

Participation of Older Adults in Participatory Budgeting: An Analysis of Data from Kraków and Pécs

ABSTRACT

This article presents the results of a study on the participation of older adults (aged 55+) in participatory budgeting (PB) in two cities: Kraków (Poland) and Pécs (Hungary). The analysis is based on data collected from 35 respondents and focuses on sources of knowledge about PB, motivations for participation, levels of decision-making autonomy, and social influences accompanying the act of voting. Particular attention is paid to the relationship between participation in the activities of the Antares Foundation and Nevelők Háza Egyesület within the Erasmus+ project “Your Idea Counts” and the degree of independence in voting decisions. The findings indicate that participants involved in project activities demonstrate more than twice the level of decision-making autonomy compared to non-participants, with a difference of 28.57 percentage points. In the second part of the article, these findings are compared with the results of research conducted among older adults in Rzeszów by Mirosław Sołtysiak, which examined seniors’ knowledge, sources of information, and motivations for participation in the Rzeszów Participatory Budget. The comparative analysis reveals distinct patterns of participation and different models of civic agency, resulting both from local contextual factors and from varying levels of informational and social support. The conclusions highlight the importance of digital competences and the role of civil society organizations as key factors strengthening the political agency of older adults.



INTRODUCTION

Participatory budgeting is one of the most widely recognized tools of civic participation, enabling residents to directly influence the allocation of a portion of municipal funds. In the academic literature, participation in PB is considered an indicator of both civic engagement and trust in public institutions¹. Older adults represent a particularly important group in participatory processes, as they constitute a growing demographic segment whose civic activity may reduce social exclusion, strengthen social capital, and foster intergenerational solidarity².

The aim of this article is to analyze the participation of individuals aged 55 and over in participatory budgeting processes in two cities characterized by different social and cultural contexts: Kraków and Pécs. The study examines sources of information about PB, motivations for voting, the degree of autonomy in decision-making, and social influences affecting voting behavior. Special attention is given to the role of the Erasmus+ project “Your Idea Counts” in strengthening participants’ decision-making independence.

An additional objective is to compare the obtained findings with the results of earlier research conducted by Mirosław Sołtysiak (2017) on seniors’ participation in the Rzeszów Participatory Budget. This comparison makes it possible to capture the broader context of the phenomenon and to identify both shared and divergent elements of participation in participatory budgeting across different cities and time periods.

¹ Sintomer, Y., Herzberg, C., & Röcke, A. (2008). *Participatory Budgeting in Europe: Potentials and Challenges*. International Journal of Urban and Regional Research

² Górecka, D. (2025). Potrzeby starzejącego się społeczeństwa a proces budżetu obywatelskiego. *Optimum. Economic Studies*, 1(119), 105–129



METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted using a direct survey method. Questionnaires were collected in person during the participatory budgeting voting process in Kraków and Pécs. The sample consisted of 35 respondents, of whom 65.71% were aged between 55 and 64 and 34.29% were aged 65 or older. Women constituted 62.86% of the sample. The research was exploratory in nature and did not aim to achieve statistical representativeness, but rather to identify participation patterns and mechanisms of influence, particularly in relation to the activities of social organizations.

The questionnaire covered sources of information about participatory budgeting, motivations for participation, factors influencing voting decisions, previous engagement in PB processes, and involvement in activities organized by the Antares Foundation or Nevelők Háza Egyesület. Both quantitative and qualitative analytical approaches were applied.

In the comparative section, published research results based on a sample of 643 respondents from Rzeszów were used, including 195 individuals aged 55 and over³. That study focused on seniors' self-assessment of their knowledge, sources of information, levels of activity, and motivations in the context of the Rzeszów Participatory Budget. The design of that study allows for a comparison enabling the identification of similarities and differences between the two samples.

