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Does Participatory Budgeting Still Matter When a Global Threat Emerges Next Door? Evidence from Poland

Abstract: Participatory mechanisms have emerged as an attempt to reduce urban practices that create uneven realities in many cities. In Poland, various instruments of civic engagement in urban policies have been developed to address this challenge. It has been over ten years since one such instrument, participatory budgeting (PB), was implemented in 2014 in the six largest Polish cities. This paper aims to explore the extent to which PB has developed in these cities and how resistant it has become to global threats such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. The empirical analysis, based on surveys and desk research, reveals the residents' engagement in PB is largely influenced by a series of shifts in both local and international politics. The findings suggest that the triggers of participation often refer to critical moments in local policy that temporarily reshape urban life. Likewise, the factors that hinder the success of PB are linked not only to internal barriers but also to upheavals in global politics, which may reduce interests in local matters.

Key words: participatory budgeting, urban policy, war, pandemic, COVID-19

1. Introduction

Despite much has already been published about participatory budgeting (PB) worldwide, there is still considerable room for further research of the mechanism (Baioichi, Ganuza, 2014; Bartocci et al., 2022; Murphy et al., 2023). This paper examines PB in the largest Polish cities for the period 2014–2023. Participatory budgeting, understood as a decision-making process that engages citizens in prioritizing public spending, was first implemented in Poland, in Sopot, over a decade ago (2011). Among the largest cities that followed Sopot and subsequently implemented PB were Poznań, Wrocław, Łódź, Warszawa, Kraków, and Gdańsk. Initially, PB was applied in selected neighborhoods of these cities and since 2014 it has been instituted across all six. The paper compares PB in these largest cities because, apart from Sopot, they have the longest experience with developing this mechanism in Poland.

Given that participation – defined as direct or indirect engagement of people in decision-making about public issues in which they have interest (Quick, Bryson, 2016) – has become increasingly pervasive, this study raises the question of to what extent PB has boosted civic involvement in the largest Polish cities over the last decade, particularly in the face of changing external circumstances. The period of analysis begins in 2014 and ends in 2023, when the world was recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic and grappling with Russian aggression against Ukraine. In Ukraine's neighboring countries, such as Poland, the consequences of the war were particularly evident (Didkowska et al., 2022; Duszczek et al., 2023).

In that sense, the paper sheds new light on participatory budgeting in Central and Eastern Europe, where the pandemic and the war have considerably changed the situation not only in foreign policy, but also in domestic affairs, including education, the housing market, and social engagement (Rahimi, Talebi Bezmin Abadi, 2022; Spiegel, 2022; Trojanek, Gluszak, 2022). The study examines whether participatory budgeting still matter when a global threat emerges next door. I hypothesize that the role of PB increases when significant events occur in local politics and decreases when major events take place in global politics.

In Polish cities there is a general tendency among public officials to portray the rise of participatory practices as the result of their purposeful actions (Ossowski, 2017). This paper shows something different. It argues that, in the largest Polish cities, the triggers of participation are linked to critical situations in local politics. Likewise, the factors that hinder the success of PB are associated not only with internal barriers but also with upheavals in global politics, which may reduce interest in local matters.

2. Literature Review

In the literature, two main theoretical perspectives regarding participation can be identified: the affirmative approach and the critical approach. The affirmative discourse highlights the benefits of participation and draws on numerous practices from cities around the world. Estimates suggest that participatory budgeting has been implemented in more than 11,000 cities globally, with Porto Alegre, Brazil, serving as the original point of reference (Touchton et al., 2023). According to Cabannes (2019), one of the key proponents of the affirmative approach, participatory budgeting is likely to continue expanding. Certainly, there are multiple drivers for people to participate. Beyond individual motivations, collective incentives also play a vital role, including the need to address public problems, the enhancement of bottom-up initiatives, the advancement of dwellers' rights, and support for a more equitable sharing of public funds (Abers, 2000; Quick, Bryson, 2016). In some cases these benefits have been realized, but in many others, they have not (Soukop et al., 2021; Lee, Min, 2023).

Although the affirmative discourse is underpinned by a prevailing attitude of unconditional faith in the participatory paradigm (Bryson et al., 2013; Curato et al., 2017; Sintomer et al., 2012), its drawbacks have been highlighted by advocates of the critical approach (Font, Galais, 2011; Wan 2018). Among these critics, Pateman (2012, p. 14) has pointed that we are witnessing “an expansion of participation and an extension of citizenship.” On the surface, we appear to be inundated with participatory rhetoric, which often only seemingly include those who should be entitled to. Dudley (1993, p. 7), another representative of the critical approach, has argued that “community participation may have won the war of words but, beyond rhetoric, its success is less evident.” In a similar vein, Shapiro (2017, p. 80) has addressed the predominantly consultative nature of participation and points out that some instruments, like “deliberative polls and citizens' juries have no authority to decide anything.” Baiocchi and Ganuza (2014) have also argued that although PB could serve as an institutional link between urban dwellers and local governments, in reality, its empowerment function remains

