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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Sroka, J., Pawlica, B., & Ufel, W. (2023). Participatory budgeting in Hrubieszów, Poland, as an example of residents' sustainable participation in shaping public expenditure. *Studia z Polityki Publicznej / Public Policy Studies*, 10(1), 41-56. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-91515-8>

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Participatory Budgeting in Hrubieszów, Poland, as an Example of Residents' Sustainable Participation in Shaping Public Expenditure

Abstract

The article contains a case study of residents' participation in the process of shaping the city's public expenditure through participatory budgeting. The case of Hrubieszów deserves a closer look due to the pro-participatory attitude of a significant number of the city's officials, social activists, and residents. There is also a certain level of enthusiasm, despite the fact that participatory budgeting arrived in the city relatively late – in 2017. This article presents the functioning of this process both from the perspective of the local authorities and officials, as well as the project applicants and residents involved in the process. The focus of analysis is on local signs of readiness to cooperate which, in favorable conditions, focus on “deliberative moments” and are followed by a “deliberative stance,” constituting a basis for pro-participation activities.

Keywords: participatory budgeting, civic budget, local government, governance, deliberative moments, deliberative stance

JEL Classification Codes: H70, H72, L38

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Budżet obywatelski w Hrubieszowie jako przykład praktykowania zrównoważonego udziału mieszkańców w kształtowaniu wydatków publicznych

Abstrakt

Artykuł przedstawia studium przypadku partycypacji mieszkańców w procesie kształtowania wydatków publicznych miasta w ramach budżetu obywatelskiego. Badanie dotyczące Hrubieszowa zasługuje na uwagę ze względu na zaznaczające się lokalnie propartycypacyjne nastawienie wyraźnej części funkcjonariuszy publicznych, aktywistów społecznych oraz mieszkańców. Uwidacznia się tu także pewien entuzjazm, mimo że jest to miasto, w którym budżet obywatelski wprowadzono stosunkowo późno – w 2017 r. W artykule przybliżono funkcjonowanie tego procesu zarówno z perspektywy lokalnych władz oraz urzędników miejskich, jak i z punktu widzenia wnioskodawców projektów oraz mieszkańców uczestniczących w tym procesie. Analiza koncentruje się na poszukiwaniu lokalnych znamion atmosfery gotowości do kooperacji, która w odpowiednich warunkach ogniskuje się w momentach sprzyjających deliberacji (*deliberative moments*) i z którą wiąże się kooperacyjne nastawienie (*deliberative stance*), stanowiące bazę propartycypacyjnych działań.

Słowa kluczowe: budżet partycypacyjny, budżet obywatelski, samorząd terytorialny, współzarządzanie, momenty sprzyjające deliberacji, nastawienia kooperacyjne

Kody klasyfikacji JEL: H70, H72, L38

The popularity of involving citizens in shaping public expenditure by means of participatory budgeting has been growing in the last decade in Poland, making the country one of the world leaders in this category. According to the report developed in cooperation with the World Bank, there were already between 1840 and 1860 cases of participatory budgeting solutions in Poland 2019. Poland came third in the world in this respect, trailing only Japan and Peru (Dias, Enriquez, & Julio, 2019). One of the reasons why participatory budgeting has become so popular in Poland is the operation of the so-called Village Funds, i.e., relatively small local investments allocated in accordance with the decisions of Village Assemblies. Data provided by the Ministry of the Interior and Administration show that between 1596(2018) and 1498(2021) Village Funds were established, but even without them the scale of participatory budgeting in units larger than the village is high. However, this arrangement differs from the one adopted in cities, has been analyzed in different studies (Gawłowski & Sobolewska, 2017; Sześciło & Wilk, 2018), and will not be subject to further analysis in this article.

