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Inclusion as ownership in participatory budgeting: facilitators' interpretations of public engagement of children and youth

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ABSTRACT

This article draws from two cases of participatory budgeting (PB) in Poland and Finland to explore PB as an inclusive practice of involving children and youth in local governance. Scrutinizing interpretations of facilitators involved in the creation of PB, we analyze the motivation for incorporating children and youth into governance and how their engagement was conducted from the view of ownership. We identify *ownership* as a central element of inclusion when children and young people are invited to participate in public matters. Our conceptualization distinguishes four analytical dimensions of ownership: ownership of (1) process, (2) issue, (3) action produced, and (4) decision-making. Additionally, we argue that from the view of PB facilitators, encouraging the ownership of children and young people to PB involves four functions: carrying out a legally mandated task, identifying topical issues, developing tools of support, and constructing a motivational link between school and society. We highlight that ownership can potentially contribute to the challenges of engagement experienced in PB initiatives. However, promoting ownership possesses a risk of disempowering the participants and raises concern about the relation between ownership and the level of genuine inclusion.

Introduction

In recent years, local governments in Europe have remodeled their participatory frameworks, motivated by two main reasons. First, grounding decision-making solely in elected politicians is fraught with many deficiencies (Urbinati and Warren 2008). Second, the idea of local governance, including the aim of involving stakeholders from different sectors in decision-making, has made a significant contribution to the growth of new forms of civic engagement. In this context, local authorities began to look for innovative instruments to encourage citizen involvement (Cornwall and Coelho 2007), such as participatory budgeting (PB).

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PB has become one of the most popular tools for public engagement in governance (Dias 2019). In PB, people are invited, for example, by local governments to prioritize the allocation of public money. Citizens are involved in discussing spending priorities, suggesting specific proposals, and ultimately voting on what projects should be implemented by local authorities. Hence, PB builds on participatory decision-making process that, in theory, is deliberative, transparent and inclusive. The method originated in Brazil's Porto Alegre in the late 1980s and has since spread globally (Ganuza and Baiocchi 2012; Sintomer, Herzberg, and Röcke 2008).

As regards features supporting PB's popularity, the literature has identified its potential to strengthening democracy by giving citizens a powerful role in decision-making, empowering those who take part in it, and improving the level of public services (Cabannes 2004). PB is considered to increase trust in governance (Wilkinson et al. 2019), and it has the potential to involve marginalized or excluded groups from decision-making (Souza 2001; Hernández-Medina 2010). However, doubts have been raised whether PB leads to enhanced democracy or improves decision-making (Wu and Tzeng 2014). There is evidence that PB only attracts already politically engaged citizens, increases the level of frustration (Célérier and Cuenca Botey 2015 2015), and ultimately leads to low-level participation (Zepic, Dappand, and Krcmar 2017). Finally, some argue that PB results in processes where participation has only a 'cosmetic' or consultative role (Baiocchi and Ganuza 2014).

Acknowledging the criticisms of the democratic influence of PB, our aim is to study PB as a potentially influential participatory instrument to enhance the engagement of children and youth at the local level. If PB is approached as an inclusive process of involving children and youth in governance, we argue it is essential to scrutinize the inclusivity of its design, practices and actor positions. The rationale behind this approach is twofold. First, young people's inclusion in local governing possesses a risk of marginalization or adult manipulation (Hart 1992; Young 2002). Second, although initially PB was perceived as a tool focused on the problems of inclusion of marginalized groups (Shah 2007; Goldfrank 2007), later it became one of many available participatory instruments. Presently, within PB research and practice, especially in Europe, there remains a limited understanding of the PB with underrepresented groups. Therefore, our article contributes to critical studies of inclusion (Baiocchi 2003).

