

## Participatory Budget: a review of scientific research and its democratic implications from 2000 to 2016

### *Presupuesto participativo: una revisión de la investigación científica y sus implicaciones democráticas del 2000 al 2016*

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#### **Abstract**

*Since the 1900s, a new form of democracy has emerged, where the social representation is reinforced and the citizens participate in the public policy and they determine the budget for their location. The level of diffusion and application of participatory budgeting is unknown. The implications caused for democratic processes are also unknown. In this context, a systematic literature review of publications indexed from 2000 to 2016 was conducted. Using the software NVivo for qualitative analysis and using matrices the following information was organized, analyzed and synthesized: title, author, year of publication, research line and application of common themes. The results show to Porto Alegre in Brazil as the area of greatest application of this methodology, the political will as the main factor of success, and a time of controversy in the process.*

#### **Keywords**

*Governance, decentralization, democracy, participatory budget, citizen participation.*

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### **Resumen**

En los años 90 surge una nueva forma de hacer democracia, donde la representación social toma fuerza y la ciudadanía participa en la formulación de políticas públicas y en la determinación de parte del presupuesto para su localidad. El nivel de difusión y aplicación del presupuesto participativo a nivel mundial es desconocido, así como también se desconocen las implicaciones que ha causado a los procesos democráticos. En este contexto se realizó una revisión bibliográfica sistemática de las publicaciones indexadas del 2000 al 2016. Mediante el uso del software para análisis cualitativo NVivo y el uso de matrices se organiza, analiza y sintetiza información como: título, autor, año de publicación, línea de investigación y aplicación de temas comunes. Los resultados muestran a Porto Alegre en Brasil, como la zona de mayor aplicación de la metodología, y a la voluntad política como el principal factor de éxito de controversia en el proceso.

### **Palabras clave**

Gobernabilidad, descentralización, democracia, presupuesto participativo, participación ciudadana.

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## **Introduction**

Society has evolved and faced multiple models of governance and these processes have generated new tools for citizen participation. In today's democratic societies, it is increasingly important that the opinion of the citizen be considered in the planning of their environment, not only as an act of political will but as a true citizen's right. The participatory budget (PB) arises to democratize the processes of decision making in the development of communities through the participation of various actors, be they political, public or private. In this way, citizen participation is shown as an essential process for communities to abandon passivity in democratic management. Gómez (2007) stated that the purpose of participatory budgeting is to ensure that communities define for themselves the ends and means necessary to overcome their needs and to guide the allocation of public resources effectively, efficiently and above all with transparency.

The emergence of the participatory budget coincides with the problems of governance and corruption that several countries have suffered and with

the efforts of the United Nations to improve governance, the fight against corruption, increased transparency and accountability. Its first application has its origin in the seventies, in the Brazilian municipalities of Vitoria, Vila Velha and Ubelandia, in response to claims for improvements in the quality of life and control of municipal public resources demanded by social movements. The legislation of the time, which supports participatory democratic processes, and the triumph of leaders of the left, of trade unionism and militants of urban movements were crucial factors for its rise. Strengthened by the municipality of Porto Alegre (Brazil), the participatory budget is recognized internationally as good governance practices and serves as a “starting point for political and administrative decentralization” (Corona, 2014, p. 11).

The participatory budget is defined as a “process of popular participation for the distribution of the local investment budget” (Díaz, 2009, p. 27). It constitutes a mechanism by which citizens are empowered to propose and vote on projects that involve a flexible percentage of the municipal government’s budget (Annunziata, 2011). The participatory budget is a useful tool to defend the interests of the population through the generation of mechanisms so that decision making is shared and responds to the interests of the majority of the population, which is a valuable reinforcement of democracy. This citizen participation allows consolidating the processes of social inclusion, encompassing social groups, civil associations and the inhabitants of neighborhoods, cities or regions.

The analysis of the main scientific publications referring to the participatory budget of the last sixteen years helps to determine its effectiveness as a methodology for action and participative management in a state of democracy, based on experiences from Latin American, European and Asian countries. The research determines which countries apply PB, which are those that investigate and publish on the subject. As a result, it is determined that the main challenge of the PB is to achieve greater citizen participation under a process that depends in large part on the political will of the authorities. It also determines the success factors such as: the degree of decentralization and institutionalization, the improvement of promotion campaigns, the holding of conferences and negotiation tables, and the leadership and transparency of those responsible for the process. Among the challenges and limitations stand out the resistance of the politicians, little interest of the citizenship and their resistance to adopt the new system.

