



govlab
better public services

Participatory budgeting for inclusive local governance in BiH – Evaluation report

Gov Lab Ltd.

Anežka Holeňová

anezka@govlab.cz

+420 773 215 713

Richard Kokeš

richard@govlab.cz

+420 733 388 174



Contents

Contents	1
1 Introduction.....	2
1.1 About this report	2
2 Reasons for implementing participatory budgeting	4
3 Participatory budgeting with student involvement	5
3.1 How does the participatory budgeting process look like?	5
3.2 How are the students involved in the project?	7
4 Case study: Implementing participatory budgeting with student involvement in four municipalities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.....	8
4.1 Participative budgeting in municipalities: tool for the trust and interest building	8
4.2 Involving students in participatory budgeting	10
4.2.1 Advantages of student involvement	12
4.3 Involvement of other marginalized groups.....	14
5 Project results and benefits.....	15
6 Annex.....	17



1 Introduction

Participatory budgeting for inclusive local governance in BiH is project implemented by Agora CE in cooperation with Association of Election Officials in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A main goal of the project is to continue with already established good practice of **introducing the participatory budgeting in municipalities in BiH, with further focus on increasing the inclusivity of whole process. Process is considered inclusive, when all citizens have chance to participate on decision making and have their voices heard. No one should be excluded or marginalized because of his race, age, gender, ethnicity etc. This project should help to increase involvement of groups, which are at risk of social exclusion.**

During the project, citizens in municipalities get a chance to come up with their own project ideas – they propose projects and promote their ideas in various ways. Projects are then discussed with public and finally, citizens vote for their favorite project. Wining projects are then implemented. Increasing of participatory budgeting inclusivity is designed to happen mainly by involving **students** into the budgeting process and promotion.

In the beginning of the project, cooperation was established with four municipalities in BiH – **Vareš, Breza, Kiseljak an Trnovo (RS)**. In all four municipalities, **coordinator** from local office was appointed and trained to be liaison between **municipality, AEOBiH and local citizens**. Students from local schools or youth organizations are participating in the project.

1.1 About this report

This report was created to help gain insight into how the project works. Report is structured as follows: First, we discuss idea of participatory budgeting and its benefits, second, we describe process of PB and process of increasing PB inclusivity by engaging students. In next chapter, case study of using the PB for more inclusive governance in four municipalities is presented. We discuss closely mechanisms of PB and student involvement. We focus on important moments and opportunities for further implementation of this practice – what are the biggest benefits to gain and possible obstacles municipalities can face. In last section of this



chapter advantages of student involvement are described. In final chapter project outcomes are presented.

Multiple semi structured interviews with various participants were conducted to understand their perspectives and experience with project involvement. Interviews took place in Bosnia and Herzegovina in all four involved municipalities.



Interviews were conducted with four mayors of municipalities, four project coordinators, three students who proposed their own project, one student who attended training but didn't finish her project, one young person assisting with voting in her municipality and eight authors of various projects. Apart from main interviews, we spoke to few other officials and locals. Additional information was gained from interviews with members of project team data available from the voting.





2 Reasons for implementing participatory budgeting

Main principal of participatory budgeting is bottom up approach to financial planning in municipality level. In case of this project, **citizens are directly involved** in the process by creating and proposing their own projects. Citizens are then **voting** for proposals, which they feel are the best or most needed in the community. This way of budgeting has several advantages – for citizens as well as for local government.

Apart from benefiting from realization of proposed projects, PB was described by participants (both officials and citizens) as having the power to bring:

Trust - Involving citizens more directly in decisions about spending public finances is a good way for building a trust between municipality and local people. In the time and place where people feel extremely dissociated from ruling structures and powerless, usually have a feeling of democratic principles working poorly or not in their benefit, introducing transparent and more direct ways of involvement can prove effective and well accepted. This effect of PB is described further in text.

“We have a problem with participation in our society and corruption is present almost everywhere – this is a good example of process, where results reflect wishes of citizens without possibility of being manipulated.” (author of the project)

Learning opportunity – Participants had a chance to go through whole budgeting process. This was considered positive for citizens, because there is an opportunity to learn something new, as well as for municipality – officials felt, that seeing the sometimes long and difficult process of budgeting can help citizens understand that it is not an easy job.

