

Mayoral Influence on Participatory Budgeting in Lithuania during Covid-19

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Abstract

The paper deals with two topics: Participatory Budgeting (PB) and mayoral impact on its success. Its theoretical background is rooted in the interrelation of the discourse of PB and characteristics of mayors as city leaders. The paper analyzes articles revealing personal, social and political characteristics of mayors and their impact on civic governance. The scope of collected characteristics was researched with a view on how they impact succession and the resilience of PB. The idea behind this analysis was not only to reveal mayoral characteristics and their impact on PB in general, but to test them against the background of the Covid-19 pandemic as an example of an external crisis. PB practice in Lithuanian municipalities was researched. Qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with mayors or their subordinates and helped to reveal the mayors' role and impact on PB resiliency. Relevant statistical data was collected and analyzed in order to obtain the specific characteristics. The results proved the impact of mayors' social and personal backgrounds on PB resiliency, but during challenging times or even crises, political affiliation, interrelation with the council or administrative and political skills are supportive factors. The paper suggests that mayors cannot ensure the persistence of PB alone when finances are scarce during times of crisis.

Keywords:

Participatory Budgeting;
Mayors;
Lithuania; Covid-19;
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1- Introduction

Participatory Budgeting (PB) is not a novel approach when municipalities deal with a lack of finances. PB is a democratic decision-making process in which residents participate in the preparation and adoption of the budget of a municipality or public sector organization. Some authors refer to PB as an emerging participatory paradigm because it is a budget-sharing approach based on dialogue, voice, debate, and direct citizen participation [1, 2]. A goal-oriented definition is important in this context: PB aims to democratically allocate funds to local government services, allowing communities to decide who will benefit from public money [3]. PB helps not only to reallocate scarce resources but also to improve governance.

External crises such as Covid-19 disrupt the allocation of resources. Municipalities in some cases even refuse or suspend PB implementation. While PB projects are usually supposed to be long-term (regular or durable), there are cities with short-term PB projects: short-term pilot projects (e.g., Toronto or Vancouver in Canada); those terminated or suspended due to various failures (e.g., Krakow in Poland); and those suspended/terminated due to the Covid-19 pandemic crisis in 2020 (e.g., New York City and Vallejo in the USA, Halifax in Canada, Velten and Kyritzer in Germany, Gdansk in Poland). As the situation has not yet stabilized, not all of the latter were determined to relaunch PB processes in 2021.

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Mayors, as city leaders, have a powerful influence on city development decisions and thus on PB as well. Democracy ensures strong devolution and thus the legitimacy of mayors. PB literature prescribes a dominant role of mayors (as a decisive political will) in the initiation of PB as a democratic innovation, opening space for the relationships between municipal administrations and communities and citizens to change [4-7]. The impact on the future of PB can therefore differ considering the type of election (direct or indirect), and specific personal or social/political features of the mayor. Literature analysis revealed the dominant role of mayors in setting PB concerning this as a new way of life in municipalities. Active mayoral policy can bring 'third sector' experience into the city hall [8]. Therefore, mayoral personal, social and political features can influence the PB process both in general and during times of crises in particular. But one deals with a lack of research analyzing the interrelation between PB and mayoral impact on its resiliency.

Therefore, academics should undertake more research on mayoral impact on the resilience of PB in order to provide society with a better awareness of the factors that could help citizens to vote for the most capable candidates for city governance. While there are papers analyzing PB as a discourse and the benefit of PB for resource reallocation, to date there has been no research on how city leaders – mayors – behave in the face of crises and what their impact on overall decisions for PB is. Hence, the aim of this paper is to assess the impact of mayors on PB resilience during crises such as the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

2- Problem Statement

2-1- The Aim of Participatory Budgeting in Modern Society

Why do local governments use participatory budgeting schemes? It is usually aimed at restoring confidence in the government and obtaining legitimacy for difficult budgetary decisions by involving the voices of the population in the process. It is likely that this initiative is therefore acceptable to parties across the political spectrum [1, 9, 10]. Some are of the opinion [11] that the absence of PB is considered to represent the non-openness of the city, and its unfriendliness to current and potential future residents. Campbell et al. [3] noted that due to growing democratic participation that is followed by greater cohesion and improved distribution of funding to public services, one can have a positive impact on healthcare and well-being. On the contrary, some also dismiss the positive image of participatory budgeting, arguing that PB is only a form of political flirtation with the population, giving them the hope of participatory governance, but excluding them from the real public finance decision-making process [12].

Research by Coleman et al. [13] revealed that different stakeholders pursue their beneficial goals using PB (i.e., administrators seek to involve more people; politicians deal with political ambitions). According to Lorson and Haustein [14], participatory budgeting imperatively opens up the budgeting and accounting of local governments to citizens. Actually, findings by Wilkinson et al. [15] assert that the process of PB faces the problem of fairness. Respondents in the qualitative study argued that PB is not a fair way to allocate public money as specific groups are formed to "push" their ideas. Other researchers believe that PB increases confidence in participatory democracy by integrating the equality dimension. However, the results of their study showed that equality is declining; on the contrary, PB creates inequality because there is a "gladiator struggle" for money and real needs are not taken into account [16]. It was found that the benefits of the project are not taken into account in PB, as those who are able to mobilize the largest population mostly influence the results of the project [15]. This is natural because PB changes the dominant representative model, in which citizens' contributions end when they participate in council elections [1]. It was also noted that PB does not address the diversity of participation and inclusion. The participation of women, youth, and national minorities remains limited, with older, educated whites generally participating in the PB process [16-18]. Despite this, some authors (Kukučková & Bakoš [19]) believe that PB has the goal of educating, as participants in this process go through a kind of "school of citizenship" and begin to gain a better understanding of the public policy process. This positive attitude proposes a long-lasting future for PB by reducing the exclusion of those whose participation is limited.