## **Research Methodology**

The scientific contents published on participatory budgeting were analyzed by applying a descriptive methodology which “reviews the characteristics of an existing phenomenon” (Salkind, 1999, p. 11). The methodology used consists of the following procedures: 1) selection of articles; 2) quantitative analysis of attributes of the abstracts; and 3) qualitative analysis of the abstracts. Each procedure contains specific activities that contribute to a thorough analysis.

### **Selection of scientific articles**

A search was made in the most relevant databases at a scientific level in order to guarantee the quality of the analyzed information. Information was collected from: Web of Science, Scopus and Redalyc. with the keywords “participatory budget”, “participative budget” and “participatory budget” -separately- in the title, and with a selection of years from 2000 to 2016. Preliminary results showed 187 articles in Web of Science, 41 in Scopus and 27 in Redalyc, of which we worked with the abstracts for the subsequent analyzes due to the impossibility of accessing the full text of all the articles. From these search results, duplicate articles were eliminated in the same database as in the rest. Finally, 164 abstracts of Web of Science articles, 24 of Scopus articles and 22 in Redalyc were analyzed, obtaining a total of 210 abstracts of scientific articles.

### **Quantitative analysis of attributes of abstracts**

The attributes of which the analysis is based are: title of the publication, author, year of publication, country of the academic institution to which the first author is affiliated, name of the journal or conference, country of the journal or conference and line research. These attributes were retrieved from each of the articles found in Web of Science, Scopus and Redalyc; they were tabulated in Microsoft Excel and imported into NVivo 10. For those cases in which an attribute was not specified, it was qualified as “Not defined”. To this information is added the geographical classification and income level of the countries involved, according to the information of the World Bank.

## **Qualitative analysis of abstracts attributes**

For the qualitative analysis, the QRS NVivo 10 software was used. This analysis consisted of the classification of the abstracts of the scientific publications in thematic nodes to subsequently carry out a detailed study of each one. The process required the following steps:

1. Consultation of word frequency: In order to obtain a general knowledge of the most used words and to determine the possible thematic nodes, a frequency query of words with a length greater than 5 characters was executed (common English and Spanish words are excluded such as: prepositions, articles and conjunctions), this from the information extracted for each publication: title of the publication, abstract, keywords, author, year of publication, country of the academic institution to which the first author is affiliated, name of the journal or conference, country of the journal or conference.
2. Classification of the abstracts in general nodes: From the results of the word frequency query, general nodes were created and after a careful reading of each abstract, they were classified within each one.
3. Classification into research lines and common themes: From the classification carried out in a preliminary way in each general node, we proceeded to refine the classification in specific lines of research, as well as in common themes among the articles such as: process, success factors, effects, limitations and challenges.
4. Tabulation and analysis of the abstracts: With the tool NVivo and Excel the information was tabulated and the extracted data was analyzed. The research lines are analyzed together while the common themes are described separately.

## **Results**

The results of this research are structured around two main sections: (1) the results of the quantitative analysis, and (2) the results of the qualitative analysis.

## **Quantitative analysis of abstracts**

This section provides a quantitative description of the basic attributes of the 210 selected publications. The fundamental idea is to know who, when and in what places there is research about participatory budgeting. The origin of the affiliation institutions of the first author, time scale of the publications, geographical distribution and income level of the countries studied in the scientific publications and the countries of origin of the journals and publication conferences are analyzed.

## **Geographical area of study**

For the geographical study of the abstracts of the articles, we worked with the classification of World Bank regions mentioned in the methodology. The objective is to know in which regions the participatory budget has been investigated as an indicator of adoption or success of the methodology.

