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A Theory of Participatory Budgeting Decision Making as a Form of Empowerment

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A Theory of Participatory Budgeting Decision Making as a Form of Empowerment

Abstract

There is a growing literature concerning participatory budgeting (PB), which transfers some element of budgetary decision making from the executive or legislature to citizens. During the earlier years of development, this practice was found primarily in less developed countries. Early PB reoriented government expenditures to better focus on the needs of the populace. Substantial shares of the budget were allocated through participatory process (Souza, 2001). PB is alternative claimed as an example of participatory democracy and deliberative democracy. This paper considers issues related to these theories and further develops a distinctive budgetary theory of participatory budgeting.

Introduction

Generally speaking, participatory budgeting (“PB”) is a process that “allows the participation of non-elected citizens in the conception and/or allocation of public finances” (Sintomer, Herzberg, & Röcke, 2008, p. 168). This approach to citizen-engagement in the public budgeting and allocation process began in Brazilian cities, and has since spread to more than 3,000 cities (Su, 2017) in at least 15 different countries (Goldfrank, 2012). PB is increasingly popular as a concept among social reformers, subnational governmental elected officials, academics, and other researchers. Despite its popularity, Wampler (2012) notes that while PB can empower citizens, enhance democracy, and increase overall well-being, PB can also act as a way for governments to legitimize themselves by co-opting activists pushing for more democratization.

Despite the general enthusiasm for PB by academics and activists, the topic has received little attention in the public administration literature and its definition is relatively amorphous (Miller, Hildreth, & Stewart, 2017a). Accordingly, what is referred to as “PB” takes numerous and various forms. In fact, Ganuza and Baiocchi (2012, p. 1) note, “To speak of Participatory Budgeting today is to speak of a seemingly infinitely malleable set of institutions.” Lacking a coherent theory and taxonomy limits the ability to incorporate this important contemporary phenomenon into public administration and budgeting literatures.

In this paper, we examine whether PB refocuses public capital spending through increased public engagement and reflects genuine transfer of significant decision-making power from officials to the residents, or is instead a symbolic process that co-opts residents, deflecting their desire for budgetary influence through merely symbolic decision-making. To address this

research question, we first detail the characteristics of PB in its varying forms, and then detail the history and spread of PB across the globe, focusing on how the practice has or has not changed public spending due to a change in decision-making locus. We build a theory and typology of PB, which allows for research hypotheses and predictions about how allocations are affected depending on which parties are involved. We use the PB process in New York City to empirically test our theory, and find that in this case, PB is a trivial budget exercise that does not transfer decision-making from elected officials to residents.

Characteristics of Participatory Budgeting Institutions

Any comparative research faces a definition problem. In the case of participatory budgeting, this problem is significant because very different forms of citizen participation in budget allocation procedures exist in different national settings. In some cases, the term “participatory budgeting” refers to an informative event connected with the budget but lacking significant consultation with citizens. Other examples, however, which are not referred to as “participatory budgeting,” may feature an intensive citizen engagement component. This is why one cannot rely on a ‘nominalist’ definition, based only on the denomination of the process as “participatory budgeting,” in order to make a comparison. An ontological definition that would aim to define what participatory budgeting should be, at any time and in any country, does not seem legitimate, because this procedure is different in different countries and because sociologists can hardly define the essence of a procedure or institution (Sintomer, Herzberg, and Röcke 2008, p. 168).

A political (or normative) definition would be possible, but this is not the aim of this article. It is therefore necessary to develop a methodological definition, which includes a set of minimal requisites in order to clearly differentiate this participatory procedure from others (such as the allocation of neighborhood funds with citizen input) and which, at the same time, is

comprehensive enough to give sufficient leeway to procedures with different specificities (Sintomer, Herzberg, and Röcke 2008). While not exhaustive, the subsequent characteristics are intended to somewhat concretize an amorphous and diverse institution. As discussed after, these different practices themselves inform the theoretical perspectives of this paper.

