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Published in:
International Review of Administrative Sciences

DOI:
[10.1177/00208523241238083](https://doi.org/10.1177/00208523241238083)

Publication date:
2024

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for pulished version (HARVARD):

Jacquet, V, Minsart, E & Dodeigne, J 2024, 'The spread of participatory budgeting: Procedural diversity, municipal context, and electoral drivers in the Belgian context', *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, pp. 1. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00208523241238083>

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The spread of participatory budgeting: procedural diversity, municipal context, and electoral drivers in the Belgian context

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Abstract

Public participation is a popular mantra in contemporary governance. Participatory mechanisms have been analyzed extensively. The systematic study of how, where and why public authorities implement them is, however, under researched. The paper aims to fill this gap by focusing on participatory budgeting (PB) processes in the Belgian context (Wallonia and Brussels). First, we critically assess the 'participatory' feature of PB by comparing who decides in such processes. Second, we identify the contextual and political factors that trigger the establishment of PB. Findings suggest that PB has become a widely diffused institutional practice for authorities with different ideological orientations and across different municipal contexts. However, the way the participatory ideal is put into practice reveals distinct dynamics. In some cases, the use of the participatory rhetoric is a way to requalify an old practice without significantly transforming how the budget is allocated. Overall, this study seeks to offer a better understanding of the integration of democratic innovations in contemporary governance.

Points for practitioners that identify key implications for professionals working in public management and administration.

- The paper unveils the diversity of practice behind the label 'participatory budgeting'
- It provides a new typology of PB processes by focusing on the decision phase
- It offers a systematic study of PB establishment in the Belgian context by analyzing the role of municipal context, ideology and the electoral drivers

Keywords: Citizen participation, Regional and Local Government, policymaking, Participatory budgeting

1. Introduction

Participatory procedures have spread to most representative democracies. The underlying idea is that democracy is more than casting a ballot every four or five years; citizens should play a greater role in decision-making processes. One of the most acclaimed forms of participatory procedures is participatory budgeting (PB), which gives citizens a direct say in local public budgets (Ganuza and Baiocchi, 2019). Established in 1989 in Porto Alegre in Brazil, PB has been organized by an increasing number of local governments worldwide (Sintomer et al., 2016). Such practices have been extensively analysed, especially regarding PB's capacity to achieve different democratic ideals (Smith, 2009). Studies have addressed the ability of such procedures to include marginalized groups, host horizontal deliberation, and favour certain policy outcomes (Font et al., 2018; Ryan, 2021; Wampler et al., 2021). These case-based studies have provided valuable insights into specific dynamics of the promises and pitfalls of such procedures (Elstub and Escobar, 2019; Goodin and Dryzek, 2006; Smith, 2009; Wampler, 2010). Nevertheless, the case-based approach that dominates the literature has limitations. By focusing only on the major PB procedures, we cannot grasp the extent and nature of the 'participatory wave' observed in most representative systems (Spada and Ryan, 2017). We do not know which municipal contexts are concerned by this spread, and which are not. Moreover, the political, partisan, and electoral dynamic that underpins this development is largely unexplored.

This article therefore analyses the nature and reasons behind PB development. We scrutinize three interrelated analytical questions. First, we analyse what sort of PB is implemented by building a typology. The popular label of 'participatory budgeting' can refer to different forms of procedures depending on national and regional contexts (Sintomer et al., 2016), and some seek broader citizen participation than others (Mattei et al., 2022). Our goal is to unpack the diversity of the 'participatory' features of PB by analysing two key features: (i) who is in charge of the decision-making process, and (ii) how much budget is dedicated to the PB. Second, we analyse where PB emerges in different political and institutional contexts. Third, we investigate why local governments choose PB by analysing the ideological and electoral determinants of its introduction. Drawing on this integrated perspective – what, where, and why – we seek to contribute to a better understanding of PB development in contemporary democratic systems.

The article focuses on Belgium (Walloon and Brussels municipalities) that have experienced a flourishing of PB in the last decade (about a quarter of all municipalities adopted at least one PB). The article is based on an original database that covers all PB processes set up at the

local level in the two Belgian regions. The rest of the article is structured as follows: we first sketch the worldwide development of PB and institutional and political factors behind its development. We then present the institutional and political contexts of Walloon and Brussels municipalities in Belgium alongside our data collection strategy. The fourth section presents our main empirical findings. In the discussion, we account for the transformative nature of PB development in local politics.

2. Grasping the participatory wave

In the last 30 years, PB has encountered considerable success. In the search for remedies to the contemporary democratic malaise, these processes have attracted lots of attention with hundreds of cases identified around the world (Dias et al., 2019). PB can be broadly defined as “a budgeting practice built on the active participation of citizens in budgetary decisions with the aim of influencing resource allocation” (Bartocci et al., 2023: 757). Five additional criteria are generally accepted (Sintomer et al., 2016): (1) a budgetary/financial dimension is discussed, (2) a process carried out on a city-wide scale and not on a neighbourhood scale, (3) repetition over time, (4) related to a form of public deliberation, and (5) facilitators must report on the follow-up to the discussions.