We draw on case examples of the City of Lublin, Poland, and the City of Tampere, Finland. With qualitative data collected among different stakeholders who are responsible for facilitating PB for children and young people, we ask what is meant by 'inclusion' when this group is involved in PB. We consider this perspective crucial, as one of the key challenges for governance is to address the problem of who can be included and to what extent included individuals influence decision-making (Ganuza and Francés 2012; Holdo 2020, 1353). In this context, the earlier studies suggest that inclusive participation is difficult to achieve as vulnerable groups are easily excluded (Baiocchi 2003; McNulty 2015). However, 'the extent' of the real inclusion in decision-making is hard to assess, as it seems to be contingent on the case and the design of specific mechanisms (Fung and Wright 2003). Therefore, we analyze the inclusion of children and young people from the view of PB facilitators to investigate how they, as architects of local participative frameworks, picture and promote young people's inclusion in PB (cf. Yang and Callahan 2007).

Based on our data, we identify *ownership* as a central element of inclusion when children and young people are invited to participate in public matters.

Regarding young people, we use United Nation's definition. Children are understood as people under the age of 18, while persons between the ages of 15 and 24 are considered young (The United Nations 2021). At the same time, we investigate their participation in local governance as a group, thus the specific age categories and classifications are not of key importance. Furthermore, we explore children and youth PBs in specific urban environments, where PB facilitators have engaged with children and young people who are publicly aware, meaning eager to cooperate with PB facilitators.

First, we discuss the inclusion of children and young people in local governance and the concept of ownership. Then we introduce the examined cities, data, and methods. In the empirical analysis, we develop four analytical dimensions of ownership, based on which we note that, from the view of PB facilitators, encouraging ownership among children and young people plays different functions for local governance. We conclude that the input of children and young people into PB is perceived as a kind of invitation for this group to local governance. However, promoting ownership possesses a risk of disempowering the participants and raises concern about the relation between ownership and the level of genuine inclusion.

Inclusion of children and young people in local governance and the concept of ownership

The interest in involving children and young people in decision-making is visible both at the level of globally operating international organizations and in the EU (Youth policy 2022; European Youth Goals 2022), nation states, and local governments (Kay and Tisdall 2013). Often the latter are recognized as a perfect arena for testing new ideas, including instruments that aim at the involvement of underrepresented or excluded groups (Hernández-Medina 2010). Experiencing frequent exposure to marginalization in political decision-making, children and youth constitute one such group.

In terms of inclusion, children and youth are easily positioned outside the realm of 'politics' and its 'rational' or 'deliberative' dimensions. The limited role of children and young people in politics derives partly from a view that considers them incapable of making rational decisions in political terms (Elwood and Mitchell 2012). Against this background, the process of involving them in local governance is likely to encounter obstacles. On the one hand, they are often portrayed as *objects* rather than subjects of policy-making, which can be exemplified by the fact that most of public authorities work *for* children and young people rather than **with** children and young people. On the other hand, it is difficult to go beyond consulting children and youth to create a framework that is based on genuine dialogue, mutuality, and integration (Taylor and Percy-Smith 2008). Furthermore, it is easy to create pseudo-forms of involvement in which young people have no or very little control over what they do or how they contribute (Hart 1992).

Approaching this group from a different view, the fields of children's geographies and geographies of youth, stress that, instead of a marginalized group, policy objects or institutional recruits, they should be considered active social and cultural beings with the ability to act as full-fledged community members (Kallio and Häkli 2013). This strand of research emphasizes that, if given the opportunity, young people can serve as capable

members of society, much like other underrepresented groups. Providing an opportunity to participate in public matters, experiments have encouraged self-respect in children and young people, supported them in becoming more knowledgeable about and adept at expressing themselves, increased their awareness of public matters, and resulted in more inclusive policy-making (Bosco 2010; Kay and Tisdall 2013). At the same time, their involvement may have a positive impact on local authorities and communities (West Berkshire Children & Young People's Trust 2010).

However, to find participation in public matters relevant for them, this group must regard both participatory tools and public matters as meaningful in their daily lives and communities. This entails feeling a sense of *ownership* of these issues.

