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Executive summary

Trust in political institutions in the UK is at a record low[2], whilst the urgency of climate action grows ever greater. There is a need to regain trust in Government, undertake rapid action to invest in our services and tackle inequalities in society. Cities and urban areas are crucial arenas for this action, and how people move around the built environment is central to this. Yet how people move around the city, and who makes decisions about our cities, is gendered.

Addressing the specific barriers that prevent women from cycling will help reduce emissions and make the city more equitable, sharing the health, wellbeing and economic benefits of cycling across society.

This report takes one question as a starting point: **whether participatory budgeting, a form of participatory democracy where citizens directly decide how to spend public money, can contribute to a more gender-equitable active travel system.**

This is explored through reviewing existing academic and practice literature on participatory budgeting (PB), gender equity, and active travel, and by exploring case studies from cities from across Europe who have undertaken participatory budgeting processes that result in cycling outcomes.

The report finds that cycling is consistently a very popular topic across cities' PB programmes: people want to engage with the public sector about cycling investment in their city. PB helps expand who makes active travel decisions through enabling 'ordinary' citizens – often regardless of age or other 'rights' to vote – to propose and support interventions and programmes that are then delivered.

The report finds that cities – and PB academia more broadly - are not fully engaging with questions of gender equity in the participatory budgeting process. It has not been possible to fully understand how different people participate throughout a PB process, whose ideas are funded, and whether the ideas proposed and funded address the specific barriers facing women any more than other existing investment programmes a city makes. Without this information, PB risks recreating some of the same exclusions experienced in traditional decision-making.

This research report establishes the need for PB to consider gender equity, as it cannot cleanly answer the original guiding question. Drawing on the learnings from the case studies and a full literature review, it makes some recommendations for PB practitioners as well as broader learnings for built environment professionals.

When the public sector is well-resourced and committed to building representative participation and mainstreaming gender, participatory budgeting has the potential to empower residents. It does this through creating a direct link between participating-citizens and spending. It is not a panacea, but it can be a powerful tool in the public sectors' participatory democracy kit to build trust in decision making and better direct spending to needs.

It is, however, worth acknowledging that in low-cycling countries like the UK, greater gains in equity will likely be realised through increased and sustained financial and political commitment to building the necessary infrastructure, rather than through PB on existing budgets. Women and other traditionally groups underrepresented in cycling should be involved in these decisions - whether through PB or using other participatory tools - to ensure the infrastructure and policies delivered address the specific barriers that they experience.

Recommendations for participatory budgeting practitioners

- Improve and deepen data collection. Collect disaggregated data on who is participating, whose ideas are funded, who benefits from ideas and how those ideas differ to the wider programmes the public sector is undertaking. This requires collecting quantitative data as well as qualitative data.

- Mainstream gender into the PB process, with gender budgeting used to analyse decisions. Equity should be explicitly codified into the design of the PB process with clear gender equity goals set out at the start to guide the process and enable assessment throughout. Little is known about how PB programmes benefit different groups, so alongside gender mainstreaming, the principles of intersectional gender budgeting should be embedded. Gender budgeting enables an assessment of how spending decisions impact different groups of men and women across society.

- Representative participation throughout, from the set-up to longer-term monitoring of the experience and its outcomes. Academic research shows that residents are more interested in participating in PB where they have meaningful control over budgets[3], and engaging citizens in the process throughout can ensure that this is enabled.

The Scottish Government[4] defines **Participatory budgeting (PB)** as a democratic process in which citizens decide directly how to spend part of a public budget.

Gender equity is about the fair distribution of benefits and responsibilities between men, women and gender-diverse people from process to outcomes[5].

Gender budgeting involves analysing budgets for their effect on different genders and the norms and roles associated with them to ensure it works for everybody[6].

Learnings for built environment professionals

The report suggests broader learnings for practitioners who make decisions about investment in the built environment.

- Trial innovative tools. There is value in utilising participatory democracy tools - like participatory budgeting – to directly engage residents in local democracy and directly tying citizen priorities to spending decisions.

- Embed the principles of gender budgeting into decision making, so that the impact of investment decisions on different groups of people can be better understood. Learnings from this should be fed back into the process to guide wider policy and investment decisions.

- Diversify the data, information and methods that are used to assess, guide and value policy and investment decisions. The public should be engaged in this process to capture richer data and perspectives. This will also aide the gender budgeting process. This could be done in a variety of forms, including innovations in decision making, like participatory budgeting.

Further research is required

- Research into participation, equity and outcomes in PB programmes and on popular outcomes, like cycling and active travel schemes. This has broader applicability, given the limited degree to which the outcomes of policies and investment decisions appear to be studied longer term.

- Undertake deep case study research to show how contemporary PB programmes – often undertaken to improve transparency and engage citizens better, rather than radically reshaping service delivery – interact with other workstreams that the public sector is undertaking to understand the scale of change that PB can deliver.

Introduction

Trust and confidence in politicians and the British political system has dropped to record lows in recent years, with almost half the population believing that politicians will always put the interests of their political party before those of the nation[7] There are concerns that this drives populism and an increasingly polarised society [8]. There is a need to overcome these trends, which will require rebuilding trust in government and delivering the public services people expect and require.

Participatory democracy offers a mechanism for this, through engaging citizens more directly in decisions that affect them. As Anne Hidalgo, Mayor of Paris, said of the city's participatory budget, there is an "urgent need to overcome this phenomenon of mistrust in order to restore the confidence necessary for the functioning of our democracies"[9] .

At the same time, we are facing a climate crisis. Domestic transport – how people and goods move around the country - is the largest contributor of greenhouse gas emissions in the UK[10], with the private car used for 60% of all journeys. Yet most of these journeys are short: over half are less than 5miles/8 kilometres, and 24% are for journeys less than 2 miles/3 kilometres[11]. There is potential for many of these car trips to be switched to other, more sustainable, modes.

Cycling currently accounts for just 2% of all journeys, but many of those shorter car trips could be made by bike. In fact, increasing the number of cycle journeys is one of the most effective ways to reduce carbon emissions [12]: switching just one car journey to a cycle journey per week over a sustained period can have a meaningful impact on carbon emissions[13]. Increasing cycling levels will also bring wider health and wellbeing benefits to individuals and to society as a whole, improve air quality and local economic benefits. Successive governments have recognised these benefits: stating their commitment to investing into walking and cycling and growing the proportion of cycling trips taken[14].

There is urgent need to overcome this phenomenon of mistrust in order to restore the confidence necessary for the functioning of our democracies"[22]
Anne Hidalgo, Mayor of Paris

Yet men and women across society have different travel patterns. Of the small number of cycle trips occurring in the UK, men make significantly more than women, whilst women make more car journeys and shorter trips than men[15] . The gender gap in cycling has existed for many years [16] and has not reduced as levels of cycling has increased[17]. These trends then intersect with other identities, like ethnicity and disability, which compound gender inequalities in cycling[18].

There is variation within the country, with Cambridge considered the UK's leading cycling city[19]; however, the overall rate of cycling across the population, as well as the share of women cycling, is considerably lower than other European countries like Belgium or the Netherlands where women cycle more than men[20]. To grow the number of cycle journeys in the UK, it is necessary to make cycling more attractive to everybody, but specifically more attractive for women, given their persistent under-representation in cycling.

Many women across the UK know the benefits of active travel - whether walking, cycling or wheeling - and they want to do so, but they need to be enabled to do so [21]. This means acknowledging and addressing the different barriers that women across the country face when it comes to cycling to ensure that investment is spent where it is needed most.

