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## Participatory Budget as a Form of Social Participation: The Example of Communes in Poland in 2020–2022

### Abstract

*Objective:* In the process of managing a commune, the needs of the community inhabiting the area of a given commune are met, and the commune budget constitutes the basis of the commune's financial management. The commune budget is an annual plan of income and expenses as well as the commune's revenues and expenditures. Communes enable the residents to decide how to spend part of the budget in the form of a participatory budget. The aim of this article is to identify and assess the activity of various types of communes in the field of participatory budget planning in Poland, as well as to explain the reasons behind differences in the level of the commitment.

*Research Design & Methods:* Selected literature references in the subject scope of the article are analysed. In addition, an analysis of secondary data was performed regarding the number of communes with a planned amount of participatory budget. The analysis is conducted considering the criterion of the type of commune (rural, urban, rural-urban). The time scope of the analysis covers the years 2020–2022.

*Findings:* The share of communes that invite inhabitants to participate in the decision-making process on how to spend part of public money as participatory budget is quite low. In the years 2020–2022, 12.27%, 11.18%, and 12.92% of all communes in Poland planned a participatory budget. In 2021, compared to 2020, there was a smaller number of communes that had a planned participatory budget. This could be due to the COVID-19 pandemic that had been ongoing since 2020. The level of offering communities the participation in the decision-making process differs in various types of communes, and that differentiation is statistically valid. Since the sources of such differences mainly can come from social, cultural, economic, or political reasons, they were explored more deeply.

*Implications / Recommendations:* Due to the diversity of the types of communes in terms of population, it is recommended that an analysis be conducted according to the discussed determinants. The results may be helpful for local managers in terms of including them into the local sustainable strategy participatory budget instrument and following Sherry Arnstein's (2019) ladder process while considering local constraints and opportunities.

*Contribution / Value Added:* The exploration of participatory budget mostly concentrated on larger urban communes. However, the delved analysis of the implementation of participatory budget in rural or rural-urban communes was not so popular. The added value is the analysis according to the type of communes as well as the discussion on the reasons behind such differences. The paper contributes to the discussion of the stimulators and inhibitors of the implementation of such a tool in creating locally social capital and tightening relations among different stakeholders in the name of common good.

*Keywords:* local government; participatory budget; public management

*Article classification:* research article

*JEL classification:* H7, O2, R5

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## Introduction

One of the basic tasks of local governments is to take care of the development of their areas and to ensure high quality of the life and well-being of residents. Local governments are responsible in particular for education, safety, health care, public transport, road condition, utilities (water, sewage, sewage disposal and treatment), order, social assistance, spatial order, real estate management, access to culture, and several other issues of key importance to residents. The ability of local governments to perform tasks is usually limited by the budgets they have at their disposal, hence the priority tasks included in commune strategies and current tasks result from changes taking place in the environment. The framework of their activities is determined by legal regulations, which is why the communes' strategies indicate in what period and what tasks, usually of an investment nature, will be implemented.

However, such a framework of action does not limit the possibility of involving residents in the development of their commune. They have the opportunity to co-decide on investments that are close to them and improve the quality of life, such as building local playgrounds, improving the quality of roads, taking actions to improve safety, greening the area, etc. (Touchton et al., 2024). An approach where a citizen is strengthened in service creation, design, production, or initiation is called the co-production of public value (Ćwiklicki, 2019; Ćwiklicki & Plich, 2020). This purpose is served, among others, by participatory budgets, also known as citizen budgets. Over the last two decades, there has been a significant increase in researchers' interest in this tool for residents' co-deciding about investments in their immediate surroundings (Milosavljević et al., 2023). Previously, it had been present, or rather initiated, in Brazil and generally in South American countries and cities (Wampler et al., 2021). In Poland, in the first edition of the participatory budget, investments were made in Sopot, including the improvement of the quality of road infrastructure (Krasnowolski, 2020). Only after 2000 did this idea begin to penetrate other regions of the world, including European countries (Klimovsky et al., 2021; Sintomer et al., 2008; Sorychta-Wojczyk, 2015).

The objective of this article is to identify and assess the activity of various types of communes in the implementation of participatory budget in Poland and the explanation of the reasons behind the differences in their level of commitment. The time scope of the analysis covers the years 2020–2022. The source of secondary data is the Local Data Bank of the Central Statistical Office (GUS BDL). The following structure was adopted in the study. The first part presents the issue of participatory budgeting and the development of the use of this tool in Poland. The second part refers to the author's own analyses, conducted on the basis of data from secondary sources, whose aim was to verify the hypotheses. The next part formulates conclusions and indicates limitations and recommendations for the future.