The countries with the greatest PB application correspond to Latin America and the Caribbean, with 43% of the scientific publications found. In this region, Brazil stands out with 30% of scientific articles. It should be noted that it is in this country where the methodology originates at the end of 1980, specifically in Porto Alegre. After Brazil the influence reaches Argentina (4%) and Chile with one (3%) of the research found in each country. In the East Asia and the Pacific region, 16% of the articles were found, with South Korea standing out with 12% and followed by China with 4%. Of the countries of Europe and Central Asia, Spain stands out with 4%, followed by France with 1%. North America is the region where less research about the participatory budget was found, barely 1% for both Canada and the United States. 24% (52/210) of the abstracts of scientific publications do not refer to any specific area; they are general or theoretical studies.

Taking the 29 countries that have been written in the 210 scientific publications, in the case of 14 countries (48%) a single publication has been written; in the case of 7 countries, 3 to 10 publications have been written; and there are 2 countries, Brazil and South Korea, which bring together 88 scientific publications. These two countries are shown as pioneers in the application of the PB as a tool to strengthen citizen participation in the

decision making of a community. The 52 publications that do not refer to any specific area are general or theoretical studies, as mentioned above.

In order to know the level of income of the countries studied in the abstracts of the scientific publications, we worked with the World Bank classification. This classification considers: high income, low middle income, high middle income, highly indebted poor countries, low income countries, middle and low income countries, middle income (World Bank, s.f.).

Based on this analysis, it was determined that countries with a high middle income are those with the most research - with 46% (96/210) of published research. High-income countries account for 27% (57/210) of published research. In this group, South Korea and Spain stand out. Countries with a low middle income only represent 2% (5/210) of the research found on participatory budgeting. The investigations that do not specify the study area reach 24% (52/210); correspond to theoretical studies or investigations that address several countries or regions. This shows that countries with a stable economy are those that motivate the inclusion of their citizens in decision-making, while low-income countries have created very few spaces, or almost none, of consultation with citizens.

### **Level of income of the countries to which the authors are affiliated**

It is important to mention that the results presented in chart 1 refer to the country in whose institution the first author is affiliated at the time of publication of the research. It does not refer to their nationality.

27% (56/210) of the scientific publications have been written by authors based in Europe and Asia, of which 8% belong to Spain. East Asia and the Pacific belong to 22% (46/210), where 15% come from South Korea. 20% (41/210) of the authors belong to Latin America, with 12% corresponding to Brazilian authors. 19% of the authors belong to North America. There have not been numerous cases of application of participatory budgeting in the United States, however, if it is found that authors belonging to North American institutions have developed a considerable amount of research on participatory budgeting in other regions.

**Chart 1**  
**Income level of the author's country of affiliation**

Continent	High income	High middle income	Low middle income	High middle income	Undefined	Total	% Articles
Europe and Central Asia	55	1				56	27%
Latin America and the Caribbean	7	47				54	26%
East Asia and the Pacific	32	11	2	1		46	22%
North America	39					39	19%
Undefined					13	13	6%
Oceania	1					1	0%
Middle East and North Africa			1			1	0%
Total	134	59	3	1	13	210	100%

Source: Own elaboration based on the tabulation of data from the 210 scientific publications.

Regarding the level of income of the countries from which the authors' affiliation institutions come, 64% come from high-income countries, followed by 28% from upper-middle-income countries, the participation of middle-income countries low is almost imperceptible (1%). They are the authors belonging to high income countries who are given a greater percentage of scientific writing, having agreement with the rankings of universities in the world that indicate that the main research and trends are developed in countries with this level of income.

### **Distribution of journals and scientific conferences and level of income of the countries to which the journals and conferences belong**

Scientific research has been published in journals and conferences of worldwide relevance. Chart 2 shows the distribution by continent and level of income of the countries to which the journals belong or conferences have been held.