Existing versions of PB could be broken down by the number of meetings and their duration; or by the intended roles of civil servants, technical staff, citizens, or participants [20]. The first PB was applied in 1989 in Porto Alegre, Brazil, and is considered an example of good practice. The aim of such a budget was to respond to the rapid expansion of the city of Porto Alegre and the difficulties in providing basic public services to the population. On the other hand, constitutionally guaranteed democratic institutions did not function as intended as corruption and clientelism flourished. In essence, the intention at the time was to give the poor a voice; they had to decide which projects of interest to the population were to be funded. In a relatively short period of time, the results of PB revealed the benefits of such an initiative: as early as 1997, appropriations for health and education in the city budget increased from 13% up to 40%; the number of roads built in deprived neighborhoods increased; an expanded network of schools and kindergartens was created; and the supply of sewerage and water connections reached almost 100% [21].

Seeing the advantages of the PB scheme in the city government, in (1999) 40,000 inhabitants were involved in the process [21] of PB implementation. Researchers note that with the emergence of PB, Porto Alegre simply saw a "window of opportunity" when a new party won the election, and urban civil society had the capacity for innovative change. In 2004, after 15 years of rule, even with the change of ruling party, the new political powers did not dare to abandon the PB initiative.

Naturally, European cities have also started looking at the initiation of their own PB model. The first attempt was to adapt the established practice of Porto Alegre. As in the Porto Alegre model, here residents participate in discussions about the city's investment priorities, putting efforts into budget implementation [22]. However, the perception very quickly emerged that the Brazilian model has limited scope for application in Europe because citizen participation is not linked to the participation of individual citizens but is implemented through interest groups, associations, and communities. Therefore, a consultative PB imported from Christchurch, New Zealand, was more appropriate for Europe. This model is based on the assumption that consultations are held on the allocation of public finances based on citizens' suggestions and recommendations on the provision of public services and the financing of projects. The involvement of stakeholders and active society groups such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in PB is crucial for the fairness, diversification, education and even sustainability of PB. Gondášová and Svidroňová [23] argue that this is a participatory version of the new public management, meaning a durable model in modern society. The rapid spread of the phenomena, albeit in different ways, was and still is consistent with the so-called '*discontent with democracy*' and '*deliberative imperative*' (as defined by Sintomer et al. [24]).

According to Baiocchi and Ganuza [25], a thorough analysis of the cities which have implemented PB (estimated to be over 1500 cities worldwide) proves that PB phenomena have become completely politically polyvalent, despite several very striking features at the outset of the phenomena some 30 years ago. The Baiocchi and Ganuza [25] argue that today's adaptability is the most striking feature of the PB, while it is implemented not only in the most varied contexts but is compatible with "the most diverse political projects: left, right and center".

The situation in Lithuania, nonetheless, looks quite unlike the above. Though the first PBs in Lithuania were implemented in 2013 at the school level, Alytus city municipality was the first to implement it at the city level in 2018. As there are 60 cities and district municipalities in Lithuania, the PB implementation process could be identified as solid and growing, with eight municipalities implementing PB since 2018/2019, seven municipalities beginning the implementation process in 2021, and some six more having declared their intention to implement PB in the near future. None of the first eight municipalities have terminated or suspended the PB due to the pandemic crisis in 2020. Some of them even increased the associated budget allocations in 2021.

Therefore, this paper focuses on these eight municipalities as a starting point for research into mayoral impact on the initiation and resilience of PB.

2-2-Assumptions of Mayoral Impact on PB

PB initiatives may already appear during an electoral campaign. The examples of Worker's Party mayors in Brazil [26] or those in French municipalities revealed that promises to introduce participatory mechanisms for citizen participation may increase a candidate's chances of being elected.

After the election, a mayor (especially one who is directly elected) becomes committed to the welfare of the particular municipality. Such welfare requires one to adjust the municipal finances in order to satisfy most needs of the local communities. An awareness of these needs is possible only if citizens are invited to express their expectations and are involved in decision-making for the further development of the municipality. This is especially important during financial and economic crises or when it is necessary to "*re-democratize a society that is losing its way*" [27]. For instance, unexpected issues such as the global Covid-19 pandemic may have a significant impact on public finances. PB is therefore suggested as a mechanism for the activation of civic participation and the solution to common problems.

Proactive mayors believe that positive changes only happen if citizens and NGOs actively collaborate with the city authorities. An active mayoral policy can bring 'third sector' experience to the city hall [2]. In some cases, powerful mayors set top-down PB alone, but usually they work hand-in-hand with the municipal councils. However, on the contrary, there may also be cases when mayors start a PB program while the majority of the council is opposed [28].

