Chapter 4
Community-Based Funding and Budgeting: Participatory Budgeting as a Transformative Act

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Why Community-Based Budgeting?

Since the 1980s, when Ronald Reagan aggressively rolled back the gains made by the various civil rights groups in the 1950s and 1960s, many people have been disillusioned about the state of our democracy (Katznelson, 2005). Citizens are often dissatisfied and frustrated at the dysfunction of the government shrouded in an oversized bureaucratic machine. And for years, everyday citizens have felt disconnected from the neoliberal government that caters mostly to millionaires and multinational corporations who lobby solely for personal profit (Chomsky, 1999).

Partly in response to an unresponsive government, people in different cities across the country have engaged in, and supported, participatory policy reforms. Borrowing from the general framework found in community-based work (CBW), people are experimenting with direct democracy to improve their communities through policy (Lerner, 2014). An aspect of CBW that is drawing the bulk of attention recently is called Participatory Budgeting (PB). While PB has its roots in Porto Alegre, Brazil, it is a growing trend throughout the world, including the United States. In some cities, like New York and Chicago, citizens engaging in participatory budgeting where community members have a direct say and control over the budget for community improvement is becoming commonplace. In fact, the

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New York Times has recently called participatory budgeting "revolutionary civics in action," noting that Participatory Budgeting in New York City (PBNYC) is the fastest growing participatory budgeting process in the United States. According to the Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation at the Harvard Kennedy School, over 51,000 local residents voted on implementing and overseeing projects to improve their neighborhoods to the tune of 32 million dollars in 2014–2015 through the Participatory Budgeting in New York City.

A Community-Based Philosophy

Quite often, community projects encourage participation and involvement of people in producing an outcome. Along the way, strangers may become acquaintances and acquaintances may become friends. The point is that intimacy among community members is nurtured and cultivated. A variety of persons and groups can participate in a community project as stakeholders or partners. While this sentiment seems to portray a positive trajectory toward democratic planning, on closer examination, traditional community projects continue to operate under atomistic philosophy with altruism as the default mechanism that supposedly ties its members as a collective.

Unlike traditional community projects, the philosophy of community-based work rests on two major principles that are very important. The first is that local knowledge should guide any project (Fals-Borda, 1988). Second, *full* participation by community members is a prerequisite to any community-based work. Accordingly, a crucial epistemological shift is made by true community-based initiatives.

Traditionally, community projects have been based on dualism (Bordo, 1987). Specifically, the assumption is made that subjectivity can be divorced from objectivity. In fact, this separation is necessary to acquire reliable data. After all, objective information is the accepted standard. Within this dualistic framework, methods are designed to overcome subjectivity. With this source of error transcended, sound data can be gathered and reliable decisions made. In effect, subjectivity is a distraction that must be left behind if a project is to be based on real evidence. In the absence of subjectivity, facts are available for scrutiny.

Community-based projects, on the other hand, eschew this dualism; this separation is thought to be impossible to justify. What actually occurs, instead, is that persons are intimately connected with everything that is known. Specifically, they interact and give meaning to their lives and act on the basis of these interpretations. In this sense, interpretation and other modes of human agency are impossible to sidestep.

Communities are thus comprised of what Kleinman (2010) calls "moral worlds," that is, norms and expectations that are constructed and modified as those persons see fit. The implication is that rather than objective, facts are invented and tied intimately to language use and the narratives communities create to make sense of their

history and prospects. Hence, as some critics say, facts are "biographical" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967).

What this rejection of dualism suggests is that local knowledge is essential to the success of any project. The values, beliefs, and commitments of a community's members are not illusory but provide insight into how they define themselves, important issues, and a successful intervention. Local knowledge, in short, reveals how a project should be designed to fit neatly and effectively into a community.

The second big principle is participation (Murphy, 2014). Clearly, community projects rely on local volunteers. But most often, these persons are mainly consulted or invited periodically to meetings. In reality, they are manipulated to gain their approval or access to resources, such as funds or land. A community-based project moves far beyond this minimal level of involvement.