Better knowledge of people’s needs – Municipality officials want to work for the good of citizens, so they are naturally very curious what people in their town want and need. Some of the ideas proposed were surprising for the municipality.

“Maybe the officials from municipality aren’t out there so much, so we don’t have idea, what people need, but this helped us and that is fantastic. The mayor can’t go from door to door and ask people, what they want – they have to come to us.” (project coordinator)

Listening to people’s needs – When municipality lets people decide about the way public money is spend and also encourage bringing their own ideas, people can directly express their needs. Implementing project created this way builds a confidence in people that someone actually listens to them – feeling lot of people are missing these days.

Chance for youth – Participating in this project gives students all the above-mentioned benefits. They can make a change in their community, they are supported to be active, express their needs and systematically work on their project and its promotion. Students feel heard by adults and experience power of involvement in community affairs, this could help them became active citizens with will to engage more in place they live in.

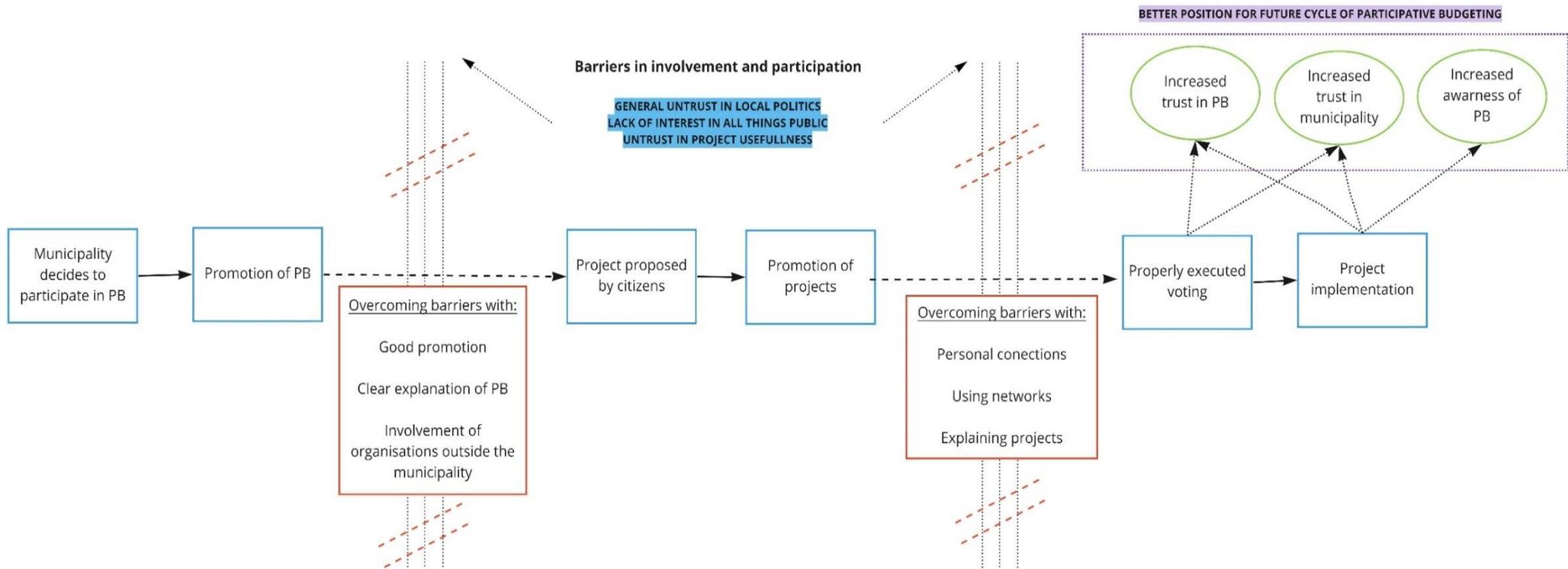


3 Participatory budgeting with student involvement

The participatory budgeting process in this project follows usual stages typical for this method - with difference of additional deliberate involvement of students. Students had additional support and training and they could choose to participate in various stages of the project, which are explained further in the chapter.