It is then relevant to ask whether involving more women in transport decision making in the UK would better address the barriers that they face and result in different policy and investment decisions. This report builds on this context by specifically considering one particular form of participation: participatory budgeting.

Through reviewing existing academic and practitioner literature on participatory budgeting, as well as speaking to cities across Europe who have delivered cycling investment, programmes and policies through PB, it asks whether PB expands who makes decisions about transport investment, what projects get funded and ultimately whether it can contribute to a more gender equitable active travel system.

Traditional decision makers and cyclist profiles

There is significant writing about the different travel patterns of men and women, where women traditionally undertake more caring responsibilities and undertake more multi-purpose journeys,[23] but a report by Sustrans suggests that there is less knowledge about how women participate in transport policy and decision-making[24]

Transport as a discipline has traditionally been dominated by men, reflecting masculine norms and values, and designed for the 'default male', where (white) male travel patterns are considered the norm[25].

These patterns remain today, where just 23% of people working in the UK's transport industry identify as women[26] and men dominate local and regional authority decision-making positions[27] where decisions around transport are often made.

In transport generally, gender remains largely under considered and often only in the binary, rather than as an intersectional identity.

Factors like perceptions or experience and wider policy goals are not always adequately considered in the transport planning process[28].

Yet academic research shows that changing who makes decisions can result in different priorities, with more representative decision making more likely to switch the "priorities of transport politics from traditional goals to gender equality"[29].

The reason that women cycle less than men in 'low cycling' countries like the UK is often explained as a result of a combination of factors, including:

- Cultural norms, like expectations around fitness levels, clothing or stereotypes about 'who cyclists are';
- Preference for segregated cycling infrastructure[30];
- Risk from motor vehicles, as women are more likely to experience near misses than men[31];
- Personal safety and street harassment, with 9 / 10 women in London experiencing verbal abuse or aggression)[32] ; and
- Trip types such as travelling with children and time available, though, as women in other countries cycle significantly, this may be more to do with cultural norms, availability of the right kind of bicycle and perceptions of safety than the ability to link multiple trips [33].

This context has been acknowledged by practitioners and academics alike who have emphasised the importance of integrating the needs and experiences of different groups into cycling policy and decision-making, with policy documents acknowledging differential needs[34], yet women are still significantly underrepresented when it comes to cycling.

Participatory budgeting in the UK

Participatory budgeting is not a new topic to the UK, experiencing waves of prominence over the last 20 years. Tony Blair's Labour government first began considering PB in 2002, with a national PB strategy published in 2008 which set out the intention to "open up local government" and "bring devolution to the doorstep", helping citizens to understand the real experience of balancing different needs within a budget, with all local areas using PB by 2012[35]. It specifically emphasised the role of PB in supporting and enhancing representative democracy. An evaluation of the pilot projects was published in 2011 which stated that PB could attract additional funds into deprived areas, and lead to different types of projects being funded than might otherwise have been the case.

With the election of the Coalition Government in 2010, the wind slowly left the sails in England. The new Government was silent on PB, despite the perceived overlap with the emerging agendas of localism and the Big Society[36]. Despite this, local authorities across the country have continued to use PB for small funding pots, often with the support of third sector organisations like Shared Future.

In Scotland, the Scottish Government has promoted PB since 2014[37] . In 2017, the Scottish Government and Scottish local authorities developed a framework to spend 1% of all local budgets through PB by 2021. This was reached in 2023, with over 110,000 citizens of Scotland directly deciding how to spend £154million, equivalent to around 2% of the population (which, as discussed later, aligns with turnout across examples)[38]. The central aim is for PB to become a core part of democratic infrastructure in Scotland[39] , marking a move to 'mainstream' PB, using it to decide core budget decisions[40].

Definitions

Participatory budgeting (PB) is a process where citizens directly make decisions about how public finances are spent. It is a form of participatory democracy, where the public are involved directly in decisions that affect their lives, rather than those decisions being made solely through their elected representatives. The power of PB is said to be in that it creates space for engagement and dialogue between citizens that is directly tied to public sector decision making[41]

PB has been active - for over 30 years, with over 10,000 processes active in year 2019[42].

Gender equity is about the fair distribution of benefits and responsibilities between men, women and gender diverse-people from process to outcomes[43]. It requires an intersectional approach, taking into the account the different needs and barriers faced by different parts of society.

In discussion, the author uses a definition of women that is inclusive of transwomen and anybody who who identifies as a woman, but many of the data sources and reports referenced do not explicitly state this.

The Scottish Government's PB framework, which guides implementation in the country, identifies a number of priorities for the country's PB, including inequalities". The Scottish Government's PB steering group note that, despite good practice across the country, there is more to do to more to evaluate the effectiveness of PB[44]

Despite this national variation in support, PB in the UK has principally focused on small budgets or community grant-giving funds, rather than on spending on (a part of) local authorities' central budgets, known as 'mainstreaming'. Many other countries across Europe and North America use PB to allocate significant portions of their central budgets to be opened up to the public in this way. It is not either or: mainstream PB processes could co-exist with on-going community grant-giving processes which are valued[45].

Structure of the report

First, key literature relating to participatory budgeting is considered, including its origins as well as a commentary on the equity of the process. It also highlights some key themes in the built environment and transport literature relating to gender equity.

Then case study cities are introduced before some lessons are drawn to understand how PB and cycling investment and delivery interact.

The third section draws on the literature and case studies to detail some key factors to consider when seeking to achieve gender equitable outcomes in participatory budgeting programmes.

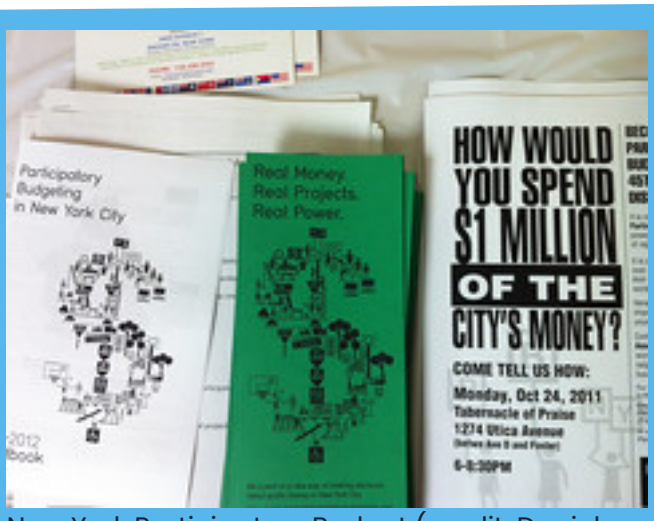
It then concludes with some recommendations for practitioners of PB. It also draws broader learnings for practitioners involved in shaping the investment into – and decisions about – the built environment, as well as for researchers and academics.

A note on methods

This report has been funded through the Royal Town Planning Institute's practitioner research fund which seeks to enable practitioners to conduct new research.
A full academic and practice literature review of participatory budgeting, gender and active travel was undertaken through Leeds Beckett University to identify case study cities and to provide background to the topic.

Case study cities were identified through the literature and narrowed down through availability of officials, who were approached through existing contacts as well as publicly available email addresses. Information on case studies was gathered through desk-based research and conversations with municipal officers. The examples presented here should be viewed as a snapshot of what it is happening, rather than a definitive picture, albeit with valuable lessons to be learnt across the board.