In principle, participatory budgeting allows citizens or residents to vote for specific public projects, which will then be implemented by governments, and which often include a value-based component emphasizing social justice (Wampler & Hartz-Karp, 2012). These different participants in the PB process likely have different goals (redistribution for poor participants versus maintaining budgetary control for politicians), which can lead to conflicts and challenges. Shah (2007, p. 1) defines PB as a “direct-democracy approach to budgeting” that has the benefits of (1) educating and engaging citizens on the processes of governance; (2) improving delivery of services by increasing transparency, accountability, and efficiency while also tackling corruption and clientelism; and (3) providing opportunity for marginalized groups to directly participate in budgeting decisions. This last characteristic is particularly relevant because it implies that one benefit of PB is a change (immediate or gradual) in where public moneys are spent because of a change in where significant budgetary decisions are made (residents versus public officials).

The limited existing literature on PB suggests that advocates view it similarly to the way that early twentieth century public administration activists, such as Frank Goodnow and William H. Allen, viewed their reforms of their era. These early activists advocated for a professional civil service to reduce corruption and patronage, increase citizen engagement, and increase the efficiency of public service delivery (Allen, 1908; Goodnow, 1900; Williams & Lee, 2008). Similarly, PB scholars view the practice as a means of an increasingly engaged citizenry shifting spending priorities, as well as improving transparency and reducing the role of patronage by elected officials. Further, PB is seen as a means of improving democratic outcomes by directly

involving and increasing the participation of normally marginalized populations, which is also expected to shift how public moneys are spent. In the next sections, we examine the implementation of PB in several contexts in order to develop a theory and taxonomy of participatory budgeting, and how PB is expected to change the allocation of public budgets.

The History of Participatory Budgeting

Cabannes (2004) divides the history of PB into three phases, starting with experimentation in Porto Alegre, Brazil and other cities during the 1990s. Subsequently PB spread more widely within Brazil during the late 1990s, and then beyond Brazil to Latin America, Europe, and beyond, with various modifications along the way.

The Beginning of Participatory Budgeting

In Porto Alegre, where PB in its modern form was first implemented, the process included shifting budgeting from a regional to a programmatic focus, which explicitly changed the rules of conduct and goals of politics (Wampler, 2012, p. 2). Essentially, this changed budgeting from “where” money was spent to which public goods were being financed and for whom. Other notable features in the Porto Alegre PB efforts included allowing anyone to participate. This was novel - especially in budgeting. This was not without friction, however, as established neighborhood associations saw their influence as intermediaries between citizens and elected officials reduced (Baiocchi, 2001). As a result of this direct democracy, politicians saw their own influence reduced as well, which in turn reduced cronyism (Ganuza & Baiocchi, 2012).

In short, the reforms in Porto Alegre were substantial in nature, scope, and effects, and saw significant changes to how public moneys were spent. Baiocchi and Ganuza (2014) argue that this combination of accommodating democratic decision-making and substantive outcomes is what makes PB significant. The early substantive outcome of PB was associated with increased

spending on basic sanitation and health care, and a reduction in infant mortality rates (Gonçalves, 2014). PB in Porto Alegre also had a redistributive effect because projects were directed more proportionately to poor areas once the citizens of these regions were able to more directly budget for these outcomes. Further, substantial shares of the budget (10 percent to 21 percent) were allocated through the participatory process (Souza, 2001). Although PB in Porto Alegre did not reach the extremely poor, the process was an improvement from a social justice perspective compared to the prior clientelist system in which communities received projects largely as political rewards only (Souza, 2001). Boulding and Wampler (2010) analyze data from 220 Brazilian cities and observe that PB is associated with increased spending on healthcare and small decreases in poverty, but caution that PB is likely to have limited impact on social justice when combined with only limited budgetary resources.

The Spread of PB

Following the perceived success of PB in Porto Alegre, PB spread across Brazil through the networks of the Worker's Party, extended across Latin America through related political networks, promoted by civil society, and finally spread beyond Latin America and across the globe in the 2000s after international organizations, development agencies, and activists were introduced to the model at the 2005 World Social Forum (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2014). Thus, in addition to the pull-factors of the inspiring example provided by the Porto Alegre-model of PB, there are push-factors behind the global spread of PB, as international development agencies, such as the World Bank, UN Habitat, and agencies of individual countries such as USAID adopted a pro-PB policy stance (Goldfrank, 2007). The World Bank, for example, has supported programs promoting PB and provided hundreds of millions of dollars in support of PB in at least

15 countries (Goldfrank, 2012). However, the World Bank version of PB is criticized as lacking social justice components that limit significant shifts in public spending.¹

