**West Research Project for CLD**

**Topic: Engagement and Action by Kirsty Anderson and Anne Marie Timmoney from East Dunbartonshire Council, Community Planning and Partnerships team.**

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*‘Necessity is the mother of invention’*

Working with Anne Marie over the last few weeks we have researched the topic of engagement and action in terms of CLD blended learning approaches. Our practice example is the HIIC course delivered by Anne-Marie earlier this year (see separate paper). For international comparative purposes Kirsty also looked at models of engagement in Brazil (participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre), and a digital model of engagement in Madrid (Consul). We were interested to what extent these models led to positive action.

Participatory Budgeting in Brazil (Porto Alegre)

The process in Brazil was initially introduced to challenge the corruption and clientelism endemic in the political culture of the 1970s and 1980s. According to Prof. Souza (2001) it was particularly effective at mobilising the poor and those who were often politically marginalised. Prof Souza covers a range of attempts by Brazilian cities to adopt PB including in Belo Horizonte and Lages where experiences with PB were formative / less positive. The time was characterised by democratisation across Brazil e.g. went from 32-187 Mayors elected during the period 1988-2000.

It is widely considered to be the biggest and most successful use of participatory budgeting anywhere in the world. It has had powerful redistributive impacts as well becoming embedded in the institutional structure of municipal government. Budgeting happens annually, beginning with the presentation of accounts from the previous year by the city government. The government also presents its investment plan for the current year, which has been decided at the meetings from the year before. The debates then begin for the subsequent year, taking a period of nine months.

A positive lesson from the model was tiered meetings gives participatory budgeting the flexibility to work at local and regional levels.

FINDINGS

* PB has led to increase per capita revenue for the regions involved (Souza)
* There is a series of citizen assemblies starting with information meetings from council officials on the budgets
* Leads to increase in transparency – all the budgets are out in the open
* In 1994, Belo Horizonte also introduced thematic fora, which worked together with the district assemblies with the aim of broadening the issues discussed in PB eg housing/homelessness. Mostly goes on infrastructure.
* Priorities vary according to the needs of each community. In Porto Alegre, the preferences for resources allocated through PB are mainly for street paving, sewerage, housing and community equipment, whereas in Belo Horizonte the preferences are for housing, sewerage, street paving, shantytown urbanization, health and education.
* Both cities established distribution criteria to assure a progressive distribution of resources so that poorer areas receive more funding than the well-off ones
* Reports that in the case of Porto Alegre, resources for PB increased steadily from 1992, achieving a peak in 1994 (US$ 82 million) – represents 5-20% of total resources dependant on year (late 90s) – rest of the budget goes on payroll etc.
* Models used questionnaires / local meetings primarily.
* Porto Alegre is a city of 1.3million (Belo Horizonte 1.7mill) The number of participants in 2001 taking part in the PB process estimated at 16,000, belonging to 300 grassroots movements.
* Average age of participant was late 30-50s. Low income and education (only 12% had above basic education).
* According to Souza per capita total revenue increased for those regions involved in PB
* Matthaeus reports that a survey in 1994 showed that 46.3 per cent of the population knew about PB and that 8.3 per cent had participated in one form or another in PB discussions.
* A 1994 opinion poll with a sample of Belo Horizonte’s inhabitants found that PB had the approval of 67.3 per cent of the population and that it received the greatest approval of all local government policies.(60)
* Further to the Internet and mobile phones becoming available from late 90s. Belo Horizonte introduced Digital Participatory Budgeting in 2006. Around 10% of local voters took part (around 200,000 voters). It has a separate budget of £11 million. Participants saw it as important they had a binding vote.

Participatory Budgeting in Spain (Madrid)

Since its inception in 2001, PB in Spain has sought to increase the number of citizens participating actively in politics. Before 2015 PB in Spain was characterized by in-person meetings that citizens attended to propose, discuss and priorities different proposals. Since 2018 any citizen can connect to the internet and submit a proposal from their own home.

This has changed in the more recent participatory budgeting processes. 91.7% of the processes studied incorporate some digital element within the Participatory Budgeting (Frances et al). The bigger the city, the more likely it is to use digital techniques, albeit they remain just a part of the process.

