

Participatory Budgeting and Placemaking: Concepts, Methods, and Practices

Carlos Smaniotto Costa ¹ , Juan A. García-Esparza ² , and Kinga Kimic ³ 

¹ Department of Architecture and Urban Planning, Lusófona University, Portugal

² School of Technology and Experimental Sciences, Jaume I University, Spain

³ Institute of Environmental Engineering, Warsaw University of Life Sciences, Poland

Correspondence: Carlos Smaniotto Costa (smaniotto.costa@ulusofona.pt)

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Abstract

Participatory budgeting has arisen as an interesting form of citizen participation in urban development and, thus, as a new way of exercising placemaking and grassroots democracy. In this article, we provide an analysis of projects in Lisbon (Portugal), Valencia (Spain), and Warsaw (Poland) with a focus on three key projects concerned with improving the public realm and their contribution to enhancing the network of public open spaces. Our guiding question is: What are the potential benefits of participatory budgeting to increase green spaces and urban governance? A comparison of the three cities' participatory budgeting programmes provides an overview of their social and political goals and the contents that provide opportunities for citizens' participation in decision-making. The cases of Jardim do Caracol da Penha (Lisbon), the Green Street Świętokrzyska (Warsaw), and the Green Plan for the Poblats Marítims District (Valencia) pave the way for a discussion on engagement, empowerment, and connectivity with the local communities through public spaces. Using participatory budgeting as a planning and political instrument at the municipal level, as the three cases show, can be a useful way to enhance and enrich the communities' engagement with their environments. One aspect that emerged is the communication strategies implemented in the three cases. The analysis shows that the use of media and social networks to disseminate information and gather supporters for their ideas and this growth in political influence seems to be essential for participatory budgeting. The study is backed by desk work (comprehensive understanding of the local programmes) and field work to better identify the changes in loco.

Keywords

citizen participation; community engagement; participatory budgeting; placemaking; Poland; Portugal; public realm; Spain

1. Introduction

This article examines the potential of participatory budgeting (PB) initiatives for placemaking, decision-making processes, and civic engagement based on the programmes in three cities (Lisbon, Warsaw, and Valencia). These three cases were randomly selected, as they provide paradigmatic results for greenspace development, and secondly, they are in the cities where the authors are based, facilitating the data collection and site visits.

The aim and scope of the research that backs up this article are to draw on the experiences of these three PB initiatives regarding their potential for placemaking and enhancing the realm of public greenspaces. Based on these experiences, we try to synthesise some generalisability to fertilise the debate on the added value of participatory programmes. The limitation of these three cases is also due to their pioneer character in implementing PB programmes. To address our aim, the article provides an overview of the three programmes' social and political goals and contents, as well as an example of how each has been implemented. PB has been used in different contexts and for different purposes. There is neither a single definition nor a discernible pattern of what it should encompass (UN-Habitat, 2004). Hence, being used for different purposes, PB might lead to different results. To overcome this shortcoming, this article first addresses the main characteristics of the local initiatives before analysing the results of the local examples.

Citizen engagement and participation are central topics in contemporary urban planning and development. They are considered an essential tool to achieve more responsive, inclusive, sustainable, and thus liveable cities (OECD, 2022b; Smaniotto Costa et al., 2019). As Taylor (2019) rightly points out, in a democratic society, governments depend on the “voluntary” compliance of stakeholders for policy implementation. Smith (1973) called some decades ago for new models to guide planning practices, those that provide greater legitimacy and the basis for rule by consent. Legitimacy, according to the author, is a fundamental basis for planning actions and historical shifts. From a legitimacy perspective, Arnstein (1969, p. 216) defined citizen participation as a type of problem-solving in which “the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future.” Thus, participatory processes open up opportunities for citizens in decision-making about their environment. Conversely, for urban policymakers, participatory processes lead to further opportunities for collaborative ways to tackle challenging urban issues and share responsibilities (Cabannes, 2004; Michels, 2011; Sennett, 2002; Whitaker, 1980).