Regardless of the initial motivations, the global spread of PB has been accompanied by ambiguity in the purposes and characteristics of PB (Ganuza & Baiocchi, 2012), which has the potential to limit the effect of PB on budgets. The ambiguity carries the risk of PB becoming a superficial project with weak links to decision-making and small budgets with rigid rules for spending (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2014), which contrasts with the successful Porto Alegre PB, in which citizens not only participated, but had the power to define the terms of their participation and shifted large shares of the municipal budget. Importantly, this weaker version may reflect symbolic democratization that co-opts, rather than empowers, participants. A process such as this would be expected to have limited to no effect on budgetary allocations because decision-making has not shifted from public officials to the citizenry in any meaningful way. Ganuza & Baiocchi (2012) distinguish between PB as a policy instrument in its early stage – a way to alter how citizens, civil society, and the government interact – and PB as a policy device in its later stage – a simple neutral initiative that may improve governance.

Sintomer et al. (2008) divide the PB processes in Europe into those with robust mechanisms for wider citizen engagement combined with active civil society engagement, contrasted with the ones where the process was merely superficial. Only the former ones produce the desired results, such as (1) transparency regarding public budgets and specific projects, and (2) improved administrative efficiency and responsiveness towards citizens including changes to budget allocations, especially the poor. Baiocchi and Ganuza (2014) find that some processes included direct decision-making, while others were merely consultations; most were open to all in

¹ Incidentally, this value neutrality may have contributed to the global spread because it is politically acceptable to potential opponents (Ganuza & Baiocchi, 2012).

principle, some used lottery to select participants, and some included organized groups as opposed to individual citizens and residents; and that usually PB is just one tool to link the local governments to citizens, causing frictions with other existing processes. These distinctions in the process clearly influence the ability of PB to alter budget allocations by shifting decision-making more directly to the people as conceived in Brazil.

Allegretti and Herzberg (2004) find that PB in Germany during the early 2000s was very centralized, with decisions made by city councils with only selective regard for citizen input. PB in Germany was not intended to be redistributive, but was a way to modernize governance and make it more open, and as such German PB is typically consultative in nature (Ruesch & Wagner, 2013). The challenges German PB has faced include declining participation and a lack of representativeness, the polar opposite of the outcomes in early PB practices in Brazil. Further, PB in Germany had limited budgetary allocative effect, perhaps because of the asymmetry in parties' power as well as its intent to not redistribute towards more marginalized populations.

Observations elsewhere in Europe reflect evolving PB practices. With the Portuguese experiences with PB, Alves and Allegretti (2012) distinguish between "first generation" PB that was ideological and consultative, and "second generation" PB which was characterized by more shared decision-making powers. In Italy, Bassoli (2012) notes that the PB process faces challenges about whether it is merely advisory, or whether the participants' decisions are binding. These evolving practices have tended to limit the effects of popularly determined (as opposed to determined by public officials) budget allocations resulting from PB processes. In general, the European with PB supports the notion that PB was merely a policy device that did not shift decision-making downwards, or significantly alter how public money was allocated.

Participatory Budgeting in North America

The first documented instance of PB in North America is in Guelph, Canada, beginning in 1999 (Pinnington, Lerner, & Schugurensky, 2009). The Guelph project used deliberative processes to allocate unrestricted grant funding that was partly awarded from the municipal government. The first United States municipality to adopt PB was Chicago in 2009 (Stewart, Miller, Hildreth, & Wright-Phillips, 2014). Alderman Joe Moore of Chicago's 49th Ward devoted \$1.3 million of his discretionary budget to PB (Lerner & Secondo, 2012). While PB in the 49th Ward has shifted spending patterns by including such project options such as murals and community gardens, it has faced criticism for failing to include significant proportions of citizens - and especially minorities - and for its rigid rules set by the alderman's staff (Stewart et al., 2014). Thus, PB in Chicago, though still expanding, has lacked the empowerment dimension seen in Latin American examples (Pin, 2017a), and has not significantly transferred decision-making from elected officials - which is expected to limit the allocative effects from PB as well.