This report sits between practice and academia, engaging with the specifics of how participatory budgeting and discussions of equity exist on the ground. It should be viewed as a starting point for further research into participatory budgeting, active travel proposals and the gender equity of the process.



New York Participatory Budget (credit: Daniel Latorre)

Literature review

What is participatory budgeting?

Participatory budgeting (PB) is a form of participatory democracy. There are various forms of participatory democracy with differing scales of participation, from consultation platforms to citizens assemblies and PB[46]. These innovations in deliberative and participatory governance developed from the 1990s to 'deepen democracy' and address concerns about transparency and legitimacy of representative democracy[47].

PB is a process where citizens directly make decisions about how finances, often those of the public sector, should be spent. It tends to operate on an area-basis, where it focuses on the budget of a specific geography, or on a specific theme, like focusing on a part of the budget such as transport, but it can also be actor-based where it seeks to engage a particular demographic or community, like young people[48].

PB, when 'done well', is noted as promoting benefits such as: targeting resources more appropriately; building trust between the state and citizens and upskilling people in relation to social and political life; encouraging deliberation and respect between people with different views; and enabling participation in politics beyond the normal electoral cycles, with often younger people and groups who cannot vote expressly included[49].

PB began in Porto Alegre, Brazil in the late 1980s in specific circumstances: the Labour Party wanted to demonstrate that they were different to the previous administrations beset by corruption and crony-ism, and in response to demands from civil society to be involved in decision making[50]. It was created to redistribute resources by mixing participation with equity and it was widely regarded as reversing social, spatial and political inequalities with core services transformed, schools built in poorer neighbourhoods, homes connected to the water network, and sanitation extended[51].

Since then, PB has gone global: first travelling within Brazil in the early 1990s, before becoming international 'best practice' from the mid 1990s to mid 2000s[52]. As PB travelled, it reformed itself through adapting to the local context, the learnings to date, and available technology, with newer approaches like entirely online PBs becoming popular in the 2010s[53].

As PB travelled to established democracies, it often lost its radicalism or its role as a reforming instrument, becoming instead a mechanism to improve trust, policy making and good governance[54] rather than attempting to "overhaul how public resources should be spent"[55].

PB is not static: a place's process may resemble a specific typology now, but it may not in the future where it may grow, contract or change. This occurred in Porto Alegre itself, where the process was not able to maintain the scope and ambition associated with its initial rise, and in other places, such as Spain, where processes declined as they were not integrated into the municipalities processes[56].

There is significant academic literature on PB, ranging from specific-location case studies, comparisons across geographies, or broad theorising about its role in participation and politics more generally. The focus here is on the equity of the process and therefore the remainder of the literature review focuses on this.

What are the components of participatory budgeting?

Participatory budgeting takes many different forms and spans a spectrum of processes from more 'symbolic' participatory gestures to those with significant impact on the structure of society[60]. This led one academic to ask whether "one can speak of one single (although complex) dynamic, or does one have to state that the name tends to be the common link, labelling quite different realities"[61].

The variation of forms has led academics to identify pre-requisites or conditions of PB, with Sintomer et al (2008) suggesting that:

- The budget must be open for discussion
- It is undertaken at a level with political representation
- Repeated process rather than a one-off meeting or referendum
- Bespoke space for public deliberation
- Accountability in the delivery of outcomes

There are other approaches, for example, Wampler thinks of PB as a set of principles - voice, vote, social inclusion, social justice, and oversight – where these principles are balanced differently in different contexts based on local incentives to undertake PB[62].

Equity in PB

A major reported benefit of PB is that it can improve trust in local government, transparency in decision-making, and make service delivery more equitable through involving the community in decisions that affect their lives[5758]. It is this offer – and PB's flexibility to adapt to any context – that has enabled it to travel so widely.

The social justice and social inclusion that were central to the original PB programmes in Porto Alegre in the 1990s were explicitly codified in the design of the programme; however, as the process has spread globally, this is no longer always the case[59]. This raises an interesting question, which is where this report is placed, about the potential of equitable outcomes in the more contemporary context.

There are few analyses of the equity of PB programmes in the literature. Pape and Lerner (2016) note that there is evidence in the US that PB can engage less politically-empowered residents but less evidence of whether this results in greater equity.

As Kasdan & Markman (2017) note in their paper on New York's PB process, where they were embedded as participatory action researchers, equity and the shifting power balances within PB is more difficult to evaluate, and they were not able to assess whether PB had changed the way resources were allocated.

Beyond the equity of the process itself, it is also important to assess the impacts of PB processes longer term. Yet as Dias et al (2021) note, there is a lack of data on implemented projects, their management and impact over time. Similarly, Campbell et al (2018) note that a very small percentage of the PB literature feature evaluations of the outcomes of PB process and where these are considered, it is often based in the Brazilian context, which – as noted above – is very specific, given the context and scale of budgets, and so not necessarily replicable in a contemporary European context.

Participation ≠ equity

An assumption underpinning PB is that better public policy and/or outcomes will be developed as a result of engaging people from across the community in debate about spending[63]. PB, like participatory democracy of all types, must "attract and retain participants"[64], yet little is known about how inclusive the process really is[65].

If PB is to achieve its much-cited benefits, the citizens participating must be representative of the diversity of the population. This means that those groups traditionally excluded must actively choose - and be enabled - to participate[66]. In different geographies, the existing exclusions will be different, so it is important to identify who is traditionally marginalised and ensure that they are involved in the design of the PB process as well as engendering wider-scale participation[67]. This requires considered and conscious work and resource from the public sector, including engaging existing networks and clearly setting out the benefits of participation[68]. If the PB process only attracts those who are already engaged in local political participation and/or have the resources (whether knowledge, time or economic) to participate, it will risk reproducing the same biases and exclusions within representative democracy that it was designed to address[69].

Given the scale of literature on case studies, it is possible to find examples that evidence the successes as well as the shortcomings of schemes' inclusion and participation. For example, a self-selection bias has been highlighted in various case studies, including in Milan participants were older, wealthier and more highly educated than the average Milano[70]; in Germany, men predominated[71]; in Czestochowa in Poland, older people were underrepresented due to the online nature of the PB[72]; and in Spain participation is skewed towards those who already participate, are members of political parties or associations and are more left wing (though they note that as the processes bed-in this trend reduces)[73]

Yet there is also evidence from case studies that PB can engage people that are traditionally excluded from politics, such as Gilman (2016) who states that, in the US context, it gives voices to undocumented migrants and younger people. Su (2017a) states that in New York there is evidence that PB extends participation in politics, with 23% of participants in the 2015 edition not having previously participated due to age or citizenship.

Fundamentally, a PB process in itself is not inherently more attractive to economically disadvantaged or excluded groups[74]. The public sector must design the PB process to address the conditions and barriers which prevent traditionally under-represented groups from participating, such as language skills, process and a clear articulation of what the tangible benefits of participating would be[75].

A small body of literature focuses on women's participation in PB specifically. Allegreti and Falgana (2016) identify some success stories for ensuring women's inclusion in PB, where gender-mainstreaming processes have been central to the project. The examples in the literature often focus on South American processes: McNulty (2015) specifically considers the inclusion of women in PB processes in Peru; and Hajdarowicz (2022) considers empowerment and PB in Medellin, Colombia, concluding individual empowerment cannot be guaranteed given how interlinked it is to wider political, economic and social power relations. In terms of maintaining or increasing participation of women in PB processes, authors caution against solely using numerical representation of women (or other demographics) within PB processes, as this can give an illusion of equality without considering power dynamics, socio-economic dynamics or intersecting exclusions[76].