With the advances in information and communication technologies (ICT), urban governance has undergone prominent changes, as ICT can promote collaborative governance and increase participation and engagement in government. ICT can act as a catalyst for engaging people with their environment and culture (Artopoulos & Smaniotto Costa, 2019; García-Esparza & Altaba, 2018). It is increasingly being used for information and popularisation purposes in implementing the PB and attracting citizens to participate in the voting process. Nowadays, this tool has become one of the preconditions to active participation in PB programmes, as there is increasing use of online voting systems, and in many countries, it is done exclusively online (Cunha et al., 2011; Popławski & Gawłowski, 2023). Digital participation strengthens the integration of citizens in the political debate through internet connectivity, which enables greater numbers of people to participate directly and more frequently in decision-making. While the benefits outweigh the disadvantages, digital participation also has constraints. It does not reach the whole population due to the lack of technical skills or desire to participate digitally. The use of online voting to increase participation in PB may

inadvertently alter the voters' demographic profile, for example, increasing the proportion of more affluent social groups who have easier access to ICTs and, at the same time, excluding those with limited access (Lisi & Luis, 2022). As a consequence, this situation may distort the final result to some extent. In order to maintain balance and avoid exclusion, a solution may be to combine online participation with traditional voting procedures.

PB, putting it simply, is a process of involving the inhabitants in deciding how the public budget (or a part of it) is to be used and which projects should be implemented. The cradle of PB was set in 1989 by the city of Porto Alegre, Brazil, and has since been emulated in several cities. The basic idea is to empower people to come together to decide how public money should be spent. PB has arisen as an interesting form of citizen participation in urban development and, thus, as a new way of exercising placemaking and grassroots democracy. As a flexible planning and decision-making instrument, PB processes can run simultaneously with statutory planning systems (Smaniotto Costa, 2021; Taylor, 2019), enabling cities to better respond to local needs and circumstances. In addition to better use of citizen inputs, PB processes can improve citizens' capacity and experiences in negotiating their own interests (OECD, 2022a, 2022b). PB is a way to adjust public policies to citizens' needs and expectations (Câmara Municipal de Lisboa, 2008). The focus of our research is on projects that, financed by PB programmes, contribute to placemaking, as they target an improvement of the public realm and enhance the greenspace network in Lisbon (Portugal), Warsaw (Poland), and Valencia (Spain). This article assesses the three PB strategies and argues that besides improvements in the quality of public spaces, the three cases also revealed an increase in citizens' abilities to participate in urban governance.

2. Research Context and Methodology

The analyses and the methodological process that back up this article are structured in two phases. In the first phase, literature and documentary research were carried out to identify the main features of the PB programmes of the cities Lisbon, Valencia, and Warsaw, considering the PB history and the cities' policy agendas and political contexts. A case in each city was selected in the second phase to further examine the local PB programmes and their contribution to placemaking. This enables a better understanding of the process and, in particular, the results regarding the benefits of PB for placemaking and greenspace development (Maksymiuk & Kimic, 2016). The PB programmes were analysed individually and jointly; Table 1 is used to compile basic information and the features of each case. These are the relevant aspects to allow us to draw some lessons on engagement, empowerment, and connectivity with the local communities—taking the greenspaces development as a starting point for the discussion. The analysis of the three cases is backed by desk work (understanding of the local programmes) and field work to better identify the changes *in loco*. This consisted of site visits, observing local changes, and interviews with city council staff and project applicants. The interviews are, however, not part of this analysis. In Lisbon, site visits and observational changes were restricted as the park was still under construction.

By applying this mixed method, this article aims to answer the central question for placemaking: Are the PB programmes useful for enhancing and enriching the engagement of the communities? A cross-case analysis is used as a research method, as it can mobilise knowledge from individual case studies (Khan & VanWynsberghe, 2008) and allow us to demonstrate the similarities and differences of the PB programmes.

Websites and social media play a relevant role in disseminating the processes and development stages that require citizen participation. All information about the PB processes can be consulted on the following websites: (a) Lisboa Participa (<https://lisboaparticipa.pt>), (b) Budżet Obywatelski w Warszawie (<https://um.warszawa.pl/waw/bo>), and (c) DecidimVLC (<https://decidimvlc.valencia.es>). Likewise, in each city, information on the different milestones of the processes is provided through the city council's generic social networks or, as it happens in Valencia, through the social networks of the Department of Citizen Participation and Neighbourhood Action. City councils use ICT to disseminate information and gather supporters for their ideas contributes to an increase in political influence on the following topics: (a) participatory investment budgets, (b) investment project proposals, (c) districts' working groups, (d) the presentation of investment proposals by citizens, (e) support for the investment project proposals presented, (f) the feasibility study of the investment project proposals by the city council, (g) citizen voting, and (h) follow-up of the PB of investments.

