

CITIZEN INTERVENTION IN BUDGETARY PROCEDURES BETWEEN THE OBLIGATION TO BE SILENT AND THE RIGHT TO SPEAK

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Abstract

The scope of our research is to find methods of partaking in local budgetary procedures in Romania, both formally and informally. The study proceeds from an inventory of legal solutions regulated by Romanian law and includes two segments: an analysis of the present formal solutions and an inventory of the emerging informal solutions. In the first part, after presenting the legal framework of formal solutions, we portray the results of the empirical study on the implementing of these solutions at the level of Iași county, by inventorying the citizens input on the last three budgetary years at the level of 100 local entities. In the second part, we have gathered information from on-line sources on the newer, non-regulated form of intervention: participatory budgeting. The results of the first study show no use of formal intervention tools and show in one case that informal consultations have been alternatively applied. On the other hand, the increasing use of participatory tools (at the proposal of local councilors) brings some novelty to this landscape. We have organized the collected data into seven categories (type of local entity, years of implementation, number of projects submitted and approved, amount of financing, number of votes, procedure of voting or debating and year of implementation). The results of this inventory are discussed under the Sintomer criteria to find the type of participatory procedure spreading in Romania. Correlating the two elements, we can affirm that the expansion of PB appears on a ground of limited (if any) interest of inhabitants on the local budget, as our study found no appeal registered within the last three budgetary years. In this context, the emerging, informal process of participatory budgeting, focused on generating projects of public services by private stakeholders has an enthusiastic start; nevertheless, our analysis rises some concerns about the legality and the viability of the process as implemented in Romania.

KEY WORDS: participatory budgeting, citizen initiative, project competition, public financing, formal participation

INTRODUCTION

Local budgetary procedures are the main context of decision for public administration agenda. Deciding the revenues and expenditures of local entities, as a procedure and as a

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process is strictly correlated to the local plan of social, political, and cultural relevancy. The budgetary process has been traditionally a part of the “command-and-control” governance model “which emphasizes centralized, top-down decision making and static rules” (Lee, 2013, p.406). Typically, the budgetary framework is highly normalized, conditioned by a strict decision-making calendar and marked by organizational corrective interventions. In opposition, the New Governance model proposes a new model of decision-making, having as key elements: “the participation of a broad array of stakeholders in a decentralized problem-solving process” and the notion of “learning by doing” (Lee, 2013, p. 409). A secondary evaluation of the process would question the meaningfulness of the participatory process, on a scale, Arnstein’s continuum (Arnstein, 1969) evaluating the impact marginalized groups have over decisions. This governance model transposed in the budgetary process has been crystallized as ‘participatory budgeting’, with a considerable number of criteria of evaluation, synthesized in six models of action (Sintomer et. al., 2013). The process is an annual one, originating in Porto Alegre, Brazil, 1989, and involving a local decision-making cycle that includes: designing the process, brainstorming ideas, developing proposals, voting, and funding of winning projects (Sintomer et. al., 2013).

The central research question is if participatory budgeting is a useful tool in a context where other participatory tools are left unused. The participatory budgeting tool is significantly expanding in Romania as a local budgetary procedure that requires citizens’ contribution. Our study assesses the existing partaking procedures (citizen’s appeals) as an indicator of local community participating will and a predictor for the success of participatory budgeting.

The study is structured in 4 sections: 1. General overview on budgetary decision in Romania; 2. Formal solutions: Traditional consultation (including legal frame, methodology of the empirical study, results of the empirical study); 3. Informal solutions: participatory budgeting pilots (including theoretical framework, Romanian inventory of PB cases and analysis of the Romanian model of PB); 4. Conclusions.

The first empirical study analyses an existing general tool for citizen intervention in local budgeting in correlation to several variables: community size, budget size, urban or rural collectivities. This empirical study illustrates the statute-quo, the context in which newer participatory tools such as calls for projects are implemented. The inventory of participatory budgeting organises the available on-line data according to seven items: type of local entity, years of implementation, number of projects submitted and approved, amount of financing, number of votes, procedure of voting or debating and year of implementation. This study finds an embryonic process, with significant differences both in structure and results.

1 GENERAL OVERVIEW ON BUDGETARY DECISION IN ROMANIA

The traditional budgetary practice is constructed on a legal basis that varies from state to state. In Romania, the general framework for local budgets is given by the Constitution and by Law no. 273/2006 about local public finances. Romania’s Constitution does not supply a direct regulation of the process, but rather a general restraint, as article 74 par. 2 stipulates a limitation to the legislative initiative of citizens to start the normative process about fiscal

matters. This prohibition has an indirect effect on budgetary practice, as budgeting has two dimensions: revenue and expenses.

These two dimensions are dependent and correlated as an expense is incorporated in the budget regardless of the process of proposing it (by the traditional method or by participatory budgeting) within the limits of the predicted revenue. Consequently, all budgeting process is limited by the revenue dimension. This limitation is a given fact, becoming inherently part of the participatory model and it includes two levels. A general level of limited local expenditures, limit given by the resources of local authorities, and a secondary level given by the formal distribution of a part of these resources to be submitted to a participatory budgeting practice. Citizens' intervention is characteristically filtered by the authority's decision to distribute part of the revenue to the participatory budgeting process, as citizens are forbidden to promote legislation finding new public sources of financing these expenses. Hence, the voice of private stakeholders is filtered by the availability of resources to be used for public services, as these private stakeholders are forbidden to generate a normative intervention on taxation. An indirect, marginal intervention is set up by law within specific limits; although insignificant in volume, local taxes are variable by law and local deliberative authorities can fix the effective amount of a tax within the limits stipulated by the Fiscal Code. Thus, indirectly, through the decision of local governments, a small surplus of revenue could be generated and subsequently directed towards participatory decision-making. This process is consistent with the formal decision-making mechanism and tributary to the traditional way of budgeting.

