



Participatory Budgeting: The Initial Kaohsiung Experience of Taiwan

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Abstract

Several local governments in Taiwan have adopted participatory budgeting to inject citizen input into the public budget process since 2015. Public officials have advocated the advantages, disadvantages, and functions of this participatory mechanism. However, it is still not clear the development of adopting participatory budgeting of the initial experience of Taiwan. Through the case study of Kaohsiung city, this study mainly describes the functions of participatory budgeting, analyzes the primary participants, discusses the Kaohsiung's participatory budgeting experience, and has suggestions for the future development of participatory budgeting.

Keywords: Participatory Budgeting, Citizen Participation, KJ Method, Taiwan

1. Introduction

Over the last few years there has been an increase in interest among public officials and scholars on the importance of participatory budgeting in urban governance (Souza, 2001; He, B. 2011; Bassoli, 2012). An argument usually put forward is that we have gone gradually from top-down policy planning and implementation age in which the most important powers was regulations and authority, into an age in which the most critical governance component is citizen participation in public affair process (Ganuza, Nez, & Morales, 2014). The implication for the government is that it is increasingly difficult to attain and sustain an effective governance only through the top-down resource allocation and authority. Meanwhile, those who have gained citizen satisfaction, have increasingly done so through implementation of citizen participation approach (Wu & Jung, 2016).

The concept of participatory democracy can be seen as one of the practical models of a civil society and would expand public participation and the public discussion to collectively resolve public issues in society. Participatory budgeting has been adopted in various countries for many years. Since participatory budgeting was launched in 1989 in Porto Alegre, Brazil, its innovative ideas and positive results have led to a growing trend that has been promoted by the worldwide cities (Gonçalves, 2014; Kasdan & Markman, 2017). Currently, Taiwanese people are still unfamiliar with these new forms of citizen participation mechanisms, and local Taiwanese governments have promoted this participatory mechanism in the process of policy planning since 2015, However, it is undeniable that the public is still unfamiliar with this new form of citizen participation and mechanism adoption and public officials have sought ways to keep the participatory budgeting promotion mechanism from becoming a cosmetic effort amid the diversification of various forms of policy participation. Accompanied by government policies and programs, various communities in Kaohsiung City have long been promoting community development events to provide opportunities for citizen participation. The Kaohsiung Municipal Government Research and Development Assessment Committee planned to conduct a program driven by participatory budgeting in 2015. This program aims to provide an impetus for public participation in public affairs and offer ways to implement the democratic deliberation process and instill democratic competence.

The Kaohsiung Participatory Budgeting Promotion Program explored in this study is the first planning model of the six municipalities of Taiwan that adopts all district participations oriented toward the citizens' needs and mainly targeted in the issues of women and elders. This participatory budget projects covers the all 38 Districts of Kaohsiung City. Moreover, the academic research about the Taiwan's participatory budgeting experience is still in the initial stage. Therefore, exploring this initial case would help to the scholars and practitioners have more understanding about the practical operations of participatory budgeting. This study mainly discusses the participatory budgeting experience of the Kaohsiung City in Taiwan and would try to answer the following questions: (1) What are the operational mechanisms and outcomes of citizen participation in budget proposals?; (2) What are the social background differences among the participants?

2. Participatory Budgeting

The values of citizen participation are based on freedom, equality, and individual rights, which are prone to be contradictory to and conflicting with the traditional functions based on normative systems, hierarchical authorization, professional knowledge, and bureaucracy (Berner & Smith, 2004; Barros & Sampaio, 2016). Conflicts between the structure of government and values of citizen participation often make it difficult to implement and sustain citizen participation. When citizen participation is incorporated into the budgeting process, there are often various political influences that conflict with each other (Callahan, 2002).