The Participatory Budgeting World Atlas that monitors PB initiatives has reported a total of 14,113 processes organized across 65 countries over the last 30 years (Dias et al., 2019). The atlas indicates the growing success of PB as well as the diversity of processes globally and over time. While this atlas provides remarkable ‘descriptive’ accounts of PB, the current literature still suffers from a more decisive ‘explanatory’ analysis of the factors behind the (non-)establishment of PB across various political systems. The present article fills this gap, and our research goals are threefold: (2.1.) Identifying the diversity of PB procedures across distinct municipal contexts; (2.2.) Assessing the impact of municipal sociodemographic factors on the (non-)establishment of PB; (2.3.) Explaining the effects of electoral incentives and political ideologies of local decision-makers for the (non-)establishment of PB.

We present below these three interrelated analytical questions and the associated expectations.

2.1. What sort of participatory budgeting?

A large variety of actors nowadays support PB: local authorities, international organizations, and more radical social movements (Ganuza and Baiocchi, 2019). This success is related to the relative ambiguity of this device. PB can take very different forms depending on local contexts. In Brazil, where PB originated, Avritzer and Wampler (2008) show how initial

institutions of the Porto Alegre municipalities continue to exist (such as the PB Council) while others tend to disappear or are considered less central (thematic meetings, for example). As PB has spread to other countries, the processes have been continuously adapted according to specific political goals and institutional contexts (Baiocchi and Ganuza, 2015). In European and North American countries (Sintomer et al., 2016), PB is generally presented as a tool for better governance: the goal is to reconnect citizens and representative institutions. But beyond this common feature, these processes display a wide variety of practices. The decision-making processes may vary from co-decision procedures to mere consultation processes (Sintomer et al., 2016). Research has also identified that some PB processes display a greater deliberative quality or procedural justice than others (Sintomer et al., 2016). Likewise, the financial resources available provide different leverages in PB policy-making capacities. Paradoxically, those budgetary dimensions are rarely considered in research on PB processes (Cabannes, 2018). Some cases show the existence of major disparities between municipalities regarding budget amounts: while the city of Ilo in Peru allocates more than \$200 per inhabitant to the PB, the district of Yaoundé 6 in Cameroon budgeted less than \$1 per inhabitant (Cabannes, 2018). Overall, the literature indicates that PB can reflect a large variety of institutional and political practices, which imply different decision- and policy-making capacities. As Mattei et al. (2022) explained, some PB's design features can enhance citizen inclusion while others do not. Our goal is to systematically and inductively analyse the form PB takes in the Belgian context.

2.2. Which municipal context?

The second question seeks to assess whether specific municipality sociodemographic factors determine the (non-)establishment of PB. While PB has become an increasingly popular tool, not all municipalities use it (Font et al., 2014). Previous literature has underlined that some municipalities' characteristics (e.g., size, urbanization, wealth) impact the probability of adopting PB (for a synthetic overview, see Font et al., 2014). First, we expect that small and rural municipalities have fewer incentives to adopt PB. These municipalities are predominantly characterized by a localist doctrine which emphasizes 'consensual' and 'harmonic' local governance (Boogers and Voerman, 2010; Holtmann, 2008) over partisan politics (Copus and Erlingsson, 2012). As a result, not only are the criticisms towards partisan representative democracy less pronounced in smaller and more rural municipalities, but local elected officials also have fewer incentives to create new channels with their local electorate. Hence, Kübler et al. (2019) indicate that urban and suburban Swiss municipalities are overrepresented among those that have established a participatory procedure. The larger municipalities in Spain and Italy also seem to implement more participatory procedures (Font et al., 2014).

Second, we expect that the municipality's financial resources influence the choice (not) to introduce PB. Avritzer and Wampler (2008) showed that PB processes are historically rooted in the richest regions of Brazil, though they noted a broader national diffusion to poorer municipalities. In their study of the first PBs in Europe, Sintomer et al. (2016), however, did not notice a significant correlation between the municipality's financial resources and the probability of implementing PB. Similar results are noted in Font, Della Porta, and Sintomer's (2014) research on participatory procedures in Southern Europe. The literature, therefore, presents contradictory results about the effect of financial resources. Two competing causal mechanisms might be at work. As suggested by Sintomer et al. (2016), richer municipalities could more easily submit part of the municipal budget to PB, whereas PB could also be used in complicated financial situations to manage scarcity of resources and avoid conflict in poorer municipalities. Our goal is to scrutinize if municipality wealth is a structuring determinant, and towards what direction (adopting or rejecting PB).

2.3. Why establish PB?

The literature on participatory governance usually presents the spread of such procedures as a response to broad political challenges: decline of legitimacy, the growing complexity of public action, or rising inequalities in societies (Beauvais and Warren, 2019). Scholarship thus mostly explains the diffusion of PB in terms of responses to the broader 'democratic crisis'. While these macro factors undoubtedly shape actors' attitudes and behaviour, they remain abstract and general considerations that tend to overlook other meso and micro factors explaining the establishment of PB (Kübler et al., 2019; Mazeaud and Nonjon, 2018). The structure of opportunities in which local decision-makers behave deserves greater attention. In particular, vote-seeking incentives behind the set-up of participatory procedures must be considered (Pin, 2020). Our original contribution is therefore to connect the literature on participatory governance with the scholarship on comparative politics studying partisan ideology and electoral competition behind institutional reforms.