## Literature review

### *Theoretical foundations*

Participatory budget (PB) is perceived as a sustainable management tool (Sinervo et al., 2024) through which citizens can influence public administration and add significant value to sustainable development from the democratic perspective. According to the United Nations Commission for Economic and Social Affairs (2010), PB should consider eight main features

related to good governance. These include participation, consensus, responsibility, transparency and responsiveness, effectiveness and efficiency, fairness, non-rejection of any groups or individuals, and the rule of law (Xu et al., 2015). As a concept, PB fits into both New Public Service and New Public Governance, among other things (Table 1).

**Table 1.** A comparison Among the Traditional PA, NPM, NPS, and NPG

	<b>Traditional public administration and management</b>	<b>New public management</b>	<b>New public service</b>	<b>New public governance</b>
Value orientation	Regime & procedure	Efficiency	Democracy	Democracy & efficiency
Theoretical basis	Bureaucratic system, political & administrative dichotomy	Economics theory, the management philosophy of private sector	Democratic citizenship, civic society, the humanistic theory of organisation, postmodern administrative theory	Contractualism, integrity theory, collectivism
Behaviour	Policymaking & execution-separating, centralised government	Government service outsourcing & marketing	The cultivation of government service spirit, cooperation with the third sector	Citizen independence, public deliberation, polycentric governance
The role of a citizen	Leader	Customer	By the service of the citizens	Participating in decision-making
Research method	Institutionalism research method	Positivism research method	Humanism research method	Collectivism research method

Source: Xu et al., 2015, p. 13.

The meta-analysis of articles, conducted by Schugurensky and Mook (2024), locates PB in the theory of change. Following the theory, PB consists of four stages of change: inputs, activities, outcomes, and impact. At the input stage, designated resources are allocated for use by the involved parties. The utilisation of these resources depends on a range of factors that define the specific context. During the activities stage, an action plan is formulated and the ideas are collected, developed, and subjected to a voting process. The projects chosen through this process are subsequently implemented. The process concludes with the monitoring and evaluation of results, including the generated impact.

The study conducted by the NGO organisation called People Powered (2022) identified different types of impact, i.e. on people, communities, and government itself as consequences of PB implementation by local managers (Wampler et al., 2022, pp. 2–15) (Table 2). Moreover, the change triggered by the implementation of PB may be economic or environmental in nature. However, due to the involvement of many stakeholders, a significant social impact occurs, which leads to a change in the knowledge, attitude, and behaviour of the involved stakeholders (Bachnik et al., 2024).

Participatory budgeting can also be considered as a tool applied at the highest level on Sherry Arnstein's ladder of participation (Arnstein, 2019, 1975; White & Langenheim, 2021). It is a form of the socialisation of local authorities that treats citizens as partners for dialogue, makes them co-responsible (empowerment) for the shape and development of a local government unit, and also

gives the right to conduct citizen control, thus expecting transparency in the spending of public money. It is also a form of social activation that aims at obtaining bottom-up initiatives from citizens that will not be imposed centrally, in a hierarchical, traditional system of local authorities. The ideas, with their support, will be the subject to voting, selection, and implementation. Their implementation creates space for dialogue between various stakeholder groups and contributes to the integration of local communities in order to achieve goals that are beneficial to all residents. At the same time, residents have the opportunity to integrate internally in order to increase their chances of obtaining a budget and implementing the initiative. Moreover, participatory budgeting can be a way to induce a psychological effect among residents in the form of a sense of their own agency. Another issue related to participatory budgeting is the increased transparency of local authorities' policies, which results in trust in decision-makers. It is also worth adding that this method can accelerate the implementation of a task for which previously there had been no financial resources or the financial resources had been insufficient.

**Table 2.** The impact of PB on three types of stakeholders

– Participants	– Communities	– Government
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– new civic and political knowledge;</li> <li>– developing stronger civic, political, and deliberative skills;</li> <li>– the adaptation of new attitudes, values, and dispositions;</li> <li>– promoting mutual trust between participants, governments, and educational institutions;</li> <li>– increasing voting in regular elections;</li> <li>– enhancing non-electoral, individual-level political participation such as contacting elected officials and proposing solutions to community problems;</li> <li>– designing and implementing BP impacts the civic engagement gap;</li> <li>– impact on knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviours.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– lower infant mortality of PB;</li> <li>– building budget literacy among community leaders;</li> <li>– communities that accessed more money per capita have seen greater participation;</li> <li>– collaboration with civil society organisations improves participation;</li> <li>– more collaborations by civil society organisations if collective action is encouraged;</li> <li>– less formal collective action.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– more local tax revenues, as residents may be more willing to pay taxes;</li> <li>– local governments spend money differently, allocating more resources to areas such as housing, health care, education, water and sewage infrastructure, as well as parks and recreation;</li> <li>– owing to PB, local governments redirect government spending to low-income communities, especially when it applies equity criteria;</li> <li>– the impact of BP differs across locations.</li> </ul>

Source: Based on Wampler et al., 2022.