**Chart 2**  
**Level of income to which the journals and conferences belong**

Continent	High income	High middle income	Low middle income	Undefined	Total	% Journals and conferences
Europe and Central Asia	63	1			64	30%
Latin America and the Caribbean	8	42			50	24%
North America	47				47	22%
East Asia and the Pacific	34	2	1		37	18%
Undefined	1			10	11	5%
Oceania	1				1	0%
Total	154	45	1	10	210	100%

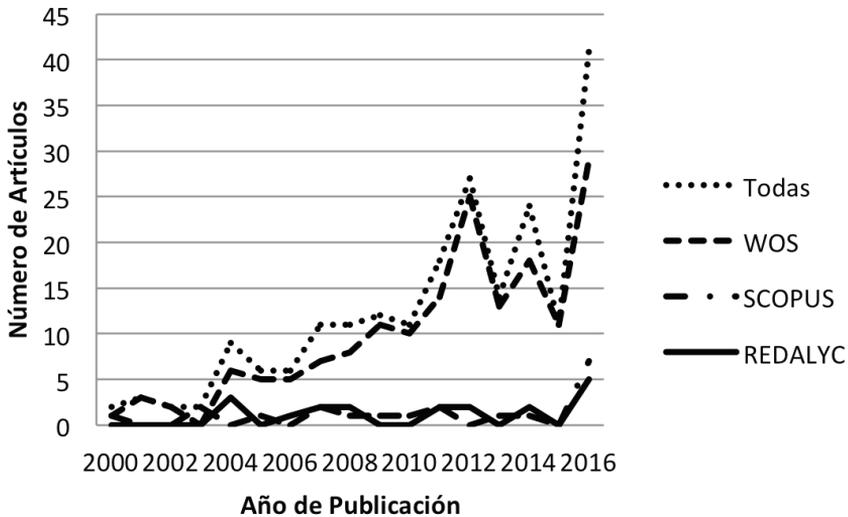
Source: Own elaboration based on the tabulation of data from scientific publications.

30% of the publications have been made in journals and conferences located in Europe and Central Asia; mostly in the United Kingdom with 12%, followed by Spain with 6%. 24% of the publications have been made in magazines and conferences in Latin America and the Caribbean, where Brazil stands out with 7%. Journals and conferences from both North America have published 22% of scientific research, with the United States predominating. Regarding the level of income, publications made by journals and conferences located in high-income countries have dominated with 73% of scientific research, followed by publications in journals and conferences located in high-income countries with 21%.

### **Timeline of publications**

Taking the set of researches found, in the year 2016, 41 investigations have been published, this being the year with the highest number of publications. Until 2003, the publications referred to the subject did not exceed 3 per year. As of 2007, publications increased notably, reaching their peak in 2016 and decreasing to 11 publications in 2015. This analysis shows that during the last years the interest and application of the PB has increased. Not only do public institutions apply this tool but it has even extended to private institutions.

**Figure 1**  
**Timeline of published investigations**



Source: Own elaboration based on the summaries of the 210 investigations.

## Qualitative analysis

This section describes the levels of analysis, research lines, process and success factors that have been described in the abstracts of published scientific research related to the participatory budget.

## Levels of analysis and research lines

For the purposes of this study, 210 scientific publications have been classified into three levels according to the geographical scope they cover: micro, meso and macro. The classification by levels has been exclusive, placing the article at the level that best defines it. In the categorization according to the research lines, 11 categories have been found. This

categorization is not exclusive; an article can refer to several lines of research at the same time.

Chart 3 shows the classification by levels. The micro level contains 37% (77/210) of the investigations and refers to local studies. They address issues of democracy, governance, competitiveness, institutionalization, citizen participation, municipal experiences, among others.

The meso level is defined as an intermediate level 25% (53/210) of the investigations. It contains studies at regional and national level. Most of them expose processes, effects, citizen preferences, political identity and models of participatory budgets at the national level.

The macro level is the broadest level of analysis 38% (80/210) of the investigations. At this level are scientific publications that contain studies worldwide or that involve general and/or theoretical applications of participatory budgeting. The topics refer to studies of legislative systems, forms of citizen integration, and methods of election of representatives, transnational models, and incentive mechanisms, among others.

**Chart 3**

**Classification of the publications according to the level of analysis**

Level of analysis	N°	Percentage
Macro	80	38%
Meso	53	25%
Micro	77	37%
Total	210	100%

Source: Own elaboration based on the summaries of the 210 investigations.

Regarding the research lines, the category “Urban Studies” presents the highest percentage of analyzed publications (40%). Within this category, issues of participatory budgeting for investments in health, infant mortality, voting process and local election, thesis of empowerment, transnational models, budgetary restrictions and effects on individuals, are among the most outstanding issues. These articles refer mostly to general aspects or worldwide application, but there are also a large number of studies at the micro level.