3. Participatory Budgeting in Lisbon, Warsaw, and Valencia

According to Dias et al. (2021), a PB initiative is considered as such when three core features are met: (a) The process involves a public or institutional budget, (b) citizens concerned decide on the projects or budgetary measures to be prioritised or adopted, and (c) the programme ensures the implementation of the deliberated measures. In short, PB consists of citizens generating ideas, turning them into proposals, and voting on which projects should be brought to life by city agencies and staff. PB is understood as an open and democratic process, as the selected proposals best meet the community's needs (Agência para a Modernização Administrativa, 2022; Câmara Municipal de Lisboa, 2008; OECD, 2022a, 2022b; UN-Habitat, 2004). The three countries (Portugal, Poland, and Spain) fully embraced the concept of PB. According to Agência para a Modernização Administrativa (2022), Portugal had, in 2022, 1,666 PB projects, making it the second-largest country with PB programmes, after Poland and before Spain, with 2,014 and 334 projects, respectively.

One main characteristic of the PB programmes is that the amount to be spent by a single project is pre-set. This limits the range of the outcomes, but on the other hand, it guarantees that resources will be available. This is a relevant issue considering the fragility of public economic flows and the risk of losing political support. The three programmes' financial framework also lays down the maximum amount for single projects. In Lisbon, the 2021 programme allocated a global budget of €3,000,000 (Câmara Municipal de Lisboa, n.d.). In Valencia, the 2022 programme allocated a global budget of €16,000,000, while the maximum limit for a single project was €1,000,000. In Warsaw, the 2022 programme allocated a global budget of 93,575,094 PLN (about €20,000,000), which was 0.5% of the city's budget for the previous year (Warsaw City Council, 2020).

3.1. Participatory Budgeting in Portugal and Lisbon

Several PB programmes are in place, encompassing national, municipal, and local levels. On the national level, Portugal allegedly with the programme Orçamento Participativo Portugal (in English, Participatory Budgeting Programme, and henceforth OPP) launched in 2016 is the first and, until now, the only nationwide PB programme (Lusa, 2021). The first OPP issue was organised in 2017; since then, it has run annually. Between 2019 and 2022, it was suspended because of Covid-19-related restrictions. The OPP also

sets a renewed emphasis on the need to tackle Portugal's perpetuated spatial inequalities (Agência para a Modernização Administrativa, 2022). Hence, it aims to build new links between the regions, striking a better balance between the coastal and interior areas and connecting rural to urban areas (Agência para a Modernização Administrativa, 2022). In 2014, a network of municipalities with the PB programmes was created (Rede de Autarquias Participativas, www.portugalparticipa.pt/Home/Network) so they could come together to develop mechanisms for citizen participation and explore its potential at the local level. Since then, the network has been an exchange forum bringing together different initiatives. In 2017, a Charter of Quality (www.portugalparticipa.pt/Library/Book) was issued, providing the basic principles for PB initiatives.

In Lisbon, in 2008, the city council started a PB programme, with its 12th edition organised in 2021. This edition is also to be the last because, in 2022, there was no call opened. For 2023, on the official website, there is no information about any new programmes, which are usually opened every March. This situation is deplored by Martins (2023), who asks: "Where has the Participatory Budgeting Programme of Lisbon gone?" While the official PB website is kept online, the latest information is from 2021. According to the author, due to the changes in the political leadership of the municipality in 2021, the PB programme could lose support. This would lead to the end of the PB in Lisbon, like similar PB programmes worldwide, including the pioneering case of Porto Alegre. However, interesting for our purpose is the 2016 edition, in which a proposal called Jardim do Caracol participated.

3.1.1. Jardim do Caracol da Penha

The project Jardim Caracol da Penha concerns the creation of a greenspace (*jardim* in Portuguese) in a derelict land in the neighbourhood of Penha. The idea behind the Jardim do Caracol da Penha is more ancient than the PB programme. It started as a social movement—and it is still called Movimento pelo Jardim (Movement for the Caracol Garden)—against the council's plans to build a community garage with 86 plots on this 8-ha-sized piece of land.

Contrary to what might be expected, the need for parking plots was not to be taken for granted. The residents around the plot did not want a car park but a green park. The council's plans for a car park, which were well advanced and developed without civic consultation, triggered the mobilisation of the community to fight against these plans. The issue of creating a local greenspace tied the community together and gave rise to the movement. One of the strongest arguments for a greenspace was the lack of quality greenspaces, which are not equally distributed in Lisbon. The neighbourhood Penha and its neighbour Arroios are among those disadvantaged communities having significantly less access to nature. The idea that fuelled the movement was creating a green lung for the neighbourhood. The plot belongs to the council and was never built upon due to its steep terrain. As a remnant from a *quinta*, those traditional estates with farmhouses surrounded by cultivated land and orchards, it has several trees, many of which are fruit-bearing species (Smaniotto Costa et al., 2017). Neighbourhood kids already used to play here as they could be supervised from the apartments nearby.