First, we consider (non-)establishment as an ideologically driven tool. Traditionally, public participation is anchored in a progressive and emancipatory political agenda (Pateman, 2012). The first PB processes in Latin America were adopted by left-wing parties with a strong emphasis on wealth redistribution (Bezerra, 2022; Ganuza and Baiocchi, 2019; Goldfrank and Schneider, 2006). In western countries, the same trend applies for the first wave of participatory procedures (Font et al., 2014; Nez and Talpin, 2010), with the first European municipalities implementing PB being governed by left-wing mayors (Sintomer et al. 2016). Nevertheless, some scholars consider that this pattern has weakened as PB gained popularity

(Wampler et al., 2018). Detached from their initial focus on social justice, PB has appealed to leaders across the political spectrum (Arhip-Paterson, 2020; Schneider and Busse, 2019). Empirical results remain, therefore, mixed as we lack systematic analysis of the ideological orientation of PB initiators. We therefore seek to empirically assess the influence of local decision-makers' partisan ideologies on the adoption of PB.

Second, we consider the (non-)establishment of PB as a response to specific electoral incentives (Pin, 2020). Participatory procedures are often demanded by opposition actors to differentiate themselves from the incumbent local governments (Fournier et al., 2011; Niessen et al., 2019). Once these opposition lists access executive office, the adoption of PB can contribute to portraying the new local government as 'acting differently' from the former governing parties. This electoral logic is particularly relevant in the context of scarce resources in local politics: local majorities are often limited in their policy-making capacities, sometimes without the possibility to make a 'real' difference in terms of public investment or social redistribution policies. Accordingly, participatory procedures help local officials to stand out vis-à-vis their electoral competitors in symbolic and procedural actions (Mazeaud and Nonjon, 2018). Therefore, we test whether opposition lists accessing local governments are more likely to adopt PB in comparison to incumbent lists.

Some might argue that incumbent local governments might develop similar incentives. Anticipating voters' preferences for democratic change, local officials might seek to bring in political and institutional novelty before being excluded from office. We consider that this incentive is particularly acute for local lists in Belgium holding an absolute majority (i.e., a majority of seats obtained by a single list, despite the use of a proportional representation system). Because coalition government is the norm in Belgium, lists with an absolute majority tend to develop specific strategies to signify their openness to electoral demands for institutional change (Dodeigne et al., 2020). As PB specifically allows greater public participation, local governments avoid the risk of being labelled as the "tyrannic absolute majority". Therefore, we expect the establishment of PB as a strategic reaction by incumbent lists holding an absolute majority.

Finally, we seek to assess the 'classic' effect of local authorities' reaction to democratic erosion. As introduced above, PB has mostly been studied as a response to democratic malaise in European and North American political systems (Kübler et al., 2019). PB can help reconnect voters with their elected officials and re-establish political trust. A direct indicator of democratic erosion is electoral turnout which is the cornerstone of representative institutions (especially in Belgium, who introduced mandatory voting in 1893). We thus expect that PB is

more likely to be adopted in municipalities with democratic red flags in terms of low or declining electoral turnout.

3. Walloon and Brussels PB: Case studies, data collection, and operationalisation

3.1. Walloon and Brussels municipalities

This study offers the first systematic analysis of the spread of PB in Wallonia and Brussels, two of the three Regions of the Belgian Federation. As in many other regions in Europe, these Regions are a good example of political areas historically anchored in a delegation-led model of government, where public entities increasingly implement participatory procedures in the context of the global malaise of representative democracy (Vrydagh et al., 2021). In addition, Belgian municipalities have the institutional and budgetary autonomy to adopt PB. Belgium scores above average on the international local autonomy index (Ladner et al., 2021) with a high self-rule score (18 out of 28); Belgian municipalities enjoy relative discretionary policy-making capacities, especially regarding (pre-)primary school, social assistance, land use, and police. Belgium also presents some of the highest scores regarding financial and borrowing autonomy, and notably financial self-reliance (top 3 of 53 countries). From a comparative viewpoint, Belgian municipalities thus enjoy significant policy and financial autonomy that allows us to study why local authorities decide (not) to adopt PB.

Moreover, the Belgian case study offers adequate variance to test our expectations (Section 2 above). Local elections in Wallonia and Brussels are organized every six years to elect members of the local council, using proportional list systems in 253 Walloon municipalities and 19 Brussels municipalities. The intra-regional variety allows us to test how the municipality features affect the (non-)adoption of PB (e.g., in terms of population size, the number of local councillors ranges between 7 in the smallest rural villages up to 47 in the largest cities). The strong variety of urbanization across Walloon and Brussels municipalities also allows us to test the effects of predominately local non-partisan lists in rural areas, in comparison to larger urban centres dominated by (national) partisan politics (Dodeigne et al., 2020). This allows us to test in a unique and systematic way the effects of electoral competition upon the (non-)establishment of PB. In larger urban municipalities, the local party systems largely resemble the national structure, with 5 to 7 parties running under national party labels, and no single-party majority. By contrast, in smaller rural municipalities, there are often fewer parties, with 2 or 3 lists gaining seats, fewer lists running under national party labels, and one list gaining a majority (Dodeigne et al., 2020). In those municipalities, intra-party competition is

less institutionalized; former lists often vanish between elections, and new lists emerge. Although less frequent, those new lists can even access office when they compete for the first time (we call these 'new leading lists', in contrast with other opposition and majority lists).