Regarding all 940 commune-level local government units, the use of participatory budgeting in the years 2011–2020 had been introduced in 433 units (Sroka, Pawlica, & Ufel, 2022). Those included all cities with powiat rights, 155 (65%) urban gminas, and 212 urban-rural gminas (34%). However, there is no uniform model for participatory budgeting in Poland. Together, those 433 gminas employing participatory budgeting form a diverse group in terms of demography and structure. Significant differences concern the number, age, education, and professional activity of residents, as well as the functioning of administration and the resources at its disposal. Cities that use participatory budgeting are characterized by differences in the local political culture, prior participation experience, and different levels of willingness to multiply participatory experience through organizational, group, and individual learning. This educational process necessarily requires readiness to reflect both on successes and failures of participation, thus encouraging corrective actions.

As participatory budgeting became increasingly popular in Poland, so did the research interest in this area. Initially, there were more general studies published by think-tanks in order to promote this phenomenon and good practices related to it (Kębłowski, 2014; Kraszewski & Mojkowski, 2014; Serzysko, 2014). Researchers' attention also began to focus on particular case studies. The most attention was paid to cities with powiat rights which are also voivodeship capitals: Gdańsk (Brylski & Połom, 2019), Łódź (Brzeziński & Michalska-Żyła, 2018; Michalska-Żyła & Brzeziński, 2018), Kraków (Bednarczyk & Hajdarowicz, 2017), or Wrocław (Brol, 2018; Madej, 2019b). Fewer scholars studied cities which are not voivodeship capitals: Sopot (Stokłuska, 2012), Dąbrowa Górnicza (Polko, 2015; Popławski, 2018), and Olkusz (Jachowicz, 2018).

Comparative research focused on voivodeship cities (Kempa & Kozłowski, 2020; Kociuba & Bielecka, 2021; Madej, 2019a), whereas smaller cities were only tackled in studies of a regional character (Mączka, Jeran, Matczak, Milewicz, & Allegretti, 2021; Węglarz, 2018; Wiśniewska, 2018). Individual case studies regarding smaller urban centers also most often focus on cities with powiat rights. A specific study containing an assessment of participatory budgeting application in 22 cities with this status is a report by the Supreme Chamber of Control (2019). A more extensive scientific research on participatory budgeting in Poland had been undertaken by the authors of this article. Partial results of the research were published, among others, in 2021 (Sroka, Pawlica, & Podgórska-Rykała, 2021), and in a recent book that includes comprehensive data and analyses of participatory budgeting in Poland (Sroka, Pawlica, & Ufel, 2022).

The disproportion between the number of studies on participatory budgeting in larger cities (with powiat rights) and other gminas is noteworthy, but at the same time, in 2018, focusing research on cities with powiat rights gained another important

justification. Participatory budgeting became obligatory in such cities while remaining optional in other local government units. It was also decided that the amount of funds allocated to participatory budgeting be at least 0.5% of the gmina's expenditure from the report on the implementation of the previous year budget (Act of 11 January 2018). As a result, participatory budgeting is present in all Polish cities with powiat rights (currently 66), but in many other units of Polish local government participation of residents in budgeting is well known and has been more or less successfully practiced. Since it is non-mandatory, however, local support for this initiative may be subject to significant fluctuations.

One of the reasons why scholars are more interested in bigger and richer local government units is that wealth is conducive to pro-participatory innovation and thus such units provide more material for analysis. However, believing that participation does not have to be impossible in poorer cities or gminas, the authors embarked on preparing this article on the case of Hrubieszów: a rural gmina populated by over 18,000 residents and situated 18 km from the Poland – Ukraine border. Its economy is based mostly on agriculture and services, with a very low industrialization level. The case of Hrubieszów also deserves a closer look due to the pro-participatory attitude of a significant number of the city officials, social activists, and residents. The first participatory budget was implemented in the city relatively late, in 2017, and it still pertains to a relatively small amount of the city budget. However, it is generally assessed positively by the stakeholders of the process. In this paper, its functioning is presented from the perspective of the local authorities, city officials involved, and project applicants in order to detect the positive determinants of this process.