Advocates of community-based projects, accordingly, argue that local persons should participate intimately in every phase of the project. Some go so far as to argue that they should control these endeavors. Given the importance accorded to local knowledge, this degree of participation only makes sense. Every opportunity, in short, should be available for this reliable information to be utilized.

But equally important is that this participation enhances the sustainability of a project. The research in social psychology demonstrates that real inclusion increases a community's commitment to an activity (Lune, 2010). For example, such "buy-in" helps to guarantee the longevity and quality of a project (Kaplan, 1973). Because of their continuous input, neighbors will take pride in their work, demand to make suggestions, and assume key responsibilities.

Most community projects do not address the issue of dualism. This epistemology often labors silently, however, to marginalize local input and lessen participation. Most community projects, after all, are very practical rather than philosophical affairs. Nonetheless, despite this initial conception, a significant theoretical shift is at the core of community-based work.

What Is a Community?

Almost none of the discussions of traditional community projects begin with the question: what is a community? This omission seems to indicate that the answer is obvious. In fact, they adopt the two usual options. But both of these versions, due to the influence of dualism, treat communities in a very superficial manner. Most projects are thus integrated into a community haphazardly.

A community is envisioned typically to be either a group or a collection of individuals (Murphy, 2014). And because of dualism, both identities are specified by objective traits that link these persons to a particular location. For example, racial, ethnic, and other markers are understood to identify persons from a particular locale. In most cases, a community is associated with demographic features and a location.

Recent research, on the other hand, reveals that this perspective is shortsighted. What is missed by the traditional objective indicators is the process whereby persons become connected and form a community (Land, 1983). Persons, stated simply, are united through their commitments. They define themselves as existing together, as sharing key elements or experiences, and gradually establish bonds that reflect these beliefs. At times, conventional identity markers may refer to a community that mimics these traits, but at others, these characteristics may have little or nothing in common.

A community is thus fairly elusive but not impossible to discover. From a community-based perspective, however, this finding is very important. No longer can a project be predicated on merely making contact with a community and trying to establish workable and cordial relationships. Something more profound is necessary, since a community is not an object but a domain of commitment (Chavis & Newbrough, 1986). A community-based viewpoint takes into account that persons constructed and continue to construct this association.

The point now is not simply to find or enter but engage a community. This process can begin with the standard "walk about," in order to become visible, interact with residents, and understand the environment. But the goal of these efforts goes beyond familiarity or friendship.

Eventually, discussions, meetings, maps, and any other means must lead to a dialogue that reveals why certain persons formed a community. From the inception of a community-based project, the world created by persons is the focus of attention (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2011). Access to this domain, or a true meeting, is necessary to understand why a community exists and how to engage these persons in meaningful relationships. Clearly without local knowledge, this style of engagement will not likely occur. Indeed, the basic premise of participatory budgeting is to best capture the elusive local knowledge of different communities (often forgotten or underserved) so that the needs of that community are met according to the priorities set by its community members.

Participatory Budgeting (PB): Beyond Traditional Budgeting

Traditionally budgets have been out of the hands of the public and made behind closed doors. The standard practice of budget making usually involves publicly elected officials consulting experts or bureaucrats in the allocation of tax dollars. The dualistic nature of traditional budgeting is quite clear: the demarcation of managers of money (politicians) and recipients (the public) of money. This benefactor/beneficiary relationship is sustained and legitimized through what Durkheim calls "rituals" where things are categorized distinctly between the sacred (experts) and the profane (lay community members) (Durkheim, 2001).

Nevertheless, due to many years of dysfunction and misuse of the tax money, the public is now clamoring for increased transparency. Due to economic fluctuations, and poor budget decisions, local needs have been overlooked. Select segments of

cities, for example, have been ignored, while money is readily available in other parts for neighborhood improvements (Lerner, 2014). Such inequities have begun to erode confidence in governmental planning. Many surveys report government dysfunction as one of the most serious problems faced by the American public.

