

Youth Participatory Budgeting – Portugal

Carlos Paz

Introduction

When we speak about young people, we are referring to a diversified and heterogeneous group in society that gathers several identities and educational experiences. However, the distinction between youth and adulthood is culturally defined and changes across time.¹

Youth participation promotes a sense of citizenship and makes political decision-making processes more accountable to young people. At the same time, it helps young people to strengthen up their self-confidence, to develop creativity and to develop skills that matters in the labour market, such as communication, negotiation and teamwork, in a practical environment.

Youth participation patterns vary across cultures, times and places. Almost all the Participatory Budgeting in Europe, back in the 90s, had a top-down root, which means they were promoted by political power or public administration, aiming to establish new alliances and partnerships between organizations of proximity and social fabric, as well as new cross-sectorial ways of governing.

In several cases, Participatory Budgeting, are limited both in thematic and territorial scope.

In the majority of European Participatory Budgeting, participants just had margin to propose new investments or changes in public policies but not deciding on how public resources are invested.

Mostly of these European Participatory Budgeting set a limited number of specific goals and do not aim to reduce traditional limitations of democratic life, as in: the lack of coordination between the different public sector branches, the lack of confidence in politicians, the marginalization of young people and immigrants in

1 Cammaerts, Bart., Bruter, Michael., Banaji, Shakuntala., Harrison, Sarah. e Anstead, Nick. (2013). EACEA 2010/03: Youth participation in democratic life, final report, LSE Enterprise. London, UK.

political life, the growing inequality between territories and social groups and the lack of environmental awareness of citizens.

The first Portuguese experiences of Participatory Budgeting have always been labelled as tools towards the promotion of a democracy based on proximity.

Nowadays, one can speak about a second generation of Participatory Budgeting that emerged after 2008, giving visibility to experiences and typological families that go beyond the ideal of “democracy of proximity”. Nowadays’ state of art of Participatory Budgeting, in Portugal, does not limit to the promotion of public consulting mechanisms and it has a majority of co-decision-making experiences in order to suggest other forms of definition of public policies, in collaboration with citizens.

The Youth Participatory Budgeting Portugal (YPBP) is a process of democratic participation. It was stated by the State Budget Law and the 1st edition was organized in 2017, aiming to:

- a) Improve the quality of democracy and its tools, valuing participatory democracy within the Portuguese Constitution framework;
- b) Foster active and informed participation of young people in decision-making processes, favouring the existence of a strong and active civil society towards cohesive economic and social development and the subsequent life quality improvement;
- c) Promote young people’s participation in the definition of the public policies that met their needs and are responsive to their opinions;
- d) To reinforce education for citizenship and the sense of belonging to community, fostering responsible citizenship through making public administration closer to young people and involving them in the continuous definition of the res publica.

This initiative is a tool to stop the progressive and growing gap between young people and public participation, particularly regarding political participation, fostering the involvement of youth in political processes.

YPBP aims to raise the perception of young people as an active part of society which benefits with policies that make young people to commit with collective decisions and to be watchdogs of political decisions.

YPBP also intends to develop citizenship’ skills, in order to increase a sense of belonging to the whole society, as well as to contribute to literacy regarding financial and bureaucratic procedures regarding

the proposal, the decision and implementation of projects.

Fed by several local Participatory Budgeting experiences, as well as innovative initiatives like the Participatory Budgeting Portugal – the legal basis for the Youth Participatory Budgeting Portugal, as well as the Schools Participatory Budget, and despite other several international experiences, YPBP is the first national Participatory Budgeting at a national level, specifically targeted to young people, globally speaking. Portuguese Republic was, then, a pioneer nation in the global plan, since there was never a project like this applied to the whole territory in any other nation.

Actually, encouraging practices of young people's participation are of great added value for society and YPBP is one of them, since it is a process to deepen participation, democracy and the informed choice of young citizens, taking into account their bigger spontaneity and creativity. For many, it is also the first time that are in touch with a decision-making process.



