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Participatory budgeting: Is it a useful tool towards co-creation of public services?

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Abstract

The research aim of the present paper was to check whether participatory budgeting fulfills the concept of co-creation of public services in Poland. To achieve this goal, the following research tasks have been implemented: (1) to identify the legal solutions of citizens' cooperation, (2) to identify the characteristics of participatory budgeting in terms of co-creating public services, (3) to identify the amount and structure of participatory budgeting, (4) to provide cross-country comparison, and (5) to identify difficulties in using participatory budgeting. It has been revealed that in 2021, participatory budgeting was most popular in big cities where it is compulsory. In 2019, Poland (with 2,014 budgets) and Portugal (1,666 budgets) were responsible for 71.69% of all implemented participatory budgets in Europe. In 2018, Europe constituted 48.9% of all worldwide projects, mostly because of their compulsory nature in Poland and Portugal. Participatory budgeting might be successful in its implementation, but needs: involvement of the local community; planning of preparatory activities; communication between all entities involved in the project; appointment of a team that will coordinate the preparation of the participatory budget. According to the research, participatory budgeting is a platform for social activation and providing services better suited to the needs of the inhabitants. Participatory budgeting is a certain form of co-creating public services, as the inhabitants create projects and decide on the allocation of funds for the implementation of public services. Nevertheless, it is a limited version of co-creation, since residents are not involved in all parts of the process. The research covers mainly the years 2018–2022. In the present paper, the following research methods have been used: analysis of scientific literature and normative documents, co-creation methodology, comparative analysis, and statistical analysis.

Introduction

The paper presents findings from the research concerning participatory budgeting as a useful tool of co-creation of public service innovations in Poland. The study is linked with the Popowice Laboratory project (ProPoLab for short). Figure 1 presents detailed roadmap of the ProPoLab as well as the information on project milestones (to the right).

ProPoLab is part of a pilot called “Co-housing of Seniors,” the aim of which is to implement the concept of senior co-housing using the tools applied in the co-creation model. The experiment took place in Popowice (district of Wrocław city, Poland), where local stakeholders and project implementers wanted to develop the space to realize joint plans and meet the stated needs (ProPoLab, 2018, 6).

The final look of the laboratory has to be decided by the stakeholders involved in the project (among others: residents, housing cooperative, municipality, developers, social and church organizations, NGOs). The project implementers encouraged the main stakeholders to develop their own definitions, tools, and models of the joint public services creation, which in our opinion would be a huge step in changing the public awareness in Poland regarding public services. As presented in Figure 1, this joint public service creation consists of:

- co-ideas,
- co-creation,
- co-governance and co-implementation,
- co-evolution,
- co-communication and co-dissemination.

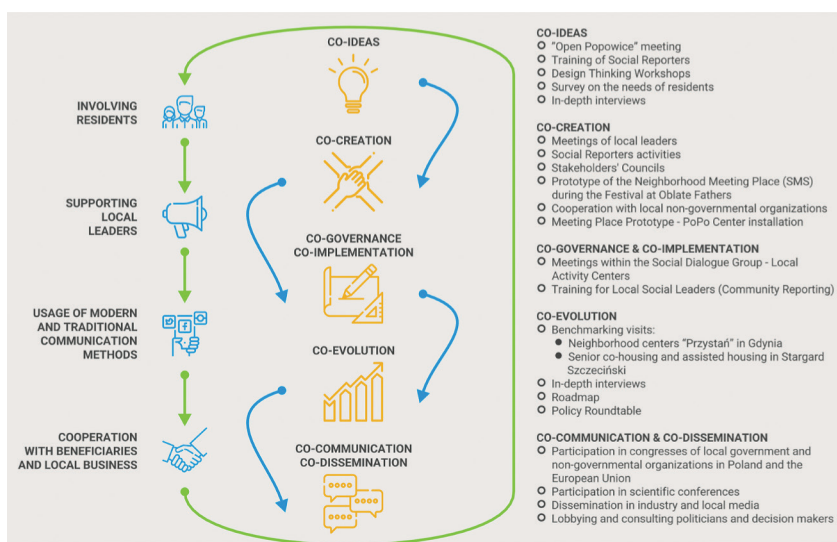


Figure 1. The roadmap of ProPoLab

Source: Wiktorska-Święcka et al. (2021, 186).