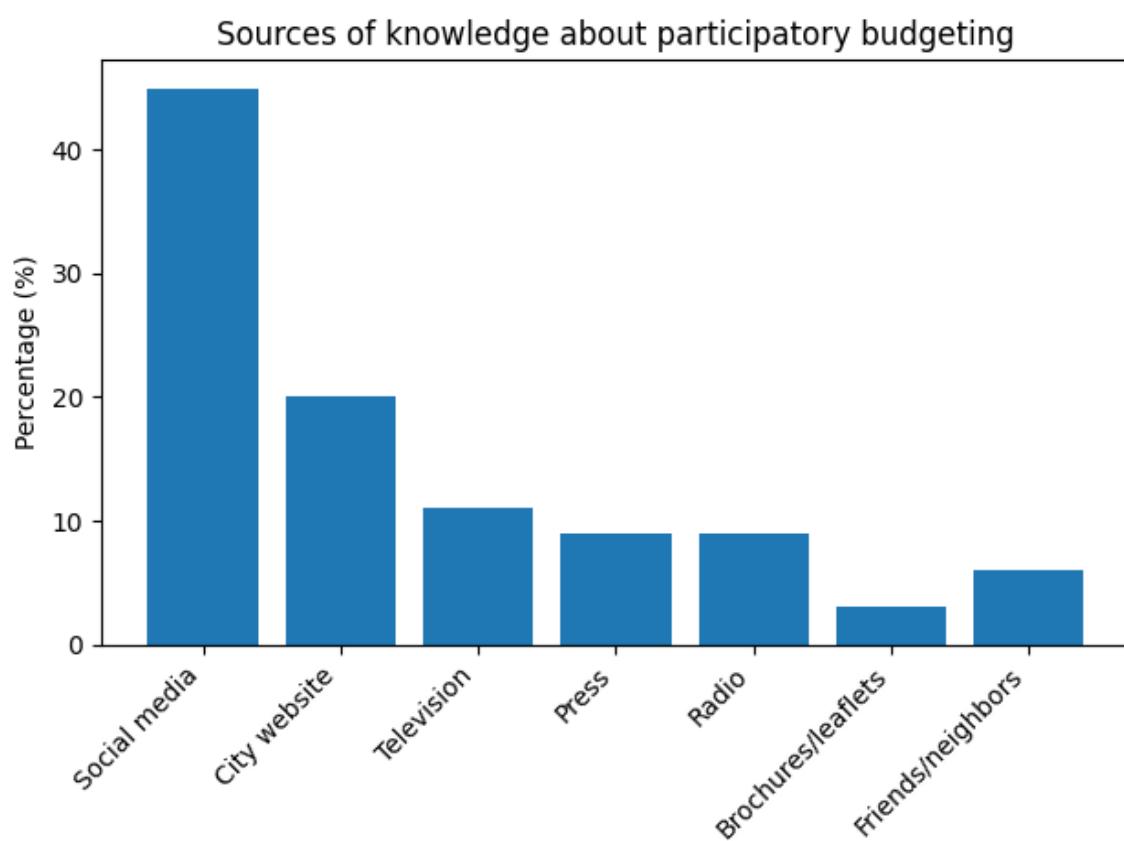
³ Sołtysiak, M. (2017). Wiedza i aktywność seniorów w zakresie budżetu partycypacyjnego. *Przedsiębiorstwo i Region*, 9, 71–81.

Available online: <https://repozytorium.ur.edu.pl/items/6fcfaa12-dbfa-49c1-a667-e32e19617e8c> (17.11.2025)