The outcry for a new budget process is not merely a technical issue. The point is not merely the elimination of corruption or bias, or to streamline matters, but to democratize the budget process. Only a "thin democracy" is in place if communities cannot play a role in determining how tax money is allocated (Barber, 1984). Given that the economy is central to social life, anything less than full participation of the citizenry poses serious questions about whether democracy exists at all. And a democratic polity seems to have widespread appeal.

Participatory budgeting burst on the scene in Porto Alegre, Brazil (Abers, 1998, 2000). As part of the worldwide movement to create a more equitable and sustainable world, a revolutionary way of creating, implementing, and evaluating city budgets was initiated. Through their local councils, persons who were formerly excluded from this process—including the poor and marginalized—were suddenly thrust into the forefront of formulating budgets. A strategy for allocating funds, accordingly, began to percolate up from neighborhoods, including specific projects that were identified as having priority. And because of this change, services were greatly improved in underserved areas (Pape & Lerner, 2016).

Once this process began, local persons felt empowered and demanded more inclusion (Rappaport, 1981; Wampler, 2007b). Simply put, they began to understand the connection between the economy and their freedom. If they could control city spending, many of the barriers to personal and collective growth could be eliminated.

The benefits of participatory budgeting began to be recognized beyond Brazil (Abers, 1998, 2000). Although a radical idea, many cities examined the process. One of the more famous examples in the United States is Chicago. Although tried seriously in only one ward, the concept began gradually to spread. Many citizens throughout the city, accordingly, began to raise questions about how government spending could be made more pertinent and equitable.

But many fears plagued this process. Specifically noteworthy is that persons will be selfish and only look out for themselves. Those who are most powerful, furthermore, will likely dominate this activity (Lerner, 2011). Hence, the budget process will no longer be rational but a free-for-all, whereby persons and communities battle one another to secure advantages.

While such dire scenes were never witnessed, why budget participants should collaborate was never made clear. At times, appeals were made to altruism and community spirit (Sousa, 1998). But another rationale is available that has not received much attention, although this idea is central to community work. This principle is solidarity, and can offer an appropriate moral framework for participatory budgeting.

While altruism and community spirit are sometimes effective in supporting participatory budget formation, these notions are notoriously vague. Solidarity, likewise, can be misunderstood, unless the philosophical maneuver presupposed by

this notion is explained, along with the practical implications. In other words, simple appeals for solidarity will not likely advance the cause of participatory budgeting.

The aim of this chapter, accordingly, is to address solidarity to supply participatory budgeting with a necessary moral framework (Pateman, 1970; Jordan, 2016). Of course, there is never a guarantee that persons or communities will adhere to moral guidelines, but having a framework is certainly better than not. Additionally, one that is attuned to the participatory nature of budget formation would be especially important.

Participatory Budgeting Must Do More than Simply Reform

Clearly, there are many benefits to participatory budgeting. In addition to improved transparency, proponents claim that relations are improved within and between communities, not to mention with governmental representatives (Lerner, 2014). Democracy seems to spread, in other words, as persons learn about the needs and ambitions of their neighbors and engage them in dialogue about budget priorities. In this regard, even the World Bank has identified participatory budgeting as a valuable best practice (Lerner, 2017).

In democratic societies, local participation in institutions is encouraged. Town meetings and involvement on school boards, for example, are part of the mythology, along with grassroots activism. Nonetheless, budgets have been almost sacrosanct and developed mostly by professionals. The assumption is that when carried out in this way, the process will be reasonable, follow set guidelines, and be value-free. In short, rationality will prevail.

For the most part, the formation of budgets remained out of sight. But even when reviewed publicly, the process seems vague, mysterious, and mostly incomprehensible. After all, for the most part, the public has had little or no experience in these affairs. Only a select group has had access to these deliberations and grasps the technicalities of assembling a budget.