First, in order to be well-prepared for the co-ideas part of the project, desk research regarding the issue of co-creation of public services in Poland was conducted. We wanted to check: how co-creation is perceived in Poland, if it is present in scientific literature, what kind of policies could be reached with the help of co-creation, what examples of co-creation can be found in Poland, and whether or not citizens are involved in co-creation activities — and if yes, to what extent.

It is also worth mentioning that “Co-housing of Seniors,” along with other eight individual (but interlinked) pilots, formed up the Co-creation of Service Innovation in Europe (CoSIE) project, which is part of the Horizon 2020. CoSIE is a consortium of 24 partners from 10 countries. According to CoSIE, public service innovations can be achieved by creating collaborative partnerships between service providers and beneficiaries. During the implementation of CoSIE (2017–2021), the collaborative partners tested and developed diverse methods of co-creation in the field of public services (Sakellariou 2008, 8).

Theoretical framework of the research

A breakthrough in the idea of co-creation of public services has its origins in the concept of public safety co-production. It was developed during the 1960s and 70s by Elinor Ostrom and her team, who used the term “co-production” in their research (Bovaird and Löffler, 2016b). Ostrom argued that cooperation between supply, customers, and service parties is a key factor in achieving the desired results (outputs) in most public services. Originally, co-production was defined as

a combination of activities that are provided by both entities specialized in delivering public services and citizens who contribute to them. The former are involved as professionals or “regular producers,” while “citizen co-production” is based on voluntary efforts by individuals and groups to improve the quality and/or quantity of the services they use. (Ostrom and Ostrom, 1977)

It should be mentioned that some researchers do not see significant differences between “co-creation” and “co-production,” treating both ideas as complementary or having a similar connotation (Voorberg, Bekkers and Tummers, 2013). They use them synonymously or jointly. Others see significant differences and in their deliberations separate these concepts with strictly defined lines (Osborne, Radnor and Nasi, 2013).

Here, one can find characteristic of co-creation, which involves the active involvement of citizens in public service delivery by creating sustainable partnerships between local authorities and citizens (Voorberg et al., 2015). Co-creation is also the joint, collaborative, concurrent, peer-level process of producing new value, both materially and symbolically (Galvagno and Dalli, 2014). Another characteristic is the voluntary or involuntary involvement of public service users in any of the design, management, delivery, and/or evaluation of public services (Osborne, Randor and Strokosch, 2016).

In world literature, after the first conceptualizations of the citizen participation in the provision of public services as a phenomenon (Ostrom, 1996; Alford, 1998), the beginning of the 21st century brought researchers who began to analyze the possibilities of using it in various areas of the public sector (social care, health protection, safety, culture and entertainment, city management) and tried to identify the main motives, processes, and effects of using the concept (Pestoff, Osborne and Brandsen, 2006; Pestoff, 2012). Ostrom, laying the foundations for research on co-production, initiated a cycle of research dedicated to this area, extended by co-creation and continued by Pestoff (1998), among others. Thanks to them, it was possible to conduct in-depth research in this area in the following years (Pestoff and Brandsen, 2008; Pestoff, 2012). Recent co-creation and co-production research has evolved from conceptual framework to fact-finding: starting with the analysis of single case studies (Bovaird and Löffler, 2016a; Dybał, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c), then experimental (Jakobsen, 2013) and cross-sectional (Fledderus, 2015), finally extended into international comparative research (Voorberg et al., 2015; Wiktorska-Święcka et al., 2021, 22).

In Polish research, the term “co-creation” appears rarely, not to mention the related term “co-production.” Other terms related to the concept of co-creation (co-design, co-management, co-governance) are not common either. Moreover, they are mostly used alternately and rarely with sufficient attention paid to the nuances and context. This is because, since the adoption of the Act of 24 April 2003 on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work (Ustawa z dnia 24 kwietnia 2003 roku o działalności pożytku publicznego i o wolontariacie, Dz.U. z 2003 r. Nr 96, poz. 873), the dominant term used by scientists to describe the relationship between non-governmental organizations, citizens, and public administration as a specific group of entities involved in the co-creation process is “cooperation.” Therefore, if there is any relationship between the NGO or citizens and the public administration, it is defined as such. Consequently, most Polish research uses the terminology from 2003 (Ciepielewska-Kowalik, 2018, 57; Gumkowska, Herbst and Wygnański, 2005; Gumkowska, 2006; Herbst, 2008; Przewłocka, 2011), Institute of Public Affairs (Makowski, 2007; Kasprzak, 2007; Rymśa, Frączak, Skrzypiec and Wejman, 2007; Niewiadomska-Guenzel, 2008; Olech, 2012).