3.2. Data collection and operationalization

In line with growing efforts to systematically evaluate the development of PB (Avritzer and Wampler, 2008; Harkins et al., 2016), we built an original database covering all participatory devices formally labelled as 'participatory budgets' in Wallonia and Brussels since the early 2000s (i.e., the first PB processes) until June 2021 (i.e., mid-term after the 2018 local elections). The goal was not to focus on 'the best practices' but to grasp what this label covers when it is mobilized by local authorities. We collected information on the presence of PB in each of the 271 Wallonia and Brussels municipalities, their dedicated budget, formal procedures, and actors involved in PB decision-making processes. The categories were built upon existing PB design feature coding schemes (Mattei et al., 2022; Sintomer et al., 2016) and inductively adapted to the Belgian context. Data were systematically accessed from official websites of the municipalities. To obtain comprehensive and reliable information, data was completed by referring to local newspapers and direct contact with local authorities. Overall, 65 municipalities formally organized PB since the 2000s. Reliable information is, however, accessible for 59 municipalities¹ only – despite our best efforts to collect information from local authorities.

Second, we scrutinized the regulation of these 59 PB processes in order to create our typology of PB in Wallonia and Brussels. In line with the scholarship on PB design features, we decided to pay specific attention to the decision-making rules, i.e., rules that "strongly influences the non-achievement of citizen engagement" (Mattei et al., 2022: 338). The study of these processes (with specific attention to the rules of ranking of projects to be funded and final selection of the projects to be funded in PB), allows us to identify four main patterns that are discussed in the next section. To ensure reliability, the coding phase was simultaneously conducted by two researchers.

Third, we combined our original database on PB (our dependent variable) with other datasets covering municipality sociodemographic factors as well as ideological and electoral determinants (Table 1). For variables related to municipality context (municipality size, wealth,

¹ In some of those 59 municipalities, multiple PB were organized. In that case, we systematically kept information related to the last PB organized, assuming that it was the most successful one (in general, no significant differences were noted with previous instances).

and degree of urbanization)², we rely on official statistics from Eurostat as well as information from Belgian public authorities. We record the ideology of the majority's mayor list, the leading figure in Belgian local politics³. We differentiate between the Socialist Party (PS), the Liberal Party (MR), Green Party (Ecolo), the Christian Democratic Party (cdH), alliances (cartel of national party lists), and non-partisan local lists (lists that do not use national party labels). In this respect, Walloon and Brussels mayors' party ideologies offer interesting diversity to test our expectations, the Socialists and Liberals being the dominant parties (respectively 62 and 36), while the Greens and Christian Democrats have fewer mayors (respectively 7 and 14). For variables related electoral determinants, we merged our dataset with information about Belgian local party systems and electoral results (Dodeigne et al., 2020). For our first expectation about electoral incentives, we identify the type of lists accessing power, making a distinction between 'new leading lists' (i.e., lists not competing at the previous elections) from other electoral lists (i.e., opposition and majority lists already present at the 2012 elections). For this expectation, we also consider municipalities with and without absolute majorities (about two thirds of the municipalities present absolute majorities). Finally, to test our expectation about democratic erosion, we use official electoral turnout (varying from 0.81 to 0.93, with a std of 0.03).

[About here - Table 1 Main variables, descriptive statistics, and expectations]

4. Findings

Although the first PB was launched in Mons in 2002, our records show that PB only recently started to spread. While 10 PB cases were organized during the 2000-2018 period, 65 municipalities (24 percent of all Brussels and Walloon municipalities) have organized at least one process labelled a 'participatory budget' since the October 2018 elections. The 10 municipalities that initiated a PB before 2018 repeated the process after the elections, which means that among the 65 municipalities with a PB since October 2018, 55 were first-time adopters. The legislation established in the 2010s was a boost for the implementation of these mechanisms. Yet, the legal framework remains particularly vague, limiting itself to authorizing the municipal authorities to allocate part of the municipal budget to projects emanating from citizen projects. The choice of the concrete procedure and form of the process rests, therefore,

² 'Municipality wealth' is based on the average per capita tax income. Belgium's wealth index is equal to 100. If the municipality's wealth index is less/more than 100, then the average per capita income in the municipality is lower/higher than the national average (source: Statbel); 'Municipality size' is the (log) number of inhabitants in a municipality (source: IWEPS); 'Degree of urbanization' refers to Eurostat classification of administrative units (source: NUT21-Eurostat).

³ Formally, PB processes are initiated by the local council. As operationalizing the ideology of the council's majority is complex, we decided to investigate the influence of the ideology based on the mayor list.

upon the communal authorities' will. In the next section, we seek to empirically detail the kind of PB organized under this open legal framework.