Traditionally, the concept of ownership has been understood to mean the control of physical or intellectual property and goods. However, the idea has also been recognized as a critical element of community inclusion and public participation in local governance. For example, community development studies have discussed a sense of ownership as key in enhancing people's participation (Moran 2004; Ritchie et al. 2004). When people become authentically engaged, it is assumed that their dedication to the cause strengthens. As a result, positive outcomes, such as well-being, capacity building, community control, autonomy, and ownership, are created (Moran 2004). Lachapelle (2008, 52) describes ownership 'as a concept through which to assess whose voice is heard, who has influence over decisions, and who is affected by the process and outcome'.

The scholarship of democratic theory has however indicated challenging aspects of ownership. These include a risk that it becomes a tool to make underrepresented groups responsible for their own inclusion or that it moves responsibility to those who 'own' the process (Cruikshank 1999). The literature suggests that ownership can impact power relations, including the fact that owners of the process are not eager to challenge certain issues (Curato, Hammond, and Min 2019). Finally, in the context of children and youth participation, an open question remains to what extent this group can 'own' participation, if they cannot be held accountable for the decisions made (Fung 2001).

Based on the literature, we suggest that ownership can be approached as participants' perspectives on their involvement as well as a participation strategy by authorities. Focusing on the latter, the more hierarchical approach to ownership as the ideal notion of policymakers and local administration, we distinguish how facilitating children's and young people's participation as a kind of 'pedagogization' (Lüküslü et al. 2019, 67) may, instead of being an inclusive endeavor initiating ownership, end up producing controversiality in participation of children and youth in PB.

The case studies

In this research, we analyzed two cities that have developed their democratic frameworks: Lublin (Poland) and Tampere (Finland). Following Biesta and Lawy (2006, 74), we consider the inclusion of children and young people as a situational and relational process, which emphasizes the influence of the context where they live and participate. Therefore, the cities exemplify two local government traditions, Nordic and Central European (Loughlin, Hendriks, and Lindström 2012), and two differing democratic and political environments. We treat the cities as idiographic case studies (Levy 2008)

as our aim is to obtain an in-depth understanding of children and youth inclusion and by that to contribute to the critical theory of participation.

Lublin

With approximately 343,000 inhabitants, Lublin is a major city in Eastern Poland. It is governed by a 31-member city council and directly elected mayor. The council is divided into a ruling party and opposition. Lublin is considered a pioneering Polish city that spearheaded implementation of innovative reforms that widen citizens' role in local democracy (Radzik-Maruszak and Bátorová 2015).

Reforms in Lublin began with a change in local leadership in 2010. The newly elected mayor emphasized that the city's decision-making was too remote from residents. On this basis, the participative framework underwent pronounced transformation, including closer cooperation with civil society activists, new forms of consultations, and a PB pilot. In 2013, the city organized the first round of PB. Since then, PB has been undertaken every year, although its principles, structure, and rules have evolved. Based on the legislative amendments introduced in 2018, PB became an officially institutionalized tool for public engagement in Poland's local governance.[1] The changes included abolishing the age limit of PB participants. As a result, city recognized PB as one form of public consultation and accorded all residents. On average the city allocates 0.75% of its total budget into PB (Braun and Marzec-Braun 2021, 29).

In 2019, the city initiated a city-wide Youth Participatory Budgeting (YPB). YPB was directed at children, youth, and students, and was related to the activities of the Youth City Council (YCC) in cooperation with a local NGO. The budget of the first YPB was rather low – approximately €22,000. Children, young people, and students from Lublin could receive financial support for the implementation of their initiatives (€250 for small, €680 for medium-sized, and €1140 for large projects). In the first YPB round, 53 proposals were submitted, 15 prepared by and for children, 26 by and for the youth, and 12 by and for students (Teatrikon 2020). After review, 33 were funded altogether. The decision on granting funding was taken by a special jury. In the children's category, among others, projects related to forgotten backyard games and prohibition of hatred in internet were funded. In the youth category financed were initiatives linked *inter alia* to healthy lifestyle, and in the last category, projects for students, funding got projects connected with scientific conferences and summer schools (Portal kominalny 2019).

Tampere

Tampere is a city in southern Finland with a population of over 235,000. Power in the city is divided between a 67-member city council and a city board headed by the mayor. Among Finnish local governments, Tampere is recognized for its aims to maintain the quality and efficiency of public services while securing citizen involvement in municipal decision-making (Radzik-Maruszak and Bátorová 2015, 92).