Finding the ways to promote public participation in the discussion of public affairs would be the major issue of the future democratic development (Robbins, Simonsen, & Feldman, 2008). The top-down policymaking has been criticized as the *Achilles' heel* of democracy because citizens' voice has been ignored. Hence, many participatory mechanisms have been asserted as the approaches which would improve citizens' willingness to participate in public affairs (Raudla & Krenjova, 2013). Among those participatory mechanism, participatory budgeting is the vital tool of public management, and the bilateral communication mechanism would create more opportunities for information sharing and citizens' voice in the policy process (Kasdan & Markman, 2017).

Participatory budgeting contributes to the spirit of democracy. Participant eligibility is not limited by certain factors such as age, profession, and happiness index. As long as a citizen has the time and the willingness to participate, he or she can join any participatory mechanism. Through the implementation of participatory budgeting, democratic values will be united with human thoughts (Rossmann & Shanhan, 2012). Through this participatory mechanism, people have the opportunity to directly participate in the budget planning process to express their views and present their preferences and deliberation in the process of budget planning and implementation. The participatory process emphasizes informed discussion and mutual communication so that participants can engage in the open discussion of public issues under all-inclusive, egalitarian, and well-informed conditions to form a collective opinion (Fung, 2015; Wu, 2017). Involving the public in deliberative discussions gives people the impression that their opinions are respected by the government. This enhances the people's sense of identity with their place of residence and helps them realize that the government has considered their voice and demands in policy decisions (Gordon, Osgood, & Boden, 2016; Wu & Tsai 2018).

Participatory budgeting provides citizens with a clear understanding of how the government actually performs specific budgetary work, especially when citizens are actively and correctly involved in the policymaking process. When decisions are made in public forums open to the taxpayers and media, the authorities can protect the citizens' interests more when conducting budgetary planning. Citizens could expect the budget planning would be implemented after public deliberation, and government actions become transparent (Barros & Sampaio, 2016).

By enhancing citizen participation, governments can get policy suggestions from various stakeholders and understand what the citizens' desires and needs for future public policy planning and decisions (Robbins, Simonsen, & Shepard, 2009). Generally, government needs the views of policy stakeholders when major social issues need to be discussed publicly and voted upon. Some scholars have stated that if the people are aware of the government's operations and join in more in the planning and decision-making process, government operations will become overburdened and overstretched. However, civil participatory mechanism is viewed undeniably as citizens' education approach which help citizens gain policy information and have mutual communication chances to government future policy planning and implementation.

3. Methodology

The study adopted case study to examine the participatory budgeting experience of Kaohsiung city, which mainly include institution, participants, and factors influencing participation. Several cities in Taiwan have embarked on the implementation of participatory budgeting, which have drawn widespread attention by the public and public officials. The majority of community residents felt that this budgeting model was unique. The current participatory budgeting in Taiwan is diverse. Viewed by the settings of specific target groups, including the residents of selected districts (Taipei, New Taipei City), people with physical and mental disabilities (New Taipei City), elders (Kaohsiung), women (Kaohsiung), and youth (Taoyuan City). The budget sizes among these cities are various and ranged from several thousand to over 10 million dollars. The case of Kaohsiung City is an important case for others cities of Taiwan because Kaohsiung City Participatory Budgeting Promotion Plan is the first case which include whole 38 districts and main emphasize on the issues of female and elderly.

Second, the on-site observation was used in order to understand the interaction and discussion of participants. Through in-person observation, the researchers are able to gain the first hand information, which is viewed as a significant reference for the assessment of subsequent quantitative analysis and implementation effectiveness.

Third, statistical analysis of empowerment workshop participants is conducted to understand the early participants of an innovative policy in a selected city. There are 394 participants in the eight participatory budgeting workshops of the Kaohsiung Participatory Budget Promotion Projects. Based upon the information that

each participant provides when registering in participatory budgeting workshops, the individual data is anonymous, but individual socio demographic information, such as gender, age, living area, and the sub-groups in participatory budgeting workshops, and final participatory budgeting topic based upon group discussion. Hence, the study is able to statistical analysis by using information of the participants’ personal background attributes (gender, age, unit, and region) as independent variables (Table 1) and the participatory budgeting choices as dependent variables, a background attribute analysis was conducted on the basis of the information of the participants’ application forms and the relevancy of the participants’ selections on different topics (see Table 1).

