

PARTICIPATORY BUDGET – AN EFFECTIVE TOOL FOR SOCIAL PARTICIPATION AND BUILDING LOCAL IDENTITY. A CASE STUDY OF THE CITY OF LODZ

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Abstract

The aim of the article: The main aim of the article is to present the essence and significance the institution of civic budget as a tool not only allowing citizens to actively participate in the process of deciding about the directions of spending public funds, but also a tool to determine the directions of social expectations, the essence and importance of social participation.

Hypothesis: The hypothesis accepted in the study stipulates that the growing popularity of the civic budget makes it an effective tool for social participation.

Methodology: The study was based on a literature review, legal acts, information on the functioning of the civic budget in Lodz as well as a questionnaire conducted among the city residents.

Results of the research: The civic budget in Lodz has been functioning for eight years, and during this time it has been constantly contributing to the idea of citizen involvement in the decision-making process. Although the budget procedure itself is undergoing numerous corrections and transformations, as the ongoing political, social and macroeconomic changes must be taken into account, it is still a basic tool enabling active participation and involvement of citizens. The matters it concerns are important to the community, and the civic budget offers an opportunity to express their opinions on key issues. The conducted survey indicates that Lodz is a positive example of using the participatory budget mechanism in the city management process. The sustained high (on a Polish scale) turnout confirms the inhabitants' interest and willingness to change the public space, thus positively influencing the building of a sense of local community.

Keywords: participatory budget, social participation, local development, local government.

JEL Class: H61, H72, H76.

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INTRODUCTION

The basis of social coexistence is social participation, i.e. active participation in the life of the local community. This may mean the involvement of citizens in matters important to the community and an opportunity to express their opinions on key issues. All this is possible, among other things, thanks to the civic budget tool.

It has been eight years since the institution of the civic budget was established in Lodz. It was then that for the first time the inhabitants received from the local authorities a tool enabling them to participate in the decision-making process concerning public funds. By submitting their proposals for investments, they not only had an opportunity to indicate some areas which, in their opinion, required more attention from the city authorities, but they also got a chance to implement their own ideas and that way have a real impact on the image of their current environment. They also received an instrument for expressing their preferences defining the directions which the city development should follow.

The civic budget has grown into the landscape of the city and it is impossible to imagine the situation that it disappears. Currently, its ninth edition will be implemented. Citizens of Lodz will be able to choose from as many as 717 projects. Among them, the ideas to invest in green areas that can improve the comfort of rest and recreation or the appearance of the streets in the city¹ enjoyed great popularity during the submission process. Generally, there are lots of low-budget projects in this edition, which might have an impact on the quality of residents' life, e.g. the square in Jaracza Street, enlargement of Staszic Park, or the pocket park in 84 Pogonowskiego Street, flowering meadows (e.g. in Old Widzew in Szpitalna Street) or planting trees along the streets (e.g. Tymienieckiego or Brzezinska Street) or flowering hedges (www1).

The increase in the number of submitted projects (e.g. in 2020 Lodz citizens selected 261 projects for implementation) proves the importance of this tool for both, the local authorities and the citizens of Lodz (www2).

The purpose of the article is to present the essence and significance the institution of civic budget as a tool not only allowing citizens to actively participate in the process of deciding about the directions of spending public funds, but also a tool to determine the directions of social expectations, the essence and importance of social participation. The article assumes the hypothesis that the growing popularity of the civic budget makes it an effective tool for social participation. To verify this objective, the article was divided into three parts. The first one focuses on issues relating to social participation, with particular emphasis

¹ Currently, according to the draft law on amending certain laws to strengthen the climate dimension of urban policy of 19.08.2021. 30% of all implemented investments under the civic budget should be so-called green projects.

on its benefits for civil society. The second part characterizes the institution of civic budget and its role in building local ties. The third part presents the results of the study in which the civic budget was assessed. It was illustrated by the example of the inhabitants of Lodz.

This article is based on a literature review, legal acts, information on the functioning of the civic budget in Lodz, and a survey conducted among the city's inhabitants.

1. CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE BENEFITS OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

„Civil society is a civic space that occupies an intermediate place between state power and the private sector. It is not here that we vote and it is not here that we sell and buy, but it is here that we talk to our neighbors about walking our children across the road, planning a charity event for school, we wonder if our parish could set up a shelter for the homeless, organize summer sports competitions for children (...). This society is formed by individuals and groups freely associated of their own free will, striving to create a common ground for action” (Piechota, 2001: 360–361). This is one of the definitions that best illustrates the concept of civil society and, consequently, social participation. It covers many aspects of social life and functioning of citizens in the public space. According to the definition adopted by the World Bank, a civil society is understood as a society identified with groups or organizations (formal or informal), which, as an entity independent from state structures, postulates diverse social interests (Wojciechowska, 2016: 2). For a society to be considered civil, there should be a number of interrelated factors (Czyż, 2007: 180):

- the sovereign should be the people who exercise power – direct or indirect,
- the elected authority shall act on the basis of established law,
- institutions exist to guarantee the protection of human rights and civil liberties,
- citizens are guaranteed the opportunity to participate in society.

One of the elements of active participation in social life is social participation, which is the basis of democracy (Siemiński, 2007: 37). It is treated as participation, that is, taking part in events concerning a given community. It is a broad notion, referring to every area of individual activity, especially to the participation of citizens in political and social life. In the literature we can distinguish three areas of citizen involvement in public affairs, including local ones (Gralak, 2018: 154–156; Arnstein, 1969: 217; Gaber, 2019: 189).