Orçamento Participativo
Jovem Portugal 2017

Methodology

Generally speaking, we will sum up the rules of this process in 2017 in the following topics:

- a) YPBP was applied in the whole national territory;
- b) The overall budget was of € 300.000,00. In 2018, the budget will be of 500.000,00€;
- c) The proposals in 2017 respected the following criteria:
 1. To fit in the thematic areas of inclusive sport; science education; social innovation and environmental sustainability;
 2. To have a budget until the maximum ceiling of € 75.000,00;
 3. Do not require the building of new infrastructures;

4. Do not ask for subsidies or involves a pre-established service supply;
5. To benefit more than one municipality;
6. To be concrete and applied in national territory;
7. To be technically feasible;
8. Do not go against the Government's policy, or projects and programs already in course in the different policy fields;
9. To be proposed and voted by young people between 14 and 30 years old as long as they are national citizens or foreign citizens legally living in Portugal.

The 2017 edition of YPBP had the following calendar:

Phase I – Proposal submission

Young people could submit their proposals from 2nd October and 29th October 2017, in the Participatory Meetings and online in the website opjovem.gov.pt. The participatory meetings were organized in partnership with the National Youth Council and the National Federation of Youth Organizations.

Participatory Meetings

There were organized 20 Participatory Meetings, one in each district capital as well in the Autonomous Regions of Madeira and Azores. The designed methodology was shared with all the regional teams of IPDJ, I.P. and it was based in the following phases:

- a) Participants' reception, which was endured by two officers of the regional services of IPDJ, I.P.;
- b) Introducing the Youth Participatory Budgeting Portugal – methodology and themes;
- c) Group working – participants discuss and present their ideas or look for answers for their doubts about YPBP or their proposals;
- d) Proposals' submission – participants are invited to introduce to the plenary a summary of their ideas.

Evaluation – participants filled a survey about their engagement in the process. Young people that submitted their proposals online

also answered this survey. The data was used to profile participants in the edition of 2017 of YBPB.

Besides these participatory meetings, self-organized meetings, promoted by youth organizations, were also encouraged.



Participants in Meetings

Young people from 142 municipalities participated in the 20 Participatory Meetings, which represent 46,1% of the overall Portuguese Municipalities.

Faro and Funchal represented 1/5 of the total participation in the meetings. The districts of Faro, Viana do Castelo, Porto and the Island of Madeira were the territories that were able to mobilize a great number of participants but that were also able to assure the presence of young people of more than a half of the municipalities in each district/Island.

The average age of the participants in meetings was 23 years old and the average age of the participants that submitted proposals was of 17 years old. In the districts of Santarém and Faro, the average age of the participants was below 20 years old. Concerning participants' sex, there is no profound difference between sexes, with males representing a little more than half of the participants (52%). More than 2/5 of the participants has a university degree and 45,2% have a high school diploma. Most of the participants were students (61%) and 1/4 has a job.

The great majority of the participants are members of non governmental organizations, 61% being active in those organizations and 3% with no relevant role.

This fact was probably due to the communication channels that were used to disseminate information among young people – through youth organizations. The number of youth organizations that were targeted with information regarding YBPB is impressive and underlines the solid network between regional structures of IPDJ and youth organizations.²



Participants in Online Assessment

There were 1440 persons that have answered the online assessment. Participants live in 142 different municipalities and 1/3 are from districts of Porto and Lisboa. The average age was of 22 years-old and the majority of participants were from 18 years old to 21 years old. There were differences in participation according to sex, with the slight majority of participants (57%) being female (the opposite of what happened in the participatory meetings). In the online participation, 45,3% of participants had a university degree (more than the ones in the participatory meetings) and 42,8% had a high school diploma. More than 2/3 of the online participants are still studying and 20,1% are employed. 71% of the participants did not belong or participate in any youth or non-governmental organization, the opposite of what happened in the participatory meetings, which demonstrates that online participation contributes to the diversity of the targets.

² Dias, Nelson. (2018). Final report of the Youth Participatory Budgeting – Portugal, Associação In Loco. São Brás de Alportel.

Online participation also helps to widen the public participation of young people, since 12% of the participants in the YPBP have never or barely voted in local, regional or national elections. Concerning European elections, 27,8% of the participants answered that have never voted for European Parliament.³

YPBP can, thus, be seen as a tool that helps to strengthen up the relations between the elected politicians and young people, rebuilding trust and increasing the levels of democratic participation.

Getting to know YPBP through internet is more frequent than other sources, such as the mobilization for the participatory meetings.

Schools and universities remain important spaces for awareness. 1/5 of the online respondents report schools as the source of information about YPBP.