limited. The critics have also underlined that, in many cases, participation “was manipulated by the dominant public actor” (Koch, Steiner, 2017, p. 168), failed to benefit the poor (Saguin, 2018), or even “harmed those who were supposed to be empowered” (Cooke, Kothari, 2007, p. 1). Matamanda and Chinozvina (2020) have reached a similar conclusion, arguing that participation favors elites while marginalizes the poor in decision-making processes. In short, the adoption of participatory approaches is not always consistent with the expected outcomes (Cleaver, 1999; Biggs, 1995). Thus, one of the key questions to ask when discussing this phenomenon is: what factors drive the expansion of participatory mechanisms, given that their results can be ostensible or even illusory.

From a theoretical perspective, the foundation for implementation of PB in Poland depended on two key factors. First, it was the politicization of major local issues, which brought people closer to attainable solutions. Politicization is understood here in the sense provided by Marcuse (2009, p. 194) as “clarifying the political action implication,” including the provision of up-to-date information to all interested parties and interventions in the media. To engage people in an important issue, that issue must be communicated to the public in a clear and comprehensive manner. In that sense, mobilization and awareness-rising through politicization tend to be more effective in attracting public attention than other conventional forms of public outreach, such as educational materials or long-term information campaigns.

The second factor is the ability to raise a particular issue through a “concrete narrative.” Such a narrative is defined by Mergler et al. (2013, p. 38) as referring to a specific situation or problem in a city that requires intervention. When a problem arises, a concrete narrative empowers stakeholders to focus on solid evidence. A concrete narrative helps to get to the heart of the problem and elevate it to the top of the urban policy agenda.

The analyses of the collected data reveals that support for participatory budgeting in six of the largest Polish cities is correlated with a number of political twist and turns, driven both by the politicization of urban problems and the use of concrete narratives. Likewise, the decline in support for PB can be attributed, not only to internal barriers, but also to global turmoil, which may reduce public interest in local matters.

3. Methods

The study is based on two methods: desk research and an on-line survey. The survey was designed to collect opinions from officials responsible for participatory programs in the six analyzed cities. The survey was conducted between December 2018 and January 2019 and consisted of 21 questions – 2 open-ended and 19 closed-ended questions using a Likert scale and multiple-choice format. Respondents were asked to evaluate various aspects of participatory activities. The survey was distributed to 526 officials working in departments responsible for the implementation, monitoring, and consultation of participatory activities with residents. A total of 210 responses were received, resulting in a response rate of 40%. Among the respondents, 68% were women and 32% were men. In addition to the survey, the study also drew on

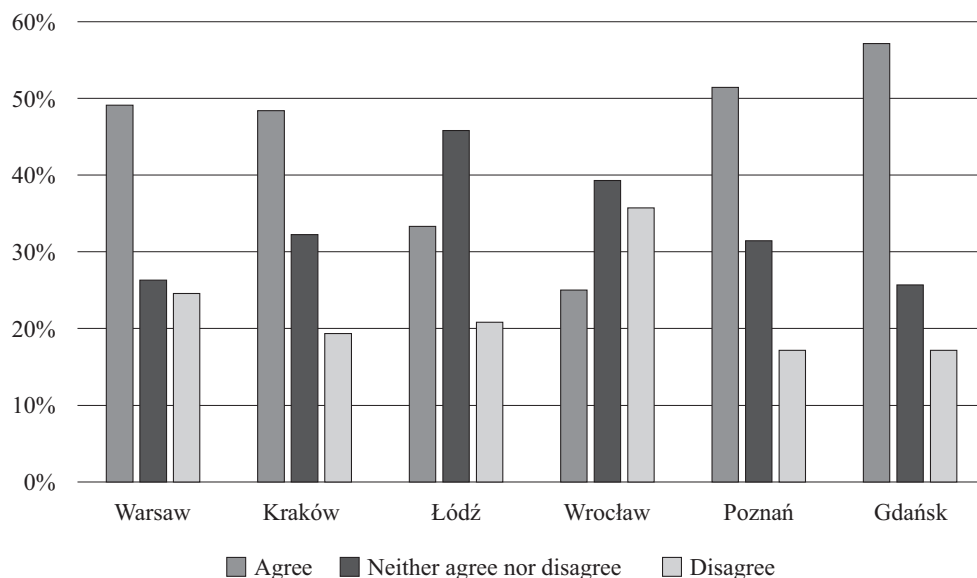
desk research based on data published by municipal offices. These data were aggregated and analyzed by the author. The desk research made it possible to assess the scale and dynamics of civic engagement in participatory mechanisms between 2014 and 2023, and to identify the key drivers and barriers influencing participation. The collected and presented research findings reflect an administrative and institutional perspective.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Triggers of participation