Critics, accordingly, began to call for increased accountability, and local participation seemed to be a logical solution. In different places, the theories and motivations varied, but in the end, grassroots guidance was considered to be necessary and viable. The required budget information is thus disseminated throughout a community, along with the requisite skills, so that local persons can act as experts and direct the budgeting process (Wampler, 2007a). Over time, these persons acquire the confidence and skills necessary to be in complete charge of this activity.

Most often, a community group is formed that guides this activity. Following this step, meetings are called where budget information is discussed, projects are proposed and evaluated, and votes are taken. Like most community discussions, this process is not necessarily neat and can be tedious. Constructing a local budget, accordingly, can take up to 6 months. But communities seem to enjoy the process and like the outcomes (Cabannes, 2004).

The anticipated result is that due to this participation, money will be spent wisely and that communities will be satisfied with the results. Local projects, in other words, will be supported in the long term, due to the commitment of community members. Simply put, participation confers a sense of ownership that culminates regularly in increased sustainability (Souze, 2001). In the literature on this topic, this support is referred to as "buy-in," and is recognized as vital to the success of a project.

While communities do not have access to the entire budgets of cities, even in Brazil, a lot of money is available—usually up to 15% of a city's budget. Most important, however, is that this amount has been sufficient to foster significant change (Kasdan & Markman, 2017). Indeed, the cumulative effect has been impressive. But can these non-professionals perform such a task, even with the necessary training? The general fear is that they are undisciplined, untested, and likely to make either stupid or self-serving decisions. What must guide this process, therefore, to avert disaster?

Cultural Challenges of Participatory Budgeting

In many respects, participatory budgeting resembles a utopian project. That is, given how persons usually behave, how can this process ever succeed? Local participation may be a nice, and even a captivating idea, but the likelihood of average persons dedicating themselves to a long-term, voluntary endeavor and cooperating is slim. In fact, this idea contradicts the cultural norms that are currently in place (Harvey, 2005).

The standard expectation is that most persons or communities will focus on their personal interests. For the most part, they are encouraged to follow this path and believe that such behavior is entirely warranted. After all, in the United States, they are taught to look out for themselves first, and if inclined to engage later in charity. Concern for the collective good, however, is optional. Any other policy is simply irresponsible.

For participatory budgeting to succeed, therefore, neighbors must be forced or enticed to cooperate. Pressure must be applied so that they see the wisdom of working together. This socialization may take the form, for example, of moral appeals or something more stringent, such as legal mandates. The problem is that these and similar enticements result often in resentment, and even spawn additional conflict.

Why does this situation appear to be so entrenched? The simple answer is that America is a capitalist society. Even though democracy is touted, and the common good applauded, persons are consumers first and then citizens. What this distinction means in everyday affairs is that they succeed or fail through their own efforts and owe little to others. Persons are expected to make sound decisions that advance their own aims, and perhaps those of their families, while according others the freedom to pursue their goals.

Although capitalism certainly contributes to minimizing the communal character of daily life, there is another, more profound philosophy that contributes to this condition. Specifically, the Western tradition is replete with atomism (Mathews, 1991). The basic idea is that reality, including society, is comprised of isolated units, or atoms, that may combine under certain conditions. Their traditional behavior, however, is that they adhere to individual trajectories and, at times, crash into one another. Any association, and resulting configuration, is tenuous.

Clearly, capitalism is consistent with this outlook, since relationships are mostly strategic to secure advantages at the market place. But what about participatory budgeting? In this case, persons can be expected to behave like self-interested egos, who calculate and strategize to protect their individual interests.

A neighborhood, accordingly, will likely act like a composite of interest groups, who focus on their immediate concerns (Herrnson, Deering, & Wilcox, 2013). Any suggestion that they should cooperate is not appealing, due to the sacrifice that may be involved. As interest groups, almost by definition, they have unique agendas that must be given priority. In fact, within this framework, cooperation may even be treated as unnatural, or at least an unwarranted intrusion or burden.

With this atomistic imagery in place, participatory budgeting will be difficult to implement. Persons can be presumed to bicker constantly and become easily frustrated with the dedicated interaction required by the process. When people believe that they must be brought together, and view these appeals as coercive, any collective action is going to be resisted and breed resentment. Participatory budgeting, accordingly, will likely be approached as an idealistic scheme, with little chance of success.