The first of them consists in the provision of information to citizens by local authorities and their passive access to information. This is the basic level of participation, which is at the same time the obligation of local authorities in Poland

and an important aspect in building relations and trust between the local government and its residents. It is realized through the commune's website, Public Information Bulletin, brochures, leaflets or notice boards.

The second area of participation is the consultation process. In this area citizens can express their opinions and enter into dialogue with local authorities on a bilateral basis. The decisions taken by the local authorities are discussed with the citizens before they are approved. As a result of consultations, they can be changed. This is achieved by organizing consultation meetings, debates, surveys among residents or discussions on internet forums. This level of consultation is the implementation of Article 5a of the Act on Municipal Self-Government, which clearly states that „in other matters important to the municipality, consultations with the residents of the municipality may be held on its territory” (Dz.U. 1990, poz. 95 z późn. zm.).

The third area of participation, a crucial from the perspective of civil society, is the participation of residents in the decision-making process. It is an authentic partnership in creating solutions to local problems and making key decisions about the local community. The most important tools here are the participatory budget and local initiatives.

For social participation to be effective and efficient, it should fulfil the following principles (Kalisiak-Mędelska, 2015: 279–280):

- the principle of good faith – postulates the maintenance of pure intentions in the conduct of all activities. They cannot be a tool for political manipulation, and all disputes and conflicts should be resolved in accordance with established norms;
- representativeness and equality – every resident has equal rights to participate in the participation process;
- principle of fairness – all parties in the process should present transparent and fair positions and opinions;
- documentation – consists of meticulous documentation of all participatory activities – meetings, reports or proposals. Each participant should have the right to inspect them;
- the principle of partnership – all parties involved in the process count on serious and fair treatment from the authorities and local government administration. Disrespect or hostility on the part of the administration is unacceptable;
- legality – all participants in the process, especially local government bodies, should comply with the legal standards in this regard.

It should be noted that participation not only increases the responsibility of the authorities for their decisions by making them transparent, but it also has a significant impact on citizens who, by participating in the decision-making process with public authorities, cease to be only the addressees of actions taken

on their behalf. They become conscious participants of the planning process, providing the authorities with valuable information on social expectations and co-creating the concepts, plans or undertakings that will be implemented.

The process of citizen participation in local government policy in Poland is becoming more and more common. This brings a number of benefits, such as (Szaranowicz-Kusz, 2014: 3):

- increasing the real control of citizens over power – legitimizing decisions;
- the activities carried out by the local government become much more understandable for the inhabitants, and thus there is an increase in mutual trust and understanding between the local government and the residents;
- cooperation between the public sector and citizens increases the possibility of obtaining new and original solutions to many problems. This enables a more precise definition of priorities and better management of resources;
- increasing citizens' awareness of their rights, responsibilities and interests, as well as developing the civic attitudes and skills of residents;
- mitigating and eliminating disputes through better access to information.

At the same time, it may be noted that „the higher the indicators of social political involvement, the better the condition of the political system, the deeper its social legitimacy. The greater the involvement of citizens in the broader social life, the higher the level of social capital, which is associated with a higher level of economic development, a wider access to high positions, goods and values, and generally translates into a higher quality of life for individuals and societies” (Kinowska, 2015: 11–12). The above benefits of the participation process relate not only to the local government unit, but also to specific citizens, people participating in it. The active participation of all participants in the process benefits primarily the entire local government community. One of such forms of participation is the civic budget, which is an active form of engagement in civic activities.

2. PARTICIPATORY BUDGET AS A TOOL FOR FULFILLING SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS AND BUILDING LOCAL IDENTITY

With the restoration of local government in Poland in the 1990s, conditions were created for a democratic process of voluntary citizen participation in managing public affairs. One of the aspects of citizen participation is to decide on the direction of spending some of the public funds made available to the local government. Active participation of citizens in deciding on matters important for the area is considered to be the essence of civil society (Leśniewska-Napierała, 2019: 1). This is made possible by the civic budget, which allows the citizens to participate in the process of implementation of selected projects, mainly at the

local level. For the first time the institution of citizens' budget appeared in Poland in 2011, when the City Council of Sopot issued a resolution on the introduction of citizens' budget (Stokłuska, 2015: 4). In order to implement the participatory budgeting procedure, the City Council Committee on Citizens' Budget was established. Residents of the city were to decide on the allocation of PLN 3 m., which was then 1% of the city budget (Sobol, 2017: 174). The vote was attended by 7% of those eligible to vote and more than 500 proposals and suggestions for the 2012 budget were submitted. Then, the officials evaluated them in terms of feasibility and selected a dozen for each of the four districts of Sopot. The above process was repeated in 2012, and following Sopot also other cities such as Dąbrowa Górnicza, Poznań and Elbląg (Kębłowski, 2013: 6). The mechanism and procedure of operation of the civic budget was created through many years of work, discussions and dialogue resulting in the exchange of examples of both good and bad practices in this area between local governments, creating an instrument tailored to the needs of local communities. And although the institution of civic budget has been functioning, as it was emphasized earlier, since 2011, it was not until 2018 that it was regulated by law. Thus, it raised importance of this instrument, systematizing the previously introduced solutions. Until then, the procedural solutions were in force, which could be found in the definition presented by the World Bank, according to which the civic budget is a process in which citizens formulate their demands and postulates, and thus influence the structure of budget expenditure through social dialogue and discussion (www3). At present the regulations concerning the principles of civic budget functioning are regulated by the acts on municipal (Dz.U. 1990, poz. 95 z późn. zm.), powiat and voivodeship self-governments (Dz.U. 1998, poz. 91 z późn. zm.). According to the definitions found in the literature, the civic budget is a separate part of the budget of a local government unit earmarked for the initiatives of citizens and investment projects submitted by members of a given community, in which the decision-making process plays an important role, clearly determining the preferences and priorities of the local community and its control and monitoring (Sintomer et al., 2008: 168; Kębłowski, 2013: 8; Harkins and Egan, 2012: 4). Thus, a participatory (civic) budget is a process that allows citizens to directly decide on spending a predetermined amount of public funds. Depending on the situation of a given local government unit, the amounts vary from several hundred thousand to even PLN 25 million, rarely exceeding 1 percent of the city budget. The civic budget is distinguished from other tools of inhabitants' co-determination in financial matters by the decisive high influence of inhabitants on the activities undertaken. It is the highest level of social participation (Długosz and Wygnański, 2005: 11). The civic budget is undoubtedly an example of a mature form of social participation based on consultation and co-determination. It is a conscious „decision-making process in which the inhabitants co-create the budget of a given

