#PBFest18
PB and its potential for community empowerment and social justice

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Participatory Budgeting and its potential for community empowerment and social justice

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The purpose of WWS is to use evidence to inform public service reform and transform public services for all of Scotland’s communities to flourish.

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Participatory budgeting in Scotland: The interplay of public service reform, community empowerment and social justice

Oliver Escobar, Fiona Garven, Chris Harkins, Kathleen Glazik, Simon Cameron and Ali Stoddart

Open access to the chapter:
http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/publications/hope-for-democracy-participatory-budgeting-in-scotland/
Political context for PB in Scotland

• PB has gained momentum as a response to challenges and aspirations to improve governance, public services and local democracy
  – **Institutional factors**, e.g. disconnect between communities of place and local government institutions
  – **Civic factors**, e.g. growing level of civic activity and democratic aspiration in Scotland
  – 2014 = pivotal year when these developments reached a critical mass, and civil society and government agendas coalesced, particularly in the run up to the referendum on Scottish independence

• Increasing political, legislative and policy support driven by a combination of grassroots / civil society proposals, and top-down policy action from public institutions
Policy context for PB in Scotland

Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services (Christie, 2011) > 4 pillars:

– **Partnership:** PB requires collaboration across organisational, thematic and geographical boundaries, and can provide new impetus to existing local governance partnerships.

– **Participation:** PB can enable substantial participation by citizens and communities, and provide a platform to channel the aspirations of a citizenry that is becoming less trusting in, and deferential towards, traditional forms of authority and hierarchical decision making.

– **Prevention:** PB can open up space for rethinking priorities and overcome short-term thinking, so that the difficult decisions that authorities often struggle to make can be addressed through open public deliberation and collective action. In addition, PB can mobilise local knowledge that may help to tackle complex and deeply rooted problems and inequalities.

– **Performance:** PB can stimulate effectiveness by increasing transparency, monitoring and scrutiny of how public money is spent. It can also foster local creativity, entrepreneurialism and collaboration in order to articulate new solutions and initiatives.
2014 COSLA Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy:

- “50 years of **centralisation** has not tackled the biggest problems that Scotland faces
- For a country with Scotland’s wealth and strength, the level of **inequality** is intolerable, and has huge social and financial costs
- There is a link between the **absence of strong local democracy** and the prevalence of inequalities
- It is **communities** that **empower governments** at all levels, not governments that empower people”
The Community Choices programme

- The Scottish Government’s Community Choices programme supports and promotes PB nationally.
- It is delivered in partnership with local authorities, communities and civil society organisations, and implemented across policy areas from policing to health and social care, transport and education.
- Since 2014/15, this has led to an investment of £4.7 million. Match funding of £1.5 million from a number of local authorities has brought the total to £6.2 million (excluding the 2018-2019 budget).
Capacity-building and civic infrastructure for PB
Review of 1st Generation Participatory Budgeting in Scotland

Chris Harkins, Katie Moore and Oliver Escobar
(Glasgow Centre for Population Health)
Scotland in transition

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<td><strong>experimenting</strong></td>
<td><strong>mainstreaming</strong></td>
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<td>Organic development of PB, predominantly small scale, driven by local champions and <em>ad hoc</em> funding</td>
<td>Unprecedented policy, legislative, capacity building and investment framework from which to embed PB</td>
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<td>Predominance of <strong>community grant-making model</strong>; PB as a community engagement tool; no need for substantial changes in the institutional system</td>
<td>Towards a variety of sustainable PB models, including <strong>mainstream budgets and services</strong>. Reorienting the relationship between citizens, politicians, civil society, and the state</td>
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<td>Positive impacts, but limited evaluation</td>
<td>Towards robust evaluation of short and long term outcomes? Stronger focus and impact on tackling inequalities – social justice agenda</td>
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<td>Limited focus and impact on tackling inequalities</td>
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PB spread has accelerated over the past few years; from little more than a handful of PB processes in 2010, to at least 200 cases to date
Findings from an interim evaluation report by O’Hagan et al. (2017) examined the Community Choices programme from October 2015 to June 2017 (final report expected by the end of 2018)

• The report notes that PB has become a valuable tool to raise awareness of community led activity and there is clear evidence of developing community identity, capacity and social capital.

• However, it also notes that PB activity is dominated by transactional rather than transformational approaches:

“Changing the relationship between communities and government at the local and national level means establishing a different contract between citizens and the state. The extent to which this leads to a shift from a transactional relationship (whereby councils provide services or resources in response to expressed needs or direct requests) to a transformational shift in power is a question at the core of developments in PB.”

(O'Hagan et al., 2017, p. 5)
Mainstreaming PB: a critical juncture in Scotland’s PB experience
landmark agreement in October 2017 between the Scottish Government and COSLA

• A framework agreement to have at least 1% of all local authority budgets subject to PB by 2021 establishes the commitment to embed it as a way of working.

• This is in the region of at least £100 million of core local government grant funding, both capital and revenue, being influenced and directed through deliberative community participation.
Examples of mainstreaming

• There have been at least two cases that have used core budgets for PB and they are informing initial discussions about what mainstream PB may look like in Scotland.