People must be enabled and motivated to participate in terms of seeing the value[77] but, at the same time, the public sector should not over promise, which may raise expectations and result in frustration and lack of trust from citizens, ultimately undermining the process[78].

Specific gender goals in PB processes

It is difficult to achieve equitable outcomes and representative inclusion without clear and explicit goals to do so from the outset[79]. It is important to identify what the goals of the PB processes are: if it is not clear what PB initiators are trying to achieve in the process, it is harder to design processes and ensure residents and citizens have access to the right information, as well as to monitor the process. Setting explicit goals requires specific resources and data to enable them to be adequately monitored[80].

In terms of gender equity, there is a need to explicitly address gender issues in PB, making gender a specific goal, rather than assuming it will happen[81]. Yet there is little writing about - gender issues in relation to PB. Writing about transport specifically, gender equity goals should then be operationalised into tangible objectives and monitoring indicators which are designed for the specific context and can be used by policy makers[82] .

Competition / self interest

A further barrier to equity identified in the literature, is the potential for 'self-interest' from participants who may choose to participate in order to suggest and campaign for funding for existing 'passion projects' or concerns[83]. Ahn et al. (2023) identified a self-selection bias in Vienna's first iteration of PB, where the open submission of ideas was dominated by a few individuals and well-organised groups which tended to reflect the structural problems in each district, rather than address them.

Similarly, a PB process may result in competition between citizens and their ideas. In a study of PB in County Durham, Wilkinson (2019) notes the different 'tactics' that people used to 'win' votes (and therefore money) for their project. Individuals who were able to leverage existing connections, dedicate resource to advertising and drumming up support, and had experience of the process were more likely to get votes and therefore have their project selected[84]. This led to concerns from other residents about the fairness of the process and who was most deserving of funding. PB processes designed like this can impact trust due to the lack of transparency, for the success (or failure) of projects is made outside of the PB process.

To counter these dynamics, it is important to support and enable conversation between the different community groups or individuals participating in the PB to open dialogue and minimise opportunities for a singular focus on winning the vote[85] (Pape and Lerner, 2016; Wilkinson, 2019). The competition element can also be removed through considering alternative mechanisms to distribute funding, such as citizen juries or weighted voting.

Local budget, scope and networks

Participatory budgeting is a 'high touch' process, requiring significant planning, engagement and resource[86]. Most contemporary PB processes have a budget greatly lower than Porto Alegre's at its height. Some cities identify a portion of the budget, often limited to capital-spending, that will be opened to PB, whereas others have distinct pots of money allocated for PB that are separate to the mainstream budgets, such as in Helsinki[87]. Decisions around the size of the budget and any conditions around how it can be spent may limit the scope and scale of ideas possible to be considered through the process[88].

Abbott & Touchton (2023) note that people are more interested in participating where the budgets are greater and targeted at whole communities. If the budget is smaller, restricted in some way so as not to be considered meaningful, residents may be less interested in participating[89] or express dissatisfaction about what is within scope. This is highlighted by Su (2017a:135) noting that where New York's PB focused on "minor things like traffic lights, like garbage pails...It wasn't progressive".

Similarly, Davies (2023:281) notes that if the scope of the PB is tightly controlled in terms of priorities, budget and scope, "residents are left with making decisions based on entrenched institutional interests". The scope is often bound by seemingly neutral concepts of 'feasibility' or 'reasonableness'[90]. This can limit the scope to achieve more equitable outcomes and shape how residents perceive the process[91].

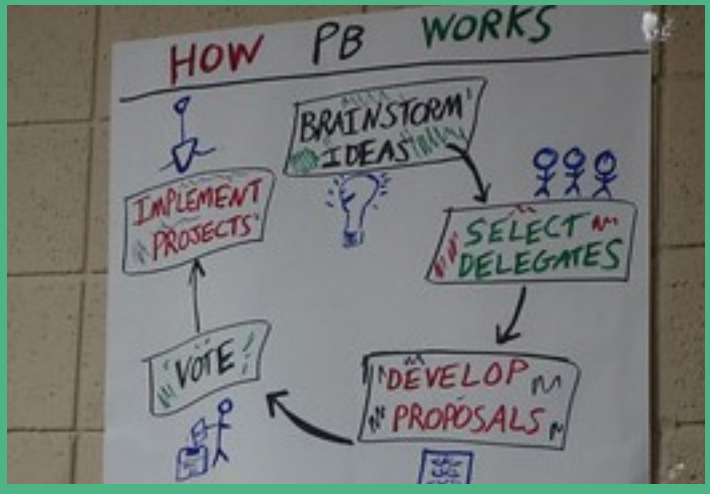
As noted above, the local economic, political and social context in which a PB operates will shape its formation. For example, the Coalition Government's 2011 report into the pilots of PB notes how it could be used to engage residents to identify their priorities in a time of austerity[92].

This is a specific use for PB: where the responsibilities of the Council are shared or delegated to citizens in a bid to, optimistically, make better choices amongst hard decisions, or cynically, insulate the public sector from criticism about cuts as they are being co-designed. Indeed, as is noted in the literature[93], there is a risk that in a context of budget cuts, PB is used as a way of distributing funding that the public sector may previously have provided, which may further instil competition between citizens.

Decisions around the scope of the PB and its budget are often political. These are often made by city leaders like Anne Hildalgo in Paris, where the PB budget is over €80 million, who wanted to "throw open the gates of politics"[94] but may also be made by national governments such as in Poland or funders like the World Bank. The scope of PB can often be linked to the political ambition and rationale for undertaking the PB process which in turn will impact its ability to achieve equitable outcomes[95] .

Further, outside of the public sector, the existing local networks and community organisations can play a central role in reaching harder-to-reach communities and support participation. Community organisations of an appropriate scale to support PB do not automatically appear with the policy decision to implement PB, and that can shape its ability to achieve its aims[96]. Pape and Lerner (2016) note the importance of these community networks pushing for greater budgetary control from the bottom up, as well as the top-down political desire to those decisions.

Finally, PB will interact with existing power structures, and it is important to acknowledge and consider these as it will impact how the projects are felt and implemented. Su (2017) drawing on New York's PB, details an example where CCTV cameras were proposed by residents in a traditionally Black community to dissuade people from letting their dogs foul in public and littering, but without the community access to the feed or videos that was expected, the cameras ended up being used to police the community instead.



New York's PB (Credit: Rosa-Luxemburg Stiftung-New York Office)

Cycling and gender equity

The post-war city, with its motor-centred urban and transport planning, neglected the bike[97], with policy-makers, planners and academics beginning to consider how to shift journeys away from cars in the 1990s in the UK[98]. Yet, despite specific policy support from successive Governments, the UK remains a 'low-cycling' country, where cycling represents less than 5% of journeys[99].

In 'low-cycling countries', cycling is demographically unequal, whereas in some 'high-cycling' countries women often cycle more than men[100]. This gender gap has remained over time: as cycling increased in the UK, from 2001 to 2011, there was no evidence of a reduction of the gap[101] and, in London, there was very little change in representation between 2022/23 and 2010/11[102]. This means that women – and society more widely - are missing out on the benefits of cycling[103] and, for those women who do cycle, the benefits are not evenly felt. Other identities with gender to compound inequalities, with, for example, White women cycling more than Women of Colour[104].