It should be noted, however, that in Poland, the concept of co-creation/co-production in academic research is taken up — to a varying degree — by a narrow group of scientists (Ciepielewska-Kowalik, 2013; Kaźmierczak, 2014; Sześciło, 2015a, 2015b; Instytut Pracy i Spraw Socjalnych, 2015; Ciepielewska-Kowalik, 2016; Sienkiewicz-Małyjurek, 2016; Austen 2016; Heffner and Klemens, 2017; Gawłowski 2018a, 2018b; Kobylińska, 2018; Dybał, 2021a; Wiktorska-Święcka et al., 2021; Dybał, 2021b). Since the topic of co-creation of citizens and public institutions in providing public services is not widespread in Polish literature, I trust that this paper could be a valuable addition to it.

Research methodology

The lack of satisfaction from the existing possibilities of provided public services prompts public organizations and citizens to look for new ones. Co-creation occurs when citizens participate actively in delivering and designing the services they receive. As noted before, this form of improving existing practices can occur both in the aspect of co-initiating and co-designing, co-deciding, and then co-governance and co-implementing of public services.

In this paper, I focus on the cooperation between citizens and public institutions in Poland through co-creative approach towards the delivery of public services. The aim of the research was to check whether participatory budgeting realizes the concept of co-creation of public services in Poland. To achieve this goal, the following research tasks have been implemented: (1) to identify the legal solutions of citizens' cooperation, (2) to identify the characteristic of participatory budgeting in terms of co-creating public services, (3) to identify the amount and structure of participatory budgeting, (4) to provide cross-country comparison, and (5) to identify difficulties in using participatory budgeting.

The research mainly covers the years 2009–2022 and was conducted using the following research methods: analysis of scientific literature and normative documents, co-creation methodology, comparative analysis, statistical analysis.

Main findings

Since the meaning of co-creation has already been discussed, another term worth explaining is participatory budgeting. Thanks to the participatory budget, the inhabitants of the commune, district, village or housing estate can be involved in allocating local expenses. The authorities reserve a certain part of the budget for the residents, who decide for themselves what to spend the money on. They do this by: participating in identifying the most urgent expenses, submitting their own proposals, and playing a greater role in controlling public expenditure. Unlike with public consultations, in the case of participatory budgeting, the decisions taken by the residents are binding.

There are many different models for such budgeting, each of them varying in the scope of the inhabitants' direct influence. However, the most important thing is to allow the residents to speak. A participatory budget allows one to manage their money more efficiently. It facilitates the identification of the most important needs of the largest part of the inhabitants, allows one to effectively meet these expectations, encourages the integration of the local community, supports the local government community, and raises the level of social trust in local authorities.

Participatory budgeting means greater transparency of local government activities and involving citizens in the process of exercising power. Hence, it seems to be a useful tool towards co-creation of public services.

Unfortunately, in Poland, there is a shortage of legal solutions which allow for the participation of citizens acting in an informal way in the process of providing public services. At the core, there are only three possibilities: village council fund (*fundusz sołecki*), participatory budgeting / civic budget (*budżet obywatelski*), and local initiative (*inicjatywa lokalna*) (Wiktorska-Święcka et al., 2021, 77).