Consul

In 2011, the 15-M Spanish indignados movement (the outraged movement – a series of protests, demonstrations, and occupations against austerity policies in Spain that began around the local and regional elections of 2011 and 2012). It brought thousands of citizens out to the streets demanding a better democracy. Latest figures cite 400,000 users in Madrid in 2018 and vote on a budget of around 100 million euros (Madrid population 3.2 million)

Following the decline of trust in public institutions propelled by a series of corruption scandals in Spain, the Madrid City Council developed the CONSUL software and launched it in Madrid under the name Decide Madrid in 2015. Decide Madrid is the official open governance platform serving as a one-stop shop for all official open governance processes in the municipality, including issues of transparency, open data and participation. The platform has many distinct areas for participation – namely, through its features providing spaces for debates, citizen proposals and participatory budgeting.

In Scotland, around twenty Councils are developing their own Consul sites for participation and engagement activities. It is led in Scotland by COSLA Participatory Budgeting Team funded by Scottish Government.

A challenge in Madrid was identified by the government in terms of resistance to the online platform by several traditional neighborhood associations, which were used to face-to-face interactions and mediation processes. To address this issue, the Decide Madrid team set up several face-to-face deliberative spaces (i.e. local forums, physical voting booths) which aim to be more inclusive and cater to the different needs of stakeholders involved.

A key to the success of the e-participation platform was identified in terms of involving end users and all relevant stakeholder in its design to ensure buy-in. It is also important to consider the needs of the different stakeholder groups to maximize the initiative’s impact, for example including those of underrepresented groups and users who would prefer face-to-face mediation opportunities.

FINDINGS

* Research concludes that ICT related factors are not decisive for the success of digital engagement initiatives.
* Issues related to democratic participation seem to be more important for the success of e-participation matters.
* The larger the population the more the extent and use of digital engagement methods (in Spain).
* Important to consider the needs of the different stakeholder groups to maximize the initiative’s impact, for example including those of underrepresented groups and users who would prefer face-to-face mediation opportunities.
* Tensions between political / participative democracy – Councillors not allowed to vote

Conclusion - Lessons for CLD Practitioners in Scotland

* When planning remote and blended participation we need to ensure that a range of methods are used (qualitative and quantitative). Ideally face-to-face can be complemented by online engagement (EqIA important)
* There are a range of ways to look at effectiveness of engagement or participation – the examples here have involved large numbers of citizens and relatively large budgets
* Other measures of success have outlined an increased level of satisfaction with government and knowledge of the civic processes.
* Individually and collectively these projects have elicited action further to participation / engagement
* Progressive distribution of resources so that poorer areas receive more funding than the well-off ones
* Very different starting points than Madrid / Brazil – bigger cities too. Qualitative HIIC course approach more effective in terms of engagement / action – although bigger scale direct participation with PB
* Existing levels of participation are important to build any ICT approaches upon.
* Important to build into criteria progressive measures to combat inequalities
* ICT can lead to less access
* for some (more access for others) – EqIA
* HIIC style engagement more difficult in bigger online groups
* Important to back up PB with face-to-face meetings and build upon existing participative structures
* Online PB models still require significant input from government officials

**Sources**

Souza, C. (2001), Participatory budgeting in Brazilian cities: limits and possibilities in building democratic institutions

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F Francés, L Carratalá, E Ganuza (2018), Hope for Democracy, 20 Years of Participatory Budgeting in Spain

<https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ernesto_Ganuza/publication/326446155_20_Years_of_Participatory_Budgeting_in_Spain/links/5b4de73da6fdcc8dae2582f3/20-Years-of-Participatory-Budgeting-in-Spain.pdf>

OECD Innovations Website on Consul Project in Madrid

<https://oecd-opsi.org/innovations/consul-project/>

Royo, S, Pina, V, & Garcia-Rayado, J. (2020) Decide Madrid: A Critical Analysis of an Award-Winning e-Participation Initiative

<https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/12/4/1674>

Other

OECD report (November 2020) that outlines a digital divide within and between countries

<https://www.oecd.org/digital/covid-19-crisis-accentuating-the-need-to-bridge-digital-divides.htm>

[The state of education – one year into COVID - OECD Education and Skills Today (oecdedutoday.com)](https://oecdedutoday.com/state-of-education-one-year-into-covid/)

“The transition to online or hybrid teacher professional learning has been an additional challenge for many teachers who were not familiar with online learning formats. Teacher engagement in online professional development was limited prior to the pandemic and teachers were less likely than other professionals to learn by keeping up to date with new products and services. The Special Survey shows how most countries made major efforts to support teachers’ learning on line during the pandemic, for instance by providing ICT access and connectivity to teachers or supporting ICT-related teacher professional learning to build teachers’ digital competence.”