The PB programme allowed the Movement for the Caracol Garden to make their demand for changing the municipal plans. The idea was preceded by several actions, in particular, to gain the community's support and to collect ideas for the design of a new greenspace. In June 2016, the community were able to organise a meeting with around 300 participants, which was taken as a sign of their direct interest in protecting the

environment (Smaniotto Costa et al., 2017, 2023). From this point, all activities towards creating, expanding, and managing the movement were taken by a coordination group. To raise awareness, several actions were implemented, including distributing posters and leaflets, information sessions, local assemblies, and creating a neighbourhood-based network of residents supporting shops and schools. To prepare the proposal for the PB programme, flora and fauna were mapped, and a collaborative design process was implemented, coordinated by a volunteer landscape architect. An effective communication strategy centred on being present in the neighbourhood through various activities, a dedicated website with the most relevant information (www.caracoldapenha.info) and building a strong social media presence, i.e., a Facebook page (www.facebook.com/jardimcaracoldapenha) currently with more than 4,000 followers, boosted engagement and activity participation. In particular, the Facebook group and the blog were very active in facilitating the temporal coordination of social events.

The proposal was submitted in June 2016 to the PB platform, as the PB process takes place online, and consisted of surveys and maps showing the environmental quality of the plot. In November 2016, it received 9,477 votes, still the largest vote ever in Lisbon. One of the main concerns of the proposal was not to propose a design but that the future garden should result from a participatory process. This process was approved by the council, ensuring the technical support for the project's development. Several workshops were organised, and design suggestions were collected and discussed through different tools across the neighbourhood. Special attention was paid to getting a comprehensive contribution from adults and children, men and women, able-bodied and disabled people. Since the plot is located on a steep slope, the garden design had to be coupled with the topography. Particularly, the steep slope was a challenge, according to the *Movimento pelo Jardim do Caracol da Penha* (n.d.); the Municipal Master Plan described the area as having a “moderate and high risk of earth movement,” so it was important to help stabilise the soil and avoid topsoil run-off. The area had to be terraced and drained to alleviate the risk.

Design workshops and consultations resulted in the final project design, which was approved by the municipality. The project thus results from the balance between technical restrictions and the often conflicting perspectives and desires of numerous people. The construction works are the responsibility of the council. The garden has been under construction since 2019, with completion scheduled for 2021. However, probably in the wake of the Covid-19 crisis, the project has been stopped, and there is no information about when the garden will be open.

3.2. Participatory Budgeting in Poland and Warsaw

In Poland, the PB concept was introduced in 2011 in Sopot by an informal group working on sustainable development and increasing citizen participation. PB implemented by municipal governments reached its apogee in 2014–2015 (Pistelok & Martela, 2019). An act from 2018 introduced general regulations for running PB programmes in Poland. It stipulated the obligation for voivodship cities to organise a PB programme so that all 16 of them have PB initiatives. This act also established that at least 0.5% of the municipality's expenditure declared in the previous year has to be dedicated to a PB programme (ISAP, 2023). Several cities (such as Malbork and Lublin) have addressed specific groups of residents through the PB program, i.e., people under 16 or 18, or projects related to greenspaces and green infrastructure development. Green projects are popular (Maksymiuk & Kimic, 2016) among the programmes and are carried out by big cities and small municipalities alike. Citizen participation is encouraged through

information and educational campaigns, official profiles of cities on social media, announcements and press releases, posters, leaflets and information brochures, broadcasts and advertising spots on local radio and television, meetings with residents, and consultancy workshops. The call for PB is disseminated by a dedicated webpage, and the number of online votes increases yearly.

The Warsaw PB programme has been operating continuously since 2014 (Warsaw City Council, 2014). The funds are divided into a citywide pool (30%) and 18 district pools (70%). The Social Communication Centre of the Capital City of Warsaw coordinates the Warsaw PB. In each district, a PB coordinator is appointed and is responsible for (a) planning and implementation of approved projects, (b) contact with residents, and (c) operation of the electronic communication system (Warsaw City Council, 2019a, 2019b). Since the first edition, most projects have been concerned with activities aimed at improving the road infrastructure and urban greenery. Many of them are also a part of other programmes in the city, such as The Million Trees for Warsaw, based on the Warsaw 19115 mobile app, to propose places for tree planting. The Warsaw PB is part of the #Warsaw2030 Strategy, the most important multidimensional long-term planning document, as it defines the vision and goals of Warsaw's development (Warsaw City Council, 2018).