Research methods and data profile

The dataset analyzed in this article comes from a larger study of 12 cases selected on the basis of an extensive desk research analysis of participatory budgeting in Poland. The selection process went beyond the so-called “usual suspects”, i.e., the cities whose participatory budgeting practices had already been relatively well examined. The study focuses both on large and significant cities, as well as smaller units. Eventually, the selected sample included 12 cities: Dąbrowa Górnicza, Gorzów Wielkopolski, Hrubieszów, Kraków, Krosno, Legnica, Nowa Ruda, Opatów, Puławy, Rypin, Sopot, and Tuchola.

The research was carried out in three stages, which included:

- Desk research carried out by distributing public information inquiries regarding basic information on the local participatory budgeting procedure.

- Analysis of local legal acts and documents pertaining to participatory budgeting (including by-laws, resolutions of councils, orders of executive bodies).
- Five in-depth, structured interviews that were conducted with: a representative of the executive body (I1), the chairman of the decision-making body (a city council representative) (I2), the official directly responsible for the participatory budgeting process (I3), the author of one of the winning projects (I4), and the author of a project that had not been qualified for formal/substantive reasons (I5).

The data was analyzed in the light of the Polish theoretical studies of governance (Rządca & Strumińska-Kutra, 2014), theory of deliberation (Steinhoff, 2009; Zabdyr-Jamróz, 2020), as well as from broader social theories on social ties and attitudes (Bobbio, 2010; Granovetter, 1973). This served as a background for the assessment of the quality of participatory budgeting in Hrubieszów, assisted in explaining its successful functioning, and guided through possible future pitfalls of its development.

Research results

Participatory budgeting has been practiced in the urban gmina of Hrubieszów since 2017. The fifth edition took place in 2022 after a one-year break due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the introduction of participatory budgeting in Hrubieszów, the amount of money allocated to projects has been PLN 100,000, which is about 0.1% – 0.15% of the entire budget of this gmina (depending on the year). This is also below the statutory limit for cities with powiat rights. The first and foremost reason for this is the city's scarce financial resources. Hrubieszów's budget thus turned out to be the smallest among the twelve examined cities in the general study (Sroka, Pawlica, & Ufel, 2022).

In five editions of Hrubieszów's participatory budgeting, 16 projects worth between PLN 8,200 and PLN 50,000 were implemented. Since the second edition, the limit per project was set at 25% of the total amount of allocated funds. In the following years, changes in the procedure were minor and evolutionary, adjusting it to the emerging problems and challenges. In 2019, participatory budgeting was suspended for procedural reasons, which stemmed from the fact that a new resolution compliant with the new statutory changes had to be adopted. Despite the suspension, however, the procedure of selecting tasks for implementation in 2020 was conducted. Certain modifications were introduced in 2019 regarding the participatory budgeting schedule. Until that time. The whole procedure, from the announcement of consultations to the implementation of projects, was carried out within one calendar year. The changes introduced in 2019 allowed for postponing

the implementation of projects to the next calendar year, which “was decided as a result of public consultations” (I1).

Another change introduced in 2019 was the required number of people to submit project ideas. Initially it was at least 50, which was quite a high barrier, but it was also to guarantee that only the projects whose applicants were able to mobilize the local community are submitted. In 2019, this barrier was removed and currently a project can be submitted even by one person, provided that they are supported by at least 15 people. Another modification concerned the verification of persons submitting and supporting projects. Initially, such verification was based on the address and PESEL number, whereas now it is based only on those persons’ declarations. The above modification was well received, as providing detailed personal data raised concerns of both the applicants and supporters. Such concerns were expressed by one of our interviewees (I4).