4.1. The types of PB

First, we observe that all local authorities opted for a logic of 'call for projects'. An amount of the municipal budget is reserved to fund citizen-based projects which are prioritized and adopted until the budget is exhausted. Following current criteria for PB from the literature (Sintomer et al., 2016), we observe the following:

- (1) The *financial and budgetary* component is present but limited. Contrary to other models developed in many Latin American cities (Ganuza and Baiocchi, 2019) or Germany (Schneider and Busse, 2019), Walloon and Brussels citizens are not involved in the prioritization of the broader local budget. Citizens can only propose small-scale projects (micro-developments, organization of small events, etc.). In addition, the median budget per capita is about 2 euros⁴ (albeit with notable variation, see Figure 1)⁵. The mean PB amount in France is 6.5 euros (Bézar, 2022), which is also considered to be very low. In Porto Alegre, PB amount reached \$201 per capita in 1996-98 (Shah, 2007).
- (2) Regarding its territorial dimension, PBs operate at the *municipal level* rather than neighbourhood scale, but some local authorities divide the initial amount dedicated to PB by neighbourhood. This prevents scale-level PB action at the municipal level. The amount of money involved also tends to favour neighbourhood-based projects (see below).
- (3) The *potential of public deliberation* is strongly limited by the 'call for projects' logic of Walloon and Brussels municipalities. Citizens are not invited to collectively co-decide on common projects (Ganuza and Baiocchi, 2019). Instead, the process usually starts with the submission of already well-constructed projects by small groups of individuals. PB merely invite citizens to define investment priorities between several small-scale projects. This can limit the public inclusiveness of such a format as only individuals with the time and skills to submit a project can participate.
- (4) Presently, it is not possible to assess whether Walloon and Brussels' PB reflects *repeated devices over time* as it is a recently adopted instrument.

⁴ No significant connections were found between the PB amount per inhabitant and the four types of decision-making in PB.

⁵ Total dedicated budgets at municipal level confirm the trend, the maximum dedicated budget being 520,845€ in the city of Auderghem. While this appears large, it is small in terms of the investments it makes possible, and when compared to municipal budgets

- (5) Regarding the *follow-up dimension*, transparency is generally achieved through the publication of results to the general public and a justification for projects not selected.

[About here - Figure 1. Participatory budget amount per inhabitant of the municipality]

These elements shed light on the sort of PB that is established in Wallonia and Brussels municipalities. In order to grasp PB's transformative potential, we propose to analyse the decision phase. PB in Wallonia and Brussels is usually organized in two steps, with a 'preselection' phase and a 'final decision' phase. This preselection and/or decision can be made by different actors including municipal administrative services, elected municipal authorities, inhabitants' vote or a jury (partially or totally) composed of volunteers or randomly-selected citizens. Based on this diversity of practices, we inductively developed a typology according to four types of decision-making (Figure 2): PB with an (1) elitist decision, (2) hybrid decision, (3) citizen jury decision, and (4) popular decision.

[About here - Figure 2. Typology of decision-making in participatory budgeting]

- PB with *elitist decisions* represent 17 of the 58 PBs (29 percent). Citizens are not involved at any point in the decision-making process. According to the common principles underlying PB (Wampler et al., 2021), those processes appear to be largely unrelated to what a PB is supposed to be.
- PB with *hybrid decisions* cover 8 PB (14 percent). These are characterized by a two-step decision phase, one including citizen participation and one without. The hybrid nature is thus partial citizen participation, and the funded projects are (potentially) vetted by local political authorities for the final decision.
- PB with *citizen jury decisions* include 8 PB (14 percent). The decision is always adopted by lay citizens that compose a small jury. These participants are randomly selected from the broader public.
- PB with *popular decisions* are the most used device in Wallonia and Brussels (i.e., 25 PB, 43 percent). The final decision is also adopted by citizens. Contrary to *citizen jury decision*, inclusiveness is, however, not restricted to preselected citizens but includes broader participation.

This typology shows that PB processes that follow a 'call for project' logic can represent distinct procedures in terms of citizen participation.

4.2. The effects of municipal sociodemographic factors, ideology, and electoral incentives

To assess how the types of municipal context and political factors shape the implementation of PB, we conduct a multivariate analysis (Table 2). We regress our independent variables (municipality, partisan, and electoral factors) on two dependent variables, i.e., the establishment of PB in each municipality as well as the types of PB adopted (see typology above). Because of the categorical nature of our dependent variable, we develop a logit regression model for adoption of PB (n=272 municipalities), while we used an ordered logit regression to regress the participatory typology of PB (n=59 PB processes). As the variable of municipality urbanity is highly correlated with municipality size in the models (vif scores above 8 in the model tested), we only included municipality size as an independent variable (best model fits). Population size is log-transformed as the variable was strongly left-skewed due to the high proportion of smaller municipalities in Wallonia. Furthermore, due to the limited number of PB processes (n=59, 22 percent), we also duplicated a specific model for logistic regression with rare events. Results were highly convergent, showing no substantial difference in the magnitude effects, nor statistical significance of the independent variables. Overall, the models' explanatory powers are moderate (Tjur's R-square is 0.19 for logit model of adoption of PB, while Nagelkerke's R-square equals 0.34 for ordered model of the participatory index of PB).