The cycling gender gap varies across the UK: in areas with lower-quality cycling environments - considering factors such as local built environment (like land uses and cycle lane infrastructure); socio-economic factors (like income and car ownership), natural factors (like hilliness), and perceptions and utility of cycling - the level of cycling is lower. As noted in the introduction, women face more barriers when it comes to cycling, principally a function of cultural norms and infrastructure provision[105], and require a more 'attractive' environment to start cycling, where that environment is a function of factors listed above[106].

In terms of infrastructure, women express stronger preferences for segregation from motor vehicles than men, particularly in 'low-cycling' countries[107]. This is perhaps unsurprising given women are more likely to experience 'near misses' than men[108] and that cycling must be experienced as safe for it to increase[109]. Yet designing cycling infrastructure for women and their needs will also encourage men to cycle[110].

The dominant identity of 'who' a cyclist is – in media or locally – can be marginalising for other groups who may be open to cycling but perceive it as not for them. Despite conscious work to diversify the image of cycling and some geographic variation, such as cycling far more 'normalised' in Cambridge[111], the idea that one must be confident, aggressive and a brave commuter tends to prevail[112].

But it is not just a perception, in a separate study, Aldred and Crosweller (2015) note that "frightening or annoying non-injury incidents" are a daily occurrence cycling in the UK, perhaps due to the low status afforded to cyclists in the UK, in part, due to a lack of empathy from other road users. Further, other identities intersect with being read as a cyclist when on the road which must also be navigated, as Pedroso (2023) notes in her study of Women of Colour cyclists.

In recent times, discussions around supporting more women to cycle tend to rely on expecting women to change their behaviour and upskill themselves to be more confident to cycle on 'chaotic' roads, aiming to bring them into the cycling majority, rather than embedding their experiences into policy and decision-making to shape the environment[113].

There is significant suppressed demand for cycling in the UK, and transport planning models, such as the Propensity to Cycle Tool, have been developed which seek to specifically consider where cycling infrastructure investment is required to meet specific scenarios, like Dutch mode share or gender equality in cycling[114]. Yet decision-making still rarely considers the more complex attitudinal aspects – such as emotional experiences and perceptions - in infrastructure decision-making[115].

Alongside these tools which upskill practitioners and diversity decision-making processes, many authors also note the importance of expanding participation, to better consider the views of all women into the process[119].

Conclusion and relevance

Many of the barriers to more women cycling identified in the literature could be addressed through significant and sustained investment in segregated infrastructure and building more attractive cycling environments, regardless of whether engagement processes changed.

Yet there is clearly relevance in considering whether engaging women in the spending decisions that are made can result in more equitable outcomes for active travel, given the limited writing on the outcomes and equity of PB processes, alongside recognition that transport has traditionally not considered women's experiences and wider policy outcomes.

Further, whilst walking and cycling projects regularly feature within the case study literature on PB , these are often discussed as part of the wider PB programme and there is limited study of the outcomes of these specifically or comparisons across geographies.

There is a value in diving into the specific outcomes that the PB in any place delivers, and – more broadly – there is also value in understanding the priorities of citizens and contemporary trends across cities when it comes to cycling infrastructure across diverse contexts.

Case studies

The case studies cover a variety of PB programmes that have resulted in the delivery of infrastructure for cycling, whether city-wide (Helsinki, Warsaw, Madrid and Milan), within a particular part of a city (Newham, Vienna), and/or those focusing on specific parts of the budget (Vienna).

The case studies cities illustrate how PB takes place across Europe. Despite the different contexts, a specific focus was placed on understanding the nature of cycling projects proposed in the PB and on how gender is considered in the process.

These case studies have been selected as a snap-shot of the processes happening in Europe. They may not be representative of processes happening in other places.

Madrid's PB, with €100million budget in 2017-2019 (Credit: Diario Madrid)

Helsinki

"The aim of participatory budgeting is to increase city residents' opportunities for influencing the city budgets, their understanding of the city's operations as well as to improve equality" [123]

Headlines

// City-wide Participatory Budget // Budget of €8.8 million[120] in 2024 // Funded from standalone, limited funding pot // Open to all residents, 13+ // Turnout of 7.1% in 2023[121] with women and young people generally more active[122]

Process:

- Residents make a proposal, with co-creation events held to enable residents to develop their ideas in consultation with officers
- City Council assess the proposals and makes a rough assessment of cost
- Residents vote
- City Council and the proposer develops the proposals
- City Council implements the project

Rules include:

- Must align with the City of Helsinki's values and strategy.
- Projects must not contradict an existing zoning plan or the City's other decisions that are in effect.
- Cannot be given to an external party to the City of Helsinki
- Permanent staff cannot be hired through participatory budgeting, rather it is intended to fund fixed-term services and operations[124].

Cycling proposals in the PB

Projects that do not align with the strategies or values of the city or are already being planned by the Council are not accepted to the public vote. Only a small number of cycling proposals have been successful in the public vote, including additional bicycle repair stations at more libraries, undertaking advertising campaigns to support cycling, and better cycle links through a particular part of the city.

In considering how to implement the latter idea, the City Council saw an opportunity to trial the City Council's new Street Network plan which would meet the aims of the PB project as well as broader ambitions of the city. The PB programme has enabled the City Council to trial a new approach in an area where buy-in and local demand has already been established.

Cycling in Helsinki

- Helsinki has a mode share of 9%[125]. Of the city's cyclists, 50% are women, but further demographic data is not available. Officers at the City Council suggested that this was due to the City Council's ambitious cycling plans, with significant per head investment, as well as the broader Nordic social democratic tradition of strong state support and division of labour. The commitment to investment, coupled with wider cultural expectations and identities, may help explain the lack of gender gap here.
- Helsinki's Bicycle Plan sets out the City Council's ambition. It seeks to reach 20% mode share by 2030. The City Council is investing into its cycle network to complete its 'target' bicycle network to make it 'seamless'[126] and make it an option for year-round cycling[127].

"To allow citizens to participate in the policies that affect them, and include them in the important decision-making process of allocating Madrid City Council's budget[129]."

Madrid

Headlines

// City-wide Participatory Budget // Budget of €50million in 2024 // // Anybody over 16, with registration in Madrid necessary to vote/support projects // Turnout of 1.1%[128], with near equal participation in the vote (49.8% women and 50.18% men) but more men participate in the idea-generation phase (55% of ideas from

Process:

- Idea generation: anybody over 16 years + can suggest an idea
- Support phase: ideas prioritised by citizens, with most popular taken forward
- Evaluation phase: projects are evaluated for feasibility by technical staff.
- Final voting phase: winners are selected.

Projects will be considered invalid where[130]:

- Technically unfeasible
- Incompatible with municipal plans
- Have a poor cost-benefit ratio
- Not exclusively dependent on Madrid City Council

Cycling in the PB

Cycling is consistently a very popular topic in the PB, with over 2,500 ideas since 2016 containing the word 'bike'. These projects include signalling, bike lanes, accessibility, routes to schools or wider pedestrian and cycling lanes.

The projects that have been successful tend to align with the City Council's existing cycle infrastructure delivery plans; however, there have been some PB ideas which have influenced wider policy development. In 2017, a citizen suggested that Superblocks were implemented in the city to tackle pollution and traffic and to create a more efficient, green and lively city. This project led to the development of Madrid's first Superblocks in the Salamanca area of the city[131], reviving an older City plan and emulating Barcelona's successful Superblocks[132].

