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The First Decade of Participatory Budgeting in Slovakia: Drivers, Models, and Impacts³

Diffusion of the participatory budgeting concept has been a kind of spontaneous process in Slovakia since the early 2010s. The first attempts were (co-)initiated by the NGO called Utopia, and they occurred in three Slovak towns (namely in Banská Bystrica, Bratislava, and Ružomberok). The experience from these towns seemed contradictory. Despite initial high expectations from the public and local politicians, the implementation of the first participatory budgets did not avoid political as well as economic disappointments. Later, local participatory budgets were co-initiated by local politicians, too. The local governments with the participatory budgets must improvise because there is a lack of any legal regulation of the participatory budgeting in Slovakia. In fact, the decisions of these governments are not illegal but they do not have sufficient support in the existing legal regulation. Therefore, various models of participatory budgeting have been used by the local governments in Slovakia since the early 2010s. The concept of participatory budgeting was “discovered” by the state in 2017. The Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Civil Society Development started to implement the national project called "Promoting Partnership and Dialogue in the Field of Participatory Public Policy-Making" in the mentioned year. Thanks to this national project, the implementation of the participatory budgeting was directly co-financed in Hlohovec. In addition, the Office has become very active in the field of participatory budgeting, and it has supported further diffusion of the participatory budgeting in the conditions of regional governments as well as secondary schools. It is difficult to provide any deep assessment of the impacts of the participatory budgeting in Slovakia, because 1) the clear majority of the implemented participatory budgets has been implemented just for few years before a suspension of the participatory budgets in Slovakia due to the COVID-19 pandemic; 2) many participatory budgets have been implemented as rather experiment-like local initiatives. Regardless of these concerns, we analyse not only diffusion of the participatory budgeting in Slovakia, its drivers, and implemented models, but we try to point out also some visible impacts. For this purpose, we have employed both desk research and field research and we use relevant qualitative as well as quantitative data for our analysis.

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