The participatory budgeting process in Hrubieszów is supported by the online Social Participation Platform, which was financed as part of a pilot project on developing an urban renewal model for the city and has been functioning since then as a default local consultation and communication tool. The platform facilitates contact and enables faster handling of matters through digitalization of certain processes, including those related to local public consultations. This solution also improves the process of voting for the projects to be implemented through participatory budgeting. It is also possible to vote in the traditional form, which makes the whole process more accessible to the digitally excluded. The functioning of the platform and its active utilization is considered conducive to participation. Such opinions are heard not only among the people associated with the authorities or the City Hall but also among the residents: “currently in Hrubieszów there are plenty of such consultations. (...) they are constantly building something here, renovating, and this is why these consultations are taking place all the time. But I do not complain – I am also happy to participate in them myself” (I4). Although there were no consultations dedicated to participatory budgeting itself, this topic was discussed during neighborhood consultations held twice a year (I1), and any regulatory changes are consulted with local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (I3). A good practice, though abandoned in 2020, was involving the representatives of three local social councils (the Economic Council, the Public Benefit Council, the Seniors Council) in the work of the team responsible for monitoring the process, preparing reports, and assessing the projects.

Hrubieszów’s participatory budgeting covers not only projects related to infrastructure but also “soft” ones, related to culture or social activation of residents. The winning projects in the first five editions of the city’s participatory budgeting are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Winning projects of Hrubieszów's participatory budgeting in 2017–2022

Year of implementation	Project name	Financing	Number of votes received
2017	Purchase of folk costumes for Hrubieszów Song and Dance Ensemble	30,000	928
2017	Young Eagles Academy	50,000	449
2017	Purchase of books for the visually impaired, audiobooks, and a series of meetings with authors	20,000	272
2018	Retrofitting of a kindergarten playground	25,000	814
2018	Comprehensive activation of Hrubieszów seniors	25,000	693
2018	Mini basketball court	10,000	508
2018	Hrubieszów conquers Hungary and Spain	25,000	492
2018	Young Eagles Academy II	15,000	333
2020	Multimedia center for the city community	15,000	1093
2020	Maneuvering area for the traffic school	15,000	572
2020	Language laboratory for all	15,000	436
2020	Green mobile island in the Hrubieszów pedestrian area	15,000	289
2022	YourOpenLibrary for 100 years	25,000	434
2022	Construction of the Street Workout Park at Primary School	25,000	347
2022	Elements of the Street Workout Park in the green space around the sports fields at Primary School	25,000	326
2022	Construction of a sidewalk	8,200	285

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

What is noteworthy is the relatively high (up to 20%) turnout in Hrubieszów voting. It is sometimes even twice as high as in many larger cities (Miasto2077, 2019: 2–3). Analyses conducted by the Institute of Urban and Regional Development showed that in 2020 statistically every tenth inhabitant of a city practicing participatory budgeting took part in the voting (Martela, Bubak, & Janik, 2021: 14). According to the more detailed report of the Supreme Chamber of Control, the highest turnout for participatory budgeting was 73% in Kalisz (2017) and 71% in Pleszew (2016). Laggging at the other end of this scale were Piotrków Trybunalski and Aleksandrów Łódzki with 3% in 2016 and 2017, respectively, and also Kraków with 5% in 2018 (Supreme Chamber of Control, 2019: 44).

Discussion

The analysis of the voting results shows that the main beneficiaries of participatory budgeting in Hrubieszów are public institutions, primarily schools. According to our interlocutors, those are also “cultural institutions such as the Library or the

Culture Center” (I3). The dominance of schools among the beneficiaries of participatory budgeting is perceived as a problem: “thanks to their large mobilization, their projects win, thus slightly discouraging others (...) They do not always adhere to the principle of general accessibility. For example, at weekends you cannot use the basketball court built thanks to participatory budgeting, because the school is closed (...) the school explains that it is for fear of the facility being vandalized” (I1). The dominance of projects submitted by those who can mobilize votes more easily can be observed in most other Polish cities where there is no age limit specified and thus schoolchildren can vote as well.