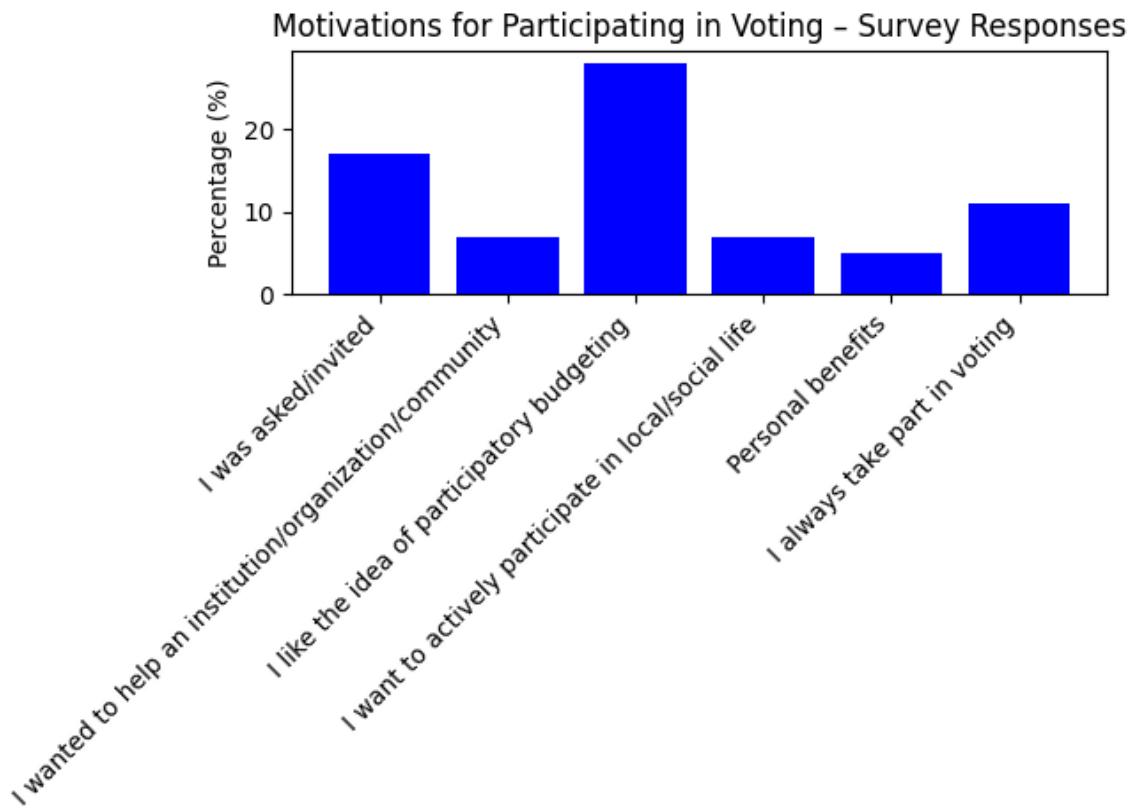


RESULTS FROM KRAKÓW AND PÉCS

The findings indicate that older adults rely on diverse sources of information about participatory budgeting. Social media platforms were the most frequently indicated source (45.71%), followed by official municipal websites. Traditional media such as television, radio, and newspapers continued to play a role, although a secondary one. Information obtained from friends and neighbors was marginal, suggesting a predominance of individualized information-seeking practices.



Motivations for participation were primarily normative and relational in nature. Respondents most often emphasized support for the idea of participatory budgeting itself, reflecting an understanding of the value of co-decision-making. Requests from other individuals also played a role, while instrumental motivations related to direct personal benefits were rare.



In terms of decision-making autonomy, 40% of respondents reported making their voting decisions independently. Others indicated the influence of family members or their immediate social environment, most often spouses, peers, or children. Importantly, participation in activities organized within the project “Your Idea Counts” was associated with a significantly higher level of autonomy. Among project participants, 57.14% made independent decisions, compared to 28.57% among non-participants.



Participation in previous PB editions was generally incidental. Only one quarter of respondents had taken part in earlier PB processes, and just 20% monitored the implementation of selected projects.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS WITH RZESZÓW

A comparison with Sołtysiak's (2017) study reveals substantial differences. In Kraków and Pécs, digital channels dominated as sources of information, whereas in Rzeszów family members constituted the primary information source. This reflects differences in digital competences and communication patterns, as well as the temporal gap between the studies.

The first difference concerns sources of information. In the studies conducted in Kraków and Pécs, digital channels predominated: social media platforms and municipal websites. Seniors used the Internet independently as their primary tool for obtaining information about projects and the rules of the PB. In contrast, in the Rzeszów study the main source of information about PB was family, indicated by 87.74% of participants. The role of friends and neighbors was also significant. This contrast reveals differing profiles of digital competencies as well as differences in communication culture between the studied groups. The results from Kraków and Pécs point to a higher level of individualization in information practices, whereas in Rzeszów a model based on interpersonal relationships prevails. It is worth noting, however, the time gap between the studies. The analysis of seniors' participation in the participatory budget in Rzeszów was based on data from 2017. The present study refers to a somewhat different group of respondents, who more frequently than several years ago turn to the Internet or social media as sources of information.



The second key difference concerns motivation for participation. The study conducted in Kraków and Pécs shows that the most frequently declared motivation is approval of the idea of PB, characterized by a normative approach to participation. Seniors understand the value of participatory processes and engage in them due to a sense of responsibility for the local community. In Rzeszów, by contrast, motivation resulting from requests made by other people clearly predominated. The majority of respondents made their decision not on their own initiative, but under the influence of their social environment, which indicates a more reactive model of participation, dependent on interpersonal relations.

The most pronounced difference, however, appears in the area of decision-making autonomy. In the Kraków and Pécs study, 40% of respondents declared making their choice independently, and this percentage increased significantly among participants involved in the activities of the Antares Foundation or Nevelők Háza Egyesület. In the Rzeszów study, by contrast, only a small proportion of seniors made decisions independently, while the dominant influence came from family members, especially spouses and children. This reveals different models of agency: seniors in Rzeszów are to a greater extent dependent on their social surroundings, whereas those studied in Kraków and Pécs demonstrate a higher level of personal engagement, supported by non-governmental organizations.