When turning to PB, mayors trade on it for quite different reasons: to strengthen their chances of being re-elected; to establish more transparency and realize a deliberative model of democracy; to claim more power; to strive for more efficiency; to renew political clientelism; or to deepen democracy [27, 29-31]. Different aims (mostly related to political affiliation) have an impact on the design of the PB mechanism and propose several possible forms: consultations with citizens [23], transactional or transformational [16], e-PB [32], etc. The PB program may also pose a risk to mayors if its implementation does not provide positive outcomes. The mayor may be accused of "election bribery" and willingness to use budgetary funds for political campaigning [28, 33]. The above statements prove the mayor's interrelationship with political affiliation (position and support) while taking steps towards the implementation of PB.

One can capture various social and personal characteristics of mayors in scientific research, but not in the context of PB. Therefore, for the purposes of this research, characteristics distinguished from various mayoral content sources were collected. According to Barber [34], cities have a civic culture that generates social capital or trust. Cities make mayors, but the social and personal characteristics of mayors also affect demands for good governance. Mayors can act globally and locally. Mayors are considered to be important as paradiplomats or as peacebuilders [35, 36]. Mayors can offer

municipal infrastructure for national or international events. They can even individually host international meetings or initiate unified mayoral organizations [37- 39].

Cosmopolitan and educated mayors actively participate in international, cross-border or regional networks [40, 41]. They are willing to go on study trips and bring new innovative practices to their cities. Being practical rather than ideological, mayors are perceived as incarnates of their cities and more committed to their own brands and cities' needs than to policy itself [34]. A mayor's role is recognized in structuring cities as educational mediums [31, 35]. Mayors learn while being directly engaged in local affairs and solving practical problems together with the community more in a pragmatic way than an ideological one. In order to achieve more efficient governance, the mayor needs to have specific skills and competencies adapted to the particular city [34].

There are also studies that touch on the gender aspect. The role of a female mayor is still underestimated because female mayors are less firmly integrated into the established tradition of male role models, even in the West [34, 41]. According to Pini and McDonald [42] local male politicians (including mayors) usually form various informal connections through the so-called 'old boys' networks' that help them not only to obtain more funding for electoral campaigns but to achieve greater cohesion in decision-making as well. There are authors, however, who do not see gender differences as an issue in terms of governance [43, 44], while others reveal positive aspects of appointing a female mayor such as less corruption, fewer temporary public employees [45] or more activity in international networks [41]. This seems to imply that the mayor should have or gain specific characteristics, be innovative and very aware of the city he or she is committed to in order to have an impact on the PB. The aim of this paper is to test these characteristics in the case of Lithuania (an example of a young democracy) with PB being a novel possibility for municipalities who have indeed dealt with an external crisis (Covid-19) since the beginning of the process.

3- Research Design

3-1- Lithuanian Case Study

The idea underlying the paper is based on the discourse of participatory budgeting and the theoretical characteristics of mayors. Literature analysis revealed that the PB initiative is not new in general. Participatory budgeting (PB) has evolved a great deal since its origins in Porto Alegre (Brazil) in 1989. As Wampler [46] point out, the third wave of PB adoption has already been experienced, but in Lithuania little is known about where the PB models originated and how they differ. Although there are differences in the process in all cases, political influence with perceived mayoral impact has been noted.

In March 2020, a state of emergency was declared in Lithuania, and quarantine was imposed. Mayors, municipal administration officials, and employees of subordinate institutions sought new models of activities and policy implementation due to changing central government policies, a lack of resources, staff vulnerabilities, and unsuccessful organizational and epidemiological solutions [47]. Naturally, in such circumstances, in most municipalities, the role of the mayor (as a directly elected leader according to Lithuanian legislation) was strengthened, as the population expected a proper response to the crisis and the restoration of public services (e.g., healthcare, social services). Lazauskienė & Bučaitė-Vilkė [48] has shown that residents particularly value the mayor as an administrator and/or manager. Some municipalities (e.g., Vilnius, Klaipėda) approved Covid-19 crisis management plans to improve conditions for businesses and residents. Such plans created the narrative of the mayor as a savior in the eyes of the residents, offering hope of a happy ending [49]. In addition, mayors and municipal administrations actively cooperated within the framework of the Association of Lithuanian Municipalities, especially during the first and second waves* of Covid-19, when coordination at the state level was lacking.

There are 60 municipalities in Lithuania in total. For research purposes, the municipalities were classified into PB starters (eight municipalities implementing PB since 2018/2019), PB surfers (seven municipalities implementing PB since 2021), PB followers (six municipalities planning to implement PB in the near future), and the so-called gray zone (39 municipalities not considering PB implementation at all). Only starters were evaluated according to the collected criteria in order to reveal the overall spectrum of mayoral characteristics impacting the PB. The remaining municipalities were used fragmentally only when aiming to compare them statistically with the eight starters.

As literature analysis [34, 35, 37, 40, 41] revealed, there are specific political characteristics related to mayoral power, such as close cohesion with council members, administration, and the civic community as well as mayors' social backgrounds and personal characteristics, which are important in terms of governing the city. The paper aims to research what impact these characteristics can have on the resiliency of PB, especially in times of crisis, considering the status of Lithuania as a post-Soviet country.