According to Kalisiak-Mędeńska (2011), the generation of conscious and active citizens and the creation of civic structures and community identity is the power of social participation. On the other hand, despite the existing legal regulations, the introduction of, e.g., a village fund for villages, as indicated by Bednarska-Olejniczak et al. (2020), depends on the political will of the legislative authorities of local government and on the willingness of the residents to participate in making decisions regarding the directions of expenditure. Nevertheless, the village fund, despite initial concerns, proved to be effective in Poland, especially owing to the autonomy of local communities and significant financial incentives (Sześciło & Wilk, 2018).

Cabannes and Lipietz (2018) note that PBs can be threefold in nature. Firstly, they may be territorial and refer to a community, district, city, or region. They are then „spatial” instruments of budget redistribution and governance. Secondly, they may concern specific issues such as

transport, housing, education, environment, or local economic development. They may also refer to specific social groups, e.g. excluded for some reasons, for which financial resources will be allocated, e.g. people with disabilities.

It is necessary to emphasise that PB is also a form of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular: goal 4 – ensuring inclusive and equitable high-quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all; goal 6 – ensuring the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all; goal 11 – making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable; goal 15 – protecting, restoring, and promoting the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainable forest management, combating desertification, and stopping and reversing land degradation as well as halting the loss of biodiversity (Svobodová & Olejniczak, 2020; Touchton et al., 2024).

### *Participatory budget in Poland – previous experience and selected research results*

According to the interpretation cited by Krasnowolski in the Polish Senate documents (2020), participatory budget, also often called civic budget, is a democratic process in which residents co-decide on the allocation of part of the budget of a local government unit, in the percentage of public expenditure determined by local government bodies in a budget year (Krasnowolski, 2020). It is assumed that Sopot was the first city in Poland to introduce a participatory budget in 2011, but significant changes in legal regulations were introduced only in 2018. As Sorychta-Wojczyk (2015) notes, the legal basis on which local governments relied when introducing the participatory budget was the institution of consultation with commune residents, in accordance with Art. 5a of the Act on Commune Self-Government of 8<sup>th</sup> March, 1990. At that time, participatory budget in Poland was organised on an informal basis as public consultations, and local authorities agreed to respect its results as an unwritten agreement. Significant changes were introduced under the Act of 11<sup>th</sup> January, 2018, amending certain acts in order to increase citizens' participation in the process of electing, functioning, and controlling certain public bodies. The provisions on participatory budget – introduced by the Sejm in 2018 in the acts on commune, county, and voivodship self-government – define participatory budget as a special form of consultation. The obligation to organise participatory budgets was imposed on all cities with county rights, while for other urban, urban-rural, and rural communes, the introduction of such a budget is optional (the decision in this regard is made by the commune council) (Martela et al., 2023; Polish Act of 8<sup>th</sup> March, 1990, on Commune Self-Government<sup>1</sup>).

The establishment of participatory budget for communes that are cities with county rights is obligatory, and its amount is at least 0.5% of the commune's expenses included in the last submitted report on the implementation of the budget (Act of 8<sup>th</sup> March, 1990, on Commune Self-Government, Article 5a, section 5). It is possible to divide funds spent within the participatory

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<sup>1</sup> Act of 8<sup>th</sup> March, 1990, on Commune Self-Government, art. 5a, section 1 stipulates that in the cases provided for by the Act and in other matters important for the commune, consultations with the inhabitants of the commune may be conducted on its territory. In section 3, it is stated that participatory budget is a special form of social consultations. The legislator further specifies that as part of the participatory budget, residents decide annually in direct voting on part of the commune budget expenditure. The tasks that will be selected as part of the participatory budget are included in the commune budget resolution. In the course of work on the draft budget resolution, the commune council may not remove or significantly change the tasks selected under the participatory budget (Act of 8<sup>th</sup> March, 1990, on Commune Self-Government, Art. 5a, section 4).

budget into pools covering the entire commune and its parts or project amounts covering the entire commune area or its parts (Act of 8<sup>th</sup> March, 1990, on Commune Self-Government, Art. 5a, section 6). It should be noted that in 2022, the legal situation changed regarding both the obligation to organise participatory budgets, which was imposed on cities with county rights, and the method of allocating pools (Martela et al., 2023).