The main reason to analyze the Hrubieszów case was the visible pro-participatory attitude of the city officials and the inhabitants’ involvement, though the funds at their disposal are relatively low. During the interviews, local politicians and officials emphasized the importance of the residents’ feedback regarding both material and financial needs as well as organizational issues. However, some participatory practices have been abandoned, such as the aforementioned participation of the representatives of local social councils. Simultaneously, some practices have not yet been introduced: for example, there have been no formal public consultations on the functioning of participatory budgeting itself. Yet, the participation of Hrubieszów residents is not low, which is evidenced by open consultations on participatory budgeting projects organized in neighborhoods. Also, the opinion of local NGOs is taken into account during the evaluation and planning of procedural adjustments to the participatory budgeting process. At the same time, our interviewees did not say they were being “looked down on” by the local authorities (Bobbio, 2010) when solving problems related to participatory budgeting.

The openness and attention given to the voice of residents exert a two-fold influence on the participatory budgeting process. Firstly, this process can undergo slow and gradual evolution without impetuous changes. It accustoms inhabitants to the concept and allows them to learn it gradually. The progress of this education is evidenced by the high and growing (until 2021) turnout in voting. Although there was a significant drop in 2022 voting, a further increase in participation can be anticipated. The above-mentioned decrease is probably a consequence of the accumulation of many general negative trends, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in a one-year break from participatory budgeting in 2019. However, 2020 saw a return to the projects submitted but not implemented in 2019 – they were completed with a year’s delay together with the ones selected in 2020.

Participatory budgeting in Hrubieszów might become a kind of incubator for local leaders who often start with submitting projects and then pursue their activism for local communities. Moreover, submitting, promoting, or implementing projects,

serve to build social relations and civic attitudes, as well as foster trust. Such opinions were expressed in the interviews:

- “I think that we, the residents of Hrubieszów, have learned a lot when it comes to participation in social life thanks to participatory budgeting. I remember that when I came here and talked with them, they were displaying a lack of confidence – the people here simply did not believe that they had much influence on anything. And it was quite a big barrier” (I5).
- “I think that a great advantage of our participatory budgeting is a sort of building and reinforcing the residents’ conviction that their voice matters in decision-making. Participatory budgeting can be said to integrate the residents (...) Initiative groups are formed around projects” (I3).
- “It seems to me that our new and young authorities act, so to speak, in a more civic way. (...) Participatory budgeting teaches responsibility, and such a civic attitude, that when you have decided to do something, it should be done, that it is necessary to get involved. And then we have this comfortable situation that we feel needed” (I5).

Undoubtedly, a positive role in building the local culture of participation was played by the cultural institutions cooperating with the residents on projects. They are also highly rated by project applicants and officials involved in the participatory budgeting process.

Although Hrubieszów is presented as a positive example of social activation in Poland, one should bear in mind that even in the most pro-participatory cities there is still a large number of inhabitants who remain passive and silent. Those are the people who do not participate in consultations, meetings, or voting, and usually little is known about their knowledge of public matters or attitudes towards public life. The degree of the residents’ involvement varies also in Hrubieszów, e.g., depending on neighborhoods: “There are neighborhoods where meetings can be attended by as many as 70 people and there are neighborhoods where only 8–10 people show up. And we are talking about a very large neighborhood. (...) where the residents have some problems or needs, for example, they want to have a sidewalk, a road, a parking lot, or a water supply system, they mobilize for action, come to meetings, try to organize themselves; whereas in the neighborhoods where most needs have already been met and there is a well-functioning infrastructure, passiveness, stagnation, and a lack of interest and attention given to social matters creep in” (I2).