Since 2018, the provisions on the civic budget have been in force in the Act of 8 March 1990 on the Municipal Self-Government (Ustawa z dnia 8 marca 1990 roku o samorządzie gminnym, Dz.U. z 1990 r. Nr 16, poz. 95; hereinafter: the Act on the local government). Pursuant to Art. 5a sec. 3–7, the civic budget¹ is a “special form of public consultation which allow residents to decide on a part of the commune’s expenses.” This choice takes place annually as part of direct voting by residents. The tasks selected as part of the civic budget are included in the commune’s budget resolution. In the course of working on the draft budget resolution, the commune council may not remove or significantly change the tasks selected under the civic budget. Moreover, since 2018, in communes which are cities with poviats rights,² the civic budget is obligatory, but it amounts to at least 0.5% of the commune’s expenditure included in the last submitted report on the implementation of the budget (Ustawa z dnia 11 stycznia 2018 roku o zmianie niektórych ustaw w celu zwiększenia udziału obywateli w procesie wybierania, funkcjonowania i kontrolowania niektórych organów publicznych, Dz.U. z 2018 r. poz. 130). According to Art. 5a clause 7 of this Act, the commune council determines by resolution the criteria to be met by the draft citizens’ budget, in particular: 1. formal requirements to be met by the submitted project; 2. the required number of signatures of residents supporting the project (however, it may not exceed 0.1% of the residents of the area covered by the pool of the civic budget in which the project is submitted); 3. rules for assessing the submitted projects as to their compliance with the law, technical feasibility, compliance with formal requirements and the procedure for appealing against a decision not to allow a project to be voted on; 4. the rules of voting, determining the results and making them public, taking into account that the rules must ensure equality and direct voting (Dz.U. z 2018 r. poz. 130).

It can be presumed that the decision on the compulsory preparation of a civic budget in large cities will have a notable impact on the development of budgeting in the future. This is quite a significant change, and it has only been several years since a civic budget was prepared in Poland for the first time (in the city of Sopot, in 2011).

¹ Due to the fact that the Act uses the phrase “civic budget,” this expression is more common in Poland than “participatory budgeting.”

² There are 66 units of this type in Poland.

The situation will be somewhat different in the years 2022–2023 because of art. 112 of the Act of 12 March 2022 on Assistance to Ukrainian Citizens in Connection with an Armed Conflict in the Territory of that State (Ustawa z dnia 12 marca 2022 roku o pomocy obywatelom Ukrainy w związku z konfliktem zbrojnym na terytorium tego państwa, Dz.U. z 2022 r. poz. 583). Therefore, as a consequence of the Russian invasion on Ukraine and the influx of refugees to Poland, the Sejm (lower house of Polish parliament) adopted regulations allowing cities with powiat rights to: a) suspend the implementation of the winning projects if their implementation has not started yet as of 2022, b) suspend the edition of the civic budget aimed at selecting projects for implementation in 2023, c) resign from the edition of the civic budget aimed at selecting projects for implementation in 2024.

Table 1. Data on civic budget in Poland as of 2021

Size of the city in thousands of citizens	Number of projects		Cities with civic budget (%)	Money spent	
	submitted	won		in millions of PLN	as % of budget expenditure
small (5–20)	1,260	459	28	26.4	0.27
medium (20–50)	2,037	607	51	58.0	0.36
medium (50–100)	1,909	467	75	71.4	0.46
big (100–200)	2,504	600	100	128.6	0.49
biggest (> 200)	8,884	1,612	100	323.3	0.50
Total	16,594	3,745	—	607.7	—

Source: Martela, Janik and Bubak (2022, 14, 51, 53).

According to data on civic budgeting in Poland as of 2021, presented in Table 1, the bigger the city, the more money spent on civic budget. Small cities spent 26.4 million PLN while the biggest — 323.3 million PLN. The same ratio is seen when we look at the money spent as a percentage of city budget expenditure. On average, civic budgets constitute as much as 0.27% of all budget expenditures in small cities. In contrast, big cities spend around 0.5% of their budget expenditures on civic budgets, so as little as the law forces them to spend on the commune's expenditure included in the last submitted report on the implementation of the budget. This also explains why all big cities offer civic budgets, and only 28% of small cities. In medium cities, depending on their size (medium 20–50 thousand or medium 50–100 thousand), civic budgets are implemented in 51% and 75% respectively.

Table 1 also presents data regarding the number of projects, as well as a breakdown of submitted and won projects. Overall, there were 16,594 submitted and 3,745 won projects. Once again, we can see a relationship between an increasing number of projects and the increase of city size. Small cities submitted only 1,260 projects, while the biggest ones — 8,884 projects. In terms of won projects, there were 459 for small cities and 1,612 for biggest cities.