A model of participatory budgeting in the context of Romanian legislation occurs in a standardized budgetary frame, where the power of decision of a public authority is partly conceded to the course of participatory budgeting. This distribution of resources with a part of revenue being reserved to participatory budgeting is not regulated at this point under the Romanian legislation, so the operation stays an administrative process. *De lege ferenda*, to ensure a predictable frame for participatory budgeting, an intervention of the legislator must formalize the sharing of revenue. Our study excludes all privately financed processes, as crowdfunding with a social purpose is fundamentally different, as are all public-private financing partnerships, given that they rely on different decision-making mechanisms. Strictly as to the use of public resources, a normative frame is essential as a guarantee of a non-arbitrary process that could derive from a random distribution of funds or even the refusal to share funds. In Romania, some current cases of participatory budgeting are implemented even in the absence of such a normative distribution. The course is based on a "renunciation" by the local authority of a fraction of its power to decide on the destination of public expenditures, such as the case of online participatory budgeting in Cluj-Napoca City in 2017 financing a total of 45 projects, in areas ranging from public transportation, school life improvement to waste management³.

As to the reasons behind this "renunciation", the worldwide spread of participatory budgeting as shown in the comparative analysis of the implemented models (Sintomer et.

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https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/conferences/citizens_good_governance/Emil%20Boc.pdf
; Projects in the current voting sessions are available at: <https://bugetareparticipativa.ro/proiecte/>

al., 2013, p. 22) had several drivers, such as participatory democracy, social justice, empowerment of subaltern groups, consensus, and social cohesion. Sharing power in the budgetary decision-making modus is a social and political decision. This diffusion of public revenue is both a driver and a barrier in the process. Public resources are limited; local public finances are even more austere, especially in countries where the financing of local authorities is constructed on the distribution of fiscal incomes from central taxes, such being the case of Romania. The financing of local governments is marginally autonomous and depends on the allocation of personal income tax back to the communities from which it has been collected (Costea, 2021, pp. 33-37). This allocation is regulated by law, which sets up specific fractions of central tax revenues for financing central, county, city/town, and commune level budgets. Secondary, as local stakeholders have an input on the usage of these resources, their limited amount is base for a result-focused decision. As shown even from the beginning, in Porto Alegre, limited revenues are not a barrier of action but an incentive, as a city level implication (Sintomer et. al., 2013, p. 11) will ensure a decision based on local, decentralized problem-solving methods and a secondary effect of ranking local priorities.

This is the case of Romania, where the process is appearing in urban communities (Iași⁴ City – 2021, Cluj-Napoca⁵ City – 2013, 2017-2021, Sibiu City⁶ – 2019-2021, Bucharest, sector 1 – 2020-2021⁷, Suceava – 2018, 2019, 2021⁸, Brașov – 2020⁹). The practice is present even in smaller municipalities (Roman – 3rd edition 2021¹⁰, Florești – 2021¹¹ (Rural area); Târgoviște – only 2019¹², Făgăraș – 2019, 2020 (suspended due to the pandemic), 2021¹³, Turda – 2019, 2020¹⁴ (Suspended due to the pandemic), Oradea – 2019¹⁵, then stopped, Zalău – 2019, then stopped¹⁶). At the county level, Călărași County (population 2021: 306.820 inhabitants) is implementing the measure¹⁷; Iași County (population 2021: 965.634 inhabitants) has formalized the action by the approval of a County Council Decision for implementing the participatory budgeting process for the budgetary year 2022. We notice in the timeframe 2019-2020 a significant spread of the model; this size proves a benevolent attitude of formal stakeholders (local governments, mayors, local councils) and a significant political encouragement. The process has correspondence in other countries as

⁴ https://www.interregeurope.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/tx_tevprojects/library/file_1618148335.pdf

⁵ <https://bugetareparticipativa.ro>

⁶ <https://bugetareparticipativa.sibiu.ro>

⁷ <https://bugetareparticipativa.primariasector1.ro/regulament>

⁸ <http://implicat.primariasv.ro/portal/suceava/bp/portal.nsf>

⁹ <https://extranet.brasovcity.ro/bugetareparticipativa/public/regulament.aspx>

¹⁰ <https://primariaroman.ro/2021-pentru-roman-bugetarea-participativa/>

¹¹ <https://floresti.decid.ro>

¹² <https://targoviste-decide.ro/anunturi/>

¹³ <https://bp.primaria-fagaras.ro/anunturi/>

¹⁴ <https://turdadecide.ro>

¹⁵ <http://www.oradea.ro/pagina/bugetare-participativa-2019> with a budget of 1.8 million euro

¹⁶ <https://participubudget.zalausj.ro/informatii/cum-functioneaza>

¹⁷ <https://www.calarasi.ro/index.php/informatii-publice/bugetare-participativa>

well, such as Poland: *“the ‘invasion’ of PB is one of the first symptoms of increasing willingness of formal and informal groups of citizens to participate in formulation and implementation of local policies”* (Sześciło, 2015, p. 375).

2 FORMAL SOLUTIONS – TRADITIONAL CONSULTATION

The local budgetary process in Romania is highly formalized as Law no. 273/2006 regulates the distribution of competences and responsibilities in the procedure, the structure of the budget and a thorough calendar of activities. Articles 37-41 supply detail as to the method of elaborating and approving the budget; the timeline of the process is extremely strict, due to the above-mentioned distribution of public revenue from the state budget to local entities. This dependency postpones the approval of local budgets, which are conditioned by the approval of the national budget. Deriving from this dependency, we can see a constant delay in the approval of local budgets, which do not meet the deadline of January 1st for entering into force. For example, Iași city budget for 2021 has been posted as project of decision on March 25th, 2021, and approved May 12th, 2021¹⁸. This mismatch could be a barrier to furthermore extended consultation with local stakeholders, seen as time-consuming.

The traditional budgetary process holds a mandatory step of public “consultation”. According to Article 39 par. 3-5 in Law no. 273/2006, within 15 days from the publication of the state budget law in the Official Gazette of Romania, Part I, the main authorizing officers (the mayor for local communities and the president of the County Council for counties) completes the local budget draft, which is published in the local press or displayed at the headquarters of the administrative-territorial unit. The inhabitants can submit appeals on the draft budget within 15 days of the date of its publication or display. These appeals are presented to the rule of the deliberative authorities, concurrently to the debate and approval of the local budget. This course of action is partially a derivative from the principle of publicity that governs the budgetary decision-making process and partially a form of public “consultation”. The process is clearly far from being qualified as a participatory budgeting process, as these appeals are limited to a censoring effect; the inhabitants do not have an active role in promoting projects or prioritizing projects, but rather act on grounds of legality. Nevertheless, the implication in the process would be an indicator of the level of awareness that local stakeholders have about local budgetary proceedings.