PB in Chicago did succeed, however, in setting a precedent and an example for further adaptations across the United States. Hagelskamp, Rinehart, Silliman, and Schleifer (2016) document 13 North American cities (with 46 districts) engaged in participatory budgeting in the 2014-2015 decision (voting) year. This appears to be an undercount as it is fairly easy to find communities not included in this report that have engaged in the process during that year ("Greensboro Participatory Budgeting Handbook 2015 - 2016," 2015; Tariq & Fletcher, 2016). While no firm count exists from a single reliable source, Public Agenda, an organization that promotes participatory budgeting, continues to show dispersion to communities not reported in earlier years as of late 2017 ("Participatory Budgeting," 2017). Where discernable from these reports, the common approach involves council members who allocate part or all of an office's discretionary budget allowance to citizen or resident decision-making. Whether these shifts in

the locus of decision-making affect how public moneys are spent remains an unexplored empirical question.

The Political Theory of Participatory Budgeting

The domain of democratic theory to which participatory budgeting belongs is disputed. Both theorists of deliberative democracy (Baiocchi, 2001; Fung & Wright, 2001; Pin, 2017b) and those of participatory democracy (Hilmer, 2010; Pateman, 2012; Stewart et al., 2014) claim this practice as evidence of their respective domain's living practices. To further confound this dispute, some deliberative democratic theorists claim to fully subsume participatory democracy within their domain (Fung & Wright, 2001; Hildreth, 2012; Pin, 2017b), which claim is vigorously disputed by some participatory democratic theorists (Hilmer, 2010; Jackson, 2015; Pateman, 2012). Others are either ambiguous (Fung, 2006, 2007; Kaswan, 2011; Miller, Hildreth, & Stewart, 2017b) or, in one case, skeptical of both domains (Mutz, 2006). Even further in one instance, procedures that look very much like a participatory budgeting are labeled direct democracy (Beath, Christia, & Enikolopov, 2017).

What all of these theory domains have in common is that they focus on a decision-making process in the hands of the population-at-large under various guises as opposed to decision by elected representatives. This focus is a rejection of the dominant western democratic political theory of the 20th century which limits the role of the population to selecting leaders, who are to use their own judgment to decide on political matters, while possibly taking into account the views as communicated by organized groups. Pateman (1970) examines these earlier theories at length, assigning the root of this pluralistic view to Joseph Schumpeter (1942), Robert Dahl (1956) and others. Individuals may be represented through their membership in interest groups, Madisonian factions (Dahl, 1967, 1998). Their different aspects are represented by different groups. It is not so much individuals themselves who are represented, their interests are

represented. This line of reasoning denies a direct decision-making role for the population; according to some of these theorists, to the degree of rejecting communication about preferences from voters to their representatives (Kaswan, 2011). The theory of representative democracy may be labeled pluralist, polyarchist, elitist, or a variety of other things, although it is not necessarily the case that all forms of participatory theory are exempt from all of these labels. The core feature that participatory theorists reject is elitism, the presumption that the great mass of humanity are incapable of governing themselves democratically and thus their democratic role should be limited to selecting leaders who make decisions in their behalf (Kaufman, 1960). Kaufman argues this view of human nature can be empirically examined through democratic experiments. Regardless of the specific label designated for participatory budgeting, when it is fully implemented as in the Porto Alegre case, it is such an experiment. Nevertheless, the advocates of these participatory processes consider the participatory process itself as the primary benefit to consider. Pateman (1970), for example, treats education in democracy as the benefit, while Baiocchi and Lerner (2007), among others, focus on the role of deliberative democracy in legitimating governance.

Fung (2006) describes three dimensions of participation: (1) participant selection, (2) authority and power, and (3) communication and decision. Miller et al. (2017b) breaks Fung's communication and decision-making dimensions into two separate dimensions. Both of these models treat these dimensions as linear which collectively merge at their minimums and they include many of the features associated with the various contra-Schumpeterian theories, although they do not explicitly express a view about Schumpeterianism. However, there are suggestions; for example, Fung finds legitimacy-enhancing deliberation at the intersection of communicative influence, open self-selection, and express preferences. Presumably, expert administration is part of elitist (Schumpeterian) government; however, it is not clear how this combines with diffuse

public (participation in voting behavior) as these two characteristics are far apart on the same dimension.

