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INNOVATIONS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT BUDGETING IN SLOVAKIA¹

Peter Čajka – Andrea Čajková*

The budgeting of local governments is a field which attracted huge attention recently. This fact is linked not only to reform and decentralization trends (e.g., implementation of various tools of fiscal decentralization) but also to a recent experience with the impacts of the global financial crisis that was a serious challenge for both central governments and local governments at municipal as well as regional level. However, local budgets cannot be understood as purely economic tools. On the contrary, they are also programs that show the values and priorities of relevant local governments. On this matter, it is no surprise that in this field one can identify various innovations of both economic and broader socio-political nature. Our research intention is associated with three clear innovations that have affected the budgeting of local governments in all economically developed countries, namely performance budgeting, gender (sensitive) budgeting, and participatory budgeting.

As for the main goal of the scientific project “Innovations in Local Government Budgeting in Slovakia” addressed with the financial support of the Agency for the Support of Science and Research of the Slovak Republic, the research team wants to find out how much the identified budgeting innovations are being used in practice, what are drivers and barriers of their implementation, and what are both intended and unintended outcomes/effects linked to their use. For this purpose, not only mapping but also quantitative and qualitative assessment

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analyses of their different implementation models are employed.

Within the partial objectives, the project team strives to achieve the following: to elaborate a state of art in the field of selected innovations in budgeting (in Slovakia and abroad); to classify selected innovations in local budgeting in terms of their implementation models; to compare used innovations in local budgeting in terms of implementation models in selected European countries and Slovakia; to chart the rate of use of the budgeting innovations in Slovakia at the municipal and regional levels (including drivers and barriers of their implementation); to compare the rate of budgeting innovation in Slovakia with the rate of budgeting innovation in selected European countries; to apply existing quantitative evaluation methodologies focused on budgeting innovations using data from the Slovak practice; to test modifications of quantitative evaluation methodologies focused on budgeting innovations; to propose a comprehensive set of qualitative criteria for qualitative evaluation of budgeting innovations; to verify the applicability of the set of quality criteria for qualitative evaluation of budgeting innovations using data from the Slovak practice; to prepare recommendations for municipal/regional governments in the field of budgeting innovations at the municipal or regional level.

The project consortium consists of four universities, namely Comenius University in Bratislava, University of Economics in Bratislava, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, and University of SS. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava.

In addition to the implementation of research and publication activities, many activities for students are carried out within the project activities, especially at the level of lectures by foreign experts at the participating universities. This category includes recently presented lecture by Ondřej Ryboň, a representative of Agora Central Europe, who delivered a guest lecture focused on citizen participation at the local level for students of the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Arts, Comenius University in Bratislava on April 25, 2022. Ondřej Ryboň focused on the importance of inclusion in terms of real citizen participation and various communication techniques in his lecture. A specific part of his lecture was focused on participatory budgeting, its strengths and weaknesses. He tried to demonstrate basic rules and steps of surveying people's emotional response to their environment as they walk through some street or other public space of a particular urban area.

The solved problem is often presented abroad by the researchers of the project, other lectures include, for example, the lecture of Daniel Klimovský, who

delivered a guest lecture at the Institute of Political Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University in Prague on March 31, 2022. His lecture was entitled "Participatory Budgeting: International Experience" and besides various international experience with participatory budgeting, its diffusion, and adoption in very diverse conditions, Daniel Klimovský also presented selected results of this research project and promoted the project itself as well as its activities.

The members of the project team also bring the latest research findings through guest lectures such as the Tomáš Černěňko and Andrea Čajková, who delivered a guest lecture for students of the Faculty of National Economy, University of Economics in Bratislava on April 11, and April 4, 2022. Tomáš Černěňko presented a lecture on "Efficiency of Public Budgeting of Local Governments in the Current Economic Conditions" addressed on several important issues linked to the efficiency of public budgeting at the local level in his lecture with several practical examples from local governments in Slovakia and during the discussion with participating students he pointed out main limitations of local public budgeting in Slovakia. Andrea Čajková's lecture focused on "Program Budgeting - Challenges and Barriers". In her lecture, she focused on both the theoretical background of this kind of budgeting and practical experience. She presented especially experience in Slovakia, and she pointed out not only the present state but also events that led to the introduction of the program budgeting at various levels of government.

Since the beginning of the project, the issue has been presented many dozens of times at foreign and domestic universities, as well as at dozens of international scientific conferences at home and abroad.

Many scientific publications were published within the project outputs, such as the textbook *Participatory Budgeting (contexts, models and practical experiences)* by Klimovský et al. (2021), chapters of books such as "Participatory budgeting (contexts, models and practical experiences)" (Klimovský, Gašparík, 2020), or "On the way to an effective decentralized state: selected questions and challenges" (Klimovský, Černenko, 2022), but also scientific papers as "Participatory Budgeting and its implementation within the Self-Governing Regions in Slovakia (Čajková, Novák, 2022)," "The Introduction of the Charter of Good Participatory Budgeting in Slovakia: The Insiders' Story" (Klimovský, Hrabínová, 2022), "Youth Engagement in Participatory Budgeting. Case Study of Kutná Hora (2019-2020)" (Balážová, 2021)," "Selected Factors Determining the Adoption and Use of Participatory Budgeting in Central and Eastern Europe" (Klimovský, Junjan, Nemeč, 2021) and many others. At international conferences

were presented and published contributions on the topics: eg. "Selected Forms of Civic Participation" (Jančovičová Bognárová, Neubauerová, Zubaľová, 2022), Participatory budgeting: absence of legislation and previous experience of local governments in Slovakia (Klimovský 2021), "Strategic Planning at the Level of Self-Governing Regions" (Butoracova Sindleryova, Garaj, 2021), or "Representation of women in political structures as a tool for the application of gender equality in the current economic conditions" (Neubauerová, Zubaľová, 2021) and dozens of others.

In the near future, the participating universities are preparing two important international scientific conferences, where partial areas of research will be communicated. Specifically, the conference "Gender Equality and Gender-Sensitive Budgeting in Theory and Practice", will be organized on 12 - 13 September 2022 by the University of Economics in Bratislava. Another will be the "Interpolis" conference focusing on performance budgeting, organized on October 27, 2022 by Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica. The final international scientific conference of the project will take place in the first half of 2023 and will be organized by the Faculty of Social Sciences UCM in Trnava.

The project team still has a long way to go to achieve the project's goals, but it is already able to present itself with dozens of high-quality scientific outputs that bring partial results. At the same time, through defended and processed diploma and dissertation theses connected with the solved problem, it is possible to actively involve other students in the researched area and thus the users of results in practice in the future.

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