To assess this implication, we took on an empirical approach in order to answer a few research questions, such as: “Are appeals against the draft budget becoming a popular instrument for citizens in local democracies?”, “Are citizens more likely to object to the draft budget in larger administrative-territorial units?”, “Is there a connection between the amount of expenses in the draft budget and the number of appeals submitted by the inhabitants of that administrative-territorial unit?”, aiming to finally determine whether the

¹⁸ <http://www.primaria-iasi.ro/portal-iasi/anunturi-pmi/proiect-de-hotarare-privind-aprobarea-bugetului-municipiului-iasi-pentru-anul-2021/10605/proiecte-hcl>

appeals step in the elaboration of the budget is a useful tool for both citizens and local administrative bodies or not.

The methodology we used consisted of sending information requests to local administrations based on the provisions of Law no. 544/2001 about free access to public information, questioning the occurrence of citizens' appeals to the draft budget for the last three years (2019, 2020, 2021). The tested sample covered all administrative-territorial units in the geographical area of Iași County, which totals 99 local administrations, urban and rural, distributed as follows:

- 93 communes (Ro. "comună", the basic form of rural administrative-territorial unit, consisting of one or several villages), with populations ranging from 1.323 to 21.697 inhabitants and amount of yearly public expenditure varying from 3.421.844 to 48.785.391 RON¹⁹;

- 3 towns (Ro. "oraș", the basic form of urban administrative-territorial unit), with populations ranging from 11.069 to 15.214 inhabitants and amount of yearly public expenditure varying from 21.250.775 to 25.358.146 RON²⁰;

- 2 cities (Ro. "municipiu", the second form of urban administrative-territorial unit, typically larger than cities), with populations of 45.165 and 387.103 inhabitants and amount of yearly public expenditure of 56.822.006 RON and 854.136.476 RON²¹ respectively;

- 1 county (Ro. "județ", the largest form of administrative-territorial unit, consisting of all communes, towns, and cities in a geographical area), totaling a population of 965.634 inhabitants and handling its own budget with an amount of 678.198.502 RON²² in yearly public expenditure.

For details on the profile of the questioned entities, please see Annex 1.

Considering these elements and our research questions, we devised two main hypotheses to be tested: (1) "The number of citizens' appeals against the draft budget is correlated to number of inhabitants of that administrative-territorial unit" and (2) "The number of citizens' appeals against the draft budget is correlated to the amount of yearly public expenditure of that administrative-territorial unit".

For both hypotheses, prior to conducting our empirical study, we were assuming that a positive, directly proportional relationship exists between the compared values. Namely for the first hypothesis, we were expecting that the more populated the administrative-territorial unit is, the more appeals are submitted by citizens against the draft budget. As for the second hypothesis, we were expecting that the larger the amount of public expenditure of the administrative-territorial unit is, the more appeals are submitted by citizens against the draft budget.

¹⁹ At the official exchange rate of National Bank of Romania from August 13th, 2021, the amounts vary from EUR 696.657 to EUR 9.932.283.

²⁰ At the official exchange rate of National Bank of Romania from August 13th, 2021, the amounts vary from EUR 4.326.474 to EUR 5.162.699.

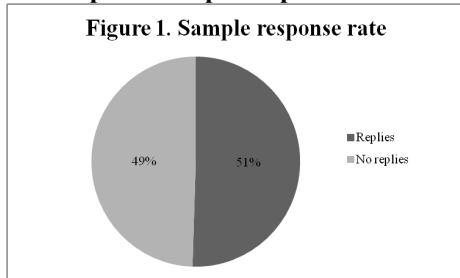
²¹ At the official exchange rate of National Bank of Romania from August 13th, 2021, the amounts are EUR 11.568.469 and EUR 173.894.800.

²² At the official exchange rate of National Bank of Romania from August 13th, 2021, the amount is EUR 138.075.349.

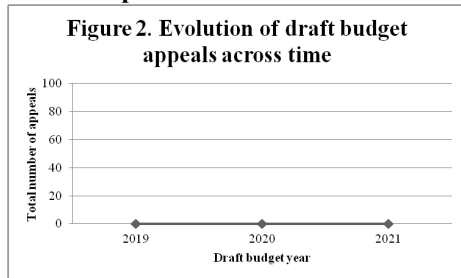
The information requests were sent out between July 9th and July 12th, 2021, and data collection took place between July 12th and August 12th, 2021, as the legal term under the Romanian legislation for replying to such inquiries is 10 days, with a possibility for extension to 30 days, should the difficulty, complexity or research volume consider it necessary.

In terms of results, as of August 13th, 2021, 50 out of the 99 interrogated local administrations replied to our information request, accounting for 51% of the tested sample [Figure 1]. Our main finding was that none out of these 50 respondents have recorded any appeals submitted by citizens against the draft budget for the last three budgetary years (2019, 2020, 2021) – Annex 1.

Graph 1: Sample response rate



Graph 2: Evolution



In discussing these results, firstly, we note that there is no positive (nor negative) evolution in the usage of appeals as a budget censorship instrument for citizens [Figure 2]. Firmly deciding the underlying causes would require further research, but the possibilities include citizens' lack of awareness about the existence of the provision that allows appeals against draft budgets, lack of knowledge and understanding of the technical way draft budgets are written, reduced willingness to get involved in local community issues, increased trust in locally elected officials.

Secondly, on the two hypotheses we set out to test, it seems as both are invalidated by the results of our study, as there is no clear correlation between the number of citizens' appeals against the draft budget and the number of inhabitants or the amount of yearly public expenditure of that administrative-territorial unit. Although the study was geographically limited, the results were surprising, as we were not expecting to be faced with virtually no data to correlate.

Therefore, we find that there is no relevant correlation between variables. The respondent municipalities are random as to urban or rural and do not follow a path connected to their budget dimension. All citizens had access to the same information, mainly the draft budget, including all revenues and all expenses. These findings figure out the conclusion of no interest of the public for budgetary procedures regardless of the dimension of the community.

In Iași city case, the largest city in the county and the second largest in Romania, a more detailed answer from local authorities revealed no appeals following the formal legal proceedings, but some inputs from informal consultations. This particular response

encourages us to conclude that informal dialogue has a better chance of success than formal legal action to construct participatory budgeting.

