Participatory Budgeting in Porto Alegre

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Location: Porto Alegre, Brazil
Time span: 1989 - present
Initiated by: Municipal government of Porto Alegre, though now spread to thousands of municipalities around the world.
Financed by: Municipal government of Porto Alegre, and later others who replicated the approach
Operated by: Municipality of Porto Alegre

Participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre is a process by which citizens -- either as individuals or through civic associations -- voluntarily contribute to decision-making over the application of resources in projects and services to be performed by the municipal government by becoming key players in annual deliberations over the previous and forthcoming years' municipal budgets. This models has spread to thousands of municipalities around the world, including Germany and other parts of Europe. We are proposing the award both for the local contribution this programme made, but also for inspiring similar approaches to revitalising participation at the local level internationally.

Project Description

Problem and objective

There were two general problems that gave rise to this programme. First, citizens and their associations -- as well as some sympathetic opposition political parties -- were concerned about state accountability and transparency in public expenditure and service delivery at the municipal levels. Second, citizens -- particularly those from poor, marginalised groups -- were insistent that a greater proportion of municipal expenditure on infrastructure and services should be directed to communities in greatest need. By bringing ordinary citizens into the decision-making process about municipal agenda-setting and budgeting, individuals and groups from marginalised communities have enhanced opportunity to express their concerns and priorities vis-à-vis public officials and state institutions.

Structure and process

While the process varies by site, in Porto Alegre it begins with preparatory meetings, in which the sitting municipal government must account to the public for the previous year's budget and related municipal projects, as well as introduce their plan and budget projections for the forthcoming year. Regional (based on neighborhood) and thematic (based on service area) assemblies follow the preparatory meeting. In each of these assemblies, ordinary citizens nominate priorities for the municipality and elect delegates to serve on the respective higher level groups that follow. Citizen representatives then serve in the Delegates' Forums, where they are responsible for prioritising and defining the works and services that will be negotiated with the municipal government (and its various agencies).

Impact

The project provided a solution to local residents' dissatisfaction with democratic governance and frustrations with the state's seeming indifference to economic and social inequality. Because ordinary citizens were brought into the realm of public priority-setting and budgeting, the resources were distributed increasingly to those communities that had been traditionally organised by municipal governments and their agencies. Improvements in community and human development within Porto Alegre have been observed in a wide array of service areas by researchers -- dramatic increases in access to public sanitation; expanded distribution of land titles to those living in informal neighborhoods; and improved infrastructure, such as road-paving and primary-school construction in informal neighborhoods, among other things.

The success of participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre has had a major impact on policy and political decisions beyond the city limits. Due, in part, to the success of the project locally, participatory budgeting has become a major feature of local government across Brazil and has expanded throughout Latin America and beyond.

Detailed Information

Broader context

Yes, the project infiltrated many levels of municipal government and administration and required technical and capacity-based changes in municipal agencies for dealing with citizen participation at this level.

Type of contribution by participants

They directly made decisions about project measures

Target group

The target groups of the project initially were Porto Alegre citizens, particularly those from poor, marginalised social groups. Now the target groups can be
broader, depending on the location where the approach is innovated.

**Total number of people addressed by the project (approx.)**
In Porto Alegre -- 1,500,000 (total city population). But potentially millions if one considers all the locations in which this programme is currently underway.

**Total number of active participants (approx.)**
In Porto Alegre -- 20,000

**Specific effort made to include disadvantaged groups**
Extensive effort to address disadvantaged groups

Extensive efforts were made to include traditionally disadvantaged groups, particularly women, ethnic minorities and those living in informal settlements.

**Specific effort made to strengthen democratic capacities**
Yes, the programme represents a dramatic reimaging of democratic behaviour and, in particular, accountability channels between citizens and state institutions. Rather than rely only on periodic municipal elections as the outlet for citizen voice, Porto Alegre’s municipal government has brought city residents into a process of co-governance. The process has strengthened the capacities and democratic behaviour of many of those who have participated, including representatives and servants of the state. After only 1,000 city residents participated in participatory budgeting the first year it was offered, approximately 20,000 residents now participate. The programme has inspired new democratic capacities and behaviours in numbers of other cities as well.

**Adoption by others**
In many cases

**Costs**
N/A

**Time and working days**
N/A

**Links**
1) Municipality of Porto Alegre -- Official Site on Participatory Budgeting (in Portuguese): [Link](#)
2) Participedia - Page on Participatory Budgeting in Porto Alegre: [Link](#)
3) Participatory Budgeting Unit UK - C Herzberg (2006) presentation on participatory budgeting in Germany: [Link](#)
4) UN Habitat, Urban Governance Toolkit Series (nd) - 72 Frequently Asked Questions about Participatory Budgeting: [Link](#) Participatory Budgeting.pdf