3.1 How does the participatory budgeting process look like?

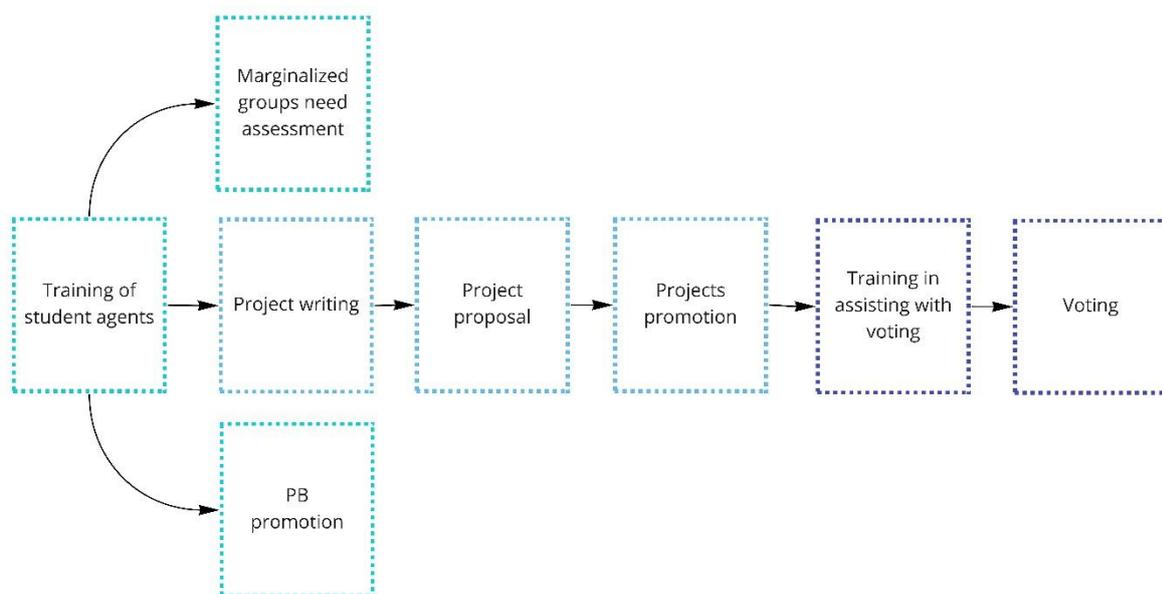
- I. **Municipality decides to participate in the project.**
- II. **Participatory budgeting project is promoted** – citizens know, what is the main point of PB, and they are encouraged to propose their own projects.
- III. **Citizens propose projects** – during the phase of project preparation, municipality officials are supporting authors of projects when they need help or clarification of the process.
- IV. **Projects are checked for feasibility** – municipality officials decide on feasibility of the projects, potential problems are fixed.
- V. **Meetings with citizens** – public is invited for discussing proposed projects.
- VI. **Voting** – citizens of municipality can vote, using mobile phones or computers. Authors of projects can help with administration of voting, collecting votes using tablets.
- VII. **Winning projects implemented** – project, which received most votes is implemented. Implementation is monitored by authors of the project





3.2 How are the students involved in the project?

- I. **Municipality contacts schools** - members of student councils are invited for initial training.
- II. **Student training** – PB is explained to student agents, who are encouraged to promote the project in their school and community and brainstorm their own project ideas. Marginalized groups in town are discussed and students are trained in assessing their needs.
- III. **Students promoting PB** – trained students (*“PB supporters”*) spread information about PB in their classes and help distributing informational leaflets.
- IV. **Marginalized groups need assessment** – PB supporters carry out marginalized groups assessment.
- V. **Project preparation** – students write their own projects, reflecting their needs and are encouraged to help others with project writing.
- VI. **Project promotion** – students promote their own projects to attract more voters.
- VII. **Training in voting** – PB supporters and authors of project are trained in voting process and using the tablet for inclusion various groups of citizens.
- VIII. **Voting** – students are assisting during voting, going around the town and helping others vote.
- IX. **Winning projects implemented** – project, which received most votes is implemented. Implementation is monitored by authors of the project.