In these conditions, we could argue that the provision of art. 39 par. 3 in Law no. 273/2006 that allows – almost invites – citizens to submit appeals against the draft budget needs to be put under scrutiny. To start with, the aforementioned legal norm is scarce in writing down the object of the appeal, namely what exactly can be contested: are the inhabitants allowed to challenge anything and everything, regardless of the ground for doing so, or are they limited to only invoking opportunity reasons? As we were stating above, citizens do not share the same active role as local councilors have when debating the draft budget and proposing amendments, but the question still is of the utmost importance, as it decides the usefulness and the necessity of the legal provision. Should the appeals step prove to be both useful and necessary, then more public awareness of the regulation is needed. However, if the provision is obsolete, then we argue that it can be repealed, as it only burdens an already cumbersome procedure of elaborating and approving local budgets.

Furthermore, such a course of action *de lege ferenda* would shorten the timeframe by 15 days, thus improving overall stability and predictability, as administrative-territorial units do not receive the typical forms of revenue from the state budget prior to the local budget being adopted. We believe that the provision would not be sorely missed, as it can be replaced by formal or informal consultations with citizens, either conducted by the mayor, as in the case of Iași City (2019, 2020, 2021), or by local councilors as part of the mission to stand for their constituents.

In retrospect, the findings of the empirical study make us conclude that the formal intervention represented by the appeals step should be ended as it consumes a valuable resource in the budgetary process: time.

3 INFORMAL SOLUTIONS – PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING PILOTS

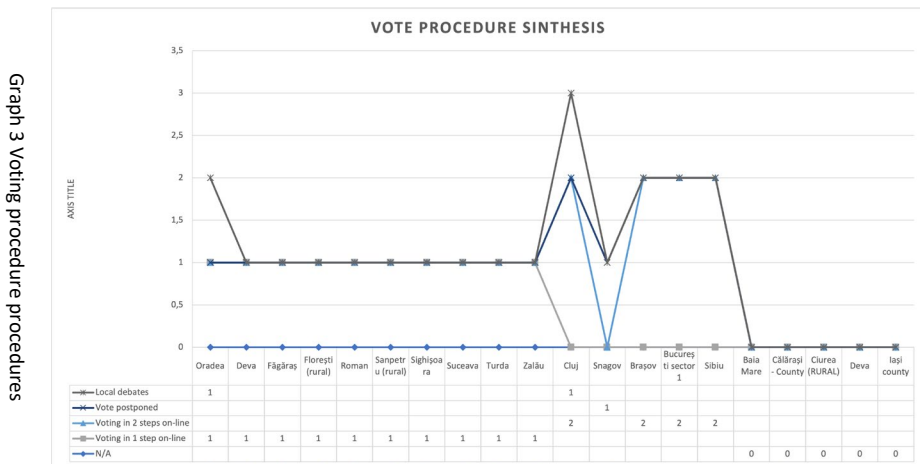
As mentioned above, the model of participatory budgeting pilots is rapidly spreading in Romania. This expansion could be correlated to the desire to enforce power in local governments, a common phenomenon in CEE countries (Krenjova, et.al., 2013, p. 35), part of the “romantic localism”. We notice that from the early Cluj-Napoca model (2013) the process has expanded to over 20 budgets in 2019-2021 (an inventory is available in Annex n. 2). Cluj-Napoca, a daring city, implements the fourth annual systematic process of participatory budgeting²³ with some evolutions in procedural and technical aspects. The Iași County project is in its embryonic state, as the decision on implementing this course of action has just been adopted in 2021.

The current generalizing model for the process is rather formal, close to the community participatory budgeting model (Krenjova, et.al., 2013, p. 26). The source of the mechanism is normative; the initiative is based on the *right of initiative in promoting administrative acts* recognized by article 211 of the Administrative Code to the local councilors. This provision places the power of decision in a strict context, as traditional stakeholders (mayor, Council President, local councilors) exerting their prerogatives have the exclusive

²³ <https://bugetareparticipativa.ro/a-inceput-a-4-a-editie-a-procesului-bugetare-participativa-online/>

right to initiate and approve the route of conceiving and implementing participatory budgeting. The initiation of the process is both optional and filtered by local government decisions. Such is the case of Iași County, where a group of local councilors promoted a draft decision for participatory budgeting. The Decision of the County/Local Council grasps the general key-points of such a procedure: the creation of a participatory budgeting context, the key project areas (hence the intervention is limited to those areas of interest shown by the authorities), the portion/amount of public incomes to be used in the process (extremely variable) and the procedure of writing and evaluating projects.

To qualify the model spreading in Romania, we will first try to answer this question: Who is expected to take part? (Krenjova et. al., 2013, p. 26) The Cluj-Napoca “model” focused on debate and on the multiple stakeholders’ direct participation (including



academia and NGOs). The newer calls for proposals are widely online and address singular citizens, that reside, live, or study in the area; the course of collecting proposals is mainly digital (hence posing a significant risk of exclusive addressability) and even tends to generalize the use of a single platform²⁴. In some cases, (e.g., Oradea City) a debate is organized; in others (e.g., Cluj-Napoca City), an alternative front-desk approach is available.

In at least two cases in 2020, the entire process has been postponed due to pandemic restrictions. Subsequently, an online voting process is arranged (in one or two rounds), according to a calendar previously voted.

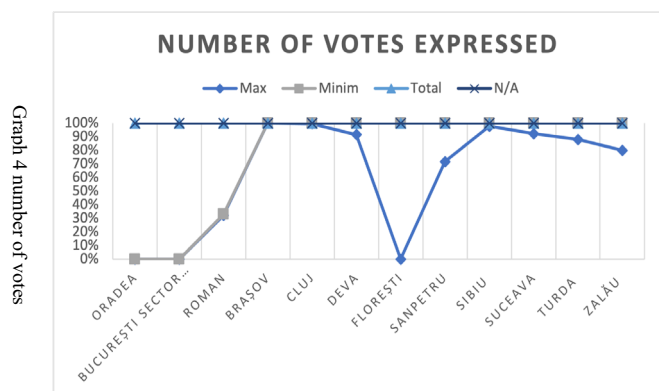
In-between, an eligibility scrutiny is applied *according to the criteria set by the officials* (community participatory budgeting model) (Krenjova et. al., 2013, p. 23). The eligibility filter has at least two dimensions, as the Council decision authorizing the process finds fields of intervention and sets a budgetary limit. For the first dimension, a question of opportunity could arise, even an interrogation on the alternativeness of these domains (public transportation versus digitalization) and the substance of the deliberation. There is