In order to identify the triggers of participation in the largest Polish cities a series of on-line surveys was conducted. Respondents were first asked to assess the overall level of citizen activity in the studied cities. In all six cases, citizen participation was predominantly perceived as moderate. Although one might expect that civic engagement in Poland has evolved since the political transformation of 1989, the study indicates that this pattern has not changed significantly. In four of the six cities, nearly 50% of respondents reported that residents' involvement is inconsistent and tends to increase periodically in response to critical events in local politics (Fig. 1). These events can be called local watershed moments and typically involve significant occurrences such as referenda and local conflicts. When such moments arise, residents tend to become more active and mobilize around specific issues, only to withdraw afterward. Only for

Figure 1. Participation increases as a result of critical events in local politics



Source: Elaborated by the author.

some individuals, a watershed moment serves as a catalyst for sustained engagement in subsequent local initiatives. In this context, watershed moments provide new insight into patterns of citizen activity and social behavior. They may trigger participation and significantly raise the level of citizen activity for some period of time, but they do not have a long-term impact on the involvement of residents. A more detailed explanation of this phenomenon is provided in the sections below, which examine each of the studied cities individually.

4.1.1. Warsaw

In Warsaw (1.8 mln residents) the initial support for participatory budgeting was correlated with growing opposition to the bureaucratic inertia of the former city mayor Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz. Over the years, signs of public discontent had been steadily increasing. Persistent issues such as the controversial restitution of public properties to pre-communist owners, commonly referred to as “wild reprivatization” (Górczyńska, 2018), along with instances of legal corruption and fraud (Kusiak, 2019), spatial segregation and gentrification of deprived areas (Górczyńska, 2017), served as triggers of grassroots urban movements. The politicization of this unrest, initially driven by urban activists, was eventually embraced by the Warsaw Community of Local Governments, culminating in a 2013 referendum on the dismissal of Mayor Gronkiewicz-Waltz. Although the referendum was non-binding due to a voter turnout of only 25% – below the 29% threshold required for validity – it marked a watershed moment in Warsaw’s urban policy. Notably, 94.8% of participating voters supported the mayor’s removal, sending a strong message to city officials. The referendum served as a wake-up call, prompting officials to acknowledge the need for more bottom-up, citizen-driven mechanisms of urban governance. In this context, participatory budgeting, implemented in Warsaw a year later, was perceived by city officials as an effective tool for easing tensions between the municipal administration and some residents.

4.1.2. Kraków

The turning point for participatory governance in Kraków (0.8 mln residents) occurred in 2013 when the City Office submitted a bid to host the 2022 Winter Olympics. Although grassroots urban movements had begun to emerge in Kraków several years earlier, the Olympic bid served as a catalyst that prompted more immediate and coordinated action from activists. Opponents of the bid protested against anticipated public expenditures and intrusive urban interventions that would accompany hosting the Olympics (Piotrowski, Lundstedt, 2016). The politicization of the issue, along with a convergence of watchdog activists around a shared set of concerns, acted as a strong mobilizing force. This collaboration gave rise to a citywide anti-bid campaign and the formation of the informal group “Kraków Against the Olympics,” later renamed “Common City” (*Miasto Wspólne*). The organization successfully pressured

local authorities to submit the Olympic bid to a public referendum. Held in 2014 as a grassroots initiative, the referendum resulted in nearly 70% of voters rejecting the bid. The outcome was legally binding and had a concrete impact: the city withdrew its candidacy for the Olympics. The residents' decisive victory in this contentious confrontation with city officials became a defining moment in Kraków's urban policy. It not only demonstrated the potential of civic mobilization but also laid the groundwork for subsequent participatory initiatives, including the introduction and support of participatory budgeting.

4.1.3. Wrocław

Wrocław, the third largest city in Poland (0.6 mln residents), experienced two triggers that significantly boosted civic participation. The first was the Central European flood of 1997, which affected over 30% of the city's area. The devastating impact of the flood became a catalyst for unprecedented solidarity among residents, who collectively worked to protect the city from severe water damage. In this context, the struggle against the natural disaster marked a turning point in the city's social fabric, fostering cooperation and mutual support among citizens. The shared traumatic experience enhanced the sense of community and gave rise to a number of grassroots initiatives in the aftermath of the flood. This bottom-up shift toward collaboration had long-lasting effects, as it helped integrate residents and, in many ways, laid the foundation for another watershed moment nearly two decades later. In 2016, Wrocław held the title of European Capital of Culture, a designation awarded in 2011 following a highly competitive selection process among several candidate cities. This competition mobilized a wide range of stakeholders, including more than 2,000 volunteers. The organizational experience and civic engagement that emerged from the numerous cultural initiatives implemented under the European Capital of Culture program served as an informal knowledge base for developing participatory mechanisms in Wrocław. Thus, both the 1997 flood and the 2016 cultural initiatives played pivotal roles in shaping the city's participatory landscape.