city, thus co-determining the distribution of a specific pool of public funds” (Kębłowski, 2013: 8). Its construction should take into account several key principles that will distinguish it from other practices involving the local community in public life (Kalisiak-Mędeńska, 2016: 358).

Therefore, we can indicate the principles, characteristics of the civic budget, which should be met so that the residents have a real impact on the management of the local government unit in which they live. These are (Szaranowicz-Kusz, 2014: 10):

- transparency of the rules applied,
- discussion between the local government and the inhabitants of a given local government unit,
- the amount of cash held within the budget,
- no administrative discretion,
- application of transparent rules,
- the need to monitor implemented projects.

It should also be remembered that the civic budget is not a one-off project, its characteristic feature is cyclicity. It is also important that the decision of the inhabitants is final and not subject to changes and modifications by the public authorities. Discussions undertaken at the design stage concern the directions of allocation of the available pool of funds. Residents have a real impact on the appearance of their surroundings and feel a real influence on the appearance of their immediate surroundings, thus social bonds are strengthened. Benefits are also achieved by local government authorities, and the increased level of citizen trust enables constructive dialogue resulting in real investment solutions.

Summing up the above considerations, since 2011, when the institution of civic budget first appeared in Poland, it has been one of the most developing tools of social participation. It plays an increasingly important role in the financial policy of many Polish cities. It leads to an increase in citizens’ awareness in the aspect of self-determination and influence on their immediate environment. The development of civil society forces constant changes in the public finance management sector. There is a tendency to move away from electoral democracy, where citizens are treated as voters, and put more emphasis on the creation of a democratic society, in which the citizen is invited to create the common good and to co-decide about it.

Currently, the civic budget functions as a permanent element of the municipal policy, and one of the cities that is slowly growing to become a leader in participation is Łódź.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE INSTITUTION OF PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING IN LODZ . EVALUATION OF THE TASKS UNDERTAKEN ON THE BASIS OF THE CIVIC BUDGET

The institution of the civic budget in Lodz began in 2014, when the first edition of the participatory budget took place. Even before the introduction of the budget, the city had been facing a number of problems, including spatial chaos and social problems. In this context, the introduction of the budget was not just a remedy, but the event can be seen as an opportunity to partially improve the quality of life of citizens (Brzeziński, 2017: 144). Moreover, this particular form of inhabitants' participation in the budgetary decision-making process has been considered as one of the most essential elements of the Development Strategy for the City of Lodz 2020+ (Kalisiak-Mędelska, 2016: 364). Preparations to introduce the procedure had been under way since 2012, when the City Council adopted a resolution on commencing preparatory activities and shaping Lodz's version of the budget (Brzeziński, 2017: 145). The next step was the appointment by the Mayor of the City of a Team for the Development of Principles of Operation and Implementation. It consisted of 23 members, including members of the city council and housing estate councils. The task of the team was to work out the rules of the first edition of the civic budget as well as to develop promotional and educational campaign addressed to the residents. The campaign was conducted in 2013 by non-governmental organizations, and as part of it, workshop meetings with residents were held, during which they were informed about the idea and possibilities of the participatory budget. Based on an annual ordinance of the Mayor (www4), the budget takes the form of public consultations where residents can propose and select tasks. Every resident of the city above the age of 16 may vote. The minimum threshold of support for a given task was set at 15 votes. After the projects are selected for implementation, an additional stage is the budget evaluation which consists of assessing the procedure and making necessary changes to ensure that the budget meets the needs of the inhabitants, and that the funds are fairly redistributed among the various parts of the city.

In the first edition of the budget, the pool of funds amounted to PLN 20 million, which constituted only 0.58% of the total income. At the time, 25% of this amount was earmarked for all-city tasks, while the remaining PLN 15 million was allocated to each of the districts of Lodz, i.e. Bałuty, Górna, Polesie, Śródmieście, Widzew. They received PLN 3 million each. The cost estimates of the proposed tasks were not limited and could even amount to the entire available pool of funds. In the voting 135 thousand citizens of Lodz took part, and in the majority of cases they voted via the Internet – over 460 thousand votes against less than 100 thousand in the traditional way. 908 projects were submitted, of which 759 qualified, and 47 were implemented, including open multifunctional playgrounds for the inhabitants and the Lodz city bike project. In the subsequent

editions, PLN 40 million was left at the disposal of Lodz citizens, i.e. twice as much as in the first edition (Kalisiak-Mędelska, 2016: 108). It should be noted, however, that in the context of the city's income, this is only 1% of the funds. The principle was retained whereby 25% of the funds were allocated to city-wide tasks and the rest to individual districts of the city.