21% of publications belong to the category “Government and Law”. They refer to government commitments, techniques for governance,

effects of citizen participation in local governments, local management models, decentralization processes, public management and constitutional resources, among others. These investigations also refer mostly to general or international studies.

Regarding the category “Citizen Representation” most of the publications are micro-analysis and the topics refer to cultural representations, social inclusion, digital participation, citizen associations, and participatory democracy. Regarding “Technological Application” 18 articles have been written, mostly applied at the macro level, the subject of the articles is about the use of the web for decision making, online integration and digital voting. As for “Democracy”, topics of local democracy, democratization of budgets in specific areas, democratic values, democratic networks, democratic mutations, participatory governance arrangements are dealt with, these studies have been carried out mostly at the macro and meso levels.

In addition to the classification in research lines of the abstracts of the publications, the following common themes were established whose results are described below: (a) the process, and (b) success factors.

## **The process**

3% of the abstracts of the publications refer to the process of implementation and application of the participatory budget. The summaries mention applications in different areas, although they rarely describe the process in detail. Depending on the localities in which the participatory budget was applied, different authors point to several procedures, some of which are described below: Ríos (2008) and Insúa (2008) propose a methodology and models often based on physical meetings and some kind of voting mechanism. In the same way, Fontana & Morais (2011) propose first of all that the representatives of the community (delegates) make a list of the actions to be considered, so that in the second place these actions are chosen by the voters in each RPA (Region - Political Administration).

In the state of Rio Grande do Sul, the participatory budget process comprises a cycle of 24 months, in which the first year the budget is sent to be approved, this is executed in the first year and evaluated in the second year to establish the respective improvements (Corona, 2014). Corona summarizes this process of participatory budgeting in four stages:

holding the regional and thematic assemblies -at the beginning of the year-; formation of the participation instances - half of the year-; discussion of the budget and approval of the investment plan by the council-end of the year; and evaluation of the executed -as a base for the improvements of the second year.

Annunziata (2011) in her study conducted in the municipalities of Morón, Rosario and City of Buenos Aires in Argentina, points out that the participatory budget also takes place over a two-year cycle, where the stages and methodology vary according to the municipality where it is applied, but in general it presents a more detailed development than the previous proposals. The development consists of four stages: general assembly in the neighborhoods, in which the neighbors express their ideas and demands; smaller assemblies of neighbors delegates or advisors with the presence of government officials, in which the projects are elaborated; voting of the projects open again to the neighbors of each neighborhood; and finally monitoring the execution of the chosen projects -which have been incorporated into the municipal budget ordinance- during the following year.

Díaz (2009), shows another detailed development of the participatory budget process through a case in the provinces of Cuzco and Puno in Peru. According to this author, the process consists of seven steps: call; registration of participants; election of the Local Coordination Council; information and prioritization workshops; technical evaluation of the proposals; budget approval; and election of the vigilance committees.

From the experience of participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, according to Goldfrank (2006), the following characteristics can be highlighted within the process: i) anyone can participate in the annual budget assemblies, and those that intervene have the same right to voice and vote, and to apply as district delegates or in thematic forums, and subsequently to the municipal budget council; ii) all meetings at each level are open to the public, there are no privileges for party representatives, for example, that the list of priority projects that each district assembly assembles is respected by the government; iii) the participants of the assemblies choose and qualify these projects, the delegates vote for a final list, and neither the mayor nor the budget council can modify these priorities; and iv) the mayor's office uses the discussions with the participants to allocate the expenditure both among the districts and the types of urban services provided.

According to Arenilla (2008), in the city of Madrid, the participatory process consisted of three stages. The first stage refers to the organization and launching; Second stage the areas of participation are diagnosed; third stage the proposals are presented and prioritized; fourth stage are approved and program activities; and fifth stage the process is executed and evaluated.

Anunziata (2011) considers that it is in assemblies where citizens have the opportunity to present their opinions; it is the concrete and particular interests of the citizens that impel them to participate, imposing a logic of competition between projects. The assemblies are considered successful when they “privileged dialogue, trust between actors and deliberation to solve the main difficulties that were caused when defining priorities and projects to be financed by participatory funds” (Montecinos, 2006, p. 72).