4.1.4. Łódź

The participatory turn in Łódź (0.6 million residents) developed in parallel with similar processes in Warsaw. Disgruntled residents began expressing their dissatisfaction with local issues through politicized narratives and targeted civic action. One of the earliest informal grassroots movements in the city was the "Group of Certain People" (*Grupa Pewnych Osób*), which emerged in 2006. Initially, the group focused on neglected urban spaces and socio-spatial inequalities, gradually laying the groundwork for participatory processes in Łódź. As a result, a growing number of activists became involved in raising awareness of urban disparities and highlighting the gap between ordinary residents and decision-makers. Reflecting the demands of local activists, some political parties began to use the emerging urban unrest as a form of

soft power against the incumbent city leadership. Indirectly, this rising discontent culminated in a 2010 referendum aimed at removing Mayor Jerzy Kropiwnicki from office. The referendum, held in January 2010, resulted in 95% of voters supporting his dismissal. Although the newly elected mayor, Hanna Zdanowska, initially followed many of her predecessor's policies, she also capitalized on the momentum of public sentiment by prioritizing demands for greater civic participation. Soon thereafter, new participatory instruments, such as local civic initiatives and participatory budgeting, were implemented in the city.

4.1.5. Poznań

When a trigger for civic participation emerges, it often sets off a series of localized actions among residents. This was the case in Poznań (0.5 million residents), widely recognized in Poland as the cradle of urban participatory movements. The city was the birthplace of two prominent civic organizations – *Investments for Poznań* (*Inwestycje dla Poznania*) and *Us – Poznanians* (*My – Poznaniacy*) – both established in 2007 to advocate for the “right to the city” (Mergler et al., 2013). These movements played a central role in politicizing urban issues, particularly in response to controversies surrounding the city's new *Study of Conditions and Directions of Spatial Development*. Soon after, the two groups formed Poland's first bottom-up urban coalition and launched a coordinated campaign in the 2010 local elections. Although they received 9.5% of the vote, they did not succeed in electing any candidates. Nevertheless, to paraphrase Walt Whitman, whatever these movements did not achieved in this case, they gained the experience of fight. Riding the wave of growing participatory enthusiasm, Poznań hosted the 1st Congress of Urban Movements in 2011. This event became a milestone for participatory activism in Poland. What unfolded in Poznań at that time set the tone and direction for similar initiatives across other major Polish cities in subsequent years. The Congress crystallized the collective ambition of Poland's largest urban centers to enhance citizen involvement in local policymaking. It triggered a new mode of urban thinking, including concrete narrative, and the practical need to scale participatory models in other cities (Mergler et al., 2013). As a result, participatory budgeting was first introduced in Poznań in 2012. Following this case, in 2014, participatory budgeting was implemented in the other five of the largest Polish cities.

4.1.6. Gdańsk

In Gdańsk (0.48 million residents), the politicization of urban issues that typically spurred support for PB in Poland's other major cities was less pronounced. This relative lack of political mobilization can, in part, be attributed to historical factors. Gdańsk is famously known as the birthplace of *Solidarity*, the first independent trade union in Central and Eastern Europe founded in 1980. Since then, no other civic event has matched *Solidarity* in terms of public engagement, making it a lasting benchmark

in the city's collective consciousness. Although various civic initiatives have emerged in Gdańsk over the years, their development largely followed participatory trends initiated in other cities rather than stemming from locally politicized issues. In fact, the trigger for a participatory turn in the Tricity metropolitan area (comprising Gdańsk, Sopot, and Gdynia) first appeared in neighboring Sopot. In 2011, Sopot became the first Polish city to introduce participatory budgeting. Gdańsk adopted a similar mechanism in 2014. Initially, the mayors of both cities expressed reservations about PB, but they later became active supporters. In this way, the introduction of participatory budgeting in both Sopot and Gdańsk was driven more by bottom-up civic efforts than by institutional initiative.

