



★ NETWORKING EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

European Workshop

**European Co-operation Projects
Experiences – Strategies – Networking and Follows Up**

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Summary

Working Group Participatory Budgeting (PB)

by

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We kicked off the workshop by looking at some very different examples of PB in Germany and The Netherlands. This led us to conclude that an attempt should be made to conceive some kind of theoretical framework to classify different kinds of PB. This framework could then be used to determine, which kind(s) of PB can be applied in different situations. For example, in Köln, Germany, a 'proposal approach' is used: citizens submit a proposal, which can be approved or disapproved. With the Dutch BudgetMaker, an entire municipal budget is put online, which citizens can modify according to their own preferences. Also the expressions 'deliberative' vs. 'consultative' as methods of participation were coined in this context. A closer look at several examples of PB from France, the UK and Portugal again showed how many different methods of PB exist.

As a start of this theoretical framework, a short questionnaire should be drafted (around 5 questions) on the basis of which of each examples of PB can be categorized.



Furthermore, we remarked that at the moment there does not seem to be a good definition of what Participatory Budgeting actually is. 'Regular' civic participation is often regarded as PB, where it is clearly not the case because citizens have no influence on the budget.

Another remark was - that at present - there needs to be more reflection and evaluation in the world of PB.

Also, we briefly touched upon the subject of the opinion sometimes vented, that PB undermines democracy. We strongly feel that this is not the case: PB is simply a mean of civic participation. It is not some sort of election, nor is it a form of direct democracy. Governments should therefore refrain from striving to achieve a proportional (e.g. in age, population groups, etc.) participation with PB. Collecting certain demographic data about the participant can of course be useful when interpreting the outcome.

Furthermore, we talked in-depth about the different goals of PB: civic participation as a mean to an end or as a goal in itself, or maybe just to enhance quality of governance, or to create understanding for budget cuts.

PB is often realized through (expensive) external advisors. We briefly talked about the possibilities of training civil servants to apply a method of PB themselves, but this seemed hardly a feasible option. It is also a cultural matter to which extent a (local) government is prepared to buy methods of PB from an external partner (e.g. a company).
Some general and specific reactions on PB:

- At present, there sometimes seems to be a participation-hype. A lot of people want to be involved and participate.
- Initiative in PB both comes from top-down as well as down-up.
- Regarding the abovementioned proposal vs. budget approach: experiences in Germany show that a one-time proposal approach of PB costs around € 60.000. The Dutch budget maker at present costs around €12.000 and may be even cheaper when integrated in the existing budget cycle of a municipality

Plans for the future

In Germany, a network consisting of around 20 to 30 PB-experts exists under the flag of InWent/bpb. We thought it would be a good idea to lift this network to a European level. We should try in 2011 to obtain funds, either through the bpb of InWent, to organize the infrastructure of a digital network and later, to organize a modest conference. This European network should ideally consist of civil servants, politicians, scientists, NGO's, entrepreneurs and even citizens. We should in 2011 start out by conceiving a mailing list to have a database of people who are interested. Maybe we could use social media like Linked-In. Also, the above-mentioned questionnaire should be drafted in cooperation of the primary contacts. Naturally, we should first write down the necessary pre-conditions for a successful European cooperation.