Croatia: Public participation in national level budget process

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The structure of presentation

- National level public participation in budget process is not satisfactory
- Obstacles are numerous
- Conclusion:
  - increased budget literacy/citizens education along with
  - more opportunities for PP is needed.
Numerous obstacles for PP

Graph 1. Online survey about PP in Croatia (in %)

- Central and local governments hide some budgetary facts from citizens
- Too few opportunities for citizens to be involved in the BP
- Budgetary information accessible to citizens insufficient
- Citizens should take part in the BP
- Learned about budgets during their schooldays
- Citizens are able to take part in the BP
- Have seen a budget at least once
- Have personally tried to take part in the BP

Numerous obstacles for PP

Graph 2: Croatia - Citizens dissatisfaction with:

- Public administration
- Regional or local government
- Parliament
- National government
- Political parties

Source: European Commission, 2017. Standard Eurobarometer 88
Numerous obstacles for PP - Engaging citizens is not easy

- Public criticism and distrust → PP is not worth
  - politicians are corrupt
  - decisions have already been made by politicians
  - citizens do not know have their inputs been used
  - it is not safe to participate (you may even lose your job if you work in public sector)

- Lack of
  - interest and understanding of the BP (importance of PP, how and where to participate)
  - understanding of technically presented long budget documents and deciding what is (not)important (too much details)
  - citizens' time (too much work or personal obligations)

Numerous obstacles for PP (within government institutions)

- Inadequate financial and staff resources
- Difficulties obtaining interest from the elected top officials
- Lack of will (government employees have many other tasks, they do not want more tasks)
- Lack of time - the budgets are made in the last minute
- Most of the budget items are already predefined (e.g. employees costs...)

Increased budget literacy/citizens education along with more PP opportunities (multiple, not dependent on time and space) are needed citizens should be motivated
Good example: 
Online Educational Budget Game
Proracun(ajme) – City of Rijeka

Aimed at
1. improving LBT
2. an interactive tool for direct communication between citizens and the mayor

- Citizens
  - get acquainted with the actual budget
  - choose projects which they would like to see realized, which are not included in the existing budget

- The statistics relating to the chosen projects is used when the budget is planned for the next year

Source: https://www.vojko-obersnel.com/hr/proracunaj-me/2018
Proracun(ajme) – City of Rijeka

1. Homepage
   • Introductory text about the current budget
   • Educational part: keywords are explained (e.g. communal fee)

2. Game
   • Citizens choose projects that are not in their current budget
     (Total maximum amount of selected projects: ≈ US$ 10 mil.)
   • Reducing items of current budget or raising communal fees citizens provide funds for the implementation of selected projects
     • Alarms alert citizens to what happens when an item of current budget decreases or communal fee increases

3. Report:
   • Selected projects and how are they funded
   • Comparison of citizens' budget to the current budget

Source: https://www.vojko-obersnel.com/hr/proracunaj-me/2018
How to increase national level PP?

1. Online educational budget game (like in Rijeka) on the level of each ministry?

2. Surveys, focus groups – to find out
   - who is (not)participating and why?
   - opinions of the goals in strategic plans of different ministries (are adopted goals too ambitious/modest)?
     - like in Standard Eurobarometer – opinions on EU 2020 targets – e.g. Target - To increase energy efficiency in EU by 20% by 2020?

3. Introducing budget literacy courses into school curricula (as a part of civil education at all levels of education)?
Thank you 😊

Your comments and suggestions are welcome...