(See annex for more elaborate scheme of students' involvement.)



4 Case study: Implementing participatory budgeting with student involvement in four municipalities in Bosnia and Herzegovina

In this part of the report, we look closely on the progress of project implementation. Experience of participants with project realization is comprehended as well as perceived impact of the project. We try to focus on how the PB mechanics were implemented in this project and look closely at specific situations which made difference in the process.

4.1 Participative budgeting in municipalities: tool for the trust and interest building

In the beginning, there is an assumption of participatory budgeting usefulness within the local government representatives. It can be curiosity, general openness to new ways of governing or mix of both which leads municipalities to decision to participate in the project.

When the process of PB starts, there is a crucial challenge of getting the citizens involved in all the stages, as the main point of whole PB lays in more active participation of the local people.

In the first stages of the process, municipality needs to promote the PB method to attract people, who have some ideas and want to transform them into the project proposals. This can be difficult for many reasons. It is hard when there is general **distrust of people in politics** – this was felt by all the people interviewed during the evaluation, from mayors to teenagers. Citizens have (and probably partially for good reasons) lot of assumptions concerning the transparency of decision making, legitimacy of public spending, they fear corruption, manipulation and project being just a cover for another nontransparent practices. Overcoming this mindset is not easy.

The way this project is constructed could help with this step in two ways. It can feel better when the **municipality is not the only subject involved in the project** – in the begging of the PB, it could be perceived as a good thing that the project and the idea was brought to the town by organizations outside the political structure. This should be more helpful when the process of PB is established for the first time - ideally, the municipality will be in better position in terms of citizens trust after the successful implementation of PB. Secondly, **municipalities are supported by experts** from Agora and AEOBiH and they should obtain good training in how the PB should be promoted and explained to public.

Good promotion is the key – all the municipalities used broad spectrum of methods, from leaflets distribution to social media posts, advertising in local media, web pages etc. In the phase of attracting people to pitch their projects, **direct contact with people working in local organizations** such as schools, sport clubs, youth centers or associations seemed to be very effective, as the majority of the project proposals came from citizens connected with these intuitions.

When projects are proposed, biggest part of the promotion before the voting is undertaken by project authors themselves. It is still a battle with lack of interest within the public and skepticism towards politics, but this time, **human factor plays the biggest role**. Some of the projects gained hundreds of votes thanks to the fearful promotion of their authors, Facebook posts, phone calls, speaking with public, explaining, persuading. It is easier to trust the person behind the project, especially if they represent well known organization or are recognized in small community. Networks work especially well – parents of school children, classmates of students etc.



Lesson No. 1 – Technical obstacles

In the phase of voting, there is a biggest risk of troubles of technical nature. In two of the involved municipalities, there were problems with SMS verification of the vote. We don't know the actual impact this error had on the results - what is important is the fact that there was a shared understanding between the participants of the voting being somehow affected. Problems can occur anytime, what is more important is clear communication of the problem and its effects. While technical problem on its own may sabotage promotion effort of authors, not communicating it properly can cause distrust in the fairness of whole process.

Lot of those who got involved mentioned people being surprised in the end by the fact, that the project really went according the promised plans. That is very important moment – **people have chance to experience the process being clear and fair**. Almost everyone we spoke to planned to participate again, if the town continues with it PB in next years. Participants talked about friends being persuaded by their successful projects and thinking about participating in the future. In one of the municipalities, where PB already took place in previous year, the difference in participation and number of projects proposed was significant. People already had a chance to see physical evidence of PB being legit and functional – playgrounds, reconstructions etc. **Participating in the project builds confidence in people – confidence in their skill, in transparency of politics and in municipality listening to their needs.**

Lesson No. 2 – Using the momentum

In one of the participating municipalities the mayor decided to increase funding of wining projects and also fund rest of the proposed projects. Logic behind this is simple – everybody, who spend their time preparing projects, promoting, communicating with citizens will feel heard and their motivation for further involvement will increase.