3.2.1. The Green Street Świętokrzyska

Świętokrzyska Street is an important artery in the Śródmieście District, surrounded by office and multifamily buildings. With the completion of the second metro line in 2014, the street space was refurbished, pavements were widened, car lanes narrowed, and parking spaces, cycle lanes, and pedestrian crossings were introduced. However, the project caused much controversy due to the lack of greenery. Some old trees were cut down, and due to the underground infrastructure, they were only replaced by small specimens in planters. This situation sparked numerous protests, and the planters were assessed as a makeshift solution and barriers for pedestrians.

In 2016, a project called Green Świętokrzyska Street (Zielona Świętokrzyska) was submitted to the Warsaw PB by the Warsaw Citizens Association (Warszawa Obywatelska). Promoted on Facebook (www.facebook.com/ZielonaSwietokrzyska), the project was preceded by consultations with citizens, tenants of commercial premises, and the Municipal Roads Authority. The project scope was very wide and included organising civic consultations and collecting expert opinions on technical solutions to enable the planting of trees, shrubs, and flower beds. Initially, the project was negatively assessed by officials, who argued that lowering the number of parking lots would reduce the number of customers of nearby services. However, social activation resulted in the project winning with 2,207 votes—the most voted in this edition. Social consultations were carried out in June 2016. They included a debate on street greenery, “street consultations,” and workshops on land development. This builds the basis for making the final decision. The importance of increasing greenery (trees and shrubs), keeping the proportion between pedestrian and bicycle zones, and increasing the accessibility for users (Kimic & Polko, 2023) were emphasised.

The scope of the project was extended many times, which increased the implementation costs. In addition, the 2016 tender was cancelled because the proposed bids significantly exceeded the available funds. The implementation of the project was postponed until May 2017. Ultimately, the realisation costs amounted to 5 million PLN (€1.08 million), i.e., 10 times more than assumed in the proposal. Large trees

were planted: 191 plane trees, four hornbeams, and 18 spreading pink cherry trees, and many areas were covered by hedges and flower meadows. Innovative solutions such as anti-root screens and casing pipes were used to protect underground installations. Parklets, benches, some with comfortable armrests and backrests for the elderly and disabled, as well as litter bins and bicycle racks, were installed along the street. Świętokrzyska Street became the first street in the centre of Warsaw with a new greenery layout, clearly separated from traffic lanes. Project participants were honoured with commemorative plaques next to the planted trees. Preferential rents for tenants of service premises were also ensured, which allowed them to survive. The Green Świętokrzyska Street is a great success for all Varsovians and an important lesson for officials (Śmigiel, 2017), a project with high contribution to developing the green infrastructure. At the same time, it shows that despite many obstacles, good ideas created by the community for PB can be realised. This initiative also caused a snowball effect—The project became a role model and set a new trend in shaping greener and people-friendly streets in Warsaw.

3.3. Participatory Budgeting in Spain and Valencia

The development of PB in Spain has been adapted from the Porto Alegre model a few decades ago (González-Salcedo & Soler-Contreras, 2021; López-Ronda & Gil-Jaurena, 2021). PBs are based on the principles of transparency, publicity, clarity, access to information, institutional neutrality, the primacy of the collective interest, diversity, public debate, equality and non-discrimination, inclusion, efficiency, protection of personal data, and accountability. These principles constitute obligations for administrations and rights and guarantees for the residents participating in the process (Martinez-Sanchez, 2023). These processes contemplate the application of measures that, from a gender perspective, help achieve an inclusive participation of women and men to identify the priorities and needs of both (Laruelle, 2021).

Aligned with the Strategic Framework City of Valencia, the seventh PB biannual edition, DecidimVLC (Ayuntamiento de Valencia, 2022), was opened in 2022. The Urban Strategy Valencia 2030 (Estrategia Urbana València 2030, 2021b) dedicates a tactical line to improve urban and metropolitan governance, which has, among other objectives, in line with Moir and Leyshon (2013), “to enhance open government, transparency and participation in the development and implementation of public policies” (Ayuntamiento de Valencia, 2022, p. 10) and “to consolidate the instruments and processes of citizen participation that allow citizens to be part of decision-making, to create new spaces for physical and digital participation” (Estrategia Urbana València 2030, 2022, p. 21). This agreement reaffirmed Valencia’s political and ethical commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals, the 2030 Agenda, and the Urban Agenda to make them cross-cutting references in the city’s public policies. The strategy is oriented to the framework of Mission Valencia 2030, whose ultimate aim is to make Valencia a climate-neutral city by 2030, within the context of the European mission of 100 climate-neutral European cities by 2030. The València 2030 Climate Mission is a contribution from Valencia to reduce climate emissions by 55% by 2030 and to become climate-neutral by 2050. It, therefore, aims to make Valencia a healthier, more sustainable, more inclusive, more prosperous, and ultimately more liveable and desirable city for people through co-creation processes (Daniell et al., 2010; Leminen et al., 2021).