Research conducted on participatory budget in Poland is often limited to a specific area (e.g. voivodeships, cities, metropolises) and does not cover the entire country. For example, research conducted by Jeran et al. (2018) focused on the Wielkopolska voivodeship. The researchers noted, among others, that the share of the participatory budget in the Wielkopolska region in the total commune budget (expenditures) was 0.59%, while in the commune's assets expenditure, it was 4.31%. Moreover, these researchers confirmed that the wealth of a commune is not a factor differentiating communes implementing a participatory budget from those not implementing it, and that communes implementing a participatory budget are characterised by a higher synthetic indicator of social activity. Ostachowski (2021) analysed the activity of local communities in the indicated scope on the example of the Świętokrzyskie voivodeship, paying attention to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the use of this region's participatory budget. In turn, an analysis of participatory budgeting on the example of small towns in the Silesian voivodeship and the Łódź voivodeship was conducted by Sobol and Rzeńca (2018). Large cities were also the subject of scientific research (Brol & Derlukiewicz, 2023) and prepared reports, e.g. the City 2077 Report compared the share in the participatory budget in the six largest cities in Poland (Miasto 2077, 2019). Metropolises were also the objects of research in the field of participatory budgeting, an example of which is an analysis of the experiences of selected metropolises in Poland and Ukraine (Kudłacz & Zhebchuk, 2019).

Participatory budget as part of the activation of citizens in cities in Poland in 2022 was conducted in 250 centres, i.e. 43.5% of cities with over 5,000 inhabitants. Regardless of the size of the city, the share of voters in the budgets does not exceed 14%, and on average it is 11% (Martela et al., 2023). The authors of the report on the participatory budget note that as the size of the centre measured by the number of inhabitants increased, the possibility of choosing more expensive and more complex projects was higher (Martela et al., 2023). However, it is worth noting that in 2022, cities reserved a total of 630.5 million PLN for the implementation of the winning projects (Martela et al., 2023). In Poland, thematic projects related to greenery and recreation are the most frequently chosen ones. On average, they constitute approximately ¼ of the tasks selected in voting. Road investments come second, and those related to kindergartens and schools come third (Martela et al., 2022).

## Research methodology

Based on the literature analysis and a review of studies and reports on the participatory budget in Poland, a research gap was identified regarding the identification of the activity of various types of communes in Poland in the implementation of the participatory budget. The lack of research covering types of the communes may be due to the fact that only a dozen or so years have passed since the first participatory budget was introduced in Poland. The Central Statistical Office provides data in this area for the years 2020–2022.

The article analyses the variable of the amount of the participatory budget planned in the commune, which in this article is identified with the term 'planned participatory budget'. Due to

the fact that the database of communes downloaded from the Central Statistical Office that have planned a participatory budget includes only those communes that have planned such a budget, the first step was to create a database of all communes in Poland with the assigned participatory budget amount. The allocation of the participatory budget amount to each commune had to be analysed separately for each year, because the status of communes changed in the analysed years and there were different numbers of communes of a given type (Table 3). An in-depth analysis of the number of communes by type limited the risk of a commune appearing twice in the developed database.

**Table 3.** The number of communes in Poland by type in 2020–2022

	Urban communes	Share	Rural communes	Share	Urban-rural communes	Share	Total	Share
2020	302	12.2%	1,533	61.9%	642	25.9%	2,477	100%
2021	302	12.2%	1,523	61.5%	652	26.3%	2,477	100%
2022	302	12.2%	1,513	61.1%	662	26.7%	2,477	100%

Source: Own elaboration based on the Centre of Statistical Information Technology (Centrum Informatyki Statystycznej, 2024).

In each year covered by the study, there were a total of 2,477 communes located in Poland. In the years 2020–2022, rural communes dominated in Poland in terms of number, followed by urban-rural and urban ones. Additionally, among urban communes, 66 cities with county rights which were obliged to implement a participatory budget were identified.

The time scope of the study (2020–2022) is the period during which there was the COVID-19 pandemic in Poland, as in other countries in 2020 and 2021. It caused a number of socioeconomic changes, including those in participation and the perception of participatory budgeting (Ostachowski, 2021). Moreover, as the report covering the first two years of the pandemic indicates, 29% of local governments with more than 5,000 inhabitants resigned from implementing the participatory budget in 2021, and 43% of local governments other than cities with county rights (those are obliged by law) withdrew from implementing a participatory budget. Online activities were the main activities of those units that decided to implement the programme, and 40% of communes want to keep online methods for the future or limit some elements of the process to them (such as voting and submitting projects).

The analysis of data regarding the planned amount of the participatory budget in Poland was divided into two parts – a general analysis of this variable for communes according to their type and an in-depth analysis in which a hypothesis was formulated and the  $\chi^2$  (chi-square) test of independence was used. During the general analysis of planned participatory budget by communes in Poland, the following general research questions were raised:

1. What part of communes in Poland has planned the amount of participatory budget?
2. Are there differences between types of communes in Poland in terms of:
  - a) the planned average amount of participatory budget?
  - b) the average planned amount of participatory budget per capita?
3. Why do differences between types of communes in Poland in the use of participatory budget exist?