Although the apathy of citizens should not be ignored, the visible activation of leaders around matters related to participatory budgeting may turn out to be one of the best local investments, which, in favorable circumstances, should bring the city benefits such as increased participation. This will be the more realistic, the more

reflective attitudes are spread among all participants of the local budgeting process involving residents. By asking about other participatory tools, it has been found out that there are important reasons for this. The answers testifying to the good results of learning processes are given below. Though to a different extent, an increase in reflectiveness can be observed in all the collected statements:

- “In my view, participation is a kind of cooperation, co-deciding of a community about spending and financing certain projects. It also involves inhabitants’ contribution to the implementation of a given task – it can be time, commitment, specific work” (I2).
- “In my opinion, participatory tools are broad channels of reaching various social groups and getting acquainted with bottom-up initiatives, feedback on what is happening in the local government, (...) on what solutions should be introduced, what should be modified. I believe that the best participatory tool is direct meetings with the residents, individual talks, neighborhood meetings (...). But we can also use indirect participatory tools such as the media, the Internet. (...) Feedback is crucial when talking about these participatory tools, and that’s why I value our Social Participation Platform so much. Thanks to it we can consult various groups. (...) But let’s face it – participation cannot be conducted using one or two tools – there must be a whole range of them. The most effective – in my opinion – are direct meetings” (I1).
- “These participatory tools are all that we have at our disposal at a given moment. (...) Those will be leaflets, posters, the media, word of mouth, brainstorming – we should use the available opportunities to make our community as much interested in our plans of action as possible. (...) We don’t have enough meetings – though they are the most inclusive (...) because we see and hear each other, we talk. Everyone can present their ideas, we discuss what is more needed” (I5).
- “Participatory tools – in our case, these are human resources, so that we can do something. We the residents. If someone gave something to us, then they would participate in the costs (...) if someone helps us, it’s very good. Because in participatory budgeting money is not all that matters” (I4).

The statements quoted above testify to the reflectiveness and increase in “deliberative stance,” which so far have been able to match “deliberative moments.” They also remind us about the very important need to take into account the existence of significant differences in the ways in which participation is given a concrete expression – in attitudes, statements, actions. In the (ideal) future, these differences should be corrected not only while practicing participatory budgeting but also through real educational solutions addressed to the widest possible group. In order for similar forms of education to appear more often and bring better results, we need NGOs that

understand the general situation, are aware of their roles, and are not detached from “the lifeworld” (Steinhoff, 2009) – not only the one that goes with the worldview of a given organization or its leader. There is a dramatic shortage of such non-partisan and omnipartial (Zabdyr-Jamróż, 2020) organizations and activists in many Polish cities. Simultaneously, there are a number of NGOs that are biased in various ways. Those include organizations whose various declared aspects of functioning are mostly abstract or fictitious, and in fact they are maintained due to local political conditions.

Conclusion

Hrubieszów is a positive example of a small local community with modest resources and residents who do not have a lot of experience in co-deciding on public matters. However, this community has a noticeable potential in organizational, group, and individual learning of participation, which so far seems to have been a relatively conflict-free process. In this regard, the case of Hrubieszów is polarly different from the one examined by Marta Strumińska-Kutra and Robert Rządca, who indicated that the case study of evolution from “government” to “governance” chosen by them: “has an extreme character (...) because it emphasizes the political tension within everyday practices, ‘ordinary’ models of ruling, including in particular the tension between the values implemented through ruling, such as effectiveness in performing public services, and the inclusion of various actors in the processes of ruling (inclusiveness)” (Rządca, Strumińska-Kutra, 2014: 273). The case study of the evolution from “government” to “governance” triggered by the conflict allows one to realize the concrete and, at the same time, practical pro-participatory application of a formula which is quite simple but has to be continually rediscovered, i.e., in subsequent real relations and situations. This formula teaches that conflicts can contribute to breaking deadlocks and routines. Conflicts often block or distort communication, but the general formula which is reflected in many real situations suggests that they can also trigger and accelerate the transfer of knowledge within wide social networks. This promotes the circulation of information and yields measurable educational effects at individual, group, and organizational levels. These effects are also evident in the more or less coordinated cooperation of various entities which either actively engage or are activated and involved in processes increasing the participation of stakeholders in public decision-making.

