



e-Participatory Budgeting: ICTs enabling citizen engagement?

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Global Governance Forum

Rio de Janeiro
23rd October 2007



What is e-Participatory Budgeting

- Participatory budgeting: broadly associated with citizens participating in the decision-making process of budget allocations
- e-PB: use of ICTs in Participatory Budgeting processes



Current uses of ICTs in PB processes

Most cases concern communication, with few exceptions such as:

- Rosario (Argentina): turnout level increased over three times
- Ipatinga (Brazil): 16% increase of attendance to public deliberation meetings
- Belo Horizonte (Brazil): turnout level increased over 7 times



Participatory Budgeting of City of Belo Horizonte

2.350.564

inhabitants

1.732.606 electors

The traditional participatory budgeting (created in 1993 with a current budget of US\$ 43 million)

- 41 district forums pre-select a maximum of 25 public works for each district. In these forums each district also elects their sub-regional delegates
- Tours are organized during which the district delegates visit together the sites of the 25 pre-selected works
- District delegates choose a maximum of 14 works per district. Election of delegates that will follow-up and oversee the execution of the public works



The drivers of the e-PB

Drivers of the initiative

- *Increase of participation*: increase the level of participation in the process (traditionally 1.46% of electors)
- *Works of broader scope*: submit to vote works of greater scope and cost if compared to the traditional Participatory Budgeting
- *Innovation*: aspiration for novelty and originality



2006: the e-Participatory Budgeting

- On the top of the budget of US\$ 43 million allocated to the traditional PB, additional funding of US\$ 11 million was allocated to the new initiative, the e-PB.
- Citizens registered as electors in the city, independent of their place of residency, vote exclusively online for 1 out of 4 public works (US\$ 1.2 million) for each of the nine regions of the city (binding and direct vote)
- Pre-selection of public works made by the district delegates and the city administration (recurrent demands)



The e-voting platform

- Information provision: overall information, FAQs, videos (association of image)
- Bilateral interactivity: possibility of citizens interacting with the city administration (e-mail adress)
- Multilateral interactivity: possibility of debate offered by the platform (i.e. forum)
- e-Voting: only entitled voters take part in the ballot, each voter one single vote for each of the nine regions



Communication campaign and social mobilisation

Communication campaign by the administration

- Various media support (e.g. TV, radio, flyers)
- Communication on the novelty of the initiative
- Strong communication on the voting points available

Unprecedented social mobilization

- Provision of information (e.g. posters, flyers)
- Identifying supporters
- Providing voting points (i.e. Internet access)
- Online campaign



Alleviating effects of digital divide

- 178 public points with trained personnel for assistance
- Mobile unit: bus equipped with Internet access
- Access provided by supporters
- Voting period: 42 days



Results

From an e-voting perspective significant by any standards:

- Total of votes cast: 502.366
- Total of registered votes: 172.938
- 9,98% of city's electors
- 7 times more participants than in the traditional PB (1,46 %)

But have ICTs by themselves generated such a result?



Possible explaining factors:

- ICTs enabling decrease in costs of participation
- Scope and relevance of the public works
- The direct and binding vote
- Communication campaign and novelty of the initiative



Concluding remarks

- Bureaucratic capability was essential.
- Still, 90 % did not participate. How to approach the nonparticipation?
- Does one participatory budgeting replaces the other?
- Improving Citizen - Government Interface: “Why” and “When” to use ICTs to provide better services and engage citizen in the policy-making process.



Thank you very much!

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