²⁴ <https://decide.direct>

no deliberation of the areas of action, but only on the most suitable projects for these areas. For the second dimension, an empirical analysis shows a variety of options. Even if a generalized value of 100.000 to 150.000 Euros for financing each project tends to coagulate, its relevance must be asserted in correlation to the dimension of the budget and to the number of financed projects. For example, Iași County proposes a total budget of approximately 1 million Euros, standing for 0.7% of total expenses, as Călărași County distributes 2% of its total budget (a singular case of ratio distribution) to the participatory budgeting course. Cities comparable in size, Oradea and Brașov limit the financing to 15.000-20.000 Euros per project. The best practice recommended in the field is the ratio-based distribution: *“participatory budgeting in operation constitutes no less than 0,5% of the local budget and is annually indexed based on the part of the budget that was not used in the previous year”* (Makowski, 2019). The distribution algorithm also decides the number of financed projects, varying from an average of 8-10 to a maximum of 22. Where many projects are submitted the process should be monitored in correlation to the risk of implementation failure.

As to the correlation between the participatory budgeting calendar and the general budgeting calendar, an empirical analysis of the identified working cases shows a variable standard. The budgetary procedure traditionally involves four stages: elaboration, approval, execution, and closure. A general contemporary rule frames the budget to the budgetary year (a principle known to European, national, and local budgets). This timeframe places the four stages of the budgetary procedure in three different years: elaboration and approval n-1, execution n, closure n+1. A view of the calendars proposed by various local governments for the participatory procedure shows a variation in these action plans. In most cases (Sibiu, Cluj, Bucharest), the decision for the participatory procedure is taken in year n-1 and appears as a part of the elaboration and approval of the budget. In other cases, the decision is taken in the first part of year n and implemented in the same year (Roman, Florești, Brașov, Sânpetru), appearing to stray from the model of elaborating a budget. In these cases, the participatory procedure decides in the frame of an approved budget which projects of investments are of interest for the inhabitants of the deciding pool. Under this circumstance, we believe we are no longer in the presence of a traditional model of participatory budgeting, as this seems to be a competition of projects to finance (with the decision traditionally belonging to the authorizing officer and partially shared in this procedure with the public).

As to the citizens' implication in these decision-making practices, a general overview of the implemented cases shows a diversified participation, from 13.896 votes in Oradea (out of a population of 221.413) to 2.480 votes in Bucharest, sector 1 (out of a population of 259.084) to



961 votes in Roman (out of a population of 68.929). Moreover, where data on votes/financed project are available, we notice many cases of financed projects with a small number of votes or even no votes at all (lowest examples: Sibiu – 5 votes, Roman – 14 votes, Suceava – 10 votes, Deva – 6 votes, Braşov – 0 votes) (see Annex n. 2). Even if generalizing the data is premature, due to the novelty of the procedure, we would underline the risk of low to no representativeness in the decision process.

If we compare the data to the 2017 Cluj-Napoca first online participatory budgeting, with a total of 76.837 votes²⁵ (out of 327.272 inhabitants), a certain evolution of participation is obvious and could be pinned to various causes, such as the online voting, the pandemic context and even the debate model used. Further observation is necessary to assess the viability of the participating model and the need to expand the addressability of the voting process. Some normative intervention could be advisable to establish a minimum of people supporting a project or voting for a project (Makowski, 2019, p. 468). Overall, if we were to assess the attitude of private stakeholders (citizens, NGOs, civil society) towards the process, we can say that the interest is rather limited and a risk of alteration of the method appears as projects with limited public support could be pushed up on the agenda.

In this context, we ask ourselves if the introduction of participatory budgeting somehow contributed to higher citizen engagement or to the more intensive application of co-creation in the field of public service delivery and the answer is affirmative as to the mere existence of such projects. In relation to the formal budgetary context, where, as shown above, there was little to no citizen engagement, the Romanian spreading process of participatory budgeting brings a plus both in creating and in deciding on the content of public services. Overall, the Romanian model seems to emphasize solution-seeking routes, as in all cases the financed projects are conceived by private stakeholders (single acting citizens or in informal groups). This element brings the Romanian context closer to the Porto Alegre model (Krenjova et. al., 2013, p. 26) and could be a source of limited support for a specific project (hence the small number of votes per project).

As to the force of the decision provided by the Romanian model, we notice that vote results are mandatory for the public authority as to the destination of these funds; the elected projects (limited as number, budget and aim) are implemented by the local authority accordingly. Once the process is set in motion, the intervention of a validating committee is a preliminary phase that evaluates the projects on a legality basis. The opportunity of the projects is asserted exclusively by the voting process and seeing through the number of received votes can raise a problem of representativeness.

4 CONCLUSIONS

To assess the success of participatory budgeting in Romania, one could wonder if it is too soon to tell? For academic reasons, we will state that a general conclusion on the success of the process is premature. Some indicators, such as the fast and rather general

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https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/conferences/citizens_good_governance/Emil%20Boc.pdf

spreading of participatory budgeting, could be read as proof of success. Some collected data endorse a question mark. The premises shown by the empirical study prove a rather restrained local public to consultations. This premise is confirmed by further data about the small number of votes collected in relation to the population of the local entity.

Firstly, as shown above, in some cases the process is not continuous and appears as a sporadic decision in contradiction to the yearly repetitive character of a proper participatory budgeting (Lotko, 2019). This factor supports our prior statement that further observation is necessary to assess the viability of participatory budgeting (the Polish example shows an increase and decrease in popularity within six years (Zawadzka-Pak et. al., 2019, p. 167), the data on the Czech Republic prior to 2018 shows only the spread of the concept) as a process and even as a procedure, suitable of improvement. We also notice that the pandemic limitations on the freedom of movement overlapped on this emerging process, so further observation will show in comparable contexts the viability of the procedure.

Secondly, or better said subsequently, some questions arise about the degree of participation in the process. The Cluj-Napoca success model (2017 – 23% of the population voted) is not confirmed by the newer participating local entities, where the largest participation is 6% of the population. This decrease could be a natural phenomenon of adaptation of the public to the new legal context, as later editions could show an improvement in knowing and taking part in the process. It could also be explained by the restrictive measures imposed by the Covid pandemic, it could be an indicator of an insubstantial procedure of consultation, as in most cases the procedure is carried out exclusively online, or it could also point to a representativeness fault as the procedure is based on single citizen proposals. Nevertheless, the poor participation could also mean a confirmation of the results of our empirical study, that there is little to no interest in formal consultations in the budgetary process.