Table 2. Number (percentage) of projects implemented in buildings as of 2021

Place	Size of the city in thousands					Total
	small 5–20	medium 20–50	medium 50–100	big 100–200	biggest > 200	
schools and kindergartens	29 (25.9)	61 (32.4)	11 (17.7)	52 (38.8)	95 (28.7)	248 (30)
libraries	11 (9.8)	9 (4.8)	9 (14.5)	23 (17.2)	130 (39.3)	182 (22)
fire stations	38 (33.9)	31 (16.5)	14 (22.6)	28 (20.9)	23 (6.9)	134 (16.2)
cultural institutions other than libraries	9 (8)	28 (14.9)	6 (9.7)	15 (11.2)	27 (8.2)	85 (10.3)
sports facilities	9 (8)	15 (8)	8 (12.9)	16 (11.9)	20 (6)	68 (8.2)
animal shelters and clinics	2 (1.8)	3 (1.6)	4 (6.5)	2 (1.5)	9 (2.7)	20 (2.4)
hospitals, clinics, emergency	1 (0.9)	8 (4.3)	1 (1.6)	2 (1.5)	4 (1.2)	16 (1.9)
rescue institutions except fire station	0 (0)	7 (3.7)	2 (3.2)	3 (2.2)	2 (0.6)	14 (1.7)
sacral	0 (0)	3 (1.6)	1 (1.6)	4 (3)	4 (1.2)	12 (1.5)
residential	1 (0.9)	1 (0.5)	2 (3.2)	0 (0)	8 (2.4)	12 (1.5)
other buildings	18 (16.1)	34 (18.1)	8 (12.9)	8 (6)	25 (7.6)	93 (11.2)
Number of winning indoor projects	112 (100)	188 (100)	62 (100)	134 (100)	331 (100)	827 (100)

Source: Martela, Janik and Bubak (2022, 59).

Table 2 presents data on the number and percentage of projects implemented in buildings as of 2021. As one can see, in 2021, there were 827 projects implemented in buildings, which represents around 22% of all won projects. From all of them, 248 (30%) were implemented in schools and kindergartens, 182 (22%) in libraries, 134 (16.2%) in fire stations, 85 (10.3%) in cultural institutions other than libraries, 68 (8.2%) in sport facilities. These are the most important indoor investments overall. We can also see that in biggest cities, most of the projects — 130 (39.3%) — involved libraries; schools and kindergartens are in second place, at 95 (28.7%). Medium and big cities spend most on schools and kindergartens — 52 (38.8%) and 61 (32.4%) respectively — and fire stations — 31 (16.5%) and 28 (20.9%) respectively. Fire stations are the most popular in small cities — 38 (33.9%) — and medium cities – 14 (22.6%). In second place are schools and kindergartens.

Table 3. Number (percentage) of projects implemented outside as of 2021

Place	Size of the city in thousands					Total
	small 5–20	medium 20–50	medium 50–100	big 100–200	big > 200	
green and recreation areas	118 (34.4)	174 (43.4)	135 (35.3)	178 (39.8)	533 (46.6)	1138 (41.9)
streets, lanes and yards	95 (27.7)	96 (23.9)	136 (35.6)	131 (29.3)	471 (41.1)	929 (34.2)
around kindergartens and schools	65 (19)	62 (15.5)	74 (19.4)	99 (22.1)	125 (10.9)	425 (15.6)
outdoor sports areas	51 (14.9)	55 (13.7)	25 (6.5)	36 (8.1)	38 (3.3)	205 (7.5)
municipal squares	9 (2.6)	3 (0.7)	7 (1.8)	10 (2.2)	20 (1.7)	49 (1.8)
at a cultural institution	5 (1.5)	10 (2.5)	2 (0.5)	6 (1.3)	10 (0.9)	33 (1.2)
fire station areas	4 (1.2)	5 (1.2)	2 (0.5)	3 (0.7)	2 (0.2)	16 (0.6)
cemeteries	2 (0.6)	3 (0.7)	1 (0.3)	1 (0.2)	4 (0.3)	11 (0.4)
other outdoor areas	12 (3.5)	9 (2.2)	15 (3.9)	6 (1.3)	5 (0.4)	47 (1.7)
Number of outdoor winning projects	343 (100)	401 (100)	382 (100)	447 (100)	1145 (100)	2718 (100)

Source: Martela, Janik and Bubak (2022, 58).

Table 3 presents data on the number and percentage of projects implemented outside as of 2021. Altogether there were 2718 projects which represented around 72% of all projects. From all of them, 1,138 (41.9%) were allocated to green and recreational areas, 929 (34.2%) — streets, lanes and yards, 425 (15.6%) — kindergartens and schools, 205 (7.5%) — outdoor sports areas. These are the most important outdoor places overall. Regarding the city size breakdown, one can notice that — with the exception of medium-size cities (50–100) — money was spend mostly on green and recreational areas, and secondly, on streets, lanes, and kindergartens. Altogether, these were responsible for 62.1% of all projects implemented outside in small cities, and around 87.7% in biggest cities.