| | Variable Type | Description |
|-------------|--|--|
| Dependent | Selection of Participatory budgeting Topic | Divided into elders’ and women’s issues. |
| Independent | Unit | Divided into community development associations, foundations, other associations, community colleges, government units (including public offices), private institutions (including personal name), and six other groups. |
| | Gender | Divided into male and female groups. |
| | Age | Divided into six age groups: 15 to 24, 25 to 34, 35 to 44, 45 to 54, 55 to 64, and over 65. |
| | District | Divided into four groups: metropolitan area, North Kaohsiung, South Kaohsiung, and East Kaohsiung |

*Kaohsiung City Participatory Budgeting Promotion Plan

Table 1. Analysis Variables

3.1 Scope

The program divides the 38 administrative districts of Kaohsiung City into four major regions. In addition, empowerment Workshops of Participatory budget are adopted in order to guide participants to plan their own proposals. Participatory budget workshops were conducted in the four districts of Kaohsiung city, which are Metropolitan Area, North Kaohsiung, East Kaohsiung, and South Kaohsiung. The implementation time is from June 2015 to July 2015, and eight workshop sessions were conducted for issue discussion and proposal development.

3.2 Theme and Targets

Transparency and understanding the residents’ needs, enhancement civic awareness, increase in public cohesion are the main targets of Kaohsiung City Participatory Budgeting Promotion Plan. The initial focus on issues of women and the elderly which try to enhance these two citizen groups, who have not included mainly in the policy-decision process in Taiwan.

In addition, through the initial participatory budgeting plan, public education in civic responsibility and a sense of community would be enhanced. To enable the Kaohsiung municipal government to integrate the concept and spirit of participatory budgeting at local level, the project mainly developed the issues of women and the elderly. Discussions and proposals of these two issues are fully open to every citizen who are interested in the issues of women and elderly.

3.3 Implementation Methods

Implementation of participatory budgeting is the impetus for change in municipal development and help promote the maturation of citizen participation. The program emphasizes five major aspects of participatory budgeting, including advocacy, training, proposal, review, and implementation. The main methods for implementing participatory budgeting are: (1) Form a deliberate group among workshop participants; (2) promote participatory budgeting (including participatory budgeting guideline, participatory budget volunteer training, participatory budget workshops, citizen review, and voting); (3) enhance the content of each policy plans through getting citizen-need information seeking and advise from public officials.

3.4 Series of participatory budgeting lecture

A series of participatory budgeting lecture would assist the participants in having the basic knowledge and ability to participate in the deliberative process and learn the proposal writing format. Pertaining to four districts and two issues, the workshop is organized into a six-hour intensive training workshop on participatory budgeting for eight sessions. The focus of the workshop is to facilitate the group’s communicative discussions and build a platform and mechanism for group discussion. These lecturers help the participants in program plan, discussion and communication.

3.5 Proposal discussion operating tools

World Café and KJ Method are used in the process in order to enlarge brainstorming and make consensus building among participants. The World Café is a forum of sincere dialogue pioneered by Juanita Brown and David Issac, which is conducted in small groups in a relaxed atmosphere, where intelligent group discussion is conducted via a flexible forum. These discussions can lead to simultaneous dialogue, problem reflection, common knowledge sharing, and the discovery of new opportunities for action (Fouché & Light, 2011). On the other hand, The KJ method is a unified operational technique that summarizes the data and intelligence of different natures (Kawakita, 1991; Scupin, 1997). When a group deals with a problem whose solution is convoluted and difficult to decide, when a creative and unconventional approach is desired, or when it is desirable to think outside the box, the KJ method can help participants find consensus and problem-solving order (Miura, Sugihara, & Kunifuji, 2011).