4.2 Involving students in participatory budgeting

The involvement of student begins with municipality approaching schools with request for involvement of students who are members of school council. In this phase, the most important is to **attract the students to the idea of participating** in the project – they should feel that they actually will have power and impact on the society. **Having a power to change things in their community is unusual for young people**, there are obvious barriers - such as minimal age for voting, but also more subtle feeling of not being listened to enough by adults or taken seriously.

Members of the school council are supposed to be the most active students and should act like link between the project and their classmates – they share the information about PB in their school. They are also trained in project preparation – majority of projects proposed by students was proposed by this group. During the training, students are taught how to write projects and which types of projects can be executed using PB. The training was considered interesting by students, they also felt encouraged to make a change in their community.

Maintaining student’s motivation to propose their own project could be difficult – there are students who tend to be very proactive themselves, don’t need further reminders and can do well with same amount of support as adult participants got. On the other hand, **there was a notion that a lot of students trained in the beginning had ideas which they didn’t manage to develop further**. There were three main reasons for lack of participation mentioned by students and coordinators during the interviews. **In no way are these conditions making participation impossible, but their can act as a final discouragement for not so active or undecided individuals.**

Lesson No. 3 – Barriers in participation

Timing – Because of delayed start of the project, some of the project work was supposed to take place during the summer holidays. The timing seemed unfortunate for involving students into anything, because it is **much more difficult to motivate them enough to participate during the holidays**. It could be also problematic for students proposing projects connected to their school. One of the participating students mentioned this in the interview, when she described preparing budget for her project (purchase of the equipment for nursing school). She needed documentation from the school principal, who also was on holidays and felt like being pushy for contacting people to ask for materials needed to propose project.

Clarity of process – Two of the participating students mentioned, that some of their schoolmates didn’t finish their projects, because they **were not sure about the deadlines and when the work on their project proposals should start**. One student said that they were waiting to be directly contacted by coordinator with information about what to do next. Students were well informed about whole process in the beginning of the project, so it would be easy to rule out this problem as a simple passivity of students. But if we want to aim at higher participation of youth, this could be good moment to intervene and add some extra support – remind students more often about deadlines, ask about their projects etc.



Difficulty of proposal - The proposal preparation was well explained in the beginning and wasn't considered to be difficult by majority of participants. Students mentioned that some of their schoolmates had problems with their projects being too complex for them – for example, they were not able to prepare the budget for reconstruction project, because of zero knowledge of building, materials etc. Students should have a notion of proposal requirements from the initial training, but this may be the same case as in the previously mentioned reason. The difficulty of the budgeting process should be explained very clearly in the beginning, students could gain from getting some additional feedback on feasibility of their projects or being interconnected with people, who can help with technical aspect of their proposal.

Those who did participate and pitched their project were able to write the proposals with help of coordinators. Coordinator usually advised students with feasibility of their ideas and necessary paperwork. All the participating students found coordinators very helpful and accommodating. Depending on the nature of the project and help they got from adults, authors of project described different experience with difficulty of project writing. As mentioned above, hardest part seems to be the budgeting, which is new thing for most of the students.

"I'm seventeen, I don't do papers." (student, author of the project)

Students had different method of project writing, some of them worked alone, in other cases it was cooperation in bigger group - *"We sat together with football club members and brainstormed what project we want propose. In the end, we prepared two and one of them won."* (student, author of the project)

Number of projects proposed by students varied in participating municipalities from 2 to 4. If we look closely at these projects, most of them are projects concerning *sport facilities – reconstructions and building of various playgrounds, football fields and premises, fitness park, airsoft field* etc. There were also projects for *small reconstructions of infrastructure and facilities* and one project for *buying equipment for nursing school*. This proposal seemed surprising for people involved in project, because it differed from what was expected.

After the project proposal, students were promoting their project (and projects of others). Usually, author of each project can use the tablet for some period to help citizens vote. Apart from face to face contact with tablet, **some use every way possible for promoting their project.** During the interviews, students mentioned using social media, asking teachers to promote their project in classes or asking friends to come over and vote together, ask their families to vote etc.

