

Digital tools promoting participatory budget participation at the local level – examples from Slovenia

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Abstract: The aim of the paper is to present the impact of the different digital tools on citizen participation in participatory budget voting practices in Slovenia. The reason why we chose the topic is that in Slovenia the Local Self-Government Act has given explicit legal ground for the use of facultative participatory budgeting (PB) on the municipal level since 2018. The act implements a constitutional understanding of the financial autonomy of municipalities, leaving the discretion to municipalities on deciding the number of funds intended for PB, deciding on who and how can propose projects and vote on them, etc. as far as the public finance rules are obeyed. This means municipalities and their inhabitants have absolute discretion regarding the nature of proposed and later (if chosen) implemented projects in a certain municipality if the projects fall under municipal authority. The latest research shows that only 30 - out of 212 - municipal governments being at some time, during the period from 2015 until 2021, engaged in PB projects.

The theoretical part will use a descriptive method of writing, where the focus will be mainly on presenting the existing legislation and different literature on the subject to describe and explain the concepts and already-known facts, while the quantitative method that will be used will be based on a survey system (the survey will be sent to all municipalities practicing PB), with which we will obtain primary data regarding three research questions:

RQ1: Which voting practices were used in your municipality in the voting phase of PB?

If the municipality offered the possibility of voting via different digital tools (different applications, email, etc.) the municipality (or the person in charge of the PB process in a certain municipality) would be asked to answer two (2) more questions.

RQ2: What was the voter turnout in your last PB?

RQ3: How many of the voters who voted used digital tools to cast their votes and decide on proposed PB projects?

Our paper will focus on voter turnout in deciding which proposed project will be implemented via PB.

Voting practices vary between municipalities. In some municipalities, people voted in person (similar to general local elections), in the general assembly of municipal residents, via different online tools (applications), or by ordinary mail or email. The analysed results will show if the use of digital tools in PB voting practice has any effect on voter turnout and the use of voting tools.