3.6 Proposal discussion and output

The proposal discussion process is free to anyone and accept any voices and opinions. Participatory budget workshop of this project contains two major tasks: (1) conduct workshop guiding to facilitate the program output; (2) enhance the integrity of topic discussion through information sharing, exchange, and assistance of group facilitators. The deliberative process is as follows:

- (1) Divide the participants into groups, each guided by a group facilitator for discussion process development.
- (2) Each group facilitators have the responsibility to explain the purpose, the content, and the all topics of the proposal that each participant propose for.
- (3) Each group facilitator would adopt the KJ method to summarize the questions of group members on the issues of the elderly and women.
- (4) Issue deliberation are implemented through group discussion of issues and compilation all participants' opinions.
- (5) First round of voting would prioritize the preference of each discussion groups.
- (6) Using poster to show the content of each proposal, which is open to every participant to review each proposal.
- (7) After each participant present commences, each group conducted the second round vote for proposal choice of the priority.
- (8) In order to have an initial proposal which is based upon the deliberative discussion, the group facilitator would collect all comments and revise the proposal based upon the comprehensive discussion of the group members.

The proposal discussion workshop is divided into two parts. First, the participants focus on problem recognition by raising the issues to be addressed. Next, participants elaborate on the priority issues by examining and weighing their public nature, need, urgency, feasibility, and benefit to map out a proposal. As a result of the proposal, 38 innovation action plans were proposed for the women's issues section in the workshops of four districts in which eight candidates were selected. In the case of the elderly issues section, 32 innovation action plans were proposed at four separate district workshops in which eight candidates were selected. The 16 final programs aggregated will be submitted to the government for policy consideration, after follow-up review, and consideration of voting procedures to prioritize plan implementation and provide a reference for municipal policy.

4. Participant Analysis

Statistical investigation and descriptions were conducted on the basis of the participant's gender, age, unit, place of residence and district according to his/her basic data.

- (1) Gender : Among the gender samples, there were 91 (23.1%) men and 303 (76.9%) women. The parameter of women is much greater than that of men.
- (2) Age : In the age category, 132 people are in the 55–64 age group (33.5%), followed by 12 in the 45–54 age group (30.7%) and 56 in the 35–44 age group (14.2%). There are 47 people in the over-65 age group (11.9%), 33 in the 25–34 age group (8.4%), and 5 in the 15–24 age group. The age analysis revealed that the proportion of elderly participants is highest in this program.
- (3) Unit : Among participants' affiliated background samples, 260 government units (including public offices) constitute the highest percentage (66.0%), followed by 88 community development associations (22.3%) and 27 other associations (6.96%). Among the others, there are 9 community colleges (2.3%), 9 private organizations (2.3%), and 1 foundation (0.3%). Analysis results revealed that government-related personnel and community development associations represent the majority.
- (4) District : In the sample districts where participants were located, 110 people were in the "metropolitan area" that constitutes the highest percentage (27.9%), followed by 107 in the North Kaohsiung District (27.2%) and 92 in the East Kaohsiung District (23.4%).

Table 2 indicates that the differences in gender-related choices in participatory budgeting do not meet the significant level of statistical test ($p = .330 > .05$). Therefore, no significant difference is observed between gender and participatory budgeting choices, meaning that no significant differences are observed between males and females in terms of their choices in participatory budgeting.

| Voting Choice Gender | Participatory Budgeting Issues | | Total | Chi-square Test |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|-------|-----------------------------------|
| | Senior | Women | | |
| Male | 44 48.4% | 47 51.6% | 91 | $\chi^2=0.948$ $df=1$ $p=.330$ |
| Female | 129 42.6% | 174 57.4% | 303 | |
| Total | 173 43.9% | 221 56.1% | 394 | |

* $P < .05$; ** $P < .01$; *** $P < .001$; $N = 394$

Table 2. Chi-Square Test of Gender and Participatory Budgeting Choices

Table 3 indicates that the difference between different ages and participatory budgeting meets the significant level of statistical test ($p = .001 \leq .001$), showing significant differences between age and participatory budgeting choices.