Similarity, however, can be observed with regard to the level of long-term activity. In both studies, seniors rarely participated in multiple editions of PB, and monitoring the implementation of projects was marginal. This indicates that although the act of voting is relatively easy and accessible, its embedding in practices of long-term participation remains limited.



DISCUSSION

A comparison of the two studies indicates a clear evolution in the participation of older adults in participatory budgeting processes. The differences between seniors from Kraków and Pécs and those from Rzeszów appear to result from several groups of factors: the local context, the availability of informational support, the level of digital competencies, and the presence of social organizations supporting civic activity. In Kraków and Pécs, seniors operate within a more individualized information environment, readily use the Internet, and make decisions to a greater extent independently. The presence of organizations such as the Antares Foundation or Nevelők Háza Egyesület further strengthens their sense of agency and decision-making competencies.

The Rzeszów study, by contrast, points to the dominance of a relational model in which the social environment—especially family—plays the role of a key moderator of participation. Seniors there become engaged primarily in response to external stimuli, often without deeper reflection on the proposed projects.

The juxtaposition of the findings from both studies suggests that social organizations may play an important role in the process of activating seniors' civic engagement. They support the development of informational competencies, strengthen normative motivations, and increase the likelihood of autonomous decision-making, which in the longer term may contribute to a sustainable improvement in the quality of public participation.



CONCLUSIONS

The article confirms that seniors are full-fledged and valuable participants in participatory processes, although their activity depends on a range of structural and social factors. The findings from the studies conducted in Kraków and Pécs point to a more conscious, autonomous, and value-based model of participation, strengthened through contact with social organizations. Comparison with the research from Rzeszów demonstrates that patterns of seniors' participation may differ significantly depending on context and the forms of support applied.

Future research should focus on developing tools that enhance seniors' decision-making autonomy, increasing their digital competencies, and analyzing the long-term effects of participation in participatory budgeting (PB). From a public policy perspective, fostering cooperation between local governments and social organizations appears crucial, as these actors play an important role in strengthening the civic competencies of older adults.

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.



References

Allegretti, G., & Herzberg, C. (2004). *Participatory budgets in Europe: Between efficiency and growing local democracy*. TNI, 5, 1–24.

Dubicki, P. (2021). *Budżet obywatelski jako element partycypacji społecznej. Studia z Polityki Publicznej*, 8(1), 91–105.

Górecka, D. (2025). *Potrzeby starzejącego się społeczeństwa a proces budżetu obywatelskiego. Optimum. Economic Studies*, 1(119), 105–129.

Klucińska, P., & Sześciło, D. (2017). *Miejski budżet partycypacyjny – w kierunku współzarządzania czy fasadowej partycypacji? Pedagogika Społeczna*, 3(65), 103–118.

Marczewska-Rytko, M., & Maj, D. (2021). *Civic/participatory budget in the Visegrad Group countries in the context of good practices*. Lublin: Maria Curie-Skłodowska University Press.

Rybińska, D. (2018). *Instytucja budżetu obywatelskiego jako narzędzia rozwoju samorządu lokalnego. Journal of Finance and Financial Law*, 1(17), 49–65.

Siemionek-Ruskań, M., & Siemionek-Lepczyńska, A. (2025). Environmental aspects of participatory budgeting in selected cities in Europe. *Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism*, 16(2), 119–126. [https://doi.org/10.14505/jemt.v16.2\(78\).03](https://doi.org/10.14505/jemt.v16.2(78).03)
Accessed: 17 November 2025, from <https://journals.aserspublishing.eu/jemt/article/view/8874>

Sinervo, L.-M., Lehtonen, P., Radzik-Maruszak, K., & Ebdon, C. (2024). Participatory budgeting in reshaping public budgeting: Evidence from Finland, Poland, and the US. In G. Grossi & J. Vakkuri (Eds.), *Handbook of accounting and public governance: Exploring hybridizations* (pp. 141–161). Edward Elgar. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800888456.00019>

Sołtysiak, M. (2017). *Wiedza i aktywność seniorów w zakresie budżetu partycypacyjnego. Przedsiębiorstwo i Region*, 9, 71–81.
Accessed: 17 November 2025, from <https://repozytorium.ur.edu.pl/items/6fcfaa12-dbfa-49c1-a667-e32e19617e8c>



Sintomer, Y., Herzberg, C., & Röcke, A. (2008). Participatory budgeting in Europe: Potentials and challenges. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 32(1), 164–178.

11



**Co-funded by
the European Union**