Phase II – Technical analysis

From 30 October until 06 November of 2017, public administration services in the four thematic areas, endured a technical analysis, taking into account the predetermined standards and specifications. The selected proposals were the ones that could evolve into projects to be voted by young citizens.

Submitted proposals

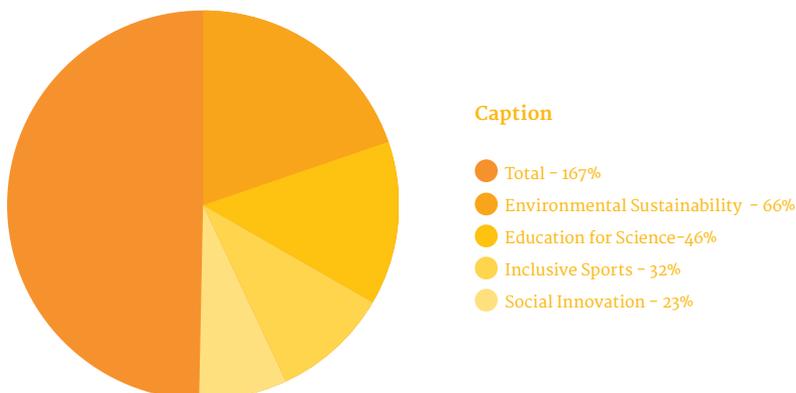
Young people could submit proposals in www.opjovem.gov.pt or in the regional services of IPDJ, filling the form. 424 proposals were submitted. The majority of the proposals were about social innovation (40%), a quarter was about environmental sustainability, followed closely by inclusive sports (21%) and 14% were about education for sciences. There were selected 169 projects.

Selected projects

The final list was published with 167 approved projects to be voted. The majority of approved projects (40%) were in the area of Environmental Sustainability, followed by Education for Sciences (28%), Inclusive Sport (19%) and social innovation (14%).

³ Dias, Nelson. (2018). Final report of the Youth Participatory Budgeting – Portugal, Associação In Loco. São Brás de Alportel.

figure 1 Number of approved projects



The majority of the approved projects (29%) were designed to be implemented at a national level and 1% intended to involve 2 or more regions. 19% of the projects were approved for the Centre Region and 16% for the North Region.

The biggest approval rate was in projects to be developed in Azores, with 56% , followed by the North Region (48%), Centre (44%), Algarve (38%), Alentejo (37%), Lisboa and Tagus Valley (30%) and Madeira (30%).

Concerning budget, the majority of the approved projects was between 12.000 and 20.000€ (32%), followed by the ones that represent a budget between €22.000 and €41.000 (25%). The projects between 6.000 and 10.000€ and also the ones between 50.000 and 60.000€ represents 13% and the ones below 5000€ and above 70000€ represent 9%.

Phase III – Public Consultation

The provisional list of the projects to be voted was published online, so that the results could be known by the parties concerned. This phase had the following calendar:

- 06 november – provisional list published;
- From 07 until 16 november – period for complaints and appeals;
- From 17 until 24 november – reevaluation and possible rectification of the proposals;
- 27 of november – publishing of the final list of projects.

Phase IV – Voting

From 27 november until 22 december 2017, voting was opened at a national level. Young people could vote in the YBPB website and through a free of charge SMS system. About ten thousand of young people have voted during the process. There were seven winner projects, which summed 4000 votes, with a rate approval about 44,5%.

Phase V – Presentation of the outcomes

The ceremony of presentation of the outcomes took place in 8th january of 2018, at the Lisbon Youth Centre, one of the 11 awarded centres with the Youth Quality Label of the Council of Europe.

It was an informal moment, targeted at young people, in the scenario of the online show “Maluco Beleza” presented by a well-known entertainer, Rui Unas. The show counted with the participation of João Paulo Rebelo, Secretary of State of Youth and Sports and Tiago Brandão Rodrigues, Minister of Education, as well as the young winners of this Youth Participatory Budgeting Portugal.



The winner projects

In this first edition of Youth Participatory Budgeting Portugal, that counted with a budget of 300.000€, there were the following winners.