Cycling in Madrid

- Recent data has been tricky to find. In 2019, mode share was 0.61%[133] . Madrid's Cycling Action Plan (2016), using data from 2013, lists the gender divide in the City 72% men and 28% women, with recent reports suggesting it is narrowing[134].

- The plan identifies the specific barriers faced by underrepresented groups, noting road danger and cultures being the primary barriers to cycling or women, and the need to create targeting strategies to create inclusive cycling.

Vienna

The aim is for the City of Vienna, the Vienna Climate Team (Weiner Klimateam) and all Viennese people to learn from each other and pull together in the fight against the climate crisis[135].

Headlines

// PB focused on climate-resilience projects in three districts of Vienna // Budget of // 6.5 million euros in 2022/2023 // No voting, with a representative jury deciding the ideas over a mutli-day workshop

Process:

- Step 1: Idea suggestion to improve climate resilience in their area.
- Step 2: verification against proposal criteria before clustering ideas into themes.
- Step 3: co-creation workshops with citizens and officials.
- Step 4: A representative group of citizens - a Citizen Jury - decide on projects to fund. Feedback is provided to those unsuccessful.
- Step 5: ideas implemented.

Proposals must:

- Have a positive impact on the climate, such as promoting adaption to climate change.
- Contribute to social justice and community building, especially disadvantaged people.
- Realisable in 2 years
- Aligns with the goals and plans of the City of Vienna, including operational costs.

Cycling in the PB:

Cycling projects could fall within several of the submission criteria, with an overall aim of climate resilience. Over the 2 pilot years, a variety of successful projects have delivered public realm improvements, such as creating a Superblock or greening and reducing car dominance parking on streets, but some cycle infrastructure-specific projects have also been funded. These directly and indirectly improve the cycling environment.

All ideas raised in the PB are passed to the District Council and councillors to help guide future work. Indeed, in some instances the District Council has put their own budget towards ideas to increase their scope.

Cycling in Vienna:

- Cycling accounts for 9% of journeys in 2022.[136] The city has seen a significant growth in the cycling network and the number of people cycling since 2010[137].
- The Mobility Plan 2025 identifies the importance of growing investment in active travel, better data collection, opening streets up for pedestrians and cycling, and working with local and regional partners to deliver strategies to meet targets[138]. A revised Mobility Plan for 2035 is under development which will seek climate neutrality by 2040[139].
- Vienna has practiced gender mainstreaming since the early 1990s, requiring all Council employees and programmes to consider the differential impact on women and men. For the PB process, the team ensure a broad base for participation in the process, including considering who participates, how and where, as well as ensuring language and imagery is accessible and inclusive. There is not specific gender budgetary analysis that is undertaken or specific gendered data collected.

To deliver the Mayor of Newham's aspiration to create a culture of participation in the Council; to increase transparency and trust in local government and bring local people into the

Newham

Headlines

// People Powered Places // Budget of £1.5million, with £200,000 for 8 neighbourhoods // Funded through Neighbourhood CIL // Anybody who lives, works or learns in the borough can take part //

Participation across the process was 4.7%[141] - 58.8% women and 37% men, with small survey sample suggesting a higher proportion of white participations than representative of Newham's population.

Process:

- Step 1: Residents decide on local priorities in 8 community meetings, such as health and wellbeing or youth empowerment.
- Step 2: Residents bring ideas to Our Solutions event to share the ideas and turn them into project proposals.
- Step 3: Residents can submit their ideas to the Council, which must meet the criteria of the Neighbourhood CIL (NCIL, a charge on new development to fund strategic and neighbourhood infrastructure) and the community priorities. Individuals can bid for £5000 whilst groups can bid for up to £20,000. All ideas are then shortlisted.
- Step 4: Residents vote online or in person.

Rules:

As it is funded by NCIL, projects must:

- help with the growth of the area;
- improve public spaces and infrastructure;
- improve the health and happiness of the community.

Cycling in the PB:

A limited number of cycling schemes have been funded through Newham's PB: a family bike club and a bike hanger[142]. Newham's PB has community implementation: money is given directly to the community rather than the Council implementing the proposal on their behalf. The community-implementation, along with the budgets available and NCIL requirements, will limit the scale and scope of projects in the PB.

Cycling in Newham:

- Mode share is currently around 2-3%[143].
- Newham is seeking 5% cycling mode share by 2025, with broad ambitions including improving the safety of cycling, normalising it as a mode of transport, and providing education. Newham's sustainable transport policies align with the Mayor of London Transport Strategy and Transport for London's Cycle Action Plan will also guide cycling in the borough[144].

Warsaw

"The goals...are to increase social participation in decision making, develop local awareness, spread the idea of self-government and stimulating discussion amongst residents, as well as between residents and officials[146]"

Headlines

// City-wide Participatory Budget // 101 million PLN (€23.7 million) in 2023 (in 2023) // Any resident with a national insurance number can suggest an idea // Turn out of approximately of 4.5%[145], with women participating at a higher rate (63%) than men (37%)

Process[147]:

- Submission of ideas. Each to be accompanied by support from other residents.
- Co-production phase, where residents can work with officials to help develop their ideas
- City Council will assess whether the proposal can be implemented in accordance with the rules. If it cannot, the City Council will contact the author to suggest changes to modify it which the resident needs to accept (or else their project will be declined).
- Voting online or paper ballot
- The successful projects enter the budget for the following year. The City Council will "usually" contact project authors on the later details but it is not necessary.

Rules include:

- Implementable in 1 year
- Must not be contrary to the adopted strategies and programmes of the city
- Be supported by at least 20 residents in a district / 40 residents of the city

Cycling in the PB

Warsaw's participatory budget – known as the civic budget – regularly features significant cycling projects. In the 2024 budgetary cycle, ideas related to urban greenery and bicycle infrastructure were the most popular, with almost PLN 70 million (c. €16 million) allocated for these areas in 2024[148], of which PLN 13 (c. €3 million) will be spent on city-wide mobility projects[149].

Warsaw's Public Roads Authority manages 790km of the city's roads[150]. The civic budget is identified as an investment process by the Public Roads Authority, alongside other funding streams like EU funds or major programmes to redevelop the centre of Warsaw[151]. The civic budget is also specifically referenced within the annual reports on bicycling and the annual report from the Road Authority. The Civic Budget appears to be significant for investment into cycling infrastructure and it is not clear how cycling is funded by the Council, if at all, outside of the investment streams noted above.

Cycling in Warsaw

- Cycling represents 3%[152] of journeys, with 67% of cyclists identifying as men and 33% women[153].
- The City Strategy 2030 seeks to create a coherent network, and in 2020 the city Council was tendering for it next Bicycle Development Programme[154]
- Warsaw has seen significant growth in its cycle lane and cycle numbers in the mid 2000s[155]. Until recently, the city focused on delivering cycling routes into the city centre[156] , but is now consolidating the network in the city centre and integrating cycle lanes into wider placemaking plans[157].

Learnings from across the case studies

The case studies are intended as a snapshot, showing the variety of forms that PB takes across Europe, with different budgets, scopes, sections of the community involved, and social, political, environmental and economic contexts. None of the case studies provides a singular answer to the questions guiding this research: it is therefore necessary to draw high-level learnings from across the cities on the interaction between participatory budgeting, active travel ideas and gender equity.

Cycling is a popular topic in the participatory budget across cities

Across the case study cities, people want to engage with local government about cycling and want to shape investments and programmes. In all cities, other engagement processes exist but this suggests that latent demand remains for something different.