The Philosophical Thrust of Participatory Budgeting

The problem is that atomism conveys an illusion. In effect, persons are not, and never have been, atoms. They are not fundamentally cut off from one another, and only by chance come into contact. Social existence, in other words, does not consist of mostly accidental encounters, interspersed with chance alliances (Taylor, 1985). At the basis of social existence is a bond.

Basically, atomism is sustained by faulty imagery, and, most recently, a particular economic ideology. In reality, persons are open to others and share a common space. In many ways, accordingly, their fates are joined, even when the communal nature of social life is denied. Even when persons or communities strive to assert their individuality, and stress their unique virtues and successes, they cannot escape the influence of others.

But given this connection, how is the illusion of atomism maintained? Stated simply, this imagery persists because of dualism. Although fundamental to Western philosophy, dualism came to the forefront with Rene Descartes (Bordo, 1987). To supply a sound, unequivocal foundation for truth, he claimed that the mind and objects occupy categorically distinct realms. In more contemporary terms, subjec-

tivity is separated from objectivity, along with facts from values. As a result, reliable knowledge is available that is uncontaminated by personal flaws or opinions.

Although dualism is treated by various contemporary philosophers as defunct, this viewpoint prevails in many areas, including descriptions of social life. In this specific case, persons are subjects while others are objects and vice versa. The result is solipsism, whereby each person is presumed to occupy a unique bubble (Strauss, 2008). A lot of ink has been spilt by philosophers, accordingly, trying to explain whether the minds of others can be known. Any authentic solidarity is thus difficult to imagine.

Bringing persons together is fraught with difficulty. Various schemes have been proposed, such as the state or contract, which assume a gap exists between persons. But also presumed, for example, is that persons are bound together sufficiently to form a state or establish a contract. That is, even before persons are saved from chaos by these schemes, they are open to others and able to cooperate.

What these newer writers are saying is that social philosophy traditionally has begun in the wrong place (Levinas, 1998). In other words, persons were never separate and unable to establish relationships, without the aid of governmental or legal frameworks. For this reason, the term intersubjective is used regularly nowadays to describe the basic human condition. Persons are not subjects severed from others, or objects, but instead are always intertwined with others and able to interact.

A more holistic image is thus appropriate for describing a community (Bauman, 2008). A new way of thinking about moral order is also implied, one that supports participatory budgeting. An entirely different message about motivation and goals is possible than is associated with atomism. Most important is that the ideology of the "individual first" loses credibility, with the ascendance of communitarian viewpoint. Starting from intersubjectivity, instead of the individual, inaugurates a new approach to understanding social responsibility (Mijuskovic, 1992). Instead of rare, simply put, cooperation is the norm. Solidarity, accordingly, is not beyond the pale.

Communal Budgetary Discourse: A New Moral Framework

Simply because persons or communities are open to others, and have impact on one another, does not mean that they have similar priorities. In contrast, the assumption is that they have different perspectives and ambitions. Conflict is thus likely. Nonetheless, even in view of these differences, a discussion about budgets diverges significantly from past discourse. The key realization is that persons are in this budget process together.

As a result, the first important change in their initial response is not self-enhancement. The traditional view that persons are on the prowl constantly to seek advantages and hoard opportunities no longer makes sense, given the communitarian character of social life (Cohen & Arato, 1992). Such avariciousness would be a scandal and hardly normative. Those who exhibit such behavior would no longer be cheered but criticized.

On the most basic level, the morals of society would change. The usual rip-off ethic would be viewed as leading to chaos. How could everyone looking out mostly for themselves, and taking advantage of others, have a positive outcome? Society would consist of barking dogs who exhibit only the most superficial concern for others, such as avoiding direct confrontations. All the time, however, they scheme against their adversaries (Lewis & Weigert, 1985).