* The first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic lasted three months from March to the end of May 2020. The second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic began in early October 2020 and continued until February 2021, when the government began easing measures.

3-2- Research Question

The research question, therefore, is as follows: what personal, social and political features of a directly elected mayor impact PB resiliency in a post-Soviet country?

4- Methodology

4-1- Methodological Flowchart

The study is logically designed following the literature analysis, systemizing the revealed aspects and using the empirical approaches that are presented in Figure 1.

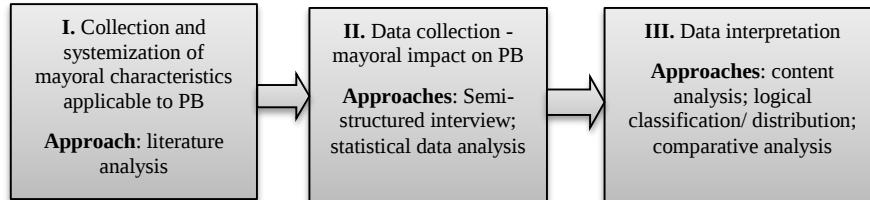


Figure 1. Research flowchart

Relying on the scientific literature, theoretical characteristics related to mayors were selected and converted into research factors as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics and research factors

Characteristic	Theoretical provisions	Factor (No)
PB aim and design with regards to politics	Design of PB depends on aims related to political affiliation; PB included in the electoral program as part of a political campaign has an impact on voting	Political affiliation (1); Electoral Program (2);
Commitment to the city; specific skills and competencies adapted to the particular city	Mayors are directly engaged in local affairs and solve practical city problems more in a pragmatic way than an ideological way	Political experience, specific skills and competencies pertaining to the city (3);
Proactiveness and innovation leading to collaboration	Highly educated mayors appreciate the model of governance; therefore, they collaborate with (seek support from) the municipal council, administration and the community to bring about positive changes, regardless of whether they belong to the ruling majority or are part of the opposition	Education is related to skills and competences and linked to Factor 3; Support at the local council (4); Executive or administrative support (5);
Gender, Age	Differences in governing by gender and age	Gender and age proportions at the local council (6).

Political affiliation (i.e., the ideological scale of political parties) is usually named as the main impact factor: PB originated among left-wing political powers. Though the fashionable spread of the phenomena led to the above-mentioned political polyvalence, mayoral political affiliation is still a valued *factor (1)* in the research. The examples of PB in Brazil and France prove the effect on the initiation and implementation of PB when the idea is fostered during the electoral campaign. Therefore, the electoral program, as another valued *factor (2)*, was added to the research.

Despite sufficient scientific research, the personal analysis of the mayors of the cities implementing PB reveals them to be quite experienced and skilled in governing their respective municipalities. They might be novice mayors (i.e., first-term), but with sufficient experience as members of local authorities. These mayors are practically aware of the city's needs and problems. Hence, political experience and skills represent one more *factor (3)* for the research.

The following two factors of support at the local council (*factor 4*) and executive or administrative support (*factor 5*) evolve due to the unique Lithuanian model. The mayor can have a political majority or be part of the opposition to the council; thus the dependence of PB resiliency on the political position of the mayor was researched. The community as a factor is eliminated from the research, because PB means the engagement (and thus support) of society in its essence as it is defined in a modern PB model.

The influence of demographic factors (namely gender, age, and education) on PB has been analyzed more through the perspective of the civic participants in PB, but not mayors. The application of these characteristics for the research is somewhat challenging in Lithuania while there is 1) a large gender gap and 2) no educational differences among the mayors. As there is a significant disproportion (only five women among 60 mayors), the choice to analyze the gender and age proportions at the local council as a *factor (6)* are logical, assuming that they might influence the PB.

4-2- Data Collection

Qualitative semi-structured individual interviews with the mayors or their subordinates, based on the theoretically proven characteristics, were conducted to reveal mayoral impact. The interview method provides for more openness between the respondent and the interviewer, as it creates the preconditions for sharing their experience of the phenomenon in question in its natural setting. Qualitative semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with the PB starters' mayors (N=6) and executive administrators (N=2) with questions based on the criteria in Table 1. All interviews were conducted by means of direct telephone calls with the mayors. In the case of several municipalities, the mayors redirected the interview to their subordinates, stating that they would provide more detailed information on the initiation and implementation of PB in the municipality. The average duration of the interviews was approximately 20 minutes. The application of this method is regular practice in public administration research, as it provides an opportunity for respondents to share their views, experiences and opinions about the phenomenon in question [47]. *Content analysis* was used for data interpretation (logical classification and distribution considering the factors).

Where applicable, statistical data was collected and analyzed from official statistical sources: 1) Statistics Lithuania^{*} and 2) the Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania[†]. Appropriate approaches related to the research factors are presented in Table 2

Table 2. Research approaches by factors

Interview approach	Statistical data
Electoral programs (factor 2)	Political affiliation (factor 1)
Experience and skills – PB knowledge (factor 3)	Experience and skills - education (factor 3)
Support at the local council (factor 4)	Support at the local council (factor 4)
	Executive and administrative support (factor 5)
	Gender, age, and education (factor 6)

Additionally, the diversity effect applying the Blau index and the representation index are calculated for the reveal of gender balance at local councils of the PB starters (see results in Table 3). The Blau index (1) is usually used to calculate the diversity of gender, ethnicity, race etc. in various institutions and organizations. A perfectly homogenous group would receive a score of 0, while a perfectly heterogeneous group would receive a score of 1.

$$1 - \sum p_i^2 \quad (1)$$

As only two genders (male and female) are usually applied when utilizing the Blau index, perfect homogeneity (or domination of only one gender) would score 0, while perfect heterogeneity (both genders represented equally) would score 0.5.

