

First announcement

International Congress on People's Budgeting Models

Note now: 21.01. - 22.01.2010 - Berlin, Germany

**Representation of the Land of North-Rhine/Westphalia
Hiroshimastrasse 12 - 16, 10785 Berlin, Germany**

21.01.2010, 12:00 – 18:00

22.01.2010, 09:30 – 15:00

Background:

People's budgeting first saw the light of day in 1989. This was the year in which it was introduced for the first time, in Porto Alegre in Brazil. There are now almost 200 municipalities in Brazil practicing the *Orçamento Participativo*, as it is called there. People's budgeting has proven its worth as an important instrument in the fight against corruption, and as a means of reducing poverty. But not only there. People's budgeting has now caught on not only in other emerging economies, but also in many industrialised nations too. Here, people's budgeting focuses on the careful disclosure of what have hitherto been largely untransparent consultative processes. This can promote citizen participation, and is seen as a means of reducing political apathy and indifference. And in the Global North too, people's budgeting is being used as a tool for managing the financial crisis at the municipal level, and as a way of tackling structural sources of poverty, e.g. disadvantaged urban districts.

People's budgeting seeks to help make the very core of municipal policy more transparent and more efficient. Public participation in municipal budget planning aims to provide citizens with new opportunities to articulate and contribute their ideas, advice, proposals and knowledge to the consultative processes of administrators and policy makers. In these times of increasingly scarce resources, this helps ensure that decisions on public expenditure and savings are taken not over citizens' heads, but together with them. Citizens are the experts in everyday knowledge. Through the people's budgeting procedures citizens become motivated to help make their municipalities sustainable. The active citizens' municipality then becomes not just a vision, but an emerging political reality.

People's budgeting can deliver a contribution toward democratisation. Nevertheless there are no grounds for euphoria. Right now just under a mere fifty municipalities in Germany have introduced people's budgeting. Several more are discussing the possibility. In the European context too only a few countries and municipalities have achieved the distinction of making progress with people's budgeting. So is people's budgeting in Europe a utopian idea?

Beyond Brazil there are many municipalities in so-called developing countries practicing people's budgeting. What contribution can it make there toward poverty reduction? Which procedures and instruments are transferrable to Europe?

The year 2009 marks several historic anniversaries of events that were of considerable significance for social processes in Europe (60 years of the Basic Law in West Germany, 20 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall, followed by efforts to build democracy in the former "East Bloc" states, EU accession by several states, and efforts to build a "Common House" of Europe etc.). In this context, people's budgeting can become a catalyst for stronger democracy here too.

Goals and content:

The success of people's budgeting depends in many areas on the frameworks put in place by policy makers and administrators. This congress will engage decision makers and opinion makers from the spheres of policy making and administration in constructive dialogue. Furthermore, experiences with existing people's budgeting models in the European context will be compared and discussed. The debate will be enriched with non-European expertise provided by selected distinguished speakers.

The congress is designed to move forward the opinion-making process at the municipal and policy-making levels in the national and international contexts. It is envisaged that both policy makers and administrative specialists will then be motivated to introduce people's budgeting.

People's budgeting generates a number of question marks and controversial issues that the congress will aim to address. These include:

- What is the relationship between participatory instruments such as people's budgeting, and representative democracy?
- Is representative democracy made stronger or weaker by people's budgeting?
- Is federalism (decentralisation) conducive to its introduction, or a constraint?
- What is the relationship between people's budgeting and formally prescribed procedures?
- How should people's budgeting be implemented? What procedures and instruments exist worldwide? What are their respective focuses and differences? What are their commonalities?
- Which approaches can be transferred and utilised?
- To what extent can people's budgeting be standardised nationally and internationally?
- How can people's budgets be compared and their result(s) measured?
- What are the indicators that measure the success of a people's budget?
- Is people's budgeting also an appropriate tool for poverty reduction in Europe?
- Can people's budgeting mobilise, support and further develop the engagement of politically marginal groups, or are certain sections of the population marginalised by the people's budgeting process?
- What role do the new media play in the implementation of people's budgets (e-participation)?
- Can people's budgeting also be implemented at the regional and national levels?

Target group:

Approximately 200 decision makers and opinion makers from the spheres of policy making and administration (both with and without experience in people's budgeting) from right across Europe. Since people's budgeting is a managerial decision-making issue, the congress is aimed at the key decision makers for its introduction.

Methods:

Inputs and discussions in plenary, workshops/working groups, pro and contra debates, fishbowl, project presentations, poster presentations

Working languages:

German and English, translation and interpretation services will be provided.

Organisers:

Federal Agency for Civic Education/Service Agency Communities in One World, Inwent (Capacity Building International, Germany)

For further information on people's budgeting in Germany and on the organisers, please visit: www.buergerhaushalt.de, www.service-eine-welt.de, www.bpb.de