Valencia City Council has earmarked €16 million for the 2022 biannual PB programme. Of this budget, €13 million is redistributed among the 19 districts of the city, and €3 million is allocated to projects in neighbourhoods where the territorial rebalancing mechanism is applied. This aims to encourage citizens’

participation in neighbourhoods where, because of low population density, it is more difficult for them to select investment project proposals.

3.3.1. The Green Plan for the Poblats Marítims District

The Green Plan brings together all main sectors that have an impact on CO₂ emissions: mobility, transport, energy, economic and industrial activities, renaturation and biodiversity, and housing and urban design. It also represents all strata of society: the public and the private sectors, and the university and civil society, whose representatives have joined the initiative as project ambassadors. Thus, in line with Linnerooth-Bayer et al. (2016), the Climate Mission demonstrates the success of integrating experts in the process of developing objectives, indicators, and evaluation formulas for the PBs (García-Esparza, Pardo, et al., 2023).

Within the Climate Mission 2030, there are several initiatives throughout the city that call for a renaturation plan, such as the one in Poblats Marítims. Activities include a network of community gardens, a seed bank, a campaign against energy poverty, routes to learn about the neighbourhood's characteristic birds, and a solar cooker. The city council, through the Las Naves innovation centre, is looking for ideas that can be developed collectively to make Valencia a climate-neutral city. To this end, a call has been opened to select five proposals. To be eligible, proposals have to contribute to the Valencia Climate Mission, i.e., to enable the city to absorb 100% of its CO₂ emissions and can be designed, built, or developed in a first version or prototype within the deadlines. Applications can result from new ideas or adaptations of previous projects. This is the first call of the citizen laboratories Ciuta-lab of Las Naves centre oriented to the Climate Mission of Valencia. This initiative also aims to facilitate the constitution of learning communities, to value the diversity of knowledge and points of view that exist in the city, to innovate in the way of responding to social and urban problems, and to share learning, among other issues (García-Esparza & Altaba, 2022; García-Esparza, Altaba, & Huerta, 2023).

Particularly, in Poblats Marítims, the planting of trees and hedges has been requested in all the streets of the district to act as a structural element of biodiversity in the urban ecosystem. The benefits they bring to the neighbourhood and the city as a whole are thermal and acoustic insulation of buildings, reduction of heat produced by human activity, CO₂ retention capacity, and an increase in fauna linked to the new vegetation. This translates into better adaptation to climate change and mitigation of its effects. This is why the PB in this district requests a study by experts to determine the density and diversity of the tree units and hedges to be planted in the district's roads, to enhance the structural heterogeneity of the greenery, and to guarantee the connectivity of green spaces so as to create urban green corridors. The project aims to consider both environmental (light, temperature, water) and functional and aesthetic conditioning factors. Thus, species are proposed if they are native to the Mediterranean, can easily adapt to the area's environmental conditions, and are resistant to pest attack and non-invasive. In addition, these species should create chromatic diversity in the streets throughout the year. Among the objectives of the Poblats Marítims Green Plan, integrated into the Climate Mission and the Valencia 2030 Urban Strategy (Estrategia Urbana València 2030, 2021a), this action is framed within the main objective: to integrate the city through green and blue infrastructure at the metropolitan level. This objective is measurable through several indicators, i.e., (a) population with access to green areas within a five-minute walking distance and (b) green areas per capita.

Table 1. Key characteristics of three analysed cases.

	Lisbon (Portugal)	Warsaw (Poland)	Valencia (Spain)
First edition of PB	2008	2014	2008
Number of editions (as of 2023)	12 (until 2019 annually)	9 (annual)	7 (biannual)
Who is the organiser	City Council of Lisbon	Social Communication Centre of the Capital City of Warsaw	City Council of Valencia
Are citizens involved in the programme preparation?	Yes, before the programme started there were consultancy workshops	Yes, before a programme starts, consultancy workshops are organised	Yes, they participate in the proposal scheme, the voting process, and workshops
Are citizens involved in the evaluation process?	No, it is performed by the technical staff of the council	No, it is performed by the technical staff of the council and experts	No, it is performed by the experts and technicians of the council
How is the call for PB disseminated?	Dedicated website (https://lisboaparticipa.pt)	Through the website (https://um.warszawa.pl/waw/bo)	Through the website (https://decidimvlc.valencia.es)
A system that is easy to track and accountable	Through the website	Through the website	Through the website
Maximum limit for projects	No limits, the selected projects are those most voted for until the budget is exhausted	No limits, the selected projects are those most voted for until the budget is exhausted	Is given by the amount of money available