A more accurate representation index (2), which helps to understand not only the distribution/balance of the analyzed factors in various institutions or organizations but also how accurately these factors represent the respective general population, was proposed by Lazauskienė & Bučaitė-Vilkė [48].

$$R = 1 - |(X_{im} - X_{is})^2 + (X_{jm} - X_{js})^2 + \dots + (X_{nm} - X_{ns})^2| \times 100 \quad (2)$$

Applying the representation index for the analysis of local councils helped the researchers to understand how well genders in respective cities or districts are represented in local councils. The closer the score is to 100, the better a given gender is represented.

5- Results

In Lithuania, PB is not imperatively regulated. However, the principle enshrined in Article 4 of the Law on Local Self-Government of the Republic of Lithuania defines the participation of municipal residents in public municipal affairs: “*Municipal institutions shall provide conditions for the residents of a municipality to directly participate in preparing and debating draft decisions, organizing surveys, assemblies, meetings, public consideration of petitions, as well as promoting other forms of civic initiatives*” [50-52]. This indicates the participation of the population in the drafting of decisions and the promotion of other civic initiatives, and can be perceived as PB. Residents of Lithuanian municipalities also have the legal right to prepare and sign petitions, attend public debates, submit applications for community projects, and participate in municipal surveys. In turn, the financial autonomy of municipalities is enshrined in Article 121 of the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, which states that “*municipalities shall draft and approve their budget*.”

^{*} <https://www.stat.gov.lt/en>

[†] <https://www.vrk.lt/>

Municipal councils have the right, within the limits and according to the procedure provided for by law, to establish local levies; municipal councils may provide for tax and levy concessions at the expense of their own budget" [53]. Such legislation from one side opens the horizons for PB and allows for the diversification of its content. On the other hand, the absence of clear regulations is a restrictive factor in a young democracy with limited creative capacity and political innovation [54]. When replying to any interview question, the mayors felt confident and showed a level of overall knowledge of their PB.

As PB originated among the left-wing political powers, political affiliation is usually cited as a significant factor. Despite the recent political polyvalence in the PB implementation processes around the world, *political affiliation (factor 1)* proved to be a significant factor in Lithuania for the initiation of PB: mayors (as well as the political majorities in the respective councils) of the eight municipalities named as *PB starters* belong particularly to center-left political groups. Even if one compares the differences in political affiliation among the PB starters, PB surfers, PB followers, and the grey zone municipalities, differences are significant while the center-left political parties are predominant among those already implementing (starters) or considering the implementation of (surfers and followers) PB (N=16 out of a total of 21), while the so-called grey zone is dominated by center-right mayors (N=19 out of a total of 39). The significance of the political affiliation reveals it to be an important factor for the initiation of PB, but in this case did not help to explain the resiliency of PB (especially in times of crisis). Such findings are more likely to occur in mayor-council systems than in council-manager ones. The concept of the mayor-council is based on the assumption that the mayor performs the function of executive power, while the council is legislative. Thus, these findings contribute to the *mayoral triumphalism* criticized by Bazurli et al. [55], as a previous study Lerner & Schugurensky [56] shows that - thanks to PB - politicians are also learning and changing.

Some of the examples of PB in the world (namely, municipalities in France* or Brazil [26] prove the effect on the initiation and implementation of PB when the idea is fostered during the *electoral campaign*. Interviews with the mayors of the respective PB starter municipalities revealed that none of them included PB as an important focus in their *electoral programs*[†] (*factor 2*). Nonetheless, the idea itself was not strange and quite often came up in conversation during the electoral campaign. In Lithuania PB is still an innovative challenge, but the informants have gained knowledge of how to implement this model from projects, twin city partners or political colleagues in advance. The results revealed that including PB in the electoral program or electoral campaign is not a significant factor in PB initiation and resiliency in the case of Lithuania at present. However, this is likely to be the starting point for other waves of PB adaptation in the future. As Gonçalves [57] points out, the different adaptation times for PB in municipalities will be important in assessing the effects of PB. This might also be influenced by the fact that the mayor's supportive team as well as opponents have strong political power, if one agrees with [27] stating that mayors are more willing to set PB when others are sufficiently weak.

Despite the absence of sufficient scientific research, the analysis of the mayors of the PB starters revealed them to be quite *experienced and skillful (factor 3)* in governing their respective municipalities. They might be novice mayors (i.e., elected for the first term), but have sufficient experience and are aware of the city's problems having served as members of local authorities. Though comparative analysis revealed no statistically significant differences among the eight PB starters and the remaining 52 mayors in terms of their experience and skills, this factor is important for the success of PB. Of eight PB starters, only one mayor does not have previous experience on the local council (though that person worked as a state vice-minister prior to the mayoral elections); the remaining seven previously served as municipality councilors for two or more terms and thus have gained skills and competences pertaining to their respective cities as they have had direct involvement in city affairs. In fact, all mayors in Lithuania can be considered skillful and competent in the field as only five (out of 60) could be labelled as total political novices with zero prior political/administrative experience. Therefore, previous (political/local) experience and skills can play a potentially important role in the resiliency of PB. Mayors with deep knowledge of the city's needs and problems as well as with competences in terms of governance can positively influence PB resilience.