In 2016, the 3rd edition introduced restrictions on the cost of a single task, which in the case of general city tasks amounted to 25% of the funds available, while in the case of local tasks the cost of a single item could not exceed PLN 1.5 million (Leśniewska-Napierała, 2017: 112). The 3rd edition also included the possibility for the applicants themselves to agree on proposals concerning the same area or building. This created conditions for possible combination of similar projects or their treatment as independent ones (Kalisiak-Mędelska, 2016: 364). From year to year, the number of submitted projects increased, and in 2017 it reached 1572.

In the fourth edition of the budget local tasks were replaced by estate tasks. Each of the 36 auxiliary units of the city was calculated according to the formula: PLN 200 000 for each housing estate + an additional amount depending on the number of inhabitants (Brzeziński, 2017: 147). Consequently, the amounts for individual housing estates varied from PLN 230 000 to PLN 1.9 million. In the 4th edition no limitations as to the amount of the estimated task costs were introduced with regard to housing estate tasks.

In 2019, the city celebrated five years of the civic budget. During this time, 709 projects worth a total of PLN 190 million were implemented. 26 kilometers of streets and sidewalks were renovated, 113 sports facilities, 42 playgrounds, 44 educational rooms, 24 fitness zones and many other modern investment were implemented (www5). Many resident-friendly zones were created, e.g. in Dąbrowa and Retkinia, where several brine graduation towers were built in 2017–2019, as well as the development of green areas was changed by adding new benches, elements of small architecture or new waste bins (www6).

Considering the projects implemented so far in Lodz through the participatory budget, it can be concluded that most of them are loosely connected with the city's development strategy, or not connected at all. In other cities, e.g. Poznań, the submitted projects are examined for compliance with the city development strategy and the Map of Local Needs (Kalisiak-Mędelska 2016: 110). The situation is slightly different in Lodz, which is exemplified by the relevant examples.

One of the first and, at the same time, most interesting projects implemented thanks to the civic budget in Lodz is the so-called Lodz city bike. The project was submitted and positively considered in the first edition of the budget in Lodz in 2014. It assumed the definition of bike rental locations and corridors served by the public bike (www7). It was also intended to recruit a system supplier and build

a network of rental stations equipped with bike racks and smart control panels. The cost of the project was estimated at PLN 3.12 million (www7). The cycling community in Lodz argued that these funds were insufficient, prompting the city to subsidize the project from its own funds. At the same time, this caused a delay in the investment, which was realized 2 years later. In August 2016, 100 finished bike stations equipped with 1000 bikes were opened. In the following years, more stations were launched and new bike models were purchased. In 2017, Lodz was the fifth city in Europe in terms of the size of its bike sharing system. In 2020, the operation of the Lodz Public Bike was suspended due to the failure of the public bike tender. In 2021, Homeport became the new operator, providing 1500 bikes at 150 stations (www8). The public bike in Lodz is a solution that has been well received by the citizens of Lodz. It was also an investment of great importance in terms of the civic budget, requiring additional funds from the city budget.

Another interesting investment was, reported in 2014, the creation of a free, city-wide Wi-Fi network. The task required the installation of hot-spots of the network around elements of city infrastructure. The cost of the project amounted to PLN 0.5 million. In the next edition in 2015, a project assuming free city internet also in MPK-Lodz buses and trams was assigned for implementation. An amount of over PLN 1 million was allocated to the project.

As part of the 3rd edition of the civic budget, the project concerning the development of the area for the future amusement park in Zdrowie Park was the winner (www9). The cost after verification of the project amounted to PLN 0.7 million and it was planned to build a bicycle track, fitness zone, animation and entertainment in the park. In 2016, the city bike project also won again, but this time concerning the eastern part of the city (the area of Widzew, Nowosolna, Olechów and Janów). PLN 1.24 million was allocated for the implementation, which was then about 3% of the available pool of funds of the entire participatory budget. Another project characteristic for this edition was the purchase of 80 public AED defibrillators, which were to be available in buses and trams of public transport, plans and transfer points in the city center, as well as in clinics, schools and kindergartens. For the purposes of the project 680 thousand zlotys were allocated (www10). Each of the 80 defibrillators had to be installed and marked with information and first aid instructions, which, together with the price of the device amounted to PLN 8000. Additionally, as part of the project, an amount of PLN 40 thousand was allocated for an information campaign promoting first aid skills (www11). Thanks to the project, Lodz became the city with the largest network of portable defibrillation devices available in public space in Poland (www12).

In 2017, as part of the fourth edition, the development of public space in the Zdrowie Park was continued, and as part of another project nearly PLN 2 million was allocated for this purpose. The intention was to modernize the recreation zone

and to extend the relaxation zones to other areas of the park. An important project selected for implementation was to provide patients from all over Lodz with specialist consultations and other pro-health and preventive measures (www13). PLN 1.5 million was earmarked for these activities, under which the citizens of Lodz could benefit from free eye examinations, cardiological and dermatological consultations as well as rehabilitation programs and treatments. The services were available in city medical centers in various parts of the city, e.g. in Bałuty, Widzew, Górna or Polesie. The project enjoyed great interest, which resulted in the implementation of its second edition in 2018. Once again, the project involving another stage of works on the Lunapark, this time in Józef Piłsudski Park, won. Within the 5th edition, the project involving assistance for free-living cats in Lodz was also continued. A peculiar, yet justified project was the purchase of a heavy rescue and fire-fighting vehicle for the Lodz firefighters. The project amounted to PLN 1.1 million and the equipment was purchased for the Lodz-Wiskitno Voluntary Fire Brigade.