4.2. Fluctuation of residents' participation

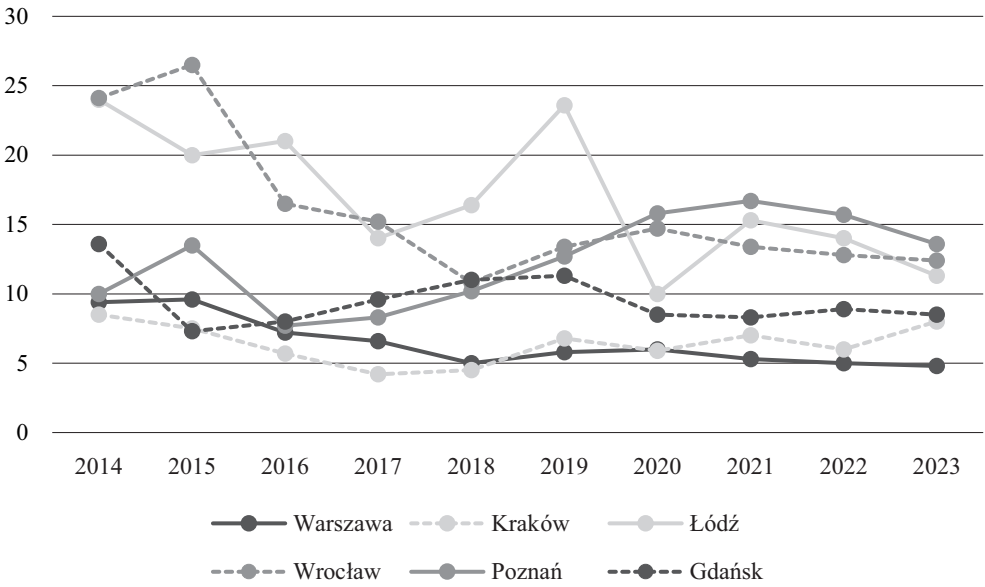
The above examples support the hypothesis that citizen participation in Poland's six largest cities tends to increase in response to significant events in local politics. This trend becomes particularly evident when examining the correlation between voter turnout in PB from 2014 to 2023 and the timing of major local political developments (Fig. 2). The data show that, up to 2023, voter turnout in PB initiatives never exceeded 30% in any of the six cities. Participation levels fluctuated between 4% and 26%, and in most cases, the highest turnout occurred shortly after a pivotal event in local policy. In Łódź and Wrocław, cities that lead in this comparison, the sharpest decline of the rate occurred 2–3 years after the initial implementation of participatory budgeting. This pattern indicates that, although pivotal political events can lead to temporary surges in civic engagement, ensuring sustained participation over time poses a persistent challenge.

The study also indicates that civic engagement in PB tends to decline during periods of major global crises. This pattern is evident when comparing voter turnout in PB following the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in 2020 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Both events diverted public attention away from local governance toward broader existential concerns. In 2020, when COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic, PB turnout declined in four of the six cities analyzed. Similarly, in 2022, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which led to an unprecedented influx of Ukrainian refugees into Poland's largest cities, PB turnout decreased in five out of the six cities. These declines can be attributed to a shift in public focus, as residents prioritized immediate responses to global crises over engagement with local participatory mechanisms. This suggests that external shocks, especially those with far-reaching social or economic consequences, can significantly dampen local civic participation.

In the first half of 2022, approximately 70.2% of Polish households were involved in providing assistance to refugees from Ukraine. The most common forms of support, reported by 80% of those households, included in-kind donations and financial contributions. Around 6% of households assisted with job placement, navigating daily tasks, and caring for ill relatives. An estimated 3% volunteered at welcome centers and refugee support points, while another 3% hosted Ukrainian refugees in their

homes, offering shelter under their own roofs (Statistics Poland, 2022). The highest numbers of refugees were accommodated in private homes in Warsaw (119,500), Wrocław (106,900), and Gdańsk (59,800) (Union of Polish Metropolises, 2022). In this context, the involvement of residents from Poland’s largest cities in supporting Ukrainian refugees represented a significant redirection of civic energy. Their engagement shifted toward immediate humanitarian aid, which, in turn, indirectly contributed to a diminished emphasis on other forms of civic activity, including participatory budgeting.