The following two factors: *support at the local council (Factor 4)* and *executive and administrative support (factor 5)* evolved due to the unique Lithuanian model of local self-governance. A directly elected mayor together with the directly elected council compose the representative branch of local government, while the director of administration is the sole executive branch of the local government. In reality, the mayor can be both part of the political majority or part of the opposition to the council; thus, PB was researched considering its subjection to the mayors' political position. In only two of the eight PB starter municipalities did mayors have strong political support on the local council. As a matter of fact, most of the local councils in Lithuania have a fragile ruling majority. This circumstance may encourage some of the risks [58] associated with PB, namely the growth of political opposition and polarization. In one of the eight PB starters, the mayor and his political party shifted to the opposition on the local council at the end of 2020, but this did not affect the implementation of PB. Moreover, the allocated sum for PB was increased from EUR 50,000 to EUR

* [Participatory Budgeting in Paris, France – Participedia](#)

[†] Meanwhile, at least several mayors of PB follower municipalities (Klaipėda city and Kretinga district) have included the initiation of a participatory budget in their election program.

180,000 in the budget of 2021 with the overall consent of all political powers at this local council. All eight PB starters expressed strong belief in the future of PB and have not reduced the budget for this initiative (five PB) or even increased (three PB) the allocations, regardless of the impact of and uncertainty surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic. The results revealed that the crisis has no influence on the resiliency of PB when it is a novelty in governance. There can be several reasons for the constancy, but following the example of Toronto or Vancouver in Canada, in Lithuania there are predominantly short-term pilot projects that do not require a great deal of resources and time. These projects can be implemented in a single year and add significant value to the political weight of the mayor.

Demographic factors (namely *gender, age, and education – factor 6*) and their influence on PB implementation are typically analyzed through the perspective of the civic participants in PB, but not mayors. The application of these characteristics in the research appeared to be quite challenging in Lithuania. The gender factor is not applicable to the research as there are only five women among 60 mayors in Lithuania and it is thus not possible to conduct valid research. The data of gender representation at local councils in Table 3 revealed that women are under-represented on the councils of eight PB starters.

Table 3. Gender representation in municipal councils of Lithuania

Municipality	Proportion of women on the local council (%)	Blau index	Representation index	Compared to the national average
Alytus city	34.6	0.453	72.1	↑
Kretinga district	25	0.375	60.31	↓
Lazdijai district	25	0.375	61.8	↓
Panevėžys city	30.77	0.426	64.1	↓
Panevėžys district	29.17	0.413	69.3	↑
Šiauliai city	26.7	0.391	61.27	↓
Vilkaviškis district	25	0.375	61.25	↓
Telšiai district	29.17	0.413	65.63	↓

Similar trends of under-representation of women at the local level have been identified by Maškarinec & Klimovský [59] in the post-communist states in Central and Eastern Europe and the USA [59]. However, other research findings by Zhang & Liao [60] argue that racial diversity leads to a higher level of PB. There are factors that can influence the limited number of women mayors, such as level or quality of representation and positioning of personal competences, previous experience, etc. [61].

No significant differences were observed when examining the age of the respective mayors (either by date of birth or membership of a given generation). Among the PB starters, the oldest mayor was born in 1952 (and belongs to the Baby Boomer generation) while the youngest was born in 1986 (and belongs to Generation Y). Education was revealed to be another complex factor. There is no legal regulation on the educational background of mayors in Lithuania. Despite this, all 60 mayors have a higher education background. Therefore, the field of study of their respective diplomas was analyzed as a factor that might influence the initiation and implementation of PB. Statistical analysis, however, revealed no significant differences.

Summing up the research results, some common characteristics of mayors concerning PB are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Mayoral characteristics impacting PB resiliency in Lithuania

Factor	Research results	Outcome/conclusion
No 1. Political affiliation.	All 8 PB starters' mayors are from center-left political organizations (i.e., parties and electoral committees).	Significant political interrelation (with domination of left-wing parties).
No. 2. Electoral Program.	No PB enshrined, but discussed verbally.	Knowledge and pilot practice of PB as governing innovation.
No 3. Political experience, specific skills and competencies pertaining to the city.	Of 8 PB starters, 7 mayors have previous experience in respective local councils, 1 worked as a vice-minister in the central government.	Personal political experience and skills Competencies in city affairs as council members.
No 4. Support at the local council; No 5. Executive or administrative support.	2 mayors with the strong support of a ruling majority on the local council; 5 mayors' parties belong to the ruling coalition; 1 mayor's party is in opposition to the local council.	Relation to ruling party or coalition and their support; collaboration with administration; Proactiveness and innovativeness.
No. 6. Gender and age proportion at the local council.	No valid results.	Proportions show inequality by gender and a wide age range. Gender and age are not influencing factors.