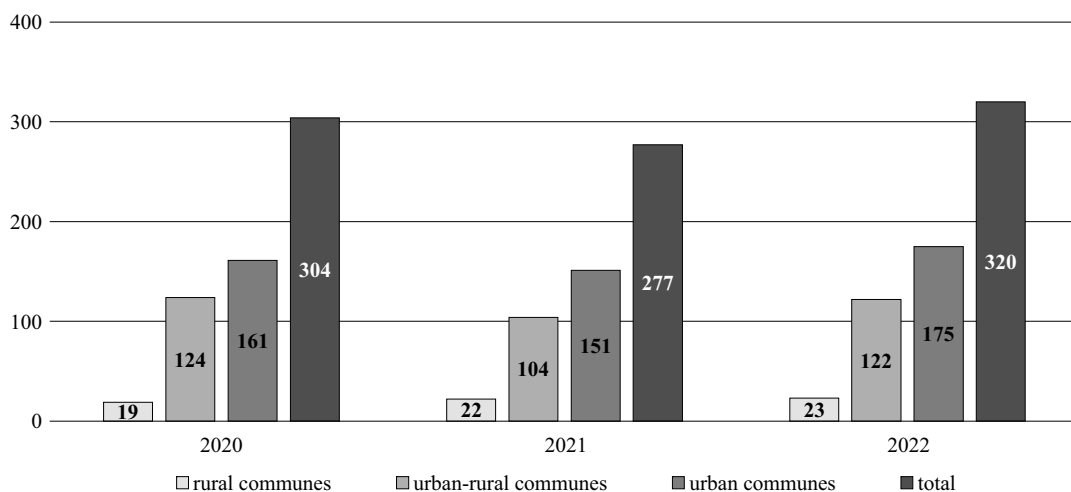
Considering the theoretical part of the article, including the research conducted in the subject area and the state of the recognition of the studied phenomenon in Poland, the research hypothesis is:  $H_1$ : There is a relationship between planning a participatory budget by communes and their type.

Due to the obligation to implement a participatory budget by cities with county rights, they were excluded from the study of the chi-square independence test (the analysis was conducted for other urban communes as well as urban-rural communes and rural communes). The Statistica software 13 was used for calculations.

## The results and discussion

As stated before, creating a participatory budget in Poland is an obligation for communes that are cities with county rights (Act of 8<sup>th</sup> March, 1990, on Commune Self-Government, Art. 5a, section 5), while for others, i.e. urban, urban-rural, and rural communes, it is a voluntary action.

In 2020, a total of 304 communes in Poland planned a participatory budget, in 2021 – 277 communes, and in 2022 – 320 communes, which constitutes 12.27%, 11.18%, and 12.92% of all communes, respectively (Figure 1). In 2021, compared to 2020, there was a smaller number of communes that had a planned participatory budget. This could be due to the COVID-19 pandemic ongoing since 2020 and the introduced special solutions related to the prevention, counteracting, and combating of COVID-19. During the epidemic situation, it is recommended that direct interpersonal contacts be limited. This period was a challenge for the local government in terms of the organisation of public services, lower budget revenues (resulting from restrictions on business activity imposed by the government), or incurring additional expenses necessary to ensure sanitary safety in subordinate facilities (Foundation for the Development of Local Democracy named after Jerzy Reguiski, 2021).



**Figure 1.** The number of communes that planned a participatory budget in Poland in 2020–2022 according to the type of commune criterion

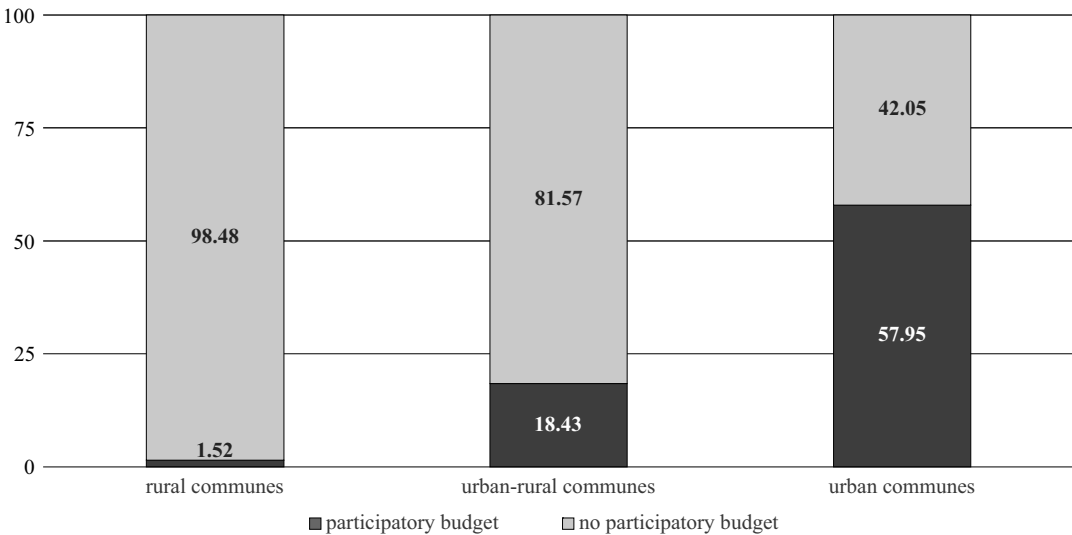
Source: Own elaboration based on GUS BDL.