In the last two editions of the civic budget, projects were implemented to combat smog (PLN 350,000), to create a leisure and recreation square in Śródmieście (PLN 112,000), to build a 24-hour bathroom with a washing and drying facility for homeless people in Lodz (PLN 637,000) or to launch a tourist tram line (www14).

In order to examine the level of citizens' involvement in the socio-political life of the city and to learn their opinion on the way the city is managed, a survey was carried out. It was conducted among 50 randomly selected inhabitants of Lodz² who answered 22 questions. The survey was divided into two parts. The first one focused on the general evaluation of the city. The respondents had an opportunity to assess the management of public funds by the City Council in the recent years, indicate the most needed investments which should be carried out in Lodz or name those which in their opinion were the least needed. The second part concerned directly the civic budget in Lodz. The respondents evaluated, among others, the system of voting procedures, indicated the elements of the process which require improvement and many others.

In the section on evaluation of the city, respondents were asked to rate how the City Hall has handled public funds over the past few years. The chart below shows residents' assessment of officials' performance in managing public funds.

² Among the respondents, 68% were women. The people taking part in the survey were of various ages, with the largest proportion, 46%, being in the 18–25 age bracket. Less numerous group were people aged 50–59 (18%), aged 35–49 (16%) and aged 26–34 (14%). A small proportion of respondents, 6%, were over the age of 60. Respondents had different levels of education. 50% of respondents had higher education, 40% had secondary education, 8% had vocational education, and only 2% had elementary education. A vast majority of respondents live in Lodz for more than 20 years. This percentage was as high as 76%.

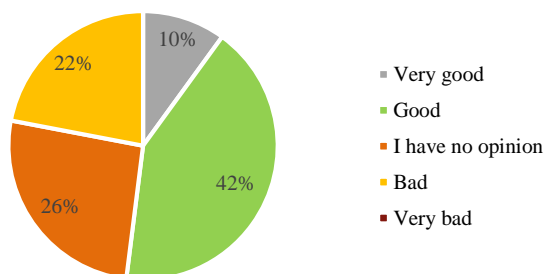


Chart 1. Assessment of the City Hall's performance in terms of spending public funds

Source: own elaboration based on the questionnaire results.

More than half of the respondents gave a positive assessment of the officials' performance in managing public funds. On the other hand, 10% of them were of an opposite opinion, but not a single person assessed the actions of officials as very negative. A large part of the respondents – every fourth person – did not have an opinion on this issue.

A related question asked the respondents to generally evaluate the performance of Lodz City Hall employees³. The majority of respondents (56%) gave an average mark of 3 for the officers' performance. 18% of the respondents gave 2 and 4 marks each. A small percentage of respondents (6%) gave the officers a failing mark, and only 2% a very good mark. This shows that residents are quite critical of the City Hall staff.

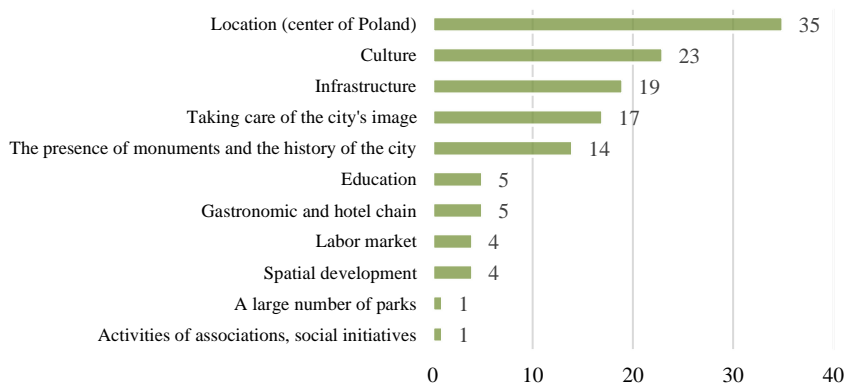


Chart 2. Lodz's assets as indicated by inhabitants

Source: own elaboration based on the questionnaire results.

³ The study used a rating scale from 1 to 5, where 1 meant the lowest rating and 5 meant the best.

In the next question, respondents were asked to identify up to three of the city's most important assets they were most satisfied with.

The question was semi-open-ended, i.e. apart from choosing the offered answers, the respondents could enter their own. The largest number of responses referred to Lodz's location in the center of Poland, which many people identified with political and geographical advantages. A large number of respondents were also satisfied with the cultural institutions in Lodz and the infrastructure consisting of bicycle paths and leisure facilities. These choices seem justified, given the number of museums, theatres and other cultural institutions actively conducting their activity in the city. In turn, as part of the infrastructure in the city, it can be observed an increase in the number of bicycle paths and the so-called woonerfs, i.e. public spaces combining the functions of a street, promenade and meeting place for residents.

The next question was the opposite to the previous one, as within it the surveyed residents indicated up to three aspects that they felt needed improvement.

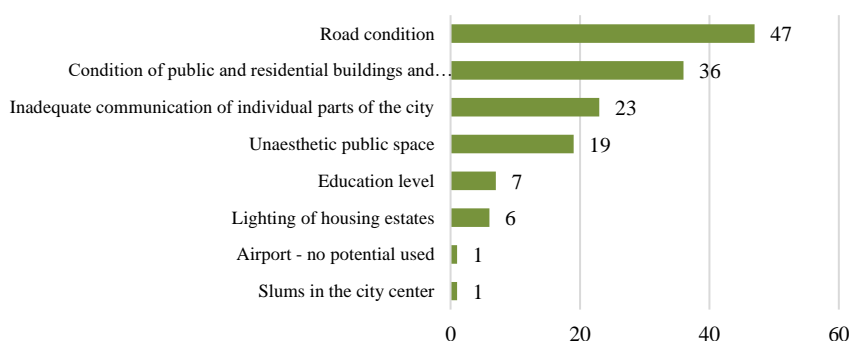


Chart 3. Areas of the city in need of improvement

Source: own elaboration based on the questionnaire results.