PB expands who makes decisions about transport investment: it enables citizens to directly shape investment decisions, through suggesting ideas or voting for those that they think are important, which is the unique value-add of PB. Whether consciously or not, people are leveraging the PB process to channel additional funding into the delivery of cycling programmes or infrastructure, beyond what the relevant city council had specifically committed already.

Beyond specific cycling infrastructure, residents are also putting forward ideas for larger area-based proposals, such as Superblocks, low traffic neighbourhoods, and greening and reduction of vehicle dominance, which indirectly improve cycling environments, through addressing factors that shape the 'attractiveness' of active travel and public realm more broadly.

There is a lack of publicly available data on who is participating and how they are participating

While PB expands decision-making through opening it up to any interested resident, it is not clear who actually participates in each place. There is a variety of publicly available data available on participation across case studies and literature. All the case study cities record high-level participation statistics, like the percentage of men and women participating in the process, and there are some examples of more detailed analysis and reflection[1],

An assessment of equity of the process, however, requires greater granularity of disaggregated data, across the length of the process and across demographic groups. It is important to understand who suggests ideas, whose ideas are funded and who benefits most from the funded ideas post-implementation. Without this data, it is not clear how different groups participate and benefit and, therefore, whether the process contributes to more gender-equitable outcomes than would happen without PB.

The role of PB in cycling investment varies from place-to place

The degree to which PB expands who makes decisions on transport investment varies. This is due to a variety of factors, including the size of the PB budget relative to the budget of wider transport investment outside of the PB process. This can be seen in the case studies: Helsinki has committed to spend €23 million on cycle infrastructure in 2023, which is significantly larger than the entire PB budget[158] but, in Warsaw, by contrast, the civic budget appears to have significant importance as an investment stream. It is important to understand the relative size of the wider investment programmes to develop an understanding of the opportunity of the PB.

1 Such as Newham's evaluation report and Helsinki's evaluation report, which provide details on participation across different stages of the process, and also considering qualitative perspectives from citizens on the process.

PB processes do not set out to radically reconsider how investment and policy decisions are made

PB can generate high-level and crowd sourced insights about the participating residents' concerns and priorities, with detailed design or amendments are undertaken by the relevant city council once a project has won. The ideas suggested through the PB may influence policy direction or provide an opportunity to trial ideas, as suggested in the case studies.

Across the cities, even those where PB appears to have a more central role in transport investment, the primary aim of the process appears to be to bring citizens into conversation about spending priorities and improve transparency. PB is tool of 'good governance', rather than a mechanism to reconsider how policy is created, or decisions are made.

How could PB help advance gender equity?

Drawing on the gaps identified through literature review and the case studies, this section will outline key factors that the public sector should consider when planning and designing participatory budgeting processes in order to better consider gender equity. There are other wider factors that will impact this process, which are not detailed here, such as wider political context.

Data on who is participating, why they are participating, and who benefits

There must be clear commitment to collecting disaggregated data to develop a full picture of participation throughout the process to ensure equity could be assessed.

- **Who is participating?**

Across the literature and case studies, varying amounts of public data is available on who participates across the process. Whilst participation by gender and age is often reported, in many places gender is reported in a binary sense and few cities report how other identities intersect with gender. Participation will vary over the PB cycle, so participation at different points should be recorded also.

Cities should establish mechanisms to record who is participating across protected characteristics alongside seeking to expand participation of those groups locally under-represented in decision making. This data will sure that the public sector knows who is participating and, therefore, which parts of the community need to be targeted to improve representativeness.

There is a balance to be struck between recording clear and meaningful data on participation and placing undue burden on secondary organisations who may aide participation or alienating people from participating.

- **Whose ideas are funded and who benefits from them?**

A participant in Helsinki's 2020 evaluation report into the first round of OmaStadi noted that the ideas selected 'reflect more traditional white, middle-class ideas' [159] whilst ideas suggested in the first round of Vienna's PB process tended to reinforce existing spatial inequalities[160]. It is important that this is more than anecdote and is fully understood and feeds back into the process.

This data is crucial for understanding how public funds are being spent through PB, to assess any bias in the funding, the assess the value to different parts of the community, to assess who uses the project post-implementation, and understand whether the PB processes are producing equitable outcomes.

This has broader applicability: there is rarely an assessment of who benefits from urban policy and planning decisions post-implementation. It links to wider conversations in the built environment about embedding greater social value in development across the UK and understanding any gap between policy aspirations and the outcomes post-implementation.

- **What are ideas are funded and how do these relate to wider programmes that the public sector is/is not funding?**

It is also important to understand what ideas are suggested and how they do – or do not – differ to those programmes being funded by the Council outside of the PB process, in terms of location (i.e.. which neighbourhoods benefits) and types of project (i.e.. Infrastructure, promotional campaigns, support to purchase bicycles). This could be undertaken through a comparison of budget allocations and may require consideration of the different governance processes in a place, such as the relationship between borough and city council spending.

This – alongside an understanding of benefits - will help provide insight into whether the budget of the council is adequately meeting the needs of citizens, as articulated by the participants of the PB, as well as illustrating the scope of opportunity presented within the PB.

- **How do people feel about the process?**

The perceptions of participants and local government more broadly towards the process is also important to be understood and monitored. An understanding of how people feel about the process will help make the process more resilient and responsive to people's needs. Newham and Helsinki's evaluation reports contains reflections from staff, which are valuable insights into how the process is considered internally as well as externally, which should feedback into future iterations.

Embed the principles of intersectional gender budgeting

The evidence from the case studies and the literature shows that it cannot be assumed that gender or equity more widely will be automatically considered in the process.

Regardless of the type of PB and its scale, gender must be mainstreamed into the participatory budgeting process. This means it is systematically considered in all parts of the process, including project teams and language[161].

Gender must be considered throughout the lifecycle of the PB process – before, during and after the PB cycle – to ensure that there is feedback from cycle-to-cycle and robust monitoring and evaluation is embedded[162].

Given the focus on public budgets and the aims of gender equity, the principle of gender budgeting should also be integrated into the PB process. Gender budgeting is a separate process but can be embedded into a PB process: it means considering how men and women benefit from the money distributed through the participatory budget in terms of active travel investment and who does not.

Combining participatory budgeting with gender budgeting is rarely done[163], but acts as a form of check through ensuring that the decisions made through PB do not reinforce the very intersecting gender inequalities present in representative democracy. To ensure that gender budgeting captures how other identities intersect with gender it is vital this is an intersectional approach[164].

Specific gender-equity goals should be established at the start of the PB process, when citizens and the public sector engage on the priorities of the PB. These could, for example, be qualitative (such as mode share target for women cycling) or quantitative (such as perceptions or experiences). These goals should be based in metrics that policy-makers across disciplines use[165] and will guide the projects that will be accepted to the PB, the projects that are selected to be funded, and enable assessment and evaluation following the implementation. They also clearly show to the wider public the intentions of the budget and its values.

Gender will be considered within Equalities Impact Assessments which are often undertaken to accompany policy and investment decisions, but they can be inconsistent[166] They can, for example, rely on assessing impact through using outdated or limited existing data sets (such as census data).

Gender mainstreaming requires a specific focus on gender (and the identities that intersect with it), through a consideration of the policy ambitions, such as reducing barriers that women experience cycling, as well as data that is available in relation to the geographical and thematic areas in which the PB operates.