[About here - Table 2. Logistic regression and ordered logit regression]

First, the results confirm that PB processes are primarily a participatory tool used in larger municipalities (see Figure 3). While the probability to develop a PB is about 80 in the largest municipalities (a log. of 12 in population size being about 163,000 inhabitants), the probability drops to 14 percent in the smallest municipalities (a log. of 9 in population size being about 8,000 inhabitants). In addition, the results show that PB is more likely to be adopted in wealthier municipalities, although the effects are moderate in magnitude: the probability of PB in the poorest to the richest polities increasing from 12 percent to 35 percent. We observe that the effects are even stronger when those two municipality factors interact with one another: the probability of PB is the highest in the largest and richest municipalities (98 percent probability, but only 14 percent in the smallest poorest villages). Finally, we note that there is no statistical difference observed in the frequency of use of PB between Wallonia and Brussels.

[About here – Figure 3. Predicted probabilities of implementing PB according to municipality sociodemographic factors]

Second, electoral incentives matter (see Figure 4). We observe a clear difference in the probability of implementing a PB between new leading lists (52 percent) and other lists (21 percent). This is in line with our expectation that electoral dynamics trigger strategic choices to develop participatory tools as a sign of political renewal for the new list part of a local coalition. We also observe for municipalities where lists hold an absolute majority, that there is a greater probability to adopt PB (29 percent, double the probability in other municipalities). PB thus seems to serve as a sign of 'openness' to develop a policy-making approach based on greater inclusiveness.

Additionally, the results confirm the (partial and moderate) effects of party ideologies. In line with our expectation, municipalities with a mayor from the right-wing Liberal Party (MR) present the lowest adoption of PB (9 percent probability). Yet, the Social-Democratic Party (PS) also presents a low figure (15 percent). The Greens and the Christian Democrats present a slightly higher percentage (respectively, 18 and 29 percent probabilities) – albeit with large confidence intervals due to the limited number of observations for these two parties. The local lists and local alliances are keener on adopting such participatory devices (respectively, probabilities around 30 percent). In addition to the leading list's ideology, we also considered if the different lists are partners in the governing coalition; no significant correlation could be found with the establishment of PB. The results show that the main party driver is less ideological divide, but rather reflects a distinction between established parties (PS and MR) and other (local) lists. This is in line with Avritzer and Wampler's (2008) findings in Brazil, which highlighted a trend towards the standardization of mechanisms without a clear-cut ideological divide.

[About here - Figure 4. Predicted probabilities of implementing PB according to electoral factors]

Third, we do not observe that PB would be established in response to democratic malaise. Lower electoral turnout at the 2018 elections does not significantly increase the probability of adopting such procedures ($p=0.28$). Our results also show no effect when we control for the decline of turnout *vis-à-vis* the previous 2012 elections. Overall, and contrary to our expectation, PB is implemented in municipalities where electoral turnout is higher. PB seems to be chosen in anticipation of democratic. Additionally, we might consider that local leaders launch institutional reforms that allow them to maintain high standards of democratic reputation. Such mechanisms are complex and would require finer qualitative analysis with local leaders.

Finally, we seek to regress whether the sociographic municipal factors, and partisan and electoral incentives define the type of PB adopted. As this analysis can only be conducted on municipalities having adopted a PB, the dataset is substantially smaller (N=59) and calls for cautious interpretation. We find that wealthier municipalities are more likely to adopt more inclusive PB. Ideology is also important as Green mayors will systematically opt for the most inclusive procedure (4th type), while the Liberal mayors are more likely to opt for the least participatory type of PB (1st type). Again, ideology is not a perfect predictor as Socialist mayors also tend to opt for a moderately participatory type of PB. We observe that electoral participation is a strong predictor of the type of BP. The most inclusive PBs (4th type) are much more likely to be found in municipalities experiencing the lowest electoral participation: the probability of adoption is nearly 80 percent in municipalities with low electoral turnout (less than 84 percent, the lowest turnout observed in the two Belgian regions), while it drops to 28 percent in the municipalities with the highest turnout (above 95 percent). By contrast, we observe that the least participatory devices (1st, 2nd, and 3rd types) are more likely to be used in local contexts where electoral participation is already high.

5. Discussion and conclusion: A symbolic success without transformative potential (yet)

This article presents an original study on the spread of PB in Belgium (Wallonia and Brussels). We analyse the (1) form of PB adopted, (2) the sociodemographic municipal context of emergence, and (3) the impact of political leaders' ideology and electoral incentives. The implications of these findings are two-fold.

First, our systematic study reveals that PB has become increasingly popular among Belgian local authorities since the late 2010s. This net increase indicates the success of the participatory rhetoric (Boussaguet, 2016). From a diachronic perspective, this is an important evolution in the governance of local politics. Ten years earlier, Belgian politics was still depicted as a fundamental elitist political regime where public participation was seen as dangerous or superfluous (Vrydagh et al., 2021). Not all municipal sociodemographics and actors are equal. Our findings suggest that PB remains more likely to be adopted in larger, richer municipalities. Likewise, Green mayors are much more likely to adopt PB (with highly inclusive procedures) than Liberal mayors. While such factors matter, their effects remain partial and moderate. The other side of our results suggests that PB tends to transcend the ideological spectrum. Contrary to the first PB processes observed in Europe in the 1990s and early 2000s (Sintomer et al., 2016), left-wing majorities are no longer the main drivers establishing PB. This is in line with previous research pointing to normalization in the adoption of participatory processes (Avritzer and Wampler, 2008; Bézard, 2022; Dias et al., 2019). Because PB is increasingly

adopted by a wider set of actors, we should pay attention to the broader set of motivations that drive them. Our contribution has underlined the need to consider vote-seeking incentives – a dimension that has been hitherto neglected in PB scholarship. Our results clearly show that electoral dynamics matter to explain (non-)establishment of PB. We show that PB processes are particularly appealing to new lists that seek to introduce PB to show how their governance differs from the incumbent majority. The organization of a PB process is becoming a common vehicle to embody a participatory ideal and signal to voters that the municipality is engaged in a process of transformation of local governance (Mazeaud and Nonjon, 2018).