• They offer examples that go beyond the community grant-making model to one that enhances the interplay of communities, councillors and officers in decision making on far larger resources.
Dundee Decides 2018

- Over 11,000 voters from across the city decided how to spend £1.2 million of the Council's capital budget through PB.
- Each of the eight electoral wards was allocated up to £150,000 to spend on infrastructure improvements. Voting was open to residents aged 11 or over through an online platform.
- The political leader of Dundee City Council who helped launch the process said: “I am absolutely blown away by the level of engagement and informed participation... We are the only place in the country to take a slice of our mainstream budget and hand it over to communities to decide how and where it should be spent.”
Western Isles 2015-16
(see PB Partners, 2016b, p. 12)

• It entailed the allocation of a transport budget of £500,000 through PB.
• Over 200 residents from Barra and Uist, the two southernmost islands, were consulted regarding the existing provision of public buses.
• The results were then passed on to bus service providers, to inform their tendering process.
• Tenders were assessed and awarded by resident groups.
• The process demonstrated that residents are perfectly capable of engaging with complex ‘information sets’, and coming to reasoned, and reasonable decisions.
• The Council’s Transport Manager, whilst initially sceptical said afterwards that he now supports this way of awarding tenders.
Key considerations for mainstreaming PB:
Institutional reform?

- Mainstreaming PB will require commitment by democratic innovators across the country in order to reinvent the relationship between citizens, public services and elected representatives.
- This may have implications for arrangements in governance, procurement, budgeting and administration, which should be considered in the current Local Governance Review initiated by COSLA and the Scottish Government to provide the groundwork for a new Local Democracy Bill.
- For PB to become central in local governance, and not just an add on, it must become part of how communities govern themselves.
- This means that participatory processes must be embedded within institutional arrangements, which sometimes requires administrative reforms as learned from international experience.
- Ensuring institutional fit can entail measures such as designing the PB process so that it works in sync with the overall budgeting cycle for the local authority in question.
Another important aspect is the need to develop workforce capacity within local authorities, especially in light of findings from the interim evaluation by O’Hagan et al (2017, p. 17):

“PB activities to date represent a significant resource commitment on the part of local authorities, or more specifically on the community development/engagement functions which have been charged with delivering this approach and where no additional staff have been allocated. Existing staff are absorbing considerable additional workloads which represents an unsustainable delivery model.”

PB must be supported by properly resourced teams of participation practitioners and community organisers capable of fulfilling the expectations of their communities, PB policy objectives, and the broader participatory democracy agenda laid out by legislation such as the Community Empowerment Act and the Public Sector Equality Duty.
Placing public deliberation at the heart of PB

• The WWS review of 1st Generation PB highlights the predominance of ‘aggregative’ models of PB, where voting takes place without prior substantial dialogue and deliberation about evidence, issues, priorities, aspirations and trade-offs.

• In contrast, ‘deliberative’ models can increase the democratic quality of PB by allowing exploration, discovery, learning and scrutiny, which in turn can generate more robust, informed and considered decision-making.

• When PB provides spaces for dialogue and deliberation between citizens, elected representatives, civil society organisations and public authorities, it creates opportunities for collective reflection, innovation and action.

• Deliberative quality is important regardless of the PB model, but arguably more so for 2nd Generation PB entailing mainstream budgets and services.
Placing social justice at the heart of PB

• The main impacts of the community grant-making model that has been dominant in Scotland and England typically relate to increasing participants’ confidence and social connections, as well as immediate local benefits resulting from the funded projects.

• If 2\textsuperscript{nd} Generation PB in Scotland is to be mainstreamed according to a more explicit social justice agenda to tackle inequalities, this requires a fundamental shift in how public services are delivered.

• PB in this form may entail structural and governance changes and redistribution of public resources to disadvantaged regions and communities, alongside tailoring service delivery based on community priorities and contexts.

• This system-wide approach to PB is long-term and arguably more likely to foster the reduction of inequalities and the improvement of life-course outcomes for disadvantaged communities.
Key challenges

• **Cultural challenges:** PB requires reshaping mind-sets and ways of working, so that participatory governance can take hold. This requires learning and commitment from public and third sector organisations, elected representatives, community groups and citizens.

• **Capacity challenges:** PB requires a range of skills including process design, organisation, coordination, knowledge brokering, communication, mediation and facilitation. It also takes local knowledge and the know-how to build trust, negotiate competing agendas and create spaces for meaningful dialogue and deliberation.

• **Political challenges:** PB can bring a new type of participatory politics that may clash with established relationships and dynamics and challenge the status quo of existing organised interests in a particular community. It can also clash with party politics and electoral dynamics, and it may be difficult to build the cross-party support that can give PB a stable framework for long-term development.

• **Legitimacy challenges:** As with any public participation process, there is the risk of tokenism by which PB may become a symbolic rather substantial opportunity for community empowerment. In the current financial context of austerity policy, there is also the risk of using PB for merely administering spending cuts, and this may undermine its perceived legitimacy.

• **Sustainability challenges:** All of the above suggests that PB requires sustainable funding, long-term commitment, on-going learning and adaptation and perhaps institutional reform. Accordingly, it can take years to bed it in and make it work effectively.
Concluding

• PB has become one of the most popular democratic innovations of the last three decades
• This is partly due to its potential for tackling inequalities, addressing local issues, improving governance and increasing civic engagement
• Its global spread has been enabled by conceptual and practical malleability, which allowed it to be adapted around the world according to disparate logics and motivations and with varied consequences
• In Scotland – PB blends **3 policy agendas which must guide mainstreaming:**
  – **Public Service Reform** – reforming institutions and service where necessary
  – **Social Justice** – building redistributive mechanisms into PB processes
  – **Community Empowerment** – ensuring that citizens are the decision-makers (in collaboration with the institutions and services that represent and serve them)
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