Tampere has a long tradition of developing participatory practices. However, while acknowledging that those experiments were controversial and full of tensions between participating actors, the city organized a PB pilot in 2014–2015 in a local neighborhood (Lehtonen 2022). This was followed in 2017 by a PB for children and young people

organized by the city's youth services unit. Together with educational services, the youth services unit annually allocates funding to projects that children and young people organize for their peers in schools or during leisure time. The amount of funding was originally €30,000, which was increased to €51,000 in 2023. At the time of data collection, the allocation of €30,000 was divided as follows: €15,000 for school day activities, €10,000 for leisure activities, and €5,000 for exercise activities among children and youth. In 2020, Tampere also started a city-wide PB with a budget of €450,000. The allocation forms approximately 0.03% of the city's annual budget.

The youth PB process, *Masseista mahiksia* ('Creating possibilities with cash'), starts when the youth services issue a call for children and young people to apply for funding. After reviewing the feasibility of all the proposals received, the youth services unit invites selected proposals to be presented at a PB event called *Massipäivä* ('Cash Day'). Usually, the event is organized as an exhibition where youth display their ideas at kiosks. During *Massipäivä*, a jury that consists of the youth decides how to allocate money between projects. During the data collection in 2020, in all categories funding was granted to activities, that the children and youth organized at school, in kindergartens or in leisure time. In total 28 proposals were funded. They provided social activities for the children and youth to act together and do something special than what is included in the kindergarten and schools' curriculums. These were, for example, a skateboarding event, a trip to a petting zoo, a theater visit, and a skiing trip. These would not have been implemented without PB as schools and kindergartens do not have funds for additional activities.

Data and methods

The principal data collected in 2019–2020 consists of 15 semi-structured interviews with PB facilitators: civil servants and schoolteachers in both cities, along with people working for NGOs in Lublin. The interviewees (seven in Lublin, eight in Tampere) were key actors at different stages of the PB process: civil servants from the departments responsible for framing PB procedures, and teachers and NGOs workers involved in PB planning and implementation. In Tampere, we also did ethnographic observation at the *Massipäivä* event.

Our focus on studying local authorities alongside other stakeholders was to identify the motivations for PB as well as practices of inclusion when inviting children and young people to participate in PB. We concentrated on public and social stakeholders to distinguish how local governance seeks to foster participation of this group in decision-making.

We used purposive sampling (Palinkas et al. 2015) and snowballing to reach key people involved in the PB. Interviews consisted of questions about the aims and practices of conducting PB, such as how it was arranged, what motivated the efforts to invite children and young people to participate, what kind of response PB received among these groups, and whether the experiences transformed participation in PB.

All the interviews were recorded and transcribed. We thematically interpreted the raw data we had gathered (McNabb 2013, 397–401). We first coded the data with main categories, such as aims, motivations, and meaning of PB. During analysis, we distinguished the concept of ownership in the interview talks as a crucial element of public
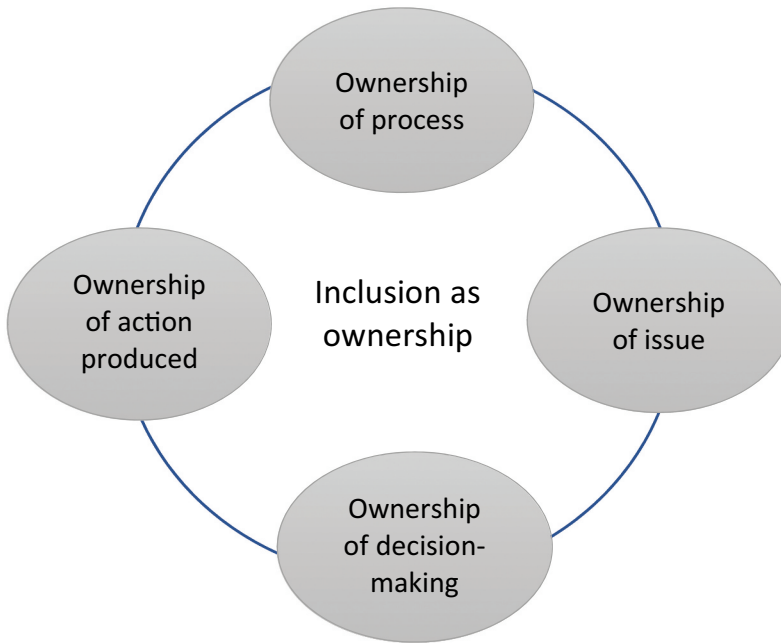
Scheme 1. Dimensions of ownership in a participatory process.