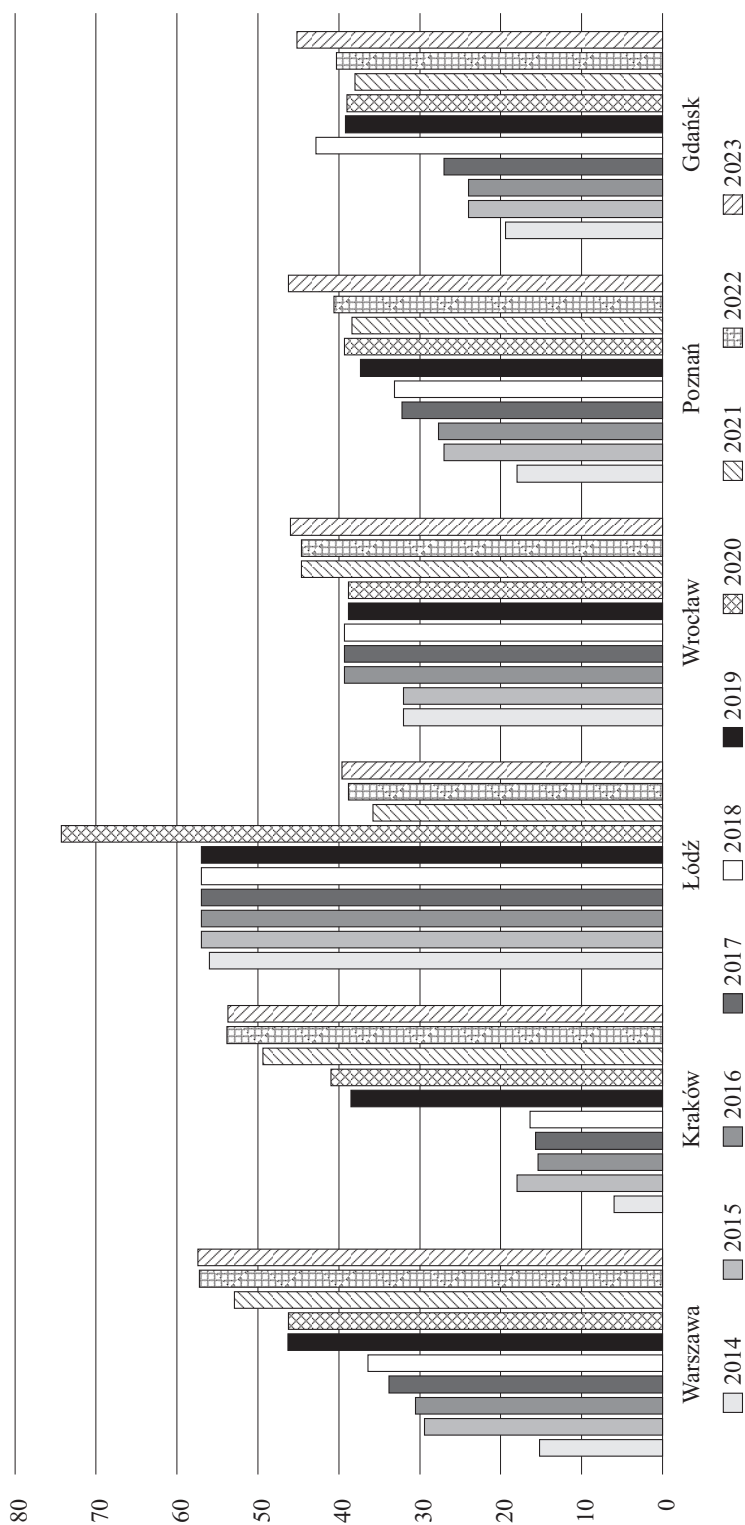
Figure 2. Voter turnout in Participatory Budgeting 2014–2023



Source: Elaborated by the author.

Interestingly, no other incentive, including financial ones, has proven effective in significantly increasing voter turnout in participatory budgeting (PB). Between 2014 and 2023, more than 1.9 billion PLN (approximately 504 million USD) was allocated to PB initiatives across Poland’s six largest cities. However, this total expenditure is not particularly remarkable when compared to international cases. For instance, in 2006, the city of Belo Horizonte, Brazil, dedicated 1.2 million USD to PB in each of its districts (Baldersheim, Kersting, 2012). Although the overall volume of PB funding has increased in five out of the six studied cities (see Fig. 3), this has not translated into a corresponding rise in civic participation. In fact, resident involvement has either declined or remained stagnant. This pattern is particularly evident in Warsaw. Despite a nearly fourfold increase in *per capita* PB spending, from 15 PLN in 2014 to 57 PLN in 2023, voter turnout dropped from 10% to just 4.8% over the same period. This suggests that increased financial allocations alone are insufficient to sustain or stimulate greater citizen engagement in participatory processes, particularly in the absence of strong social or political mobilization.

Figure 3. Value (PLN) of participatory budgeting *per capita* in the largest Polish cities over the years 2014–2023



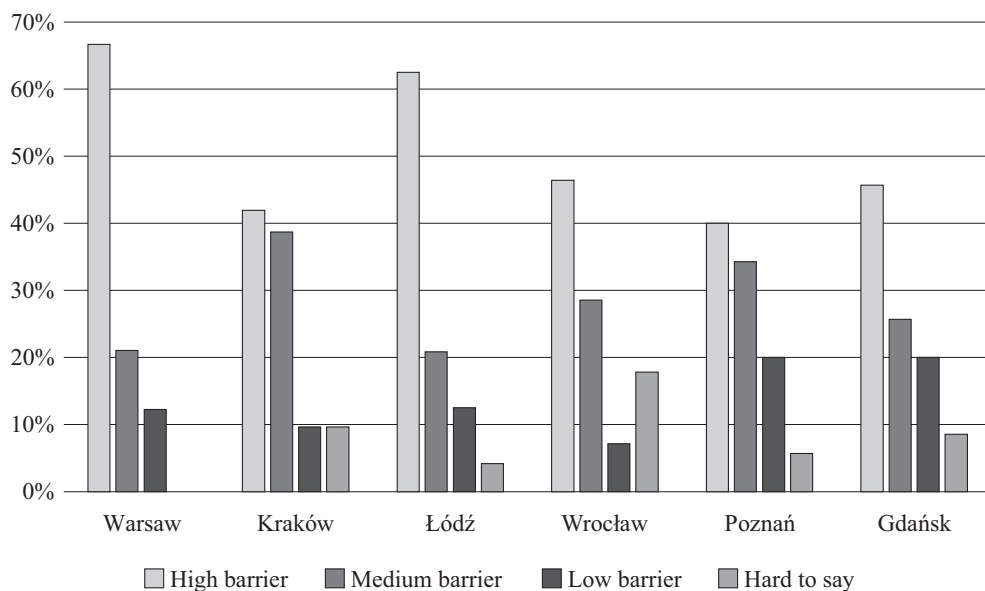
Source: Elaborated by the author.