Thirdly, in relation to the budgetary timeframe, we could wonder if a certain derivative procedure is set in motion in Romania. As shown above, in some cases, the process presents itself as a form of post-approval decision. This variation has a considerable input in modeling public services, even if it does not affect the budget drafting.

Overall, at this point, based on the empirical data and on a comparative approach, we can state that the Romanian context on participatory budgeting is in a dynamic form and only further observation can truly state on the success of the process.

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ANNEX 1 – Empirical study data

SIRUTA Code	Administrative-territorial unit name	Population (01.01.2020)	Revenue (31.12.2020)	Expenditure (31.12.2020)	Contact email	Reply no. and date	Appeals 2019	Appeals 2020	Appeals 2021	Total
225	Judetul IASI	965,634	545,663,874	678,198,502	ghiseu.unic@icc.ro	39 IP/23443/13.07.2021	0	0	0	0
95060	MUNICIPIUL IASI	387,103	876,420,550	854,136,476	cabinet.primar@primaria-iasi.ro	76699/29.07.2021	0	0	0	0
95088	Comuna BARNOVA	7,155	12,081,657	12,457,224	primar@primariabarnova.ro	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
95159	Comuna HOLBOCA	15,584	26,421,953	25,617,725	contact@comunaholboca.ro	9610/20.07.2021	0	0	0	0
95239	Comuna REDIU	7,301	12,785,030	10,887,614	registratura@primariarediu.ro	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
95293	Comuna TOMESTI	14,282	26,572,680	26,689,767	office@comuna-iomesti.ro	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
95355	ORAS HARLAU	15,214	21,081,410	21,250,775	primariahirlau@yahoo.com	13515/2/15.07.2021	0	0	0	0
95391	MUNICIPIUL PASCANI	45,165	61,325,608	56,822,006	office@primariapascani.ro	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
95471	ORAS TARGU FRUMOS	14,382	30,444,068	25,358,146	secretariat@primariatgfrumos.ro	07/IP/19.07.2021	0	0	0	0
95499	Comuna ION NECULCE	5,859	10,653,106	11,154,358	office@primaria-ionneculce.ro	7/22.07.2021	0	0	0	0
95612	Comuna ALEX. I. CUZA	2,860	5,615,102	5,285,919	primaria_aicuza@yahoo.com	5 IP/19.07.2021	0	0	0	0
95667	Comuna ANDRIESEN	4,151	9,675,196	10,027,671	andriesenprimaria@yahoo.com	3293/21.07.2021	0	0	0	0
95747	Comuna ARONEANU	4,164	10,054,331	10,173,925	primariaaroneanu@yahoo.com	6198/R/21.07.2021	0	0	0	0
95792	Comuna BALTATI	5,601	10,583,080	11,920,467	baltati@is.e-adm.ro	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
95872	Comuna BELCESTI	11,085	18,323,341	20,950,498	belcesti@is.e-adm.ro	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
95943	Comuna BIVOLARI	4,134	7,179,267	7,036,906	primaria@comunabivolari.ro	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
96003	Comuna UNGHENI (BOSIA)	4,306	8,290,263	8,266,548	primariaungheniasi@yahoo.com	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
96058	Comuna BRAESTI	3,191	12,368,194	11,327,391	contact@primariabraesti.ro	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
96110	Comuna BUTEA	4,205	13,461,020	14,923,586	contact@primariabutea.ro	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
96147	Comuna CEPLENITA	4,228	7,884,709	7,552,804	contact@primariaceplenita.ro	3344/12.07.2021	0	0	0	0
96192	Comuna CIORTESTI	3,890	11,429,257	11,813,322	primaria.ciorresti@yahoo.com	4657/19.07.2021	0	0	0	0
96254	Comuna CIUREA	16,992	36,633,134	37,541,024	registratura@comunaciurea.ro	4172/12.07.2021	0	0	0	0
96334	Comuna COARNELE CAPREI	2,850	7,778,117	7,946,883	primar@coarnelecaprei.ro	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
96370	Comuna COMARNA	5,955	12,994,930	13,374,597	registratura@primariacomarna.ro	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

SIRUTA Code	Administrative-territorial unit name	Population (01.01.2020)	Revenue (31.12.2020)	Expenditure (31.12.2020)	Contact email	Reply no. and date	Appeals 2019	Appeals 2020	Appeals 2021	Total
96423	Comuna COSTULENI	6,502	9,548,630	9,494,284	primariacostuleni@yahoo.com	51P/28.07.2021	0	0	0	0
96478	Comuna COTNARI	7,611	15,385,116	14,428,726	primaria_cotnari@yahoo.com	9/5786/13.07.2021	0	0	0	0
96593	Comuna COZMESTI	2,779	5,415,516	5,410,904	clcozmesti@yahoo.com	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
96637	Comuna CRISTESTI	3,970	4,596,947	6,823,943	primaria.cristesti.iasi@gmail.com	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
96664	Comuna CUCUTENI	1,323	3,301,010	3,421,844	primar@primariacucuteni.ro	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
96717	Comuna DAGATA	4,767	8,567,181	7,658,426	primariadagata@yahoo.com	5/12.07.2021	0	0	0	0
96815	Comuna DELENI	10,267	15,318,774	15,565,645	primaria@comunadeleni.ro	7123/13.07.2021	0	0	0	0
96888	Comuna DOBROVAT	2,282	4,878,940	3,963,716	primariadobrovat@yahoo.com	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
96904	Comuna DOLHESTI	2,719	12,123,495	13,156,630	primariadolhesti@yahoo.com	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
96940	Comuna DUMESTI	5,022	9,245,915	8,480,875	registratura@comunadumesti.ro	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
97009	Comuna ERBICENI	5,717	14,009,466	12,854,159	erbiceniprimaria@yahoo.com	5609/12.07.2021	0	0	0	0
97063	Comuna FOCURI	3,954	5,701,540	4,826,970	contact@comunafocuri.ro	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
97090	Comuna GOLAIESTI	3,941	7,879,175	7,691,970	contact@golaiesti.ro	4272/12.08.2021	0	0	0	0
97189	Comuna GORBAN	2,962	5,104,397	4,562,469	primariagorban@yahoo.com	3125/22.07.2021	0	0	0	0
97241	Comuna GRAJDURI	7,705	16,025,585	15,654,862	secretar@primariagrajduri.ro	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
97321	Comuna GROPNITA	3,272	8,015,287	7,859,675	primariagropnita@gmail.com	4369/13.07.2021	0	0	0	0
97394	Comuna GROZESTI	1,696	8,674,375	8,803,683	contact@comunagrozești.ro	1938/13.07.2021	0	0	0	0
97438	Comuna HALAUCESTI	5,677	8,889,704	7,123,686	contact@primariahalaucesti.ro	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
97465	Comuna HELESTENI	2,635	4,380,053	4,408,843	Contact@comunahelesteni.ro	3305/15.07.2021	0	0	0	0
97517	Comuna HORLESTI	3,069	7,286,210	7,622,596	primariahorlesti@yahoo.com	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
97553	Comuna IPATELE	1,676	4,071,032	3,817,554	contact@comunai patele.ro	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
97606	Comuna LESPEZI	5,792	7,559,567	7,081,700	contact@primarialespezi.ro	6/13.07.2021	0	0	0	0
97679	Comuna LETCANI	7,910	13,033,321	13,068,471	primaria.letcani@yahoo.ro	IP 10/13.07.2021	0	0	0	0
97722	Comuna LUNGANI	6,586	9,406,180	9,452,170	contact@comunalungani.ro	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
97777	Comuna MADARJAC	1,658	3,485,230	3,990,957	primariamadarjac@yahoo.com	1543/13.07.2021	0	0	0	0