engagement. We proceeded with a closer analysis to distinguish the PB design, practices of participation and actor-positions in PB in relation to ownership. This analysis led us to develop an analytical framework of ownership in PB.

Dimensions of ownership in PB

Based on the analysis of the interviewed PB facilitators, we distinguished four analytical dimensions of the concept of ownership in PB: 1) *ownership of the process*, where we refer to who defines the terms of participation (PB design such as the rules, methods, and instruments of participation); 2) *ownership of the issue*, where we scrutinize actor positions; who gets to define the issue at hand and to set the stage for discussion; 3) *ownership of the undertaken action*, where we analyze how participatory action is produced; and finally, 4) *ownership of decision-making* that focuses on how decisions are made (Scheme 1).

Ownership of the process

In Lublin, the first step was to include children into the 'traditional' PB (TPB) that had operated there for several years. As our interviewees indicated, this was not a direct result of the willingness to include young people into decision-making; rather, it was an effect of changes in the interpretation of the law, meaning that everyone, including children and youth, has a right to participate in public consultations, which in Poland includes PB. Therefore, children and adolescents are on an equal footing with adults, with the right to submit projects, vote for one, and implement their ideas.

The process was divided into three steps. First, children and youth proposed projects that were verified by city officials in terms of feasibility. Next, the projects were opened to public voting; those that received enough votes were implemented. This relatively simple procedure, however, raised doubts and even criticism. On the one hand, officials, such as city lawyers, were not sure whether 'a person under the age of 13 can express his/her will by voting' (Lubelski 2018). On the other hand, city officials and representatives of the NGOs involved were not sure how to organize the process to equip children with a real impact on project submission and implementation (Hart 1992).

Although workshops where children and youth were taught how to prepare proposals were organized, their outcome was disappointing. In fact, most projects were not submitted *by* children but *for* children, for example, by kindergartens, schools, or NGOs. The doubts over how to organize a PB process did not vanish with the introduction of YPB in 2019. The YPB rules were established by NGOs that work in the youth sector. Certain types of projects were preferred, meaning proposals that accorded with the recommendations of the YCC and that were developed under the 'Youth in politics – Youth policy' project in the field of youth activation and vocational counseling, along with projects involving young people with fewer opportunities and those connected with gender balance (Lublin City Hall 2020).

In comparison to TPB, YPB was faster and less formal. The informal groups of children and adolescents, which included at least three people learning or studying in Lublin's schools or universities, could submit proposals to the NGO that coordinated the process. The proposals were evaluated by a jury composed of one representative of the YCC, two representatives of the Lublin Team for Children and Youth, the Mayor's Proxy for Children and Youth, and one representative of an NGO working with young people in Lublin. Finally, the winning projects were implemented with the support of the NGO workers, and municipal supervisors of youth participation.

In Tampere, local authorities created the framework for participation in children and young people's PB. The local youth services unit both provided the money to be allocated and coordinated the process, such as setting the PB design and timeframe. Motivation for the children and youth PB derived from an official task of encouraging inclusion of children and youth in society: 'In youth services, participation of children and youth is a really strong value in our work. PB fits perfectly in it' (civil servant, Tampere).