In 2020, all cities with county rights had a planned participatory budget (which results from the above-mentioned legal regulations), while in the following two years, one city had an analysed budget of zero. The total number of urban communes and the total number of urban-rural communes that planned a participatory budget in 2021 was lower than in 2020, and in 2022 it was



higher than in 2021. In turn, the total number of rural communes in terms of the tested feature was higher in 2021 than in 2020, and in 2022 it was slightly higher than in 2021.

In order to notice regularities in the activity of individual communes according to their type, it is worth exploring the share of communes planning a participatory budget in all communes of a given type. Significant differences are observed in the share of communes of particular types in terms of activity in the examined area (Figure 2). In 2022, over half of urban communes (approx. 57.95%) had the planned amount of participatory budget. This group of communes also includes cities with county rights. In accordance with the Act of 5<sup>th</sup> June, 1998, on County Self-Government (Article 92, section 2), they are communes performing county tasks on the principles specified in this Act. These cities are specific in terms of the analysed feature, because, as mentioned above, the creation of a participatory budget is obligatory for them, which results from the legal regulations referred to. A total of 65 cities with county rights (out of 66 communes with such status) demonstrated the creation of a participatory budget, which constitutes 98.48% of the total. In turn, if the group of urban communes with a planned participatory budget excluded cities with county rights, then approximately 46.61% of the remaining urban communes had a participatory budget (excluding cities with county rights). Moreover, approximately 18.43% of urban-rural communes and only approximately 1.52% of rural communes had a planned amount of participatory budget. However, this does not translate into a low level of activity of these communes in involving residents in co-deciding on part of the budget, because, as mentioned in the theoretical part, they can create and implement a village fund, which is referred to as a special form of participatory budget. Community funds might be introduced only in rural or urban-rural communes that created special auxiliary units for rural areas, called communities or villages [Pol. *sołectwa*]. Rural communes cover only rural areas (villages), while urban-rural communes consist of a town and the surrounding rural areas (villages) (Sześciło & Wilk, 2018). In 2021, the number of communes with village councils was 2,173, and the number of communes with a separate village fund was 1,498 (MSWiA, 2024).

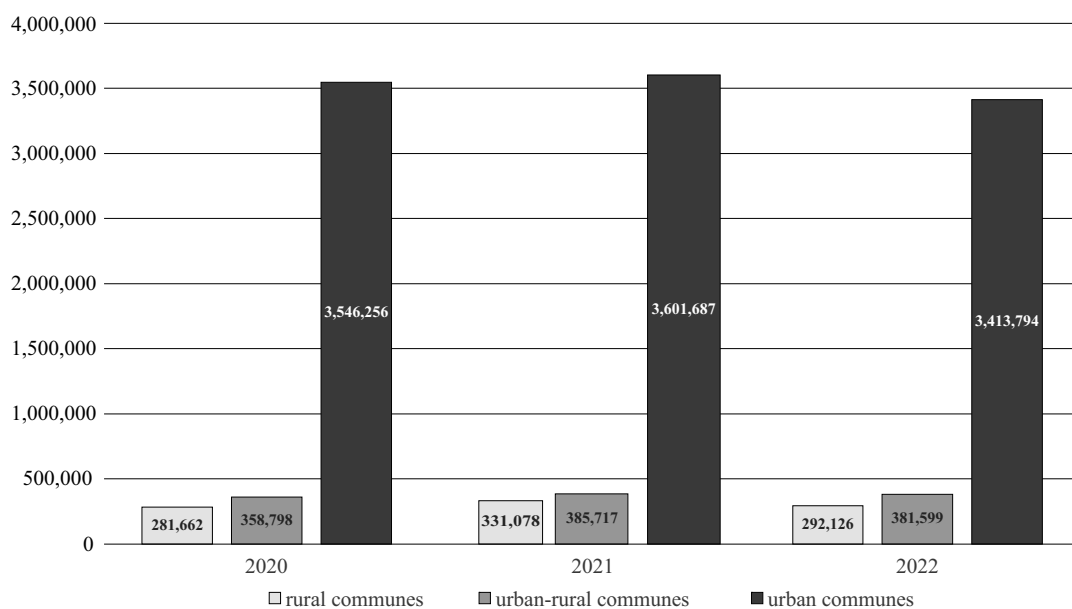


**Figure 2.** The share of communes that planned a participatory budget in 2022 according to the type of commune criterion [%]

Source: Own elaboration based on GUS BDL.