For comparative purposes, data on participatory budgets in Europe has been provided in Table 4, according to which in 2019, 5,113 participatory budgets were implemented in selected European countries. Poland offered 2,014 participatory budgets, Portugal — 1,666, Spain — 334, Ukraine — 238, France — 195, Czech Republic — 163, Germany — 140, Italy — 116. These are only the countries with over 100 participatory budgets. At the same time, countries such as Norway, Croatia, or Ireland offered only one participatory budget.

Table 4. The number of participatory budgets by country and as percentage of total for Europe as of 2019

Country	Number of participatory budgets	Participatory budgeting as a percentage of total for Europe
Poland	2014	39.11%
Portugal	1666	32.58%
Spain	334	6.53%
Ukraine	238	4.65%
France	195	3.81%
Czech Republic	163	3.19%
Germany	140	2.74%
Italy	116	2.27%
Albania	54	1.06%
Scotland	33	0.65%
Finland	31	0.61%
Romania	26	0.51%
Estonia	21	0.49%
Slovenia	18	0.35%
England and Wales	15	0.29%
Slovakia	12	0.23%
Belgium	9	0.18%
Northern Ireland	8	0.16%
Sweden	5	0.10%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	4	0.08%
Moldova	4	0.08%
Iceland	4	0.08%
Ireland	1	0.02%
Croatia	1	0.02%
Norway	1	0.02%
Total	5113	100%

Source: Dias et al. (2021, 190–191).

Table 4 also presents the participatory budgeting data of countries as a percentage of the total for Europe. Poland had a 39.11% share, while Portugal — 32.58%. The two countries are responsible for 71.69% of all mentioned projects. Behind them, there is a significant gap, because in third place is Spain, with a 6.53% share. Then, there are six countries with a 1–5% share, and sixteen countries with 0–1%. One may wonder if there is a reason for such a disproportion. Well, the answer is clear. It is worth noting that in Poland and Portugal, participatory budgets are obligatory for some institutions, while in other countries they are voluntary.

Although participatory budgeting tends to be successful in some countries, it should be said that it is not an easy tool to use. Based on international experience and several examples from Polish cities, the following barriers to project implementation can be identified:

1. The need to ensure widespread participation of the local or regional community — proper implementation of the participatory budget must take into account the voice of all social groups interested in the project. No group can be excluded, nor can the public debate be dominated by any one of them.

2. The implementation of participatory budgeting requires the involvement of local politicians, local government officials, and the local/regional community. Different assessment perspectives and levels of knowledge about the financial capabilities of local government units require negotiation skills as well as good will on both sides.

3. Politicians' fear of losing their influence on the shape of the budget — it results from the belief that councilors are losing their monopoly on making decisions regarding the local budget. However, it should be remembered that maintaining constant contact with the local/regional community is among the duties of the representatives. Therefore, the councilor should be perceived not only as a decision-maker, but also as a moderator of the local debate regarding the priorities of a given local government unit.

4. The need to prepare a plan for passing the local government budget in advance. Therefore, it is necessary to prepare information materials for residents, conduct social consultations, and then make choices on the basis of which decisions regarding expenditure are made.

5. Growing expectations of the local community, which may be difficult to meet at the level of local authorities (Budżety obywatelskie, 2022).

Table 5. The number of participatory budgets by continent and as percentage of total as of 2018

Continent	Number of participatory budgets	Participatory budgeting as a percentage of total
Europe	3452	48.9%
Latin America and the Caribbean	2438	34.5%
Asia	734	10.4%
Africa	350	4.9%
North America	75	1.1%
Worldwide	7059	100%

Source: Dias (2018, 20).

Table 5 presents other comparative issues regarding participatory budgeting. This time the data has been presented by the continent breakdown. In 2018, there were 7,059 participatory budgeting projects. Among them, 3,452 have been implemented in Europe, 2,438 in Latin America and the Caribbean, 734 in Asia,

350 in Africa, and 75 in North America. Percentage-wise, Europe was responsible for 48.9% participatory budgeting projects, Latin America and the Caribbean — 34.5%, Asia — 10.4%, Africa — 4.9%, and North America — 1.1%.