But contrary to this unfortunate situation, the second change is that compromise is not treated as defeat. When in their adversarial mode, interactions are tactical and disingenuous. Persons or communities listen to others simply to circumvent their positions and gain the upper hand. Taking the views of others into consideration in a more genuine way is treated as naïve and, in general, unproductive (Harvey, 2005).

In a more communal situation, a different outlook and outcomes are expected. Rather than a loss of freedom or autonomy, compromise is logical. Because behavior has impact far beyond the individual in the absence of atomism, divergent views should be equitably reconciled. After all, who has the unlimited freedom required to usurp the positions of others? Persons are now expected to act in concert, because of their fundamental connection.

As a result, and third, a moral budget emerges from honest negotiation that recognizes possibly different aims. The basic view of this process is that everyone's view counts and should never be violated (Sen, 1999). A realistic budget, therefore, resembles a mosaic rather than a consensus. The aim, in other words, is not to distill positions until a bottom line is achieved, but to incorporate as many proposals as possible. Basically, a different logic of negotiation is operative than is usually the case. Instead of imposing a framework a priori that restricts, and thus eliminates proposals, persons strive to adjust their respective positions until the largest range of possible projects is included. Multiple interests are thus encouraged, rather than mergers that may reflect power or a mythical imperative and require the marginalization of many proposals.

During this process, for example, some persons may realize that, at this time, the proposals of others are more important for the commonweal. Such deferment is not a personal loss, but a gain that everyone will realize. Remember that the basic point, from the beginning, is not personal enhancement but a more expansive project, that is, the promotion of all participants. The representation of diverse positions in the final budget product entails a new logic, as opposed to a zero-sum game (Thurow, 1981). Such a restrictive game, in fact, represents the old imagery of separate competitors who strive to control the budget process.

In the end, the participants make a budget. And indeed, this process is only nominally economic but social, since budget restrictions depend on how persons or communities want to treat one another and use their collectively generated resources. With persons negotiating within the confines of the common good, and the accompanying diversity, they can make any adjustments they see fit to fulfill their goals (Dussel, 1988). Budgetary *a prioris*, in other words, are passé in a truly participatory or communal environment (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2013).

Conclusion

Clearly, budgeting is a very practical activity to determine how money will be spent. Nonetheless, the participants should not be lulled to sleep by the apparent mundane nature of this process. A change of philosophy is advanced that is crucial to the success of participatory budgeting. If this shift is not appreciated, this approach to forming a budget is in jeopardy.

Particularly noteworthy is that past imagery has been antagonistic to this mode of budgeting, not to mention misrepresenting social life. Persons are not atoms, thereby invalidating the "me-first" reaction to opportunities for gain. As atoms, the collective response necessary for participatory budgeting to succeed is difficult to envision. The personal gains of persons or communities take precedence over everything else.

But a different imagery, and accompanying philosophy, is available that is more supportive of this novel economic process and solidarity. In the absence of atomism, persons and communities must now negotiate in a framework that encourages collective action, and even sees such a response as perfectly rational. A new moral outlook is thus possible, in contrast to adversarial relationships.

Rather than focusing on personal gain that may translate into the common good, a more direct approach is suggested to dispensing funds (Baiocchi, 2005). That is, through dialogue, a fair and representative budget can be developed. Through a fully participatory process, each proposal can be treated with dignity. The result is a budget mosaic that includes a range of proposals, without pre-conceived mandates (Lerner, 2014). The end product can thus be representative, rather than a distillation of input.

But as mentioned earlier, this new imagery requires a serious discussion of philosophy. At first, such an assessment maybe resisted. After all, in the traditional context of framing budgets, such an analysis is a distraction. In participatory budgeting, on the other hand, a reassessment of philosophy is essential. Participants must understand, for example, why atomism is unworkable, inaccurate, and generally silly. An opposing position, based on intersubjectivity, must make sense and be applied appropriately. Participatory budgeting, in fact, depends on the moral position that accompanies this change in philosophy. Participatory budgeting without this philosophy will not likely come to full realization.

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