Lesson No. 4 – Public distrust

Interviewed students had impression that people had problem trusting them with their contact information. Especially problematic was obligation to fill in the phone number for vote authentication. People seem to have bad experience with their personal data being mishandled in the past and need a lot of persuading before they accepted this condition. Students felt, that being trustworthy for public is even more difficult for teens.

All the students interviewed for this report **mentioned interest in participating on PB again next year**, some of them already had ideas for other projects. They also felt, that other people around them are now more aware of the PB and want to get engaged more.



4.2.1 Advantages of student involvement

Main reasoning behind involving students directly into the project is presumption, that their activity will increase inclusivity of whole process and help to incorporate voices of marginalized groups into the decision-making process. The overall involvement of MG groups is discussed in previous chapter, we focus here closer on MG which was the most active as well as probably most affected by the project – students and young people themselves.

Creating positive mindset – Feeling of distrust in politics in society and absence of believe in positive change is omnipresent. Young people don't live outside this context, they are naturally strongly affected by atmosphere in the community, by their families, media etc. Interviewed participants felt, that changing people's mindset is difficult, it takes a lot of time for people to start believing in good things happening. *"You can't teach an old dog new tricks."*, said the mayor in one of the participating towns, contemplating advantages of involving students into PB. While we would like to think that you actually can, there is a big advantage of not having to overcome decades of skepticism build in citizens minds.

Some of the young people participating in PB were very aware of the negative attitude in public and they felt good to overcoming it by their actions during the project. **Defining yourself against passivity of others seems as an excellent mechanism behind active participation.**

"The biggest barrier is the mindset. Society was the barrier I first needed to break. "You can't do it." If you have a good plan, it will get through no matter what somebody says." (student, author of the project)

"There was a post on Facebook about voting and there were comments about the projects – no one will use it; it is not necessary and so on. But I think that they are helpful for people who made the projects. Those who write hate comments don't know what to do, they just write hate comments." (student, author of the project)

Making active citizens – Having a chance to make a difference in community in young age can help students to become active citizens in the future. It is good to know, that their own activity is worth it and living conditions in their town can be improved. To let the active young people, shape their environment and make their ideas happen in this way is just a small step. However, it can be part of greater process, resulting in people with ideas having will and power to change their town, rather than leave it.

"Optimistic half of my friends wished they have a project to propose, and want to do it next time, because they really want to change something in the town. The pessimistic half wants to go to Germany." (student, author of the project)

Using existing skills for including others – Students are encouraged to help with the final voting, as well as with promotion of whole project. This have big advantage for municipality because it helps to spread the word and access more people, especially from same age group – students tend to contact their peers easier and know how to communicate the topic. While promoting their projects and also during assistance with voting via tablets and mobile phones, young people can use the skills, which are often looked down on by adults (knowledge of social media and new technologies etc.) for good purpose. As participants felt that electronic voting can create an obstacle for participation of older people, this is an important role in project.



Building skills for future – Writing project proposals was considered interesting and useful by participating students. They felt that it was good learning experience, which can help them in the future. One of the students mentioned potential of benefiting from more project and business-oriented training in their school.)



4.3 Involvement of other marginalized groups

One of the key aspects of the project was expectation of greater involvement of marginalized groups (MG) into the PB. Mindful involvement of MG should help increasing inclusivity of the process and guarantee access to participation in decision making. Students were discussing which marginalized groups are present in their towns and did a needs assessment for these groups with questionnaire. Students should support members of MG in project preparation and then promote their projects during the voting. During the discussion, students in all municipalities named few MG – young people, elderly and woman and then decided, that only group with needs differing from majority were young people.

The assumption of youth being MG is understandable. Lot of people we spoke to (officials, students or other citizens) considered young people vulnerable, facing the future in country where they feel lack of opportunities and migration isn't unusual choice. Students complained during the interviews about not having places to hang out, lack of interesting things to do and other participants also mentioned free times activities such as various clubs being too expensive. There is also a feeling of not being heard enough by adults.