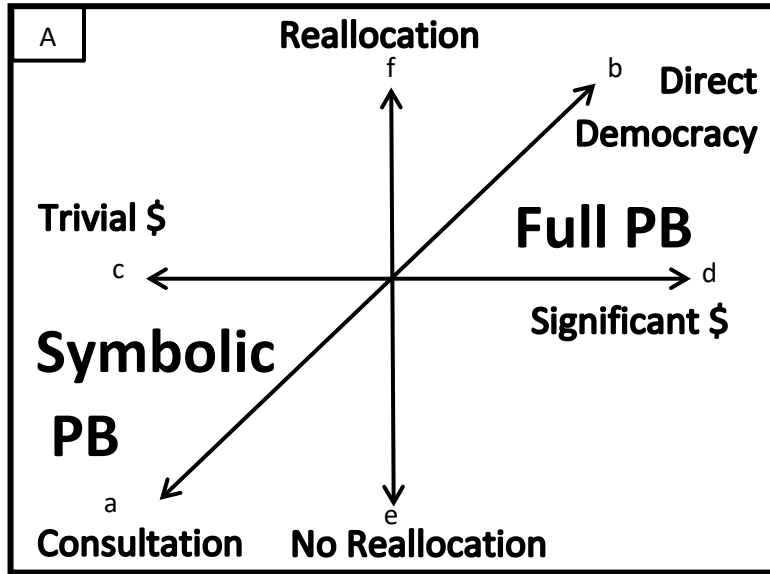
A Budgetary Theory and Typology of Participatory Budgeting

While theories develop a citizen or resident based democratic decision theory, they generally omit the requirement that the decisions are in fact substantial. They focus, instead on perceptions of legitimacy and education in democracy. From a budgetary perspective, what is significant is the decision. We use the history of PB practices across the globe to articulate a comprehensive theory and typology of PB decision-making, and the effect of this decision-making on which types of public projects receive funding. Early PB developed in three significant dimensions as shown in Figure 1:

- It expanded the access to budget decision making by engaging a broad array of citizens or residents;
- It provided these participants control over a significant share of public resources; and
- Most importantly for our purposes, it reallocated funds from purposes preferred by elites and experts, to those preferred by the newly empowered population.

The effect of this redirection of decision-making and, as a result, public money has been to provide more equitable access to governmentally funded projects. That is, PB in its original incarnation sought to transfer significant decision-making power from public officials to residents, especially those usually excluded from budgetary decisions. Figure 1 shows that each of these dimensions can be understood as a continuum from minimal engagement to transformative change.

Figure 1 Dimensions of Participatory Budgeting



B	a. Consultation	b. Direct Democracy
c. Trivial Amounts	Low Influence & Low Impact	High Influence & Low Impact
d. Significant	Low Influence & High Impact	High Influence & High Impact

C	c. Trivial Amounts	d. Significant Amounts
e. No Reallocation	Low Impact & Little Change	High Impact & Little Change
f. Reallocation	Low Impact & More Change	High Impact & More Change

D	a. Consul	b. Direct Democracy
e. No Reallocation	Low Influence & Little Change	High Influence & Little Change
f. Reallocation	Low Influence & More Change	High Influence & More Change

The first dimension, labeled a - b in Figure 1A,² ranges from consultation to direct democracy. In the consultative form, engaged residents may select projects and expenditure plans, but these are treated as recommendations to more traditional political actors, elected officials, and governmental experts. At the opposite end of the continuum, through direct democracy, the PB selections are decided. The role of elected officials and government officials is to implement these decisions. The range of this continuum may reflect the degree to which the governmental participants can influence or veto decisions made by the public. This control may be subtle – for example, government actors may reject projects as not meeting funding requirements as a capital project, or making the project cost estimation prohibitively expensive. Alternatively, it may be overt – for example, government actors may have a formal role in the project selection process and decision-making, not leaving it exclusively to residents.

The second dimension, labeled c - d in Figure 1A, involves the amount of resources affected by decisions or recommendations made through the participatory process. In early Porto Alegre experience, the share of total annual expenditures was substantial, as much as 21 percent, although it varied widely for reported years. On the other hand, some literature shows that in more developed countries, the share may be much smaller, reflecting the discretionary funds controlled by a single legislator. More significant decisions in this dimension reflect larger shares of resources.