In Hrubieszów, there have been no serious conflict situations around participatory budgeting, which does not mean that they cannot appear in the future, e.g., in connection with the territorial distribution of investments and a possible division

into sub-local pools. At that stage, although some of our interlocutors noticed such a threat, it remained potential. On the other hand, an atmosphere of readiness to cooperate clearly prevailed, bringing to mind the concept known in the literature as deliberative moments, in which cooperative attitudes (deliberative stance) and pro-community grassroots initiatives converged – although the latter were relatively least widespread among the residents, many of them preferring passive participation. Despite the city's intensive communication activities, the aforementioned 20% turnout seems to be a limit that it will not be easy to go beyond (or even sustain) without further consistent work on building a local culture of participation. At the same time, it should be noted that Hrubieszów's participatory budgeting is a plebiscitary tool. Consultations in the neighborhoods are ancillary and can only to a limited extent come close to a deliberation that could be initiated in the form of an in-depth discussion by its residents, local NGOs, and public officials. A factor hindering a discussion on participatory budgeting may be unsatisfactory financing, which in addition is much more often used by public institutions, especially schools. The low financing of participatory budgeting and the generally difficult financial condition of the city make it impossible to incur additional costs on the development of participation and co-deciding.

To sum up, Hrubieszów's participatory budgeting deserves attention as an example of a relatively rapid evolution towards an increasingly real expansion of local participation. Most probably, there were already patterns of behavior conducive to this expansion in Hrubieszów, which is evidenced not only by the collected material but also by how and to what extent the inhabitants of Hrubieszów provided assistance to Ukrainian refugees in the wake of the Russian aggression. The residents of Hrubieszów proved that they can organize themselves both in a bottom-up and coordinated manner, unifying the local community, which is the best remedy for conflicts. The case of Hrubieszów may serve as a basis for a generalization that many Polish cities, despite obstacles and differences in pace, are reaching more and more milestones of participatory governance. When attempting to overcome barriers to participation, however, the most important thing is to sustain open reflectiveness combined with empathy, i.e., a force fueled by an individual's: functions of a healthy nervous system, configuration of acquired knowledge, own experiences and character components, and scale of willingness to build friendly relationships with people, including those less lasting and casual as part of so-called weak ties (cf. Granovetter, 1973). The art of using empathy may not be available to everyone, not always, and not to a similar extent. Moreover, it is a skill that cannot be learned "once and for all". Nonetheless, it is worth learning, as it allows one to go beyond different divisions and more effectively participate in fairer social transactions. The

extraordinary properties and capabilities of empathy are well-known, but it is also known to be often difficult to achieve. The empathy displayed in Hrubieszów was more clearly perceptible than in other examined cities, and this is the reason number one, though given at the end of the paper, why this case deserves to be highlighted.

Author Contributions

The article is a result of a balanced collaboration between three authors, each of whom has made a significant and direct intellectual contribution to the development of its jointly approved final version.

Conflict of Interest

The research was conducted in an ethical manner, without any commercial/financial associations that could be interpreted as a potential conflict of interest.

Funding

The article has been written as part of research project no. 2019/33/B/HS5/00353 financed by the National Science Center, Poland, under the OPUS 17 program “Evolution of the participatory budgeting in Poland towards a deliberation or plebiscite?”

Ethics Statement

The authors certify that the research published in the text was conducted in accordance with the principles of research ethics in a broad sense, as well as in accordance with the rules applicable at their home academic institutions which did not require verification and approval of the research.

Research Data Availability Statement

The original data presented in the paper are contained in the authors' comprehensive monographic study, written thanks to the implementation of the National Science Center. The authors declare that the moment the project is completed and procedurally settled, the National Science Center will take immediate action to make the research data available. It is also possible to contact the authors directly in order to obtain detailed information on the data.

Acknowledgments

Particular thanks are due to a research team colleague, Mr Wiesław Zając from the Office of Socio-Economic Analysis. Special thanks should go to Beata Pawlica, Joanna Podgórska-Rykała, and Wojciech Ufel, who, to a varying extent and at various stages of the research process, all contributed to the work coordinated by Jacek Sroka.

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