Analyzing the respondents' answers one may state that almost all of them indicated that the condition of roads needed improvement. A very large group of respondents also mentioned the poor condition of public buildings, housing and monuments. In these aspects, the city has been carrying out actions aimed at improving them for a long time, for example through the construction of the W-Z route or revitalization programs (www15). However, it is possible that the area of degraded urban fabric is so extensive that the actions are carried out on an inadequate scale. Time also plays a key role in this case, as it is impossible to make up for decades of neglect of public aesthetics and roads in just a few years.

According to the respondents, insufficient access to particular parts of the city remains a significant problem. In this area, the cities also made lots of reforms, including in 2017 (www16), but immediately after their implementation there were lots of negative opinions from residents (www17). In their opinion, individual bus and tram lines should remain unchanged. The punctuality of individual lines after the reform is also subject to reservations.

As for the first part of the survey, residents were also asked to assess the socio-economic condition of the city. Half of the respondents gave an average assessment of this aspect of the city, giving a rating of 3. Respectively, 24% gave a rating of 2 and 22% a rating of 4.2% of the respondents assessed the condition of the city very negatively (rating 1) and very positively (rating 5). In the context of an objective assessment of the state of the city, these figures do not seem surprising. Revitalization is one of the key tasks facing city authorities, but the magistrate still has a lot of work to do to renew the degraded urban fabric or the state of the roads.

The next series of questions was somehow related to the evaluation of the city's condition, as it concerned related investments. These were open questions in which the respondents were asked to:

- list investments that should be carried out in Lodz in the coming years,
- indicate the investments made in recent years that they felt were most needed,
- identify investments that they felt were most unnecessary (least needed).

Within the first category of investments, i.e. concerning the future, the respondents indicated:

- improving the condition of roads (such as Wojska Polskiego, Puszkina, Widzewska, Rąbieńska streets),
- revitalization of other parts of the city than just those mentioned in the Municipal Revitalization Program,
- building a large amount of social housing that young people can afford, and fighting alcoholism and vandalism,
- construction of subways and multi-storied car parks.

In turn, residents indicated the most needed projects that were completed in recent years:

- construction of the W-Z route,
- woonerfs, improving quality of life and aesthetics,
- the construction of the Lodz Fabryczna station and the ongoing investment to connect it with the Lodz Kaliska station,
- construction of the Widzew Stadium, thanks to which the club can play in a modern facility,
- repairing roads and improving the image of public places,
- creating a gateway to the city and revitalizing downtown.

In the context of least needed investments, the following were mentioned:

- construction of the Lodz Fabryczna station, which is not connected with the rest of the country,
- woonerfs, through which the number of parking spaces is decreasing,
- the unicorn statue, which cost a lot and has nothing to do with Lodz,
- revitalization of Dąbrowskiego Square and the fountain, which, according to the respondents, disfigures the surroundings,
- the construction of the City Gate,
- reconstruction of Dąbrowskiego and Kilińskiego streets.

What seems particularly noteworthy is the fact that certain items were repeated in both groups of investments – useful and unnecessary. These include the Lodz Fabryczna station and woonerfs. On the one hand, some of the inhabitants consider the station to be a good investment which will improve communication in the city and is good for its image. On the other hand, some people think that the construction of the station was too expensive and the city gained nothing from it. Also, the topic of the station appears in the public debate pointing to the fact that it is used by very few people (www18).

The residents are also divided on the issue of woonerfs. Some see them as enhancing aesthetics and quality of life, others as limiting parking spaces. Certainly, the growth of these spaces in the center of Lodz in recent years should be noted. Investments in Traugutta, 1 Maja or Sienkiewicza Streets are examples of this (www19). It is worth noting that some of them are created through the civic budget, so the initiative is grassroots on the part of the inhabitants.

The issue of the unicorn monument at the intersection of Mickiewicza-Piotrkowska streets remains controversial. The respondents in the survey repeatedly indicated that its construction was an unnecessary project, not connected with the image of the city. At the same time, the creation of the monument was the result of voting for the project of its creation in the civic budget. The investment amounted to PLN 400 thousand, but the project itself did not define the appearance of the monument. The city organized a competition to select the best project by voting. Next, the inhabitants chose the location of the monument (www20). The topic of the appearance and legitimacy of the monument is often discussed in the media and online debates. By decision of the City Council, the monument stands in its original location to this day.

One of the last questions in the first part concerned selection of the commune's business card. It was a semi-open question, so the inhabitants could enter their own answers apart from the basic pool of answers. However, it was a single-choice question, so the inhabitants could choose only one area which in their opinion, the commune should stand out.

The study indicated the most important area that should distinguish the city and it was investment attractiveness (30% of votes). Certain groups of people also

mentioned the labor market (18%), culture (16%) and the education offer (14%). The results allow to draw a conclusion that the inhabitants are aware of the importance of attracting external investors. They can contribute to further development of the city and create new jobs.