SIRUTA Code	Administrative-territorial unit name	Population (01.01.2020)	Revenue (31.12.2020)	Expenditure (31.12.2020)	Contact email	Reply no. and date	Appeals 2019	Appeals 2020	Appeals 2021	Total
97811	Comuna MIRCESTI	3,895	7,746,375	7,840,989	primaria.mircesti@yahoo.com	3983/15.07.2021	0	0	0	0
97875	Comuna MIRONEASA	5,488	9,385,114	8,976,390	contact@primariamironeasa.ro	05 IP/13.07.2021	0	0	0	0
97919	Comuna MIROSLAVA	21,697	49,188,922	48,785,391	secretariat@primariamiroslava.ro	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
98051	Comuna MIROSLOVESTI	4,206	7,609,816	7,019,626	contact@comunamiroslovesti.ro	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
98113	Comuna MOGOSESTI-IASI	5,165	8,735,625	8,689,667	contact@mogosesti-primaria.ro	4/21.07.2021	0	0	0	0
98168	Comuna MOGOSESTI - SIRET	3,727	6,007,875	6,016,810	mogosesti_siret@yahoo.com	3303/14.07.2021	0	0	0	0
98202	Comuna MOSNA	6,204	11,095,366	10,357,407	primariemosna@yahoo.com	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
98220	Comuna MOTCA	5,428	8,324,366	9,007,032	motca@is.e-adm.ro	2993/14.07.2021	0	0	0	0
98257	Comuna MOVILENI	3,089	11,081,786	10,507,080	contact@primariamovileni.ro	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
98300	Comuna OTELENI	3,603	7,581,147	7,507,130	contact@primariaoteleni.ro	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
98337	Comuna PLUGARI	3,462	5,925,374	7,785,968	primaria_plugari@yahoo.com	2683/12.07.2021	0	0	0	0
98373	ORAS PODU ILOAIEI	11,069	18,509,362	21,502,026	podu_iloaiei@yahoo.com	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
98435	Comuna POPESTI	7,315	11,252,146	10,489,334	primariapoesti@gmail.com	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
98505	Comuna POPRICANI	8,498	20,661,710	19,921,181	contact@primariapopricani.ro	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
98603	Comuna PRISACANI	4,983	5,644,646	4,378,299	prisacani@is.e-adm.ro	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
98649	Comuna PROBOTA	3,639	12,237,055	14,205,314	primariaprobota@primariaprobota.ro	reply via email	0	0	0	0
98685	Comuna RADUCANENI	8,916	15,598,519	15,534,104	primariaraducaneni@yahoo.com	4913/RG/19.07.2021	0	0	0	0
98738	Comuna ROMANESTI	1,751	4,424,483	6,138,684	primariaromanesti@yahoo.com	3182/15.07.2021	0	0	0	0
98774	Comuna RUGINOASA	6,334	14,600,559	14,903,361	primar@primariaruginoasa.ro	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
98827	Comuna SCHITU-DUCA	3,999	5,375,652	5,362,447	registratura@comunascituduca.ro	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
98916	Comuna SCANTELA	10,098	9,889,282	10,351,675	registratura@comunascanteia.ro	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
98998	Comuna SCOBINTI	7,613	13,234,082	13,618,428	primaria_scobinti@yahoo.com	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
99058	Comuna SINESTI	4,428	9,832,681	9,033,179	sinestprimaria@yahoo.com	4490/13.07.2021	0	0	0	0
99101	Comuna SIRETEL	4,376	7,762,978	7,549,172	primariasiretel@yahoo.com	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
99165	Comuna STOLNICENI-PRAJESCU	5,429	12,207,959	12,605,195	primarie@stolniceni.ro	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