- a) Liga-te à Pateira (“Connect yourself to Pateira”) – a project to be implemented in the municipalities of Águeda and Aveiro, in the field of environmental sustainability;
- b) Arribearar – a project to be implemented in the municipalities of Águeda, Aveiro and Oliveira do Bairro in the field of environmental sustainability;
- c) O Grande Livro do Parque (“The great book of the Park”) – a project to be implemented in the municipalities of Águeda, Aveiro and Oliveira do Bairro in the field of environmental sustainability;
- d) Banco de Ajudas Técnicas Desportivas (“Technical and Sports Aid Bank”) – a project to be implemented at the national level.
- e) Minhotacleta – a project to be implemented in the municipalities of Viana do Castelo and Caminha, in the field of environmental sustainability;
- f) App Caderneta do Aluno (“App Students’ Book”) – a project to be implemented at a national level, in the field of education for sciences;
- g) Gym4All – a project to be implemented in the municipalities of Seia, Oliveira do Hospital and Gouveia, in the field of Inclusive Sport.



The municipalities of Águeda and Aveiro were the most benefited, since 3 of the winner projects are to be implemented there.

The Region that benefited more in what concerns budget was the Centre Region, with 51% of the total budget (152.000€) in the projects to be implemented there. The projects to be implemented at a national level were granted with 83.000€ and the ones that benefited more than one region have been granted 20% of the overall budget (60.000€).

The young winners' profile

The 7 winner projects were submitted by 10 proponents – 8 female and 2 male – between 15 and 28 years-old, with the average age being 22 years old. Concerning the education level, 2 of them had a bachelor degree, 1 of them a master degree, 2 had a high school diploma and 2 had completed the 3rd cycle of the Basic Education. Half of the proponents were from the municipality of Águeda, 2 of them from Viana do Castelo, and Torres Vedras, Abrantes and Seia had one proponent living in each municipality.

Analysis on the future

United Nations promote democratic Governance as a set of values and principles that must be followed towards a greater participation, equality, safety and development.

This position is founded in the freedom of expression of the people and it is deeply connect to the rule of Law, as well with human rights and fundamental freedoms. Democracy and democratic governing practices mean that human rights and freedoms are respected, promoted and assured so all can live in dignity. People have a say in the decision-making processes that influence their lives.

Democratic Governance is the process of creating and sustaining an environment for inclusive and responsive political processes.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the General Assembly of United Nations in 1948, had set the concept of democracy saying that the “will of the people must be the basis for authority of a Government”. People between 15 and 25 years old represent 1/5 of the entire world population. In the developing countries, the numbers are even bigger, since the majority of young people live in countries of low or average income.

Nevertheless, studies show a decrease of interest of young people in political issues, decrease of the levels of participation in elections, political parties and social organizations world-wide. This is true both for mature democracy as well as for emerging democracies.

Concerning this question, the former Secretary-General of United Nations, Ban-Ki moon, in 2016, had targeted young people in his speech:

*“Take control of your faith and transform your dreams in a better future for all. To contribute and to build better democratic societies. Work together, use your creativity and become architects of a future that does not leave anyone behind. Help your world to start a path in direction of a brighter future”.*⁴

Life-long learning and education perform an important role in the improvement of participation in democratic life. Young people learn about democracy in non-formal activities, engaging in a club of young people, a youth centre or a sports club, developing skills that contribute to their employability.

Although the ability to adjust and reform a participatory cycle in time has to be considered a key component of resilience and durability of a participatory budget, that does not always live side by side with the maximization of possibilities to contribute to the root of the participatory institute.

A Participatory Budgeting should be understood as a process in continuous evolution, prepared to correct what needs to be corrected and to transform challenges into opportunities. The Youth Participatory Budgeting Portugal had contributed with the innovation of being a national-level activity, pioneer in the whole world, what reinforces the need of keeping itself as a dynamic public policy, open to the progressive introduction of reforms that help to strengthen up its deliberative dimension and institutional sustainability. That requires a very careful attention by the promoter, maintaining a system of evaluation of the different phases of the Youth Participatory Budgeting Portugal, so they can provide evidence that could feed political decisions.

Considering the very positive experience of the first edition of Youth Participatory Budgeting Portugal, it is expected a greater participation from young people in the second edition. The Youth Participatory Budgeting Portugal is a fundamental tool of civic and democratic participation of young people, contributing, thus, with its ideas and projects, for the local and national development as well to the modernization of Public Administration.

⁴ <https://www.unric.org/pt/actualidade/31608-dia-internacional-da-democracia-jovens-tem-um-papel-crucial-em-tornar-o-mundo-o-local-mais-livre-e-democratico>