Considering the criterion of the type of commune, in the years 2020–2022, the share of communes planning a participatory budget in Poland was 12.27% of communes in 2020, 11.18% of communes in 2021, and 12.92% of communes in 2022. The smaller number of communes with a planned participatory budget in 2021 could result from the COVID-19 pandemic ongoing since 2020 and recommendations related to limiting interpersonal contacts. In 2022, approximately 57.95% of urban communes had the planned amount of the participatory budget, although if cities with county rights were excluded from this group (the legislator imposed the obligation to prepare a participatory budget), this share would amount to approximately 46.61% of urban communes. Among urban-rural communes, it was approximately 18.43% of them, and among rural communes – only approximately 1.52% of them. This does not mean that these groups of communes do not engage residents in consulting projects aimed at improving their living conditions, because the legislator provides them with the opportunity to create a village fund and it is created by over half of the communes in which there are villages.

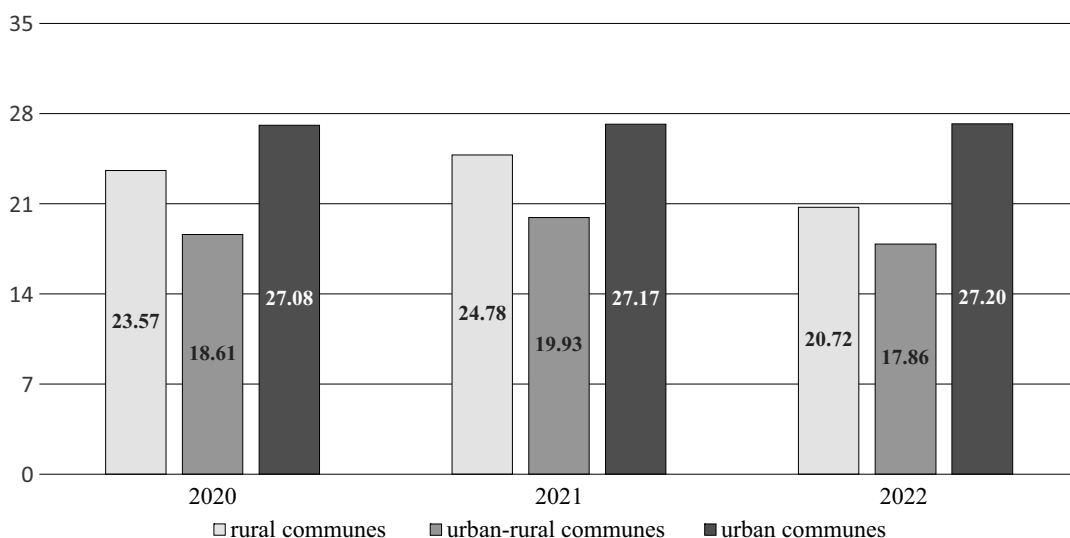
By conducting an in-depth analysis of the average amount of the participatory budget in a given type of commune, its highest value was observed for the group of urban communes, which is related to the large population and high budget of these units (Figure 3). The average amount of participatory budget is much lower for urban-rural communes and rural communes.



**Figure 3.** The average amount of the planned participatory budget in Poland in 2020–2022 according to the type of commune [PLN]

Source: Own elaboration based on GUS BDL.

It is cognitively interesting to determine the amount of planned participatory budget per capita. In the years 2020–2022, the highest value of participatory budget per capita was in urban communes, followed by rural and urban-rural communes (Figure 4). If a group of cities with county rights were separated, the average value of the planned budget per capita in these cities in the analysed period would be 39.27 PLN, 39.60 PLN, and 42.87 PLN, respectively.



**Figure 4.** The average amount of the planned participatory budget per capita in Poland in 2020–2022 according to the type of commune [PLN]

Source: Own elaboration based on GUS BDL.

In order to verify whether planning participatory budget depends on the type of commune, the independence test  $\chi^2$  was used. Contingency tables were built for the analysed variables (Table 4), which shows the actual number of observations in each combination of variables.

**Table 4.** Contingency tables with the numbers of communes that planned a participatory budget by type in 2020–2022

communes	2020				2021				2022			
	Participatory budget (PB)		Total	Share of PB	Participatory budget (PB)		Total	Share of PB	Participatory budget (PB)		Total	Share of PB
	no	yes			no	yes			no	yes		
urban	141	95	236	40%	150	86	236	36%	126	110	236	47%
rural	1514	19	1533	1%	1501	22	1523	1%	1490	23	1513	2%
urban-rural	518	124	642	19%	548	104	652	16%	540	122	662	18%
total	2173	238	2411	10%	2199	212	2411	9%	2156	255	2411	11%
Share	90.1%	9.9%	100%		91.2%	8.8%	100%		89.4%	10.6%	100%	

Source: Own elaboration based on GUS BDL.

