

# Chapter 57

## Production and Transfer of Knowledge Between Citizens and Local Governments in Democratic Participatory Processes: The Case of the Participatory Budget in Cascais

**Vanessa Duarte de Sousa**

*University of Algarve, Portugal*

**Nelson Dias**

*In Loco Association, Portugal*

**Maria Helena Almeida**

*University of Algarve, Portugal*

### **ABSTRACT**

*Participatory budgeting has been progressively implemented by several Portuguese municipalities, encouraging a broad discussion about the importance of the participation of citizens in political life. This approach implies new forms of relationship between electors and elected little explored in the Portuguese democratic system. New learnings related to the dialogue among stakeholders and the possibility of coexistence of representative and participatory models have emerged. There is a transfer and production of knowledge between local governments and citizens that increases the field of opportunities for working together. After a theoretical reflection that refers to the key concepts coupled with this new form of exercising governance, the authors present data on the participatory budget of Cascais (region of Lisbon, Portugal) and the participatory deliberative experience consolidated in Portugal.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In recent years, Portugal has been experiencing an increasing political interest in promoting participation of citizens through the creation of the “Participatory Budget” (PB). The possibility of direct intervention of the citizens in the decision to allocate a part of the public resources, appeals to a greater attention and critical sense about the territory in which they live, work or study. At the same time, elected representatives have the possibility of accessing information on citizens’ demands much more quickly, responding to concrete questions through tangible results that are required to provide. By promoting community participation, the PB allows citizens to influence or decide on public budgets by reinforcing representative democracy. Portugal is the country with highest percentage of municipalities that experienced the Participatory Budget (PB), with the exception of those where this process is required by law (Dominican Republic and Peru) or where local governments have benefited from financial incentives from the State budget (Poland). In Portugal are identified 238 PB experiences developed between 2002 and 2017, of which 143 promoted by municipalities, indicating a practice that is used in about 46% of Portuguese municipalities. In this year are in development at the governmental level three participatory budgeting initiatives nationwide, including the Participatory Budget Portugal (Ministry of Presidency and the Administrative Modernization), the Participatory Budget of the Schools and the Participatory Budget Young Portugal (Ministry of Education).

The expansion of the mechanisms of public participation occurs in a context of great fragility in various indicators relating to trust in the political system. According to data from the European Social Survey (ESS, 2014), of Portuguese respondents:

- 32,5% it’s not interested in politics.
- 24,9% claims that the political system does not allow citizens to have a say about what the Government does.
- 29,4% believes that the political system does not allow people to influence the policy.
- 33,9% have no confidence in their own abilities to participate in politics.
- 39,1% believe that the politicians are not interested in what people think.
- 33,5% admits not being easy to participate in politics.
- 26,2% has no confidence in the national Parliament.
- 40,7% has no confidence in politicians.

Given this vulnerability framework, is it worth questioning how the PB can support the building of greater trust between voters and elected representatives and how the participants can effectively impact the policies that are carried out in their territory? This chapter aims to: i) analyse the main theoretical references which support the reflection on this new democratic approach; ii) analyse, from the case of the participatory budget of Cascais the way it translates the relationship between voters and elected officials, particularly at the level of the production and transfer of knowledge between both parties. Cascais is the Portuguese experience with highest amount assigned to the process – more than 6 million in the latest edition – and in their 8 years of accomplishment has been increasing steadily the number of voter (also the largest in Portugal), whose constant attention and innovation on the process have been awarded both nationally and internationally.

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