4. Discussion

The purpose of the article is to better understand the experiences within the three distinct PB programmes specifically chosen for their contributions to the improvement of the local greenspace network. According to Smith (1973) and the experiences from the three cases, a participatory programme also contributes to the stability of the social system and is an essential element in making urban development a learning process. The three PB programmes provided interested stakeholders the opportunity to influence decisions that affect many spheres of their lives; the once-empowered citizens play a more active role in decision-making, as witnessed by the high number of voters in the three PB cases. According to Bernaciak et al. (2017), both creating opportunities to partake in decision-making and empowerment are important areas of creativity and innovation for the residents and municipalities alike. In particular, the interest in “green projects,” such as in the three cases, indicates the increasing need of local communities for solutions aimed at ecology (Gherghina & Tap, 2021), climate mitigation (Bernaciak et al., 2017), and health improvement and wellbeing (Campbell et al., 2018). Such bottom-up processes can support and improve public governance and provide more responsive and sustainable public spaces capable of being public goods (Kardos, 2012; Stortone, 2010). At the same time, they can contribute to the long-term strategic goals for more sustainability

(Drobiaziewicz, 2019) and digital agency. The last issue, digital agency, is approached in the three cases by online processes, communication, and, in particular, remote voting and vote ranking; a process also called e-PB (Barros & Sampaio, 2016). This means the proposals have to be prepared to be displayed online, and viewers (and voters) can gain insights only from these platforms.

The general features of PB include simple forms of participation (mostly voting), as confirmed by the cases. Discussion and communication between proponents and citizens occurred online through various platforms such as blogs, Facebook, and Twitter. In the three cases, the municipalities launched public awareness campaigns to inform citizens about the proposed projects so they could get involved in selecting the projects. This suggests that the proponents had to organise their own campaign to mobilise voters. The most popular projects include creating spaces for face-to-face encounters to reinforce social ties and relationships between administrators and residents. Today, when social interactions are increasingly moving to cyberspace, digital tools more strongly support the process of citizens' participation in PB (Šuklje Erjavec & Ruchinskaya, 2019). ICT tools, as exposed in the methodology and cases, promote plural and varied forms of citizenship, democracy, and participation (Cunha et al., 2011). There is also strong evidence that social media helps the government, empowers citizens, and expands democracy, especially in open local governments (Bonsón et al., 2015; Smaniotto Costa et al., 2020; Śmigiel, 2017; Šuklje Erjavec & Zlender, 2020). According to the cases, the use of social media platforms is a key issue in e-mobilising the community and voters.

Moreover, the Valencia case evidences that a strategic diagnosis was fundamental to the planned development of the PB system in a city (Estrategia Urbana València 2030, 2022). The framework for PB in Poland is not very deep but is guided by rules (Warsaw City Council, 2018) that impose PB programmes on the major cities. In Portugal, the central government sets a series of rules that municipalities have to follow when organising their PB programmes. The three cases demonstrate how a preliminary framework, or a strategic plan, helps draw up an initial diagnosis to identify the recurrent and cross-cutting themes for the cities in the coming years and the main city challenges associated with them. A strategic framework can be a tool to promote a process of participatory debate and shared decision-making, in line with Cabannes (2004), and as exemplary exposed by the Valencia case, PB:

Is intended to be open to debate and citizen participation in order to be enriched by the contributions of a wide range of agents, whether from public administrations, the private sector, civil society or academia. To this end, the necessary mechanisms are established so that the city's Strategic Framework is widely agreed [upon]. (Estrategia Urbana València 2030, 2022, p. 7)

PB is based on the idea that service providers are encouraged to co-create services "with" service users rather than designing services "for" them. This requires a mindset change (Strokosch & Osborne, 2020). Citizens become co-creators of urban spaces, aware of their needs and a kind of "expert" based on their life experiences, while professionals are moderators using local knowledge. However, PB is most effective when citizens have the opportunity to be involved in every step of its process, and the projects can advance in the implementation of the urban strategy (Leśniewska-Napierała & Napierała, 2020; López-Ronda & Pineda-Nebot, 2013). The cases confirm that implementing PB as city labs can lead to positive changes in the city, even if the process is long and intricate due to all sorts of stakeholders' collaboration and co-creation (Williams, 2021).