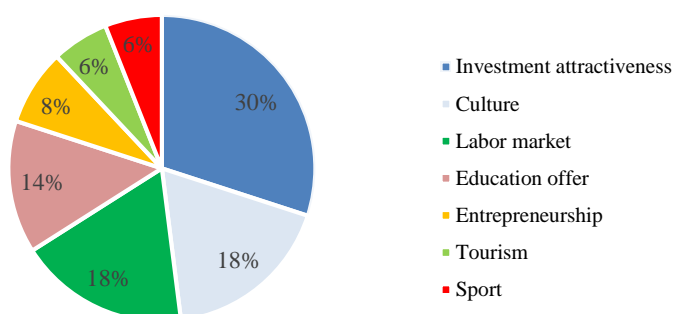


Chart 4. Selecting one area as a showpiece of the commune

Source: own study based on the survey results.

The second part of the survey consisted of questions strictly devoted to the civic budget. The first question was to find out about the civic awareness of Lodz citizens, i.e. whether they have ever heard about the civic budget. The vast majority of respondents (90%) gave affirmative answers, with one in ten respondents indicating the opposite. The high number of people aware of the functioning of the civic budget in Lodz confirms that the information was widely disseminated through various communication channels. For this reason, in the next semi-open question, the respondents were asked to mark all communication channels that were a source of information about the civic budget for them.

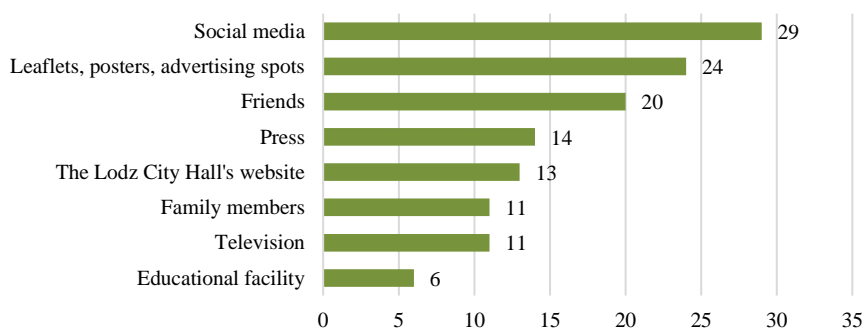


Chart 5. Sources of information about the civic budget

Source: own study based on the survey results.

Out of the listed communication channels, social networking sites (63% of respondents), as well as leaflets, posters, advertising spots (52.2%) and friends (43.5%) were the most frequently indicated. Moreover, smaller groups of respondents pointed to the press, the Lodz City Hall's website, television, and family members. The respondents' choice confirms very good promotion of the civic budget on the Internet along with leaflets and advertising spots.

The next questions concerned participation in the participatory budgeting procedure. As many as 76% of respondents declared their participation in the previous editions of the civic budget. Among this group there were also people who participated both as voters and project designers (6% of respondents). Almost all respondents participated in voting via the Internet (94.7% of responses), the rest voted stationary (5.3%). Next, the respondents were asked to evaluate the civic budget voting system. The vast majority of people (81.4%) positively assessed the voting procedure. Some people had no opinion (18.6%), and none of the respondents evaluated the voting system negatively. In this question there was also a possibility to justify one's assessment. The respondents indicated the ease of finding the voting site, the division of projects into particular districts and their clear description. The voting process itself is assessed as easy and intuitive, in line with democratic principles. The shortcomings of the procedure included too many steps in the procedure, stuttering of the voting system and poor readability of the voting.

The next question concerned the participation of residents in information meetings about the civic budget. Unfortunately, the results showed that only a handful of respondents attended such meetings (4%). This is quite worrying, because during the meetings important issues concerning both the procedure itself and the projects in the given district are often raised. The lack of participation in the meetings may result in ignorance of the projects implemented and submitted in a given region.

Next, the respondents were asked about the visibility of the activities undertaken by applicants, organizations, schools and other institutions to promote projects submitted to the civic budget. Most respondents (75.5%) noticed the presence of such activities. This high result may be indicative of the high involvement of project creators in activities promoting their projects in a given area of the city. Leaflets and housing estate meetings are often used in this regard.

One of the final questions of the survey asked whether particular elements of the Civic Budget needed improvement. The question concerned aspects relating to the information campaign, the procedure, the division into districts, the amount allocated to projects in the Civic Budget, etc. In this respect, 33 respondents gave their opinions, some of them were negative. The main objection is the information campaign, which in the opinion of many people is insufficient and favors projects with large budgets. The respondents also indicated problems with the

implementation of particular projects, which often takes several years. Moreover, there were proposals to exclude from the civic budget institutions which are financed from state funds such as zoos or museums. The financing of projects involving very small communities, such as painting a school gym or a bus stop, was also considered a problem.

It is difficult to state unequivocally, whether the information campaign in Lodz is sufficient. However, as the respondents indicated, some of their acquaintances are not aware of the existence of the procedure at all, which encourages to review the current campaign and potentially extend it. It seems a good idea to exclude institutions already financed with public funds, not only museums or zoos, but also schools. In the context of the latter, the problem mentioned by the respondents, i.e. financing of projects concerning small communities, could be solved at the same time. On the other hand, it would deprive these institutions of the possibility of obtaining additional funds in case of insufficient outlays from the state. The last two questions concerned projects implemented in the closest vicinity of Lodz citizens. In the first question, the respondents were asked whether any of the civic budget projects had been implemented in their neighborhood/area of residence. The majority gave an affirmative answer (63.3%), however, there was also a large group of people who were unable to give a clear answer (30.6%). This may be due to lack of participation in information meetings and insufficient information campaign. Only 6.1% of people said that in their area no project has been realized as part of the participatory budget. The respondents who answered affirmatively to this question, had the opportunity in the last question to evaluate the implementation of the project.