An analysis of mayoral influence on PB proves mayoral impact depending on personal, social or political characteristics as well as on economic or extreme challenges. Mayors of the respective municipalities are important enablers for the initiation of PB, as the interviews revealed their dominant role as PB initiators. The resiliency of PB depends more on the proactiveness and innovativeness of the mayors, which means the competences and skills to cooperate not only with the political and administrative supporters but also with the opposition. Political support on the local council as well as executive and administrative support were viewed as very important and necessary during the Covid-19 pandemic by all informants.

6- Discussion

6-1- Further Research Ideas

A modern and educated mayor, being responsible for the welfare of his or her city, should be aware of governance as a modern model of governing in the 21st century and its improvement while engaging citizens, stakeholders and nongovernmental organizations in the process of PB. Actually, some research emphasizes a decline in governance standards, revealing aspects of unfairness, and limited efforts to engage the poor, the elderly and youth, minorities, the technologically uneducated, etc. The allocation of finances in some cases is given as a factor in the declining level of equality, protecting the groups that “push” their specific ideas with no real needs being paid attention to. These examples lead to the idea that PB discourse has not yet been fully researched and many questions still remain open. The impact of the mayor and the political affiliation could be researched in these contexts.

e-PB and sustainability are innovations that are both interrelated and require further scientific attention. Innovations and global issues foster innovation by everyone; thus, PB has been proposed to serve as a platform where all engaged parties can learn [62] from each other: mayors, council members, and civil servants on one side and society on the other. This idea lifts PB to a higher level of complexity and can be discussed in the interdisciplinary field.

The example of Lithuania, with the direct election of mayors, has been given. Indeed, the findings can differ in the countries with indirect mayoral elections. As Baldersheim et al. [41] state, a directly elected mayor has the greatest scope for acting individually and taking personal initiatives. Adams & Ramsde [8] therefore, warn about the possible danger when a government process relies on one leader's will. According to the authors, the continuity and stability of the process can be very fragile during the change in leadership. In the Lithuanian case, PBs do not rely only on the mayors' wills and are influenced by political affiliation, the support of the council and administration as well. This provides conditions for the overall success of the PB initiative, especially in uncertain times of specific crises (i.e., Covid-19). Further research would be helpful, not only to reveal the facts around the individual impact of (in)directly elected mayors in other post-Soviet and Western countries, but also to find commonalities and differences among them.

Previous studies proved that the social and personal characteristics of mayors are significant in successful governance [34, 35]. According to Baldersheim et al. [41], mayors' education, age, gender and political style are facilitating factors. Mayors are powerful actors in global and local affairs [36-38]. According to Barber [34], a preference for pragmatism and practical problem-solving over ideology is a feature of a successful mayor. However, social and personal characteristics should be further researched as the case of Lithuania did not reveal them to be significant.

It is worth mentioning that a significant number of mayors in Lithuania have sufficient experience as managers (as the heads or deputies of public entities or private enterprises) prior to their election as mayors. Management is treated as a very valuable competence in a modern governance model. Therefore, management experience might be considered as a factor for similar future research, as this feature of mayors is as yet unresearched.

Brollo & Troiano [45] propose some advantages of female mayors such as them being less engaged in corruption and hiring fewer public employees during election years. Maškarinec and Klimovský [59] asserts that feminine quality and honesty are advantages of female mayors. However, female mayors attract lower contributions to reelection and have less chance of being reelected than their male counterparts. The analysis of gender representation at local councils revealed the PB starters in Lithuania to be quite male-dominated councils with the majority of mayors being male. According to Heinelt et al. [44], male leaders are significantly more common in more populous territories with higher education, but lower for left-wing mayors. In the case of Lithuania, center-left political parties are predominant among those which already implement PB, and thus more females should be seen in mayoral positions. Female mayors, according to Baldersheim et al. [41], can be inclined to search for new ideas on how to run a municipality and thus drawn into new networks locally and internationally. Despite the fact that previous research revealed fragmented advantages of female mayors, the overall picture of female mayors still needs more analysis set against the ‘old-boys’ networks’ of traditional male mayors [41]. On the other hand, Frey [63] argues that a participatory budget is not automatically gender-oriented, just as a gender-based budget is not automatically participatory. This topic may also lead to some scientific discussion and further research.

Maškarinec & Klimovský [59] has found that women candidates are seen by voters as less experienced than their male opponents, and proposes to pay greater attention to campaign messaging. Why not include PB messaging in the electoral program then? The experience of mayoral candidates in municipalities in France or the Workers' Party in Brazil [26] proves that communication of the PB concept during the election campaign is beneficial and adds extra political value. On the contrary, the example of the Czech Republic argues that PB is not strongly related to traditional electoral participation [64]. Emphasis on gender peculiarity was not made by the sources. Further research on election results would be supportive in order to reveal the added value of PB in electoral programs or campaigns. As the gender aspect has not been the subject of much scientific attention to date, further research could examine the relationship between communication of PB in election campaigns and gender.

The pandemic crisis in 2020 has brought about significant changes to the future of PB, which is now primarily perceived to be a long-lasting project. Terminations or suspensions of PB in various cases can raise concerns as to whether the Covid-19 pandemic crisis has started a new era of PB shrinkage, and requires that one keep a close eye on further PB research.