| Voting Choices Age | Participatory Budgeting Issues | | Total | Chi-square Test |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|-------|-------------------------------------|
| | Senior | Women | | |
| 15–24 | 4 80.0% | 1 20.0% | 5 | $\chi^2=21.683$ $df=5$ $p=.001$ *** |
| 25–34 | 17 51.5% | 16 48.5% | 33 | |
| 35–44 | 28 50.0% | 28 50.0% | 56 | |
| 45–54 | 36 29.8% | 85 70.2% | 121 | |
| 55–64 | 58 43.9% | 74 56.1% | 132 | |
| Over 65 | 30 63.8% | 17 36.2% | 47 | |
| Total | 173 43.9% | 221 56.1% | 394 | |

* $P < .05$; ** $P < .01$; *** $P < .001$; $N = 394$

Table 3. Chi-square Test for Age and Participatory Budgeting Decisions

Table 4 indicates that the differences between the choices of different unit sources and participatory budgeting meet the significant levels of statistical test ($p = .000 < .001$), indicating significant differences between unit sources and participatory budgeting choices.

| Voting Choices Unit | Participatory Budgeting Issues | | Total | Chi-square Test |
|---|--------------------------------|--------------|-------|---|
| | Senior | Women | | |
| Community development Organizations | 87 98.9% | 1 1.1% | 88 | $\chi^2=196.840$ $df=5$ $p=.000$ *** |
| Foundations | 1 100.0% | 0 0.0% | 1 | |
| Other associations | 23 85.2% | 4 14.8% | 27 | |
| Community colleges | 7 77.8% | 2 22.2% | 9 | |
| Government units (Including public offices) | 50 19.2% | 210 80.8% | 260 | |
| Private organizations (Including individuals) | 5 55.6% | 4 44.4% | 9 | |
| Total | 173 43.9% | 221 56.1% | 394 | |

* $P < .05$; ** $P < .01$; *** $P < .001$; $N = 394$

Table 4. Unit and Participatory Budgeting Determination of the Chi-Square Test

Table 5 indicates that the differences between the participant’s regional and participatory budgeting choices do not meet the significant levels of the statistical test ($p = .573 > .05$), showing no significant relationships between the participant’s regional and participatory budgeting choices.

| Voting Choices Unit | Participatory Budgeting Issues | | Total | Chi-square Test |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|-------|--------------------------------|
| | Senior | Women | | |
| Metropolitan area | 50 45.4% | 60 54.5% | 110 | $\chi^2=1.998$ $df=3$ $p=.573$ |
| North Kaohsiung | 44 41.1% | 63 58.9% | 107 | |
| South Kaohsiung | 42 49.4% | 43 50.6% | 85 | |
| East Kaohsiung | 37 40.2% | 55 59.8% | 92 | |
| Total | 173 43.9% | 221 56.1% | 394 | |

* P < .05; ** P < .01; *** P < .001; N = 394

Table 5. Cartoon Verification of Regional and Participatory Budgeting Decisions

5. Discussion and Implication

Studies asserted that the main obstacles to citizen participation are budget complexity and citizen apathy, and compared to past budget implementation models, the number of participants was higher and their willingness was more active (Lerner, 2011; Montambeault & Goirand, 2016). However, some people questioned the way in which this participatory budget was implemented, as they thought that the discussion topic of proposals were too limited. This study indicates that when not regulating the budget size for each proposal, the content, size, types of each proposal are various. Interestingly, some proposals are not budget-based, rather than policy suggestion-based for current issues of public services and policies. In the participation process, participants were highly interested in the issues and actively engaged in discussions. Many group facilitator, who are familiar with citizen meeting play a vital role in the whole group discussion process.

Overall, the participatory budgeting of Kaohsiung City, was divided into various stages. Table 6 has shown that each stage of Implementing Participatory Budgeting would assist participants be more familiar with the operation of Participatory Budgeting. Through participatory budgeting workshops, table discussions and mutual information exchange would enhance the content of each proposal. Local residents were informed of the operational mechanisms and spirit of participatory budgeting, followed by assistance of group facilitator. Issue-discussion workshops are adopted to reach consensus and identify objectives through dialogue and disunion. Then, the proposals were all open access online and offline, and residents would vote in-person after the time of proposal presentation.