4.3. Barriers of PB

It appears that in Poland's largest cities, a significant increase in participatory budgeting activity is unlikely to occur. This situation can be attributed to a combination of external and internal obstacles. The external barriers are primarily linked to global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, whose impacts on civic engagement have been discussed earlier. While the nature of such global disruptions may change over time, they tend to divert residents' attention away from local governance issues and weaken participation in mechanisms like PB. The internal obstacles to PB are primarily related to procedural and structural barriers within the PB process itself. Three of these barriers appear particularly significant. First, PB has generally produced small-scale improvements when compared to broader urban investments, which limits its ability to mobilize large numbers of residents. This observation aligns with the findings of Oliver (2000), who argued that civic participation tends to diminish in larger urban contexts. Put bluntly, for many residents, the perceived benefits are not worth the effort. For example, in Warsaw, the most active participants in PB tend to be residents of newly developed housing estates in areas where even basic infrastructure remains insufficient. In contrast, residents of districts where essential amenities have already been provided by municipal authorities show considerably less interest in PB. This suggests that PB participation is often driven by immediate and unmet needs, and where those needs have already been addressed, the incentive to engage declines.

Second, delays in the implementation of selected projects represent a major barrier to increasing stakeholder participation. In Warsaw and Łódź, over 60% of respondents, and in Kraków, Wrocław, Poznań, and Gdańsk, over 40%, identified such delays as a serious obstacle to civic engagement (Fig. 4). Respondents also highlighted the lack of consul-

Figure 4. Delays in implementation of PB projects as barriers of participation

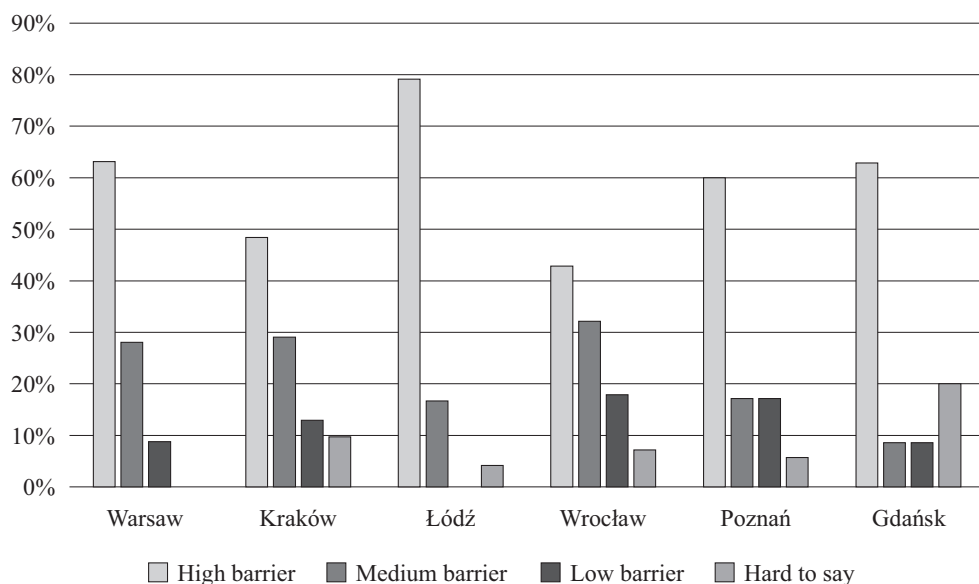


Source: Elaborated by the author.

tation regarding modifications to projects before they are executed as a further concern. These issues – prolonged timelines and superficial deliberation – undermine public trust and contribute to declining levels of commitment among residents. This is consistent with research suggesting that decreasing participation often reflects residents' responses to previous negative experiences, rather than a fundamental disinterest in participatory budgeting itself (Swapan, 2014; Nared, 2020).