The procedure was structured as follows: first, young people and children came up with an idea; they then created a project group that developed the idea into a proposal to be submitted to the youth services unit for evaluation. If the proposal met certain criteria (such as whether it was implemented by youth themselves or targeted at more than a small group of young people), the project group was invited to present it at the *Massipäivä*. If the proposal collected enough votes from those at the event and an appointed PB jury, then it received funding. After the event, the group implemented the project and reported to the youth services unit how the project was undertaken.

In Tampere, children and youth are responsible for planning and implementing the projects. Authorities facilitate the process by providing resources and establishing the general framework. Appointed adults like schoolteachers and youth workers offer backup if needed, for example, in practicalities, such as money transfers if youth are under 18 years and not permitted to take care of financial issues on their own.

While children and youth PBs in both cities were initiated by following legislation or public duty, the design of PB differs between cities. In Lublin, the participation of children and youth was not separated from other groups of residents as it was originally included as part of the city-wide PB. In Tampere, the inclusion of children and youth was an independent, tailor-made process. This was partly due to varying approaches to public participation; in Lublin local administration sought to enable equal participation for all residents, whereas in Tampere the position of children and youth as a marginalized group from decision-making was prioritized by tailoring a participatory instrument for them.

Ownership of the issue

Public engagement studies have suggested that people become mobilized when an issue that they feel relevant is at stake (Marres 2007). Against this background, it can be stated that in PB people get to define important issues. Their participation begins when they identify a key issue.

In Lublin, the degree of mobilization and activities undertaken depended on the type of PB. According to our City Hall informants, in TPB that was addressed to all citizens, children and youth activity drew attention to issues that were often overlooked by adults, such as playgrounds, sports fields, or skateparks. However, a majority of juvenile proposals were offered by kindergartens and schools that were interested, for example, in improving their infrastructure. In this case, the role of participatory facilitators was mainly played by schoolteachers who took part not only in choosing the activity that could be submitted to PB but in coordinating the actions undertaken by their pupils as well. This was reflected in different ways by our informants.

On the one hand, city officials who were responsible for framing participation were frustrated to see issues important to children and adolescents somehow 'taken over' by adults e.g. playgrounds. There were even accusations of manipulation and setting goals that were not as important to youth as to schools. On the other hand, NGO members indicated that based on 'school projects,' 'some parents started talking to their children about PB projects and noticed the untapped potential of youth participation' (NGO member, Lublin). By contrast, in YPB, where only children, adolescents, and students had a right to submit proposals, the genuine activity of youth was more visible. Not only were most applications submitted by children and youth, as was reflected in the language of the proposals, but the proposals also covered a variety of issues from sports activities through environmental problems to scientific conferences that were fully connected with the wishes and needs of adolescents (Teatrikon 2020).

In Tampere, only children and youth proposed topics for PB. When presenting their proposals at the *Massipäivä* event, they emphasized their projects as enhancing a feeling of togetherness in schools. The projects facilitated doing something together, such as organizing a party for the whole school, a prom night for graduates, or a sports day. For example, students at a local elementary school applied funding to organize a spring celebration for graduating students. The students that formed the project group for the proposal were selected by voting between classes. The plan was to invite the whole school to the celebration to lift the school spirit. The idea came from the student board, the representative forum in the school:

> Previously the parents' association had sponsored a lunch for graduating students. But the students wanted to renew that. (--) The students decided to combine the lunch and a party for the whole school. (Schoolteacher, Tampere)

Interviewees in Tampere noted that young people committed to participation when they felt they could set the agenda. Having the power to define the focus of participation was noted as creating commitment in engagement (see, Body, Lau, and Josephidou 2020):

> I think it's extremely important that young people arrange the kind of activity for other youth that they themselves want. It comes from the young people that 'we want to act together.' It's not like adults saying, 'You could do it this way.' (--) That is perhaps the biggest value in it [PB] that they [the young] have the power to influence what they get. (Schoolteacher, Tampere)

In both cities, the proposal submission revealed actor positions and forms of power. In Lublin, adults, such as staff from kindergartens, were more capable in filing proposals than small children. Hence, they had more power in setting the scope for issues to be included in PB. In Tampere, local authorities aligned that only children and youth were eligible in filing proposals. However, the proposals needed to follow rules that the