The following research hypothesis was formulated:

$H_1$ : There is an association between planning a participatory budget by communes and their type.

Based on the chi-square independence test, it is concluded that there is a relationship between planning participatory budget by communes and the type of commune. The value of Pearson's

$\chi^2$  statistics is 4437.6003 in 2020, 369.1400 in 2021, and 498.3568 in 2022 at  $p < 0.05$ , so there are grounds to reject the null hypothesis. This means that planning a participatory budget is connected with the type of commune in each analysed year. The p-value is the probability of obtaining a chi-square statistic value equal to – or greater than – the calculated value, assuming that the null hypothesis is true. A low p-value (below 0.05) suggests that we can reject the null hypothesis of the independence of variables. The  $F_i$  coefficient and Cramer's V coefficient indicate that the relationship is moderate.

Based on the  $\chi^2$  independence test, the null hypothesis about the lack of a relationship between planning the participatory budget and the type of commune was rejected. There is an association between planning a participatory budget by communes and their type.

## Conclusions and future recommendations

Participatory budget combines two issues. Generally, a budget concerns a plan, a statement of income, and expenses for a future period. In relation to a local government unit (commune, county, voivodeship), the budget is an annual plan of income and expenses as well as revenues and expenditures of this unit, adopted by its decision-making body. In turn, participatory budget includes funds that the local government unit allocates to the implementation of tasks indicated by those residents who are entitled to vote. As a tool, PB provides residents with the right to vote and co-decide on the selection of tasks that are considered particularly important to them and possible to implement in a given period. At the first stage of the PB, applications for initiatives are collected from the residents and, after formal verification of the applications, they are put to a vote at the next stage. This means that participation in this case refers to submitting ideas for spending a separate part of the funds from the commune budget and, through voting, to co-deciding on implemented projects, which, in turn, may affect important issues for the quality of their life and well-being.

In 2018, 93% of Polish residents aged 16 and over felt connected to their place of residence (people very strongly connected or rather connected). The vast majority was satisfied (including very satisfied) with the place of residence (80%). The Cohesion Survey Report shows that 56% of Poles trust local authorities (more or less), 29% do not trust them, and 15% have no opinion (Jakość życia i kapitał społeczny w Polsce, 2020). This may explain why the results of commitment to PB and the impact of implemented ideas are not always fulfilled with the same degree of success (Lehtonen, 2022). The added value in the PB implementation process is generated in the form of social capital understood as a network of interpersonal (but also inter-organisational) connections resulting from a sense of community-based shared norms, values, and beliefs. That sense facilitates cooperation within a given community or between individuals or communities in the implementation of ideas creating common goods. If the level of social capital measured by means of trust towards local authorities differs in communes (also trust among members of the community), also the attitude and behaviour of the inhabitants towards PB may differ. In countries with any tradition of joint decision-making, people are used to a hierarchy of power and a top-down decision-making system. It becomes more difficult to attract the residents to participate in co-creating the local environment by co-deciding on how to spend funds. This results, among others, from limited trust and a sense of lack of influence and agency over what happens in the neighbourhood. Wampler et al. (2021) stated that the results of PB can vary significantly depending on factors such as the political context, the intentions and power of the actors, the existence of a deliberative culture

and vibrant neighbourhood associations, the available resources, the quality of the process, and local government control over tax revenues and policy areas (Schugurensky & Mook, 2024). The implementation of PB without sufficient conviction and commitment of stakeholders, especially representatives of local authorities, generates the risk of losing its original goals and attractiveness, and being discontinued. Differences between voivodeships and smaller communes can result from the number of inhabitants, the number of enterprises, the level of investments, access to EU grants improving the quality of life and reducing differences, and other factors. Also, the effectiveness of PB practice depends upon the historical and cultural context in which the governance system is embedded. Considering the Polish history, social differences between regions still exist.

Another issue refers to the attitude of citizens and local managers towards PB. Those citizens who are not familiar with PB, do not have positive experiences with such initiatives and do not know any successful examples, tend to be averse and keep distance from the new practice. Another issue that arises is connected with the local strategy and regularly implemented tasks according to budget timeline. It may be difficult for local managers to connect PB to other policies, programmes, and initiatives, as well as to avoid potential duplication of efforts and financial spendings. Participatory budget as a tool of the dissemination of the budget produces administrative burdens by delaying decision-making or increasing additional administrative costs (Oh et al., 2019).

Due to the fact that communes differ also internally – e.g. in terms of the population size – it is recommended that a similar analysis be conducted by applying deeper exploration inside of each type of commune. This may broaden the awareness of stakeholders and rulers about the implementation of the participatory budget tool in Poland, its mutual benefits, and the direction of future development.

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#### **Data Availability Statement**

All data will be available and shared upon request.