As can be seen, both Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean were responsible for 83.4% of participatory budgeting in 2018. What is the reason? Well, in the case of Europe, it is due to the compulsory nature of civil budgeting in Poland and Portugal. Similarly, in the Latin America and the Caribbean, participatory budgeting is obligatory in Peru, the Dominican Republic, Panama, and Ecuador. Moreover, the first participatory budget was implemented in 1989 in the Brazilian city of Port Alegre, and afterwards spread all over the Latin America (Marquetti, Schonewald da Silva and Campbell, 2012).

On the basis of international experience related to the functioning of participatory budgeting, a certain standard of its functioning can be identified. Its use makes it possible to achieve the benefits mentioned above as well as to avoid the barriers that naturally arise when preparing a project. The standard of participatory budget implementation is as follows:

- the selection of investments prepared for implementation within the budget should concern the level as close as possible to the inhabitants (e.g., district);
- the process of preparing a participatory budget should be planned in detail and start well in advance so as to avoid working under time pressure;
- it is necessary to involve a representative local group in the process of preparing the participatory budget;
- it is necessary to systematically monitor the representativeness of groups within the local government unit (LGU) involved in the implementation of the participatory budget. If there is an overrepresentation or underrepresentation of any of the groups, care should be taken to amend it;
- it is necessary to include the substantive part in the preparation of the budget, so as to provide people who will participate in the decision-making process with an optimal amount of knowledge about the financial realities of local government units;
- councilors and civil servants should participate in the process of preparing the participatory budget from the very beginning, starting with the preparation of a work plan;
- the success of the project largely depends on the involvement of councilors, which is why it is important to engage them personally as moderators of the debate within districts or housing estates;
- each decision regarding the preparation of the participatory budget is made public along with its justification. In particular, a justification is necessary if there is a change in the previously-made arrangements. Decision-making transparency is a prerequisite for trust and cooperation within the project;

- in the prepared materials intended for residents, care should be taken to use accessible language and avoid specialist wording which may make understanding the problem more difficult;
- the composition of the team dealing with the preparation of the participatory budget, the division of tasks, and contact details of these people should be made public, so that interested parties can submit their comments/suggestions on the project on an ongoing basis;
- any disputes or discrepancies related to the determination of the implemented investments/priorities should be made public;
- the time allowed for decision making and the resources that will be used to prepare the draft budget should be specified from the outset;
- from the very beginning, one should work on evaluating the project in order to summarize it at the end and use the knowledge in subsequent editions (Budżety obywatelskie, 2022).

Conclusions

The research aim of the paper was to check whether participatory budgeting fulfills the concept of co-creating public services in Poland. It has been revealed that in 2021, participatory budgeting was the most popular in big cities, where it is required by the law. Only 28% of small cities implemented participatory budgets, and 51–75% of medium ones. On average, 22% of budgets are spend on indoor, while 72% on outdoor projects. According to the data, around 70% of indoor projects involve schools, kindergartens, libraries, and fire stations. As to outdoor projects, around 90% of them involve green and recreation areas, streets, lanes, and yards around kindergartens and schools.

In 2019, Poland (with 2014 participatory budget projects) together with Portugal (1,666 projects) were responsible for 71,69% of all implemented participatory budgets in Europe. In 2018, Europe constituted 48,9% of all such projects worldwide, mostly because of their compulsory nature in Poland and Portugal.

Participatory budgeting might be successful when implemented, but needs: involvement from the local community — devoting time, exchanging ideas, willingness to cooperate are crucial for the success of the project; leadership — i.e., taking action, not only by representatives of local government units, but also by councilors, whose participation as moderators and informants in the process of preparing the budget is necessary; planning of preparatory activities; appointment of a team that will coordinate work on the preparation of the participatory budget; communication between all entities involved in the project — due to the large number of entities, the diverse levels of their knowledge and aspirations, this is a particularly important element, the functioning of which may be decisive for achieving the ultimate success.

According to the research, participatory budgeting is a platform for social activation as well as for providing services better suited to the needs of the inhabitants. Moreover, on the basis of the presented data, it should be stated that participatory budgeting is a certain form of co-creation of public services, as the inhabitants create projects and decide on allocating the funds for the implementation of public services. Nevertheless, it is a limited version of co-creation, since residents are not involved in all parts of the process.

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