the country. The chapter provides an overview of the financial support provided by the EU and other European institutions and foundations to improve Belarus’ local development. To portray the perception of PB implementation, the chapter includes details of 20 in-depth interviews with representatives of state administrations, local government bodies, and civil society organizations from different localities, spanning from the main city to agricultural regions. The interviews clearly outlined the perceived advantages of PB – such as the promotive constructive interaction and rapprochement with local authorities.

Jasmina Džinić is the author of the chapter entitled *“Participatory Budgeting in Croatia: A Mixed Bag of Good, Bad, and Indifferent”*. The chapter begins with the statement that Croatia is lagging in the number of cities applying PB and in the elaboration of existing PB practices. It offers reasons

for the lack of PB implementation, especially in terms of a lack of goal setting, transparency, and law enforcement – something not present in the majority of European cases (with some exceptions such as Poland and Slovenia) – and mentions the resistance of civil servants. The chapter provides a set of “basic preconditions”, including the strengthening of local capacities, transparency, and openness, as a step towards successful implementation.

In the Czech Republic, a growing number of downgrading municipalities were detected. In the chapter entitled “*Project-Oriented Participatory Budgeting in the Czech Republic*” by Lucie Sedmíhradská, Soňa Kukučková and Eduard Bakoš, the reader is offered an insight into the Czech case. The chapter is based on an analysis of 133 PB cases in fifty-nine municipalities between 2014 and 2019. The eighth chapter is entitled “*The Beginning of a Beautiful Friendship? Participatory Budgeting in Hungary*” and is written by Péter Klotz. Hungary is shown to be a latecomer to PB, with the first case reported in the Budapest district of Kispest in 2016. Slovenia, presented in Chapter 14, is another PB latecomer; However, a legal framework for the PB has been proposed in Slovenia, while not yet in Hungary.

The chapter entitled “*Participatory Budgeting in Poland*” by Artur Roland Kozłowski and Arnold Bernaciak opens up a discussion on question, whether PB should be seen as a municipal budget policy that truly gives opportunities to residents alongside the infrastructural solutions. The chapter reveals a significantly higher number of PB cases in comparison to the rest of the CEE region. Although the chapter naturally leaves the reader without a decisive answer, it nonetheless offers a realistic view of the successes and shortcomings of the PB in its journey to a stable position in Polish society.

Emil Boc and Dan-Tudor Lazăr discussed the current subject of PB online and its opportunities and challenges in “*Participatory Budgeting in Romania*”. This chapter describes the model case of Cluj-Napoca, which was subsequently implemented throughout the country. Despite the limited development of PB in Romania, Boc and Lazăr conclude “there are many challenges to face [and] obstacles to overcome, but the process is alive, successful, and irreversible.”

Mstislav Afanasiev and Nataliya Shash presents “initiative” budgeting in their chapter entitled “*Participatory (Initiative) Budgeting in the Russian Federation*”, which is a synonym for PB being practised by the Russian Ministry of Finance. It provides a broader concept of including citizens in budgeting processes that were brought by the World Bank in its Local Initiatives Support Programme when PB in the CEE region was in its early stages of development.

Similarly, to Russia and Belarus, the initial PB projects in Serbia were externally funded. In *“Participatory Budgeting in Serbia”*, Miloš Milosavljević, Željko Spasenić, and Slađana Benković show that the sustainability of these projects remains questioned because in Serbian local development the PB has not devoted to an ‘indigenous phenomenon’ (p. 241) but stayed rather an imported idea from the “old democracies” and other countries. This chapter does not deny the positive results of the PB in the process of building the democracy, but this research pointed out that the results have not exceeded the expectations yet.

Mária Murray Svidroňová and Daniel Klimovský show in the chapter entitled *“Participatory Budgeting in Slovakia: Recent Development, Present State, and Interesting Cases”* that the level of local government in Slovakia is rather fragmented and uneven among the municipalities, although there is a common trait of a strong mayoral figure. The chapter introduces to the reader the first experiments with the PB in Slovakia and presents the further heterogeneous implementation of PB in the country, supported by a table giving an overview of the PB municipalities based on the year when they introduced the PB (p. 253). The chapter shows concern for the low amount allocated for PB (between 0.04% and 0.39%) but also pragmatically asks whether the benefits of implementing PB are higher than the costs in these conditions.

The case of Slovenia as a relative latecomer is presented by Maja Klun and Jože Benčina, who describe the development of PB in Slovenia. The authors claim that despite the existing legal framework, there are obvious obstacles to PB in the process of becoming a common practice, and PB is based on individual experiment cases at the local level.

The book concludes with the chapter *“Unraveled Practices of Participatory Budgeting in European Democracies”* by Nemeč, Špaček, and de Vries. Here a critical standpoint is expressed towards budgetary decision-making when it comes to interconnections and cooperation between national and local governments. The chapter outlines that only “minor power lies” in the hands of local decision makers, meaning that PB experiments ultimately have very low amounts of funding – in some cases, from external financial sources and grant providers – with resulting difficulties in developing PB further. This all leads to a vicious circle that leaves local politicians with little desire to experiment with PB. This explains why attempts to achieve objectives often produce only minor changes. PB developed in some cases to stagnate, even discontinue, rather than scaling processes, and it has achieved minor changes rather than

resulting in radical changes that would involve marginalized groups into active policy-making.

Although the CEE countries were among the first to experiment with participatory budgeting processes in Europe, the relevant academic literature devoted to the experience of this innovation in the region remained divided into the topics, focused primarily on the establishment of early attempts to apply, and develop PB initiatives. This is exactly where this book fills the gap and is generous when it comes to the amount of data and dates that help categorize and compare cases. Both early-career researchers and advanced readers undoubtedly appreciate the wide scope of references, which include international and local works. These traits give this book the function of inspiring further questions and research in participative and innovative budgeting.

As Tarso Genro said: "Participatory budgeting is not a lost experience, nor is it the beginning of a revolution" (p. 14). Without setting lofty expectations, this book shows both sides of the process, while removing the veil of enthusiastic predictions and presenting the cases of PB in its real light. It also recognizes PB's unquestionable achievements. All these characteristics make this book very rich in information and the most comprehensive overview of PB in the CEE region and in some Western democracies.

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