Finally, excessive bureaucracy has been identified as a significant barrier to participation. On average, 60% of respondents across the six cities indicated that red tape and organizational silos within municipal departments hinder the effectiveness of participatory mechanisms (Fig. 5). Although the scale of large cities naturally requires complex administrative structures, these structures can also hinder participatory processes. Even if we “reject the idea that political power within cities resides in city hall” (Davidson, Martin, 2014, p. 6), procedural constraints remain central to how participatory processes are shaped and implemented. On the one hand, institutional frameworks impose necessary structure and help ensure that participatory budgeting is managed and evaluated in a professional manner. On the other, these frameworks can significantly limit the flexibility and responsiveness of the process (Mazeaud, Nonjon, 2019). Although PB procedures have been revised and improved multiple times in all of the investigated cities, more than 40% of respondents perceive these adjustments as an unstable stream of regulatory changes that ultimately undermine the process. As a result, PB is frequently perceived less as a genuinely participatory instrument and more as a public poll, plebiscite, or competition. Paradoxically, the trial-and-error approach to refining PB has, in many cases, deepened existing obstacles rather than resolved them.

Figure 5. Excessive bureaucracy in PB projects as barriers of participation



Source: Elaborated by the author.

In an effort to improve the participatory budgeting mechanism and increase citizen engagement, the Polish government enacted an amendment to the Act of 11 January 2018. The revised law mandates that PB, referred to in Poland as civic budgeting, is compulsory in all municipalities that hold the status of cities with poviát rights. According to the legislation, the value of PB must amount to at least 0.5% of the total municipal budget. As a result, since 2019, PB has been mandatory in 66 Polish cities with poviát status. Despite this legislative effort, participation levels have not increased significantly. This outcome further supports the study's central finding that citizen engagement in PB is more likely to rise in response to critical events in local politics than as a result of top-down administrative mandates. In other words, institutional compulsion alone is insufficient to stimulate meaningful civic involvement in the absence of motivating social or political catalysts.

5. Conclusion

This paper sets out to identify the main drivers of civic engagement in PB across Poland's six largest cities, as well as the reasons behind residents' withdrawal from such involvement. The article puts forward the hypothesis that the role of PB increases when significant events occur in local politics and decreases when major events take place in global politics.

The findings reveal that citizen participation is closely tied to critical events in local politics, so-called watershed moments, that disrupt the *status quo* and galvanize local communities. A common feature of these moments is their ability to catalyze mobilization and trigger short-term increases in civic activity. Importantly, watershed moments in local politics have not only driven citizen participation but have also influenced the adoption of policy tools such as PB. In the cities examined, PB was often introduced in the aftermath of such moments, reflecting a perceived need among municipal authorities to respond to heightened civic expectations. However, while PB may temporarily elevate levels of participation, it has not succeeded in fostering long-term engagement. This is evident in the declining voter turnout in PB over time, with participation peaking shortly after watershed moments and falling as their influence fades. The fluctuating nature of engagement in participatory budgeting is explained by both internal and external barriers. External disruptions, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, have diverted public attention away from local matters resulting in an additional drop in voter turnout in PB. Internal obstacles, particularly those related to administrative inefficiencies and procedural complexity, have further discouraged sustained involvement.

The study underscores that civic engagement in PB remains vulnerable to both administrative constraints and shifting public priorities in response to global crises. To ensure the sustainability of participatory budgeting, it is essential to broaden the base of participating residents. Diversifying engagement would not only enhance the legitimacy of PB but could also expose previously overlooked urban challenges, offering new opportunities for more inclusive and responsive governance.

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Czy budżet partycypacyjny nadal ma znaczenie, gdy pojawia się globalne zagrożenie? Dowody z Polski

Streszczenie

Mechanizmy partycypacyjne rozwinęły się jako próba ograniczenia praktyk miejskich, które tworzą nierówności społeczne w wielu miastach. W odpowiedzi na to wyzwanie również w Polsce pojawiły się różnorodne instrumenty partycypacyjne. Minęło ponad dziesięć lat odkąd jeden z takich instrumentów, budżet obywatelski (BO) został wprowadzony w 2014 r. w sześciu największych polskich miastach. Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu przeanalizowanie, w jakim stopniu BO został wdrożony w największych polskich ośrodkach i czy jest on odporny na globalne zagrożenia, takie jak pandemia COVID-19 i wojna na Ukrainie. Analiza empiryczna oparta na badaniach ankietowych i danych zastanych potwierdza, że zaangażowanie mieszkańców w BO jest w dużej mierze stymulowane szeregiem nagłych zwrotów w polityce lokalnej i globalnej. Czynniki wywołujące partycypację odnoszą się do ważnych wydarzeń w życiu politycznym miast. Z kolei determinanty ograniczające zaangażowanie w BO, wynikają nie tylko z wewnętrznych barier, ale także z zagrożeń w polityce globalnej, które zmniejszają zainteresowanie sprawami lokalnymi.

Słowa kluczowe: budżet partycypacyjny, polityka miejska, wojna, pandemia, COVID-19

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