## **Success factors**

The aspects that made active participation by citizens in the formulation and execution of the participatory budget are considered factors of success. 5% of the summaries of the publications refer to the success factors. As a general hypothesis it is stated that the design and results depend both on the intentions of the designers and on the preconditions of the specific place, and especially on the degree of decentralization and institutionalization, a situation mentioned by Goldfrank (2006). Yoo (2012) states, with respect to the previous conditions, that it is necessary to prepare a detailed political system that allows diversified forms of participation and that sensitizes the public. Rocke (2008) mentions the need to improve promotion campaigns, hold conferences and negotiation tables; Kyo-Sik (2013) and Heu (2014) believe that the crucial thing is to improve processes in public hearings and the implementation of local budget schools to sensitize and train citizens. For Souza (2011) the level of institutionalization of opposition parties is a relevant factor, since many of the consensuses will be achieved if there is a good relationship and cooperation between local political actors.

The participatory budget requires the application of democratic values, an open and inclusive attitude on the part of the administration where an intellectual commitment and application of ethics stand out. The South Korean author Gwakchaegi (2007) points out that the PB in the municipalities requires a strong leadership of the mayor, the establishment of commissions

and subcommittees and continuous training for public officials to change their attitudes and open the process. Transparency is also a factor that contributes to a successful participatory budget process; Kyo-Sik (2013) and Kim (2011) state that a wide variety of information must be available; the process must be open and transparent to attract citizens' participation and increase their awareness.

## **Conclusions**

In most cases there is a direct relationship between the area of application and the countries of affiliation of the authors of the scientific publications. The investigations regarding a country in North America have been carried out only by authors based in institutions of the same area (Canada, United States). The investigations referring to Latin America and the Caribbean have been written in greater proportion by authors based in countries of the same continent, followed by authors from North America. Written research in East Asia and the Pacific has also been written by authors from the same continent, followed at a much lower rate by articles by authors from Europe and Central Asia.

The trend is maintained in the case of research that refers to Europe and Central Asia, of which the majority has been written by the same authors in Europe. Of the cases in which the research does not refer to a specific geographical area, the vast majority were written by authors from Europe and Central Asia, either because they did not mention the title or in the abstract, they were theoretical articles without application in any country or because they are applications in more than one territory.

The participatory budget has contributed to the process of democratization and decentralization of decisions, in some cases efficiently and in others with little improvement. However, its application has spread to different regions, predominantly Latin America and the Caribbean and with little application in Oceania judging from the scientific production found in this research. The upper middle-income countries applied the participatory budget in a greater percentage, but the authors who belong to high-income countries are the ones who most investigate the subject.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the qualitative analysis: Inequalities with respect to participation are significant, and getting all

citizens involved equally is a complicated task. Each citizen participates according to its own interests. Given this, it is in accordance with the conclusion of Ganuza (2014) and Frances (2012) that manifest that the challenge for deliberative governance does not seem to be the capacity for deliberation of individuals, but rather the design of participatory procedures and the participation of individuals.

The fundamental factor of success for the implementation of the participatory budget, despite the fact that modern legislation promotes it, is the will of the political class; will to provoke complementary processes of citizen participation in representative democracy and generate designs that encourage the participation of citizens or the creation of popular assemblies. To do this, a wide variety of information must be available, and all processes related to the participatory budget must be open and transparent to attract the interest of citizens.

In order to respond to the fundamental purpose of the participatory citizen budget system, it is important to develop the experience of citizens through the holding of conferences and public hearings and the functioning of local budget schools. A system that takes into account the characteristics and regional conditions is required for a greater effectiveness of the voluntary participation of citizens. The main risk of this trend is that the participatory budget can be transformed into a mechanism co-opted by the representative actors, especially when civil society does not manage the processes, and the political will of its leaders is excessive, so in the process it is crucial to change the delegation of powers to the renewal of strategies for the concentration of power.

Analysis of the abstracts of the analyzed publications does not allow us to conclude if the participatory budget is a tool of general success in a participatory democracy, however, it is evident that it is a methodology applied at a global level and that has clearly contributed to the insertion of the citizen opinion in many of the governance processes, still limiting and processes to be improved.

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