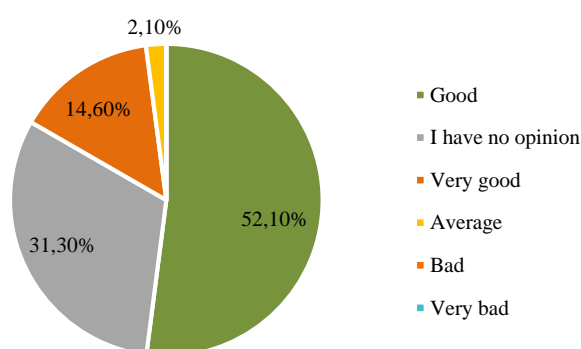


Chart 6. Evaluation of the project carried out in the respondents' region of residence

Source: own elaboration based on the questionnaire results.

A vast majority of the surveyed assessed positively the project implementation in their region (66.7%). At the same time, a large group of people have no opinion on this matter, but this percentage (31.3%) almost entirely coincides with those who answered negatively to the previous question. Only 2.1% of the respondents assessed the project realization as average. No one expressed a negative opinion about the project executed in the area of their place of residence.

To sum up, the study made it possible to identify both well-developed areas of the city and those in need of improvement. Thanks to the survey, it was possible to learn about the preferences of Lodz citizens concerning the city management and get familiar with their opinions about the participatory budget.

Some of the problems mentioned by the respondents, both in the context of unnecessary investments and the disadvantages of the civic budget procedure, are discussed in the literature and during public debates. Indeed, the city management processes require improvement in many respects, yet as far as the civic budget is concerned, it should be emphasized that it is a tool implemented relatively recently, as it is not even 10 years old in Lodz yet. Year by year, the process is being constantly improved, which allows us to look positively into the future in terms of the shape of the participatory budget.

CONCLUSION

Year by year, the number of voters in Poland's largest cities is falling. Between 2014 and 2018, the total number of votes in Warsaw, Krakow, Lodz, Wroclaw, Poznan and Gdansk fell by more than 30% (www21). Despite the decline in popularity that the institution of the civic budget is experiencing, Lodz remains a leader in participation compared to other cities. The city is at the forefront of cities with the highest turnout when it comes to the civic budget. In 2018, the city recorded the highest civic budget turnout of 16.4% of the total city population, which proves the high popularity of the budget among Lodz residents. It is much higher than in other cities (www21). In terms of the pool of funds, the city is second only to the capital, where it amounts to PLN 65 million. Krakow, larger than Lodz, allocates only PLN 12.4 million for participation. The studies indicate a correlation between the scale of funds allocated to civic projects and the turnout. In Lodz, the average amount of funds per capita is four times higher than in Krakow (www21), and accordingly the turnout in Lodz is almost four times higher (16.4% vs. 4.52%).

As a result of the analysis of projects accepted for implementation in the examined time horizon, i.e. the years 2014–2021, the following conclusions may be reached. First of all, it should be noted that a large number of projects related

to the renovation of pavements, the real condition of roads, the installation of monitoring or lighting in various parts of the city were (and still are) implemented. These projects are in line with the idea of sustainable city development, but a significant part of them concerns areas for which the municipality, as the basic unit of local government in Poland, is responsible. The condition of roads and safety in public space are undoubtedly among those areas and it is projects concerning the already existing infrastructure that dominate among the submitted proposals (Leśniewska-Napierała, 2017: 117). Among the implemented projects the projects concerning strictly local communities with a very narrow scope, such as renovation of educational facilities, purchase of equipment facilitating teaching or construction of sports facilities for students, dominate. This is indicative of the high level of neglect in the education system and the glaring inadequacy of equipment in Lodz schools, which seems to be at variance with the strategy of the city's sustainable development. A positive aspect is the pool of funds available – PLN 40 million, which allows not only for the implementation of symbolic projects but also those of greater significance (Buchard-Dziubińska, 2016: 224). Many projects have contributed to significant, visible changes in the public space. Many resident-friendly zones for relaxation and recreation have been created. Infrastructural and environmental issues turn out to be the most important for Lodz citizens.

Most of the tasks selected by the inhabitants through voting have been completed or are in the process of completion. Residents have a real say in the city management process, making decisions to improve the quality of life of Lodz citizens. The city organized numerous informative meetings with residents, as well as took care to promote the budget through information campaigns and other sources of communication. The launch of consultation points by NGOs supported the inhabitants in the process of preparing their own projects for the budget, the City Hall in turn appointed officials responsible for contact with the inhabitants (Buchard-Dziubińska, 2016: 227). Importantly, the city actually seems to provide its inhabitants with many opportunities for discussion and space for cooperation, by organizing discussions and information meetings.

To conclude, the civic budget in Lodz has been functioning for eight years, and during that time it has been constantly contributing to the idea of citizen involvement in the decision-making process. A positive aspect is the possibility to choose the form of voting – online or traditional. The former, due to its convenience, significantly increases the number of voters, especially young people. It was a good move to increase the pool of funds in subsequent editions to PLN 40 million. Based on the data (www22), Lodz allocates 1% of the city budget to the civic budget every year, being among the top Polish cities allocating the largest funds for that purpose. However, as a city with a population of almost 700 000, it is doubtful whether these funds are sufficient (Brzeziński, 2017: 152).

Lodz is a positive example of using the participatory budget mechanism in the city management process. The high turnout (on a Polish scale) proves the interest and willingness of the inhabitants to change the public space. Despite its proximity to Warsaw, Lodz is the capital of public participation in Poland, with the highest number of residents participating in the procedure. The procedure itself is still undergoing a phase of numerous corrections and improvements, since as a tool for meeting public expectations it must take into account the ongoing political, social and macroeconomic changes.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors report no conflicts of interest.

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