Second, our empirical analysis reveals that the increase of PB is primarily a symbolic success of participatory rhetoric. Yet, the establishment of PB is not necessarily translated into deeper transformation of local governance. Walloon and Brussels PBs exclusively follow a 'call for project' logic. Groups of citizens can apply for small-scale projects instead of contributing to the prioritization of public investments, as envisioned in the Porto Alegre model. Plus, the financial resources allocated to PB remain relatively limited. None of the 65 PBs allow for fundamental, structural investments in local policy-making. These models of PB limit the real transformative potential often associated with the participatory rhetoric. Moreover, the procedures that organize this 'call for project' can substantially vary across municipalities. Whilst some local authorities design PB as a inclusive and participatory design, others virtually exclude citizens from the decision-making phase. In some municipalities, the PB model rests firmly upon the principle of representative democracy as the decision to fund projects remains exclusively in the hands of traditional local policy-makers (elected officials and the local bureaucracy). In other words, PB merely allows local authorities to follow old practices under a fashionable label. This shows the relevance of not selecting participatory mechanisms based on predetermined criteria: not only did it help us to understand the diversity of practices, but also how labelling may be an issue. These results align with Mattei et al. (2022: 309) who showed that some PBs in Italy are designed without citizen involvement during the evaluation and voting phases, i.e., 'the heart of deliberation and decision-making'. In this context, it is questionable to consider PB as tools that can trigger substantial shifts in the policy-making processes.

The typology developed here offers a starting point for future research to systematically analyse the decision phase of those devices and question the real degree of citizen involvement. Further studies should explore whether PB processes with popular decisions succeed in changing local decision-making processes, an element that was beyond the scope of this study. This will allow researchers to assess under what conditions PB processes may trigger substantive transformation of local decision-making.

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Table 1. Presentation of the descriptive statistics for the dependent variable, municipality and electoral factors and their expected effects

Dependent variable	Type of variable	Descriptive stats	
Participatory budgeting process	Binary variable	65 municipalities with PB; 207 without PB	
Where ? Municipal variables	Type of variable	Descriptive stats	Expected effect on PB establishment
Population size (nb. Of inhabitants)	Continuous variable	Min=1.407,Max=201.816, Mean=17.544, Std=26.746	PB processes are more likely to be adopted in larger municipalities
Urbanization	Categorical variable	Rural=143, urban=29, mixed=100	PB processes are more likely to be adopted in urban municipalities
Wealth	Continuous variable	Min=49, Max=139, Mean=97, Std=14 (100 = Belgian average per capita tax income)	Mixed expectations
Why? Electoral variables	Type of variable	Descriptive stats	Expected effect on PB establishment
Mayors' party	Categorical variable	Socialists=62, Alliances=60, Liberal=36, ChristDemo=14, Ecolo=7, Local lists=93 (ref. cat)	Mixed expectations
New leading list	Binary variable	22 with new leading lists; 250 other lists (ref. cat)	New leading lists are more likely to establish PB processes
Absolute majority	Binary variable	188 coalitions with absolute majorities; 84 with relative majorities (ref. cat).	Absolute majorities are more likely to establish PB processes
Electoral Turnout	Continuous variable	Min=0.81, Max=0.96, Mean=0.90 Std=0.03	Low turnout is more likely to lead to the adoption of PB processes
Control	Type of variable	Descriptive stats	
Region	Binary variable	Wallonia=253; Brussels=19	Control of the regional context
Effective Number of Parties (ENP)	Continuous variable	Min=1.0, Max=6.3, Mean=2.9 Std=1.0	Control of the municipal context

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Table 2. Logistic regression upon factors determining the adoption of PB (first column) and ordered logit regression upon factors determining the types of PB (second column)

	Adoption of PB (logit regression)	PB' index of participation (ordered logit)
<i>Municipality factor</i>	Coefficient (std. errors)	Coefficient (std. errors)
Population size (log)	-2.61* (1.36)	-4.85*** (0.35)
Municipality wealth	-0.38*** (0.14)	-0.40*** (0.05)
Region (Wallonia as ref. cat).	-0.18 (0.82)	1.45 (1.24)
Population size * wealth	0.04*** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)
<i>Electoral factors</i>	Coefficient (std. errors)	Coefficient (std. errors)
Electoral turnout	10.28 (9.44)	-19.51*** (0.06)
Effective Number Parties (ENP)	0.08 (0.29)	0.82 (0.51)
New leading list in the coalition	1.43*** (0.53)	0.19 (0.94)
List with an absolute majority	1.09** (0.52)	-0.15 (0.81)
<i>Mayors' Party (ref.= Local lists)</i>		
Christian democrats (cdH)	-0.36 (0.74)	-0.88 (1.15)
Greens (Ecolo)	-0.72 (1.00)	16.64*** (0.0000)
Liberals (MR)	-1.53** (0.65)	-1.87 (1.14)
Socialists (PS)	-0.94* (0.54)	-1.66* (0.94)
Alliances	-0.18 (0.44)	-1.87 (1.14)
Constant adoption of PB	-11.96*** (2.58)	
Constant index participatory 0 1		-57.50 (0.05)
Constant index participatory 1 2		-56.65 (0.28)
Constant index participatory 2 3		-55.93 (0.36)
Observations	272	59
AIC	276.4	158.4
R ² Tjur / R ² Nagelkerke	0.19	0.34