SIRUTA Code	Administrative-territorial unit name	Population (01.01.2020)	Revenue (31.12.2020)	Expenditure (31.12.2020)	Contact email	Reply no. and date	Appeals 2019	Appeals 2020	Appeals 2021	Total
99209	Comuna STRUNGA	4,200	6,405,176	6,530,609	strunga@is.e-adm.ro	3260/12.07.2021	0	0	0	0
99290	Comuna SCHEIA	3,273	11,433,791	12,533,407	contact@scheia.ro	3464/15.07.2021	0	0	0	0
99370	Comuna SIPOTE	5,043	10,327,061	10,469,589	primariasipote@yahoo.com	4841/15.07.2021	0	0	0	0
99441	Comuna TANSĂ	3,088	6,281,513	5,799,096	cltansa@yahoo.com	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
99478	Comuna TATARUSI	5,441	9,827,310	11,851,228	primaria_tatarusi@yahoo.com	6524/19.07.2021	0	0	0	0
99539	Comuna TODIREȘTI	5,243	8,785,839	9,739,300	taxesimpozite@primariatodiresti.ro	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
99600	Comuna TRIFESTI	3,936	9,840,479	10,306,022	contact@primariatrifestiasi.ro	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
99673	Comuna TIBANA	8,201	12,856,043	11,491,972	contact@primariatibana.ro	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
99780	Comuna TIBANESTI	8,219	19,290,325	17,629,432	contact@primariatibanesti.ro	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
99879	Comuna TIGANASI	4,911	11,936,200	12,305,943	contact@primariatiganasi.ro	06 IP/13.07.2021	0	0	0	0
99922	Comuna TUTORA	2,220	3,884,967	3,534,954	contact@comunatutura.ro	3249/13.07.2021	0	0	0	0
99968	Comuna VALEA SEACA	6,135	8,905,947	6,703,011	secretariat@primariavaleaseaca.ro	3963/13.07.2021	0	0	0	0
100004	Comuna VICTORIA	4,432	12,280,015	11,493,428	primariavictoria@yahoo.com	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
100086	Comuna VANATORI	4,643	9,185,431	9,184,703	primariavinatori@yahoo.com	2922/22.07.2021	0	0	0	0
100148	Comuna VLADENI	4,242	12,353,788	12,494,103	primariavladeniiasi@yahoo.com	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
100219	Comuna VOINEȘTI	8,372	11,932,647	14,275,603	contact@primariavoinesi-iasi.ro	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
100273	Comuna BALS	3,653	5,153,918	4,242,186	contact@primariacomuneibals.ro	23/13.07.2021	0	0	0	0
100282	Comuna COSTEȘTI	1,803	4,103,936	3,968,049	ad.primariacostesti@gmail.com	6 IP/13.07.2021	0	0	0	0
100308	Comuna DRĂGUSENI	1,468	12,477,842	12,241,407	contact@comunadraguseni.ro	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
100317	Comuna FANTĂNELE	2,077	5,328,544	4,521,363	contact@comunafantaneleiasi.ro	5 IP/19.07.2021	0	0	0	0
100326	Comuna HARMANESTI	2,569	6,423,882	6,393,802	harmanesti@is.e-adm.ro	61P/16.07.2021	0	0	0	0
100335	Comuna RACHITENI	3,296	6,585,260	9,942,269	contact@primariarachiteni.ro	3563/19.07.2021	0	0	0	0
100344	Comuna ROSCANI	1,568	4,030,931	3,857,390	primaria_roscani@yahoo.ro	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
100353	Comuna VALEA LUPULUI	10,086	14,726,138	12,474,501	primaria_valealupului@yahoo.com	R 9IP/19.07.2021	0	0	0	0
100362	Comuna CIOHORANI	1,954	5,560,451	4,889,050	primaria_ciohorani@yahoo.com	4494/13.07.2021	0	0	0	0

Annex 2 – Inventory of on-line participatory budgeting data in Romania (organized chronologically)

LOCAL ENTITY	YEAR	NUMBER OF PROJECTS	FINANCING LIMITS	NUMBER OF VOTES	PROCEDURE OF VOTING	YEAR OF IMPLEMENTATION
CLUJ	2017 (pilot) 2018 2019 2021	20 projects eligible (2021)	100.000 euro/project	2017 - 76.837 Votes 2021 - In process Votes per project between 456 and 2	Voting in 2 steps on-line Local debates	2017 results implemented in 2018
ORADEA	2018	52 projects presented 10 projects financed	1.8 million euro/total	13.896 Votes	Voting in 1 step on-line Local debates	2018 results implemented in 2019
DEVA	2018	5 projects financed	20.000 euro/project	N/A	N/A	2018 results implemented in 2019
BAIA MARE	2018	N/A	200.000 euro/total	N/A	N/A	
SUCEAVA	2018 2019 2021	18 projects financed (2021)	20.000 euro/project	Votes per project between 10 and 120	Voting in 1 step on-line	2021 results implemented in 2022
SIBIU	2019	6 projects financed	150.000 euro/project	Votes per project between 5 and 217	Voting in 2 steps on-line	2019 results implemented in 2020
CĂLĂRAȘI - COUNTY	2019	N/A	2% from revenues/total	N/A	N/A	2019 results implemented in 2020
BRAȘOV	2019	22 selected projects in second stage	15.000-4.500 euro/project	Votes per project between 0 and 163	Voting in 2 steps on-line	2019 results implemented in 2019
ZALĂU	2019	6 projects financed	200.000 euro/project	Votes per project between 58 and 233	Voting in 1 step on-line	2019 results implemented in 2020
TURDA	2019	20 projects	200.000	Votes per project	Voting in 1 step on-line	2019 results implemented in 2019

	(2020 COVID)	financed	euro/total	between 261 and 1.937		(postponed for 2020)
FĂGĂRAȘ	2019 (2020 COVID)	8 projects financed	15.000 euro/project	N/A	Voting in 1 step on-line	2019 results implemented in 2020
ROMAN	2019 2020 2021	5 projects presented (2021)	50.000 euro/total	961 Votes Votes per project between 14 and 461	Voting in 1 step on-line	2021 results implemented in 2021
BUCUREȘTI SECTOR 1	2020	104 projects presented 58 projects eligible 7 projects financed	500.000 euro/total	2.480 Votes	Voting in 2 steps on-line	2019 results implemented in 2020
SIGHIȘOARA	2020	3 projects financed	50.000 euro/project	N/A	Voting in 1 step on-line	2020 results implemented in 2021
SNAGOV	2021	12 projects presented 3 projects eligible	10.000 euro/project	N/A	Vote postponed	N/A
FLOREȘTI (RURAL)	2021	7 projects presented 2 projects financed	100.000 euro/total	Minimum 100 votes needed	Voting in 1 step on-line	2021 results implemented in 2021
DEVA	2021	12 projects financed	10.000 euro/project	Votes per project between 6 and 65	Voting in 1 step on-line	2021 results implemented in 2021
SANPETRU (RURAL)	2021	31 projects presented 6 projects financed	40.000 euro/total 10.000 euro/project	Votes per project between 76 and 193	Voting in 1 step on-line	2021 results implemented in 2021
IAȘI	2021	N/A	2 million euro	Non-functional	N/A	

COUNTY CIUREA (RURAL)	2021	N/A	N/A	Non-functional	N/A	Platform procurement
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