Where insufficient disaggregated data exists, it simply does not exist as it often the case, is outdated or at the wrong spatial scale, it is important to commission quantitative and qualitative data to enable a full assessment of impacts of spatial interventions. It is also important to consider whether data is representative and design specialist approaches to target groups that are not captured by any existing data sets[167]. Without adequate sex and gender disaggregated data, including on non-binary people, impacts cannot be assessed.

Gender budgeting

Gender budgeting is applying gender mainstreaming to any budgetary process. It means making sure that budgets work for everybody – men, women and gender diverse people – and ensuring the equitable distribution of resources and equal opportunities for all[168].

It involves conducting a gender-based assessment of budgets and restructuring revenues and expenditures in order to promote gender equality[169].

Intersectional gender budgeting recognises that other identities intersect with gender which may affect or compound inequalities.

Further resources:

- Oxfam and the Women's Budget Group ***guide***.
- **Sustrans** gender budgeting in active travel ***research***
- European Institute for Gender Equality ***guide.***

Any learnings or findings from a gender-assessment of the PB projects should not only feed back into the next cycle of PB but should also inform wider policy making to ensure that any wider investment learns from the process. Indeed, any wider investment outside of the PB process should also be subject to intersectional gender budgeting to assess who benefits, as discussed above.

Engage people throughout the process

The literature notes that citizens are more interested in participating in PB where they have meaningful control over budgets[170]. Others note that PB programmes require ideas to meet seemingly neutral terms of 'feasibility''. Yet if these criteria are not explained fully or are assessed using models and mechanisms that do not value wider social benefits, like gender equity, it may not provide the meaningful participation citizens want and be dismissed as focusing on "minor things"[171], and it will limit the scope and opportunity for more innovative ideas to be submitted[172]. A commitment to an equitable PB process may mean the public sector being receptive to considering broad or more innovative approaches to assessing value for the projects submitted.

The most common method for selecting the projects to implement is a vote. A straightforward vote with a 'winner takes all' outcome is easy to understand and to implement in larger PBs, but it risks pitting citizens against citizens to gather votes for their projects[173]. It is possible that voting in this way is more likely to position some projects, like traffic reduction projects, as 'wedge' issues and, without a forum for debating the merits of each idea, could become divisive. An emphasis on deliberation and consensus may help cut through these dynamics, such as the representative juries in Vienna, but these processes must be fully resourced to work as intended.

Once decisions have been made, the public sector must implement the ideas. If the ideas are not implemented, it erodes trust in the entire process. In many case studies, the public sector had to make amendments to a proposal upon detailed design. It is important to keep residents updated around changes and provide rationale, and ideally, involving the citizen in this process.

Finally, residents should be involved in evaluation and monitoring of projects and the process. It is also important to use diverse methods to obtain the richness of data necessary to fully assess the impacts of PB on different groups. It may mean employing citizens to understand lived-experience audits of implemented projects, mapping exercises, interviews and focus groups.

We can't wait!

In the 2018 edition of Milan's PB, citizens voted to build a cycle lane on a major road, Ponte della Ghisolfa, which had a poor accident record. Despite commitments from the City to implement the project, it has not yet been delivered due to detailed planning and feasibility issues. A local lobbying group has developed off the back of this, *non vediamo l'ora* (we can't wait)[174] to push for its implementation..

The City has made some temporary interventions whilst the detailed planning continued and included signs indicating the presence of cyclists and optical speed bumps for cars[175]. Although temporary, these interventions are unlikely to meet the expectations for the larger project, voted through the PB. The City appears to have failed to manage expectations, forcing residents to form campaign organisations to lobby for changes. The failure to implement ideas, voted for by people on the assumption that they would be delivered, risks the entire PB process.

Conclusion and recommendations

This report has considered whether participatory budgeting, through expanding who makes decisions about public spending, can produce more equitable active travel outcomes.

It has identified that cycling projects are consistently popular across cities but that gender equity is not fully considered across the case studies or in the literature. This research report establishes the need for PB to consider gender equity, as it cannot cleanly answer whether the process delivers more equitable outcomes compared to standard governance and budgetary processes.

Through the literature review and case studies, the report has identified that the following factors should support more gender-equitable outcomes in participatory budgeting:

- collecting full disaggregated data,
- mainstreaming gender and budgeting, and
- engaging people throughout the process

When the public sector is well-resourced and committed to building representative participation and mainstreaming gender, participatory budgeting has the potential to empower residents. It does this through creating a direct link between participating-citizens and spending. PB can be a powerful participatory democracy tool for the public sector to compliment representative democracy.

PB alone will not deliver gender equity in cycling: in places like the UK, greater gains in equity is likely to be found through increased and sustained financial and political commitment to building infrastructure, rather than through PB on existing budgets. Yet women and other underrepresented groups should shape these decisions, whether through PB or other participatory tools.

Recommendations for participatory budgeting practitioners

- **Improve and deepen data collection.** Collect disaggregated data on who is participating, whose ideas are funded, who benefits from ideas and how those ideas differ to the wider programmes the public sector is undertaking. This requires collecting quantitative data as well as qualitative data.

- **Mainstream gender into the process, with gender budgeting used to analyse decisions**. Equity should be explicitly codified into the design of the PB process with clear gender equity goals set out at the start to guide the process and enable assessment throughout. Little is known about how PB programmes benefits different groups, so alongside gender mainstreaming, the principles of intersectional gender budgeting should be embedded. Gender budgeting enables an assessment of how spending decisions impact different groups of men and women across society.

- **Representative participation throughout,** from the set-up to longer-term monitoring of the experience and its outcomes. Academic research shows that residents are more interested in participating in PB where they have meaningful control over budgets, and engaging citizens in the process throughout can ensure that this is enabled. Political commitment should be made to fully implement the winning proposals.

Learnings for built environment professionals

Whilst the focus of this report is participatory budgeting, the research has also identified some observations that are applicable more broadly to other practitioners working in the built environment.

- **Trial innovative tools**. There is value in utilising participatory democracy tools - like participatory budgeting – to directly engage residents in local democracy and directly tying citizen priorities to spending decisions.
- **Embed the principles of gender budgeting** into decision making, so that the impact of investment decisions on different groups of people can be better understood. Learnings from this should be fed back into the process to guide wider policy and investment decisions.
- **Diversify the data, information and methods** that are used to assess, guide and value policy and investment decisions. The public should be engaged in this process to capture richer data and perspectives. This will also aide the gender budgeting process. This could be done in a variety of forms, including innovations in decision making, like participatory budgeting. The report provides an illustrative outline of how an active travel themed PB process could operate. It would also be beneficial to monitor the impact of policies and decisions longer term to understand any gap between ambition and/ or expectation of who uses and benefits from these, and the on-the-ground-reality.

Further research is required

The lack of literature and writing on gender equity in participatory budgeting and the outcomes of processes more broadly requires further study, particularly given how many cities across Europe use this process and the importance of diversifying participation to address concerns with representative democracy.

To build on the gaps identified by this report, it is therefore relevant to draw some recommendations for academics or researchers.

- Research into participation, equity and outcomes in participatory budgeting programmes and on popular outcomes, like cycling and active travel schemes. This has broader applicability in public sector delivery, given the limited degree to which the outcomes of policies and investment decisions appear to be studied longer term.
- Undertake deep case study research to show how contemporary PB programmes – often undertaken to improve transparency and engage citizens better, rather than radically reshaping service delivery – interact with other workstreams that the city council is undertaking to understand the scale of change that PB can deliver.

Get in touch

The author would welcome further discussion on these themes, including other case studies, with any interested practitioners or researchers to consider how they can be operationalised further.

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