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

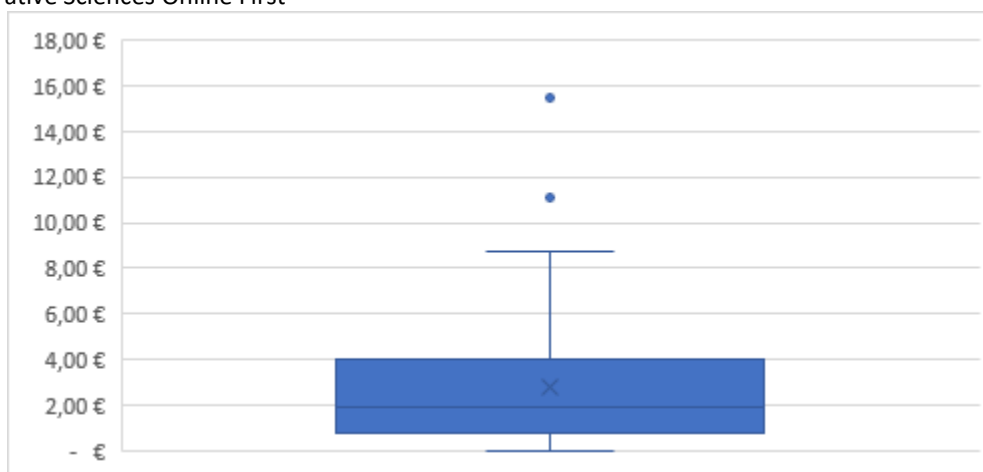


Figure 1. Participatory Budget Amount per inhabitant of the municipality

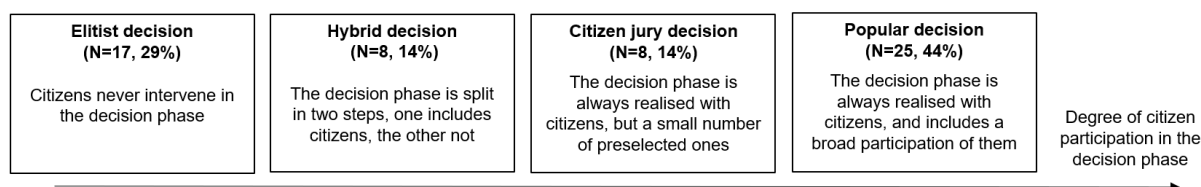


Figure 2. Typology of decision-making in Participatory Budgeting in Wallonia and the Brussels Region

Figure 3. Predicted probabilities of implementing PB according to municipality factors

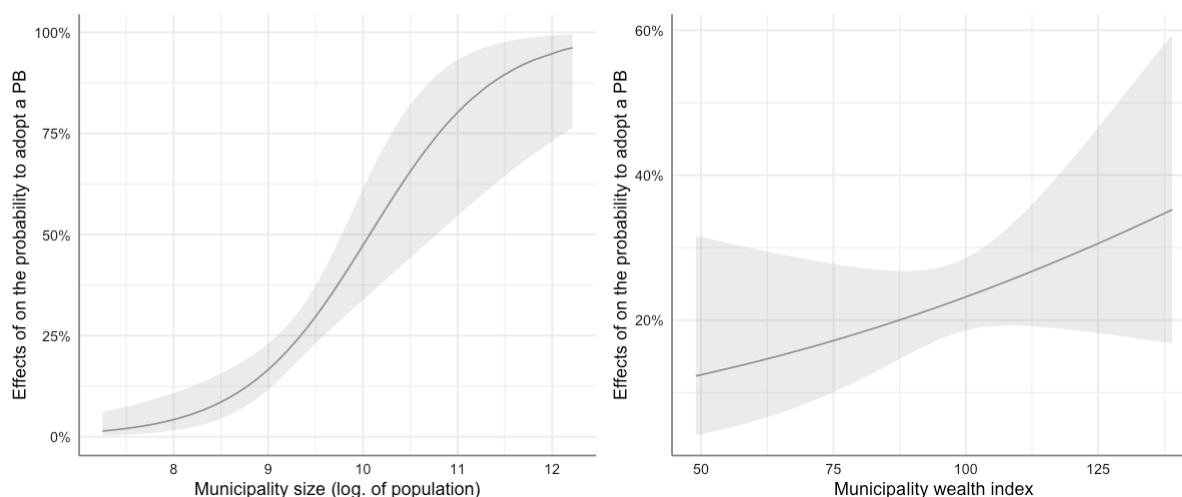


Figure 4. Predicted probabilities of implementing PB according to electoral factors