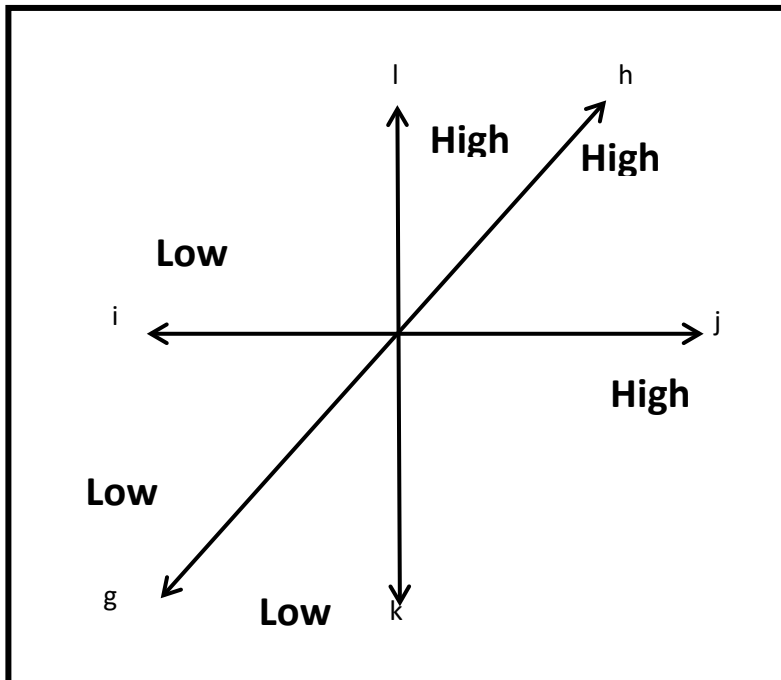
The third dimension, labeled e - f in Figure 1A, reflects the degree by which resources are redirected. More significant redirection of resources involves changing the purpose for which public resources are spent and the beneficiaries of these resources. Early PB redirected resources to basic needs in neglected communities; that is, the use of this money is reported to redirect both

² The three dimensions shown in Figure 1A are shown in paired relationships in Figures 1B, 1C, and 1D.

purpose and beneficiaries of funds. More minimal redirection may involve selection of projects without power to shift the purpose or beneficiaries of funding.

As shown in Figure 1A, we label direct democracy affecting substantial resources and substantial redirection (reallocation) as “Full PB,” while consultation with less significant resources and minimal redirection is labeled “Symbolic PB.” This symbolic PB may be thought of as the co-option of residents by public officials and elites, which may deflect the potential budgetary influence of PB itself. Where a municipality’s PB system falls in Figures 1B-D helps predict the outcomes from PB. With the history and theory of PB thus articulated and a typology developed, we turn now to a specific case of PB to apply and test this theory with specific hypotheses.

Figure 2 Dimensions of Reallocation



g-h Reallocate by program
i-j Reallocate by location
k-l Reallocate by size and number of grants

Figure 2 shows that the reallocation dimension can be further subdivided into three components, each of which can be classified as low (no reallocation) or high (substantial reallocation). The g-h dimension reflects reallocation by program. In early PB this might be from aesthetic uses to basic infrastructure. The i-j dimension reflects reallocation by location, considering the empowerment objective, it may reflect redirecting funds from wealthy neighborhoods to poor ones. The k-l dimension reflects reallocation by size and number of grants. For a fixed amount of money small grants can be distributed to more beneficiary groups. This form of reallocation is ambiguous with respect to the point of participatory budgeting. While it may provide funding to more beneficiaries (thus reflecting empowerment), it may also reflect use of participatory budgeting by powerful officials to more fine-tune their use of patronage to gain votes, which is contrary to the anti-clientelistic purposes of participatory processes.

These dimensions are quite distinct from those previously discussed as they focus not on abstract issues such as the presence of bureaucratic decision making, but on much more concrete and measurable factors related to decision making. They, therefore, provide a greater opportunity to observe the decision-making effect of participatory budgeting.

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper has developed a theory of participation budgetary decision making with the aim of defining clear measurable dimensions of decision making that clarify the degree to which participatory budgeting is a form of direct democracy as compared with a symbolic exercise. Three major dimensions are defined and one of those is further developed into three

subdimensions. These dimensions can be used for examination of specific instances of participatory budgeting to determine the degree to which power is shifted to the population at large through direct democracy as compared with the degree that it is symbolically transferred while actually maintaining an elite-pluralist form of governance.

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