The program emphasizes five major aspects of participatory budgeting, including advocacy, training, proposal, review, and implementation, to develop the bottom-up participatory budgeting mechanism. Through in-site observations and interviews, the study found that five major aspects of participatory budgeting are significantly positive to participants’ engagement, issues discussion, the development of proposal content, mutual interaction, and trust.

| Stages | Content |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Pro-proposal Preparation Stage | Illustration meetings to educate public officials, community organizations and NPO personals the guideline of Participatory Budgeting operation. |
| Proposal Discussion Stage | Participatory budgeting workshop: participants who from different workshops are able to have a comprehensive dissuasion and mutual information exchange, which would in turn enhance the content of each proposal for gaining more support of workshop participants. Each group facilitator would guide group discussion and develop their own issue proposal in the deliberative process |
| ProposalVoting Stage | A total of 70 proposals and 16 of them were selected through participants’ vote. All proposals are open access in city government website, and billboards with these proposal content were set up in each district center. After the process of open access proposals, every community resident is able to vote for proposals that they are interested in or support for. |

Table 6. Main Stages for Implementing Participatory Budgeting in Kaohsiung City

There were significant differences between different unit backgrounds and participatory budgeting choices. The role of regional nonprofit organization is important for implementing an innovative citizen participation project.

Studies asserted that the more nonprofit organizations involved in the public governance process, the development of civil society and citizens' commitment to public affairs would be enhanced. In this study, most participants were the members of community development associations, neighborhood associations, and regional NPOs. Different organizations have differentiated professionals, abilities, information advantage, and missions that lead to diverse options which would increase more dialogues and information exchange among these participants.

It is important to have well-rounded dialogues and cohesion through effective guidance tools. Researchers themselves guided participants to discuss the observation process through the World Cafe and KJ methods and found that World Cafe can help the accumulation of trust and view exchange among participants. These two methods help group brainstorming of women and elderly issues and needs, and narrow down their wide discussion as well as summarize the main points of each proposal. When adopting these two method, the training of group facilitator is important because this study found that the group facilitator have significant influence on the workshop development, especially, issue discussion, group meeting host, and participants' commitment as well mutual interaction.

Overall, the design of the participatory budgeting proposal discussion mechanism of Kaohsiung city enables all parties to benefit from the participation process and effectively stimulate the interest and enthusiasm of participants in dialogues and policy issues. Importantly, participatory budgeting is an innovative approach of representative democracy and direct democracy. It facilitates a strong sense of community. Citizen participation in the budgeting system is implemented in different cities at different levels in Taiwan, and the mode of operation will be different. It is expected to produce different expectations and impacts. However, no matter the participatory mechanism is various, public officials need to consider a comprehensive participation among various citizen groups in the participative process.

6. Conclusion

To implement the spirit of deliberative democracy, it is necessary to promote the development of citizen governance in a comprehensive, sustainable, and pluralistic way through the bottom-up participation of the people. Participatory budgeting can enable the active participation of public in public budget discussions and proposal activities and the development and implementation of the budget. This study, while describing the initial experience of participatory budgeting, also offers a litmus case for local government to consider when they adopt bottom-up participatory budgeting mechanism.

Mechanisms of participatory budgeting does affect citizen participation, particularly when citizens are free and familiar with on participatory institutions. However, this study believe that the citizen education and training of participatory budgeting are vital to the development of participatory budgeting at regional level. Given past experience, it is probably unrealistic to ever expect that citizens are ready for the issue discussion and information exchange in the deliberative process. Hence, public officials need to spend more time in the well preparedness and plan at early stage of participatory budgeting. Although only a minority of the sample local governments currently adopted participatory budgeting in Taiwan, this study would provide a learning cases in other cities.

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