5. Conclusions

The three PB projects selected in Lisbon, Warsaw, and Valencia provide an overview of greening strategies and objectives. They are incipient forms of grassroots-driven citizen science. Our focus, as researchers, lies in better understanding the stakeholder's role. In this line of thought, PB is a good way to close the gap between government and citizens and foster a culture of participation to include public concerns and demands in community-based urban design. The three PB processes show how the multitude of participatory practices can be set under an umbrella to base common meaning relations; this includes, above all, striving for a better and more responsive green environment. PB also means making use of local knowledge and citizens' needs. It enables greater involvement, which could culminate in a civic culture of participation and responsibility sharing.

The findings revealed that ICT, including diverse forms of social media, have an important role in supporting, sharing, and integrating information for stakeholders. In all three cases, voting occurs online, although the Warsaw programme also allows people to cast ballots at polling stations. There are two main ways in which ICT are being used: to host official sites to inform the public about the programme and the projects and to provide a means for them to vote for the most appealing project. In the three projects analysed, the proponents have also widely used social media platforms to spread information about their proposals faster to reach a broad public and, ultimately, voters. Although these three cases show the benefits of participatory approaches, citizen participation in urban planning is still a challenge that goes well beyond the mere selection of the most appropriate tools and methods. The focal point of applying ICT-based tools for participation should remain the citizen, who should be provided with a channel to dialogue, share knowledge, and express their spatial needs (Hadjimichalis & Hudson, 2007; Kallus, 2016; Kimic et al., 2019; Sintomer et al., 2008; Smaniotto Costa et al., 2023). As the three cases show, the digital agency offers a growing opportunity that could help guide planning decisions besides creating social capital (Taylor, 2019; Williams, 2021) and improving training and skills (Śmigiel, 2017).

A key issue for successful citizen participation and placemaking is the design of well-integrated strategic phases and work processes. It is also important to use various forms of social participation in order to adjust them better to current social needs and expectations, initiate positive interactions of people and space, and consequently contribute to the final success. Although the success of getting a project financed depends on many contextual and local factors, some general conclusions can be drawn, considering the three cases: They involve a range of ways to participate, from information to co-design, and they have a broad and creative dissemination strategy.

In terms of research and knowledge sharing, the analysis of cases demonstrates that the implementation of PB schemes needs to be accompanied by rigorous qualitative and quantitative evaluations over time to identify long-term impacts and collateral outcomes that revolve around eventual benefits not foreseen at the initial stages of the process. In the context of spatial planning, particularly greenspace development, as the three cases evidence, PB has proven useful as a creative problem-solving tool to encourage more responsive environments and, in turn, more sustainable and resilient urban development patterns. However, further research is required to better understand who participates in PB initiatives and why. This may enable a better understanding of the causes and effects of the PB programmes for strengthening the democratic processes and improving institutional transparency.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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About the Authors



Carlos Smaniotto Costa (PhD) is a landscape architect and professor of Urban Design and Urban Ecology at Lusófona University, where he also leads the research area on socio-spatial studies. Smaniotto serves on the editorial board of several peer-reviewed international journals and has worked on a number of national and international research projects covering a range of issues all centred on sustainable urban development and transforming cities into more liveable spaces. Smaniotto has published widely on environmental, social, and urban geography as well as urban planning and design issues in professional journals in English, Portuguese, German, and Italian.



Juan A. García-Esparza holds a PhD in Cultural Heritage. He is an associate professor at Jaume I University (Spain), where he teaches Conservation and Heritage Management (2012). His research interests rely on heritage science in a broad sense, from buildings and historical materials science to the wider built environment. His current research focuses on historic towns and villages. He holds a Chair on Heritage and Sustainable Development (2015–2025) and is an elected member of the Regional Committee for the Cultural Heritage at Valencia Region, Spain (2016). He is an expert member and an elected member of the Executive Board of the ICOMOS International Scientific Committee for Historic Towns and Villages CIVVIH (2021).



Kinga Kimic (PhD) is a landscape architect, designer, and assistant professor at the Department of Landscape Architecture, Institute of Environmental Engineering, Warsaw University of Life Sciences—SGGW, Poland. Her research is related to the programming and design of urban public spaces with a special interest in public parks and focuses on functional, environmental, and social aspects. Her interest also relies on participatory processes of co-creating public spaces, implementation of ICTs to urban green areas to increase their attractiveness for users, and enhancement of urban parks' inclusiveness to meet the needs of older adults and people with disabilities. She is a vice-president of the Section of Landscape Architects at the Warsaw Branch of the Association of Polish Architects (OW SARP).

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