The fact, that students focused almost exclusively on projects benefiting them and their peers is not surprising – they understand their needs the best and creating something good for themselves is highly rewarding, they **learned how to become their own advocates, be responsible for their own ideas.**

“I feel the responsibility on my shoulders, it is a good start.” (student, author of the project)

As a tool for empowering young people and an opportunity to improve their living conditions the project works well. It is difficult to imagine the same result in case of students helping other MG for many reasons. It is extremely hard to understand people through questionnaire. It is also difficult to uncover what people (especially excluded and vulnerable groups) really need. This is though job for adult, educated social scientists, it is very ambitious to expect high school students to be able to execute it well.

Good news is, that projects focused on helping other MG were present in the project – they were proposed by people working with young kids or elderly in various institutions, kindergartens, social services, schools etc. People who made them usually wrote the proposal as a part of their job, promoted them via Facebook pages and webpages of their organizations and contacted their clients to get more votes. **These projects show that there are probably at least some groups** (families with kids, older people) **with specific needs.** Especially the need to address old people as a vulnerable group was mentioned – in one interview author of project spoke about absence of spaces friendly to elderly, where they can meet and socialize. Student administrating voting in other municipality talked about initial reluctance to vote she experienced with older people – *“Next year we should pay more attention to old people. In the begging, they didn't want to vote, because there was no project regarding their needs.”*

If we want to increase participation of other MG through whole process, we could try to use same mechanics as we did for the students with members of MG – train people from MG group in writing projects and promotion, support them in writing and promoting and let them become their own advocates.

For better understanding of the MG involvement in voting and for making more accurate assumptions about inclusivity of the voting, sociodemographic characteristics should be collected for all voters.

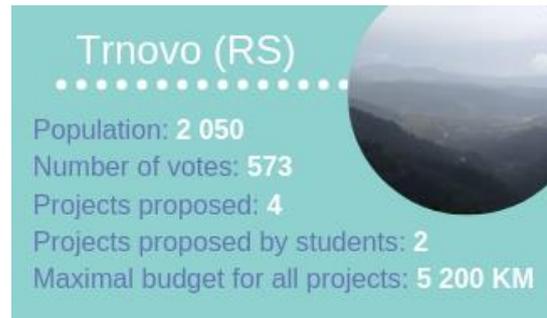


5 Project results and benefits

There were four municipalities involved in the project, more than two thousand people participated in the final voting. The highest turnout was in the smallest participating municipality, where more than 25% of population participated. In total, 30 projects were proposed. Number of projects chosen for implementation in each municipality varied from 2 to 4, depending on maximal PB budget and budgets of each proposed project.

The topics of projects varied as well as their authors and benefiting population. **Most of the projects were reconstructions of public spaces – infrastructure, school and sport facilities etc.**

66 students were trained in the beginning of the project and more than 40 of them were active in project preparation as well as in other project activities. **Students proposed ten projects in total.**



In every municipality, there was at least one project proposed by students, which succeeded in the voting. In total, **five projects created by students will be implemented.** Students and younger children will be also **benefiting from other projects proposed by adults.** Apart from projects which will benefit young people, there were more projects targeted directly on needs of other vulnerable groups which were successful in the voting. One of them is focused on elderly and socially excluded people, second one on disabled children and their families.

Project aimed for increasing inclusivity of PB – **promoting access of all citizens to decision making and prevent possible exclusion and marginalization of vulnerable groups during the process.** Project helps to increase inclusivity during the project preparation phase mainly for young people, by training them and supporting them in developing their skills and ideas

into proposals. For including more of the marginalized groups, better understanding of their needs and direct involvement of their representatives would be needed. Access to decision making is increased by possibility of electronic voting, personal assistance with voting (especially important for older people) and setting quotas for participation of certain groups.

Huge benefit of the project consists in **building trust of public in participation and active involvement in community.** Increased participation and interest in project writing in town with previous experience with PB shows that successful implementation of PB helps people to believe in the system and come forward with their ideas. Participants feel that their needs are reflected by municipality.



Project gives students opportunity to **express themselves, make positive change in their community and gain new skills.**



6 Annex

Detailed scheme of student involvement