6-2- Limitations

As with any social scientific endeavor, this study has some limitations. The main limitation is that not all Lithuanian municipalities (39 of 60) are more or less associated with PB and not all could be researched. Also, participatory budgeting is not imperatively regulated (obligatory) in Lithuania. The decisions taken by every municipality depend on the mayor and political will. State government decisions on national budget reallocations during the Covid-19 pandemic did not influence restrictions on, nor the reduction of, municipal PB. In actual fact, a very small number of Lithuanian municipalities were researched; hence, a comparison with similar municipalities in other countries as well as with municipalities which have state regulations pertaining to PB or the indirect election of mayors would be beneficial.

The next limitation is related to the conditions of lockdown during the pandemic that periodically occurred during the research period. The period of PB implementation is quite short in Lithuania, and interpretation of the resiliency of PB in these municipalities is relative. Further research in the field should be carried out.

7- Conclusions

Participatory budgeting has become an attractive innovation in the modern world. The initiative is acceptable to a wide range of political parties on both sides of the political spectrum. The integration of PB in budget allocation shows friendliness to the residents and invites them to participate in the decision-making process for the wellbeing of the city. Citizens obtain a platform to express their needs and wishes for the city's development and its welfare. Such participation leads to the adjustment of municipal finances for the greatest satisfaction of citizens' needs. PB also plays an educational role, as during the PB process citizens gain knowledge on the public policy process as PB opens up municipal accounting affairs to the citizens. A better understanding of public policy increases engagement and conditions a more positive attitude of society to public decisions. Higher numbers of different stakeholders and social groups involved in the PB process creates more fairness and more democracy in the municipality. Meanwhile, the contrary arguments against the benefit of PB deconstruct its positive image. From the perspective of political critics, the PB process faces the problem of fairness because the winning project depends to a large extent on the ability to mobilize the largest group of voters to successfully push one's ideas. PB is also criticized for not representing the diversity of participants. Women, youth, minorities, the elderly, the less educated and non-indigenous participation still remains limited. PB is often mocked as a mere flirtation with the population with no real engagement of citizens in the decision-making process.

It has been suggested that active mayoral policy can influence the PB process since this idea was first included in an electoral campaign. Mayors are receptive to the idea for various reasons: to gain increased popularity and to be reelected; to claim more governing power; to look for more efficiency in governing; to deepen democracy, etc. Powerful mayors can set PB alone, but in most cases, they need the support of the council regardless of whether they are part of the governing majority or in opposition. Political cohesion with council members and administrators creates conditions for the fluent implementation and resiliency of PB. Strong interconnectivity between the mayor and the council (whether the majority or the opposition) leads to collective decision-making on PB and strong political and administrative support for the overall success of PB. Despite the fact that political aspects are dominant in the case of Lithuania, the inclusion of PB in the electoral program or electoral campaign is not related to successful PB initiation or durability. Instead, mayors' political experience and practice are more significant factors in PB success. Neither the age nor level of education of the mayors are influential factors in PB of Lithuanian municipalities. Furthermore, the underrepresentation of women confirms trends from previous similar research. In Lithuania, on the one hand, PB is not under strict regulation, which makes it possible to flexibly adapt PB according to the local needs. On the other hand, in such a young democracy, clear regulation and rules could help to foster such innovation.

The PB model seems to be very beneficial during times of crises as it activates civic participation and helps to concentrate on finding a joint solution to common issues in order to find a common consensus. Changing central policies

and uncertainty during the Covid-19 pandemic reduced resources and forced mayors, in cooperation with local authorities, to seek new modes for policy implementation and public functioning. In such circumstances the role of a directly elected mayor (as in Lithuania) stood out rapidly, as mayors are valued as the primary leaders and rulers of cities. Citizens expected proper and timely responses to the crisis and the swift restoration of public services. This study proved that mayors in Lithuania were especially powerful in the initiation of PB. Proactiveness and personal engagement, specific knowledge, and competencies pertaining to the city are influential factors in the implementation of PB. Therefore, when citizens in municipalities with direct mayoral elections strive for successful PB, they should vote for a person with the above individual, social and political characteristics. The research added scientific value to the discourse of participatory budgeting by analyzing its aspects in a country which is a young democracy during the pandemic. The study has placed the theory of what makes a successful mayor in the context of PB. The findings can be applied to further research, both to develop the theory of what makes a successful mayor and the discourse surrounding participatory budgeting, and for practical use in local policy and administration.

8- Declarations

8-1- Author Contributions

Conceptualization, V.B. and G.B.T.; methodology, V.B. and G.B.T.; validation, V.B., G.B.T. and J.D.; formal analysis, V.B., G.B.T. and J.D.; investigation, V.B., G.B.T. and J.D.; resources, V.B., G.B.T. and J.D.; data curation, V.B. and G.B.T.; writing—original draft preparation, V.B. and J.D.; writing—review and editing, V.B. and J.D.; visualization, V.B.; supervision, J.D.; project administration, J.D.; funding acquisition, J.D. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

8-2- Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

8-3- Funding

The paper was prepared within the scope of the project #R084 EmPaci of the Interreg Baltic Sea Region.

8-4- Ethical Approval

Not applicable.

8-5- Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of this manuscript. In addition, the ethical issues, including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and/or falsification, double publication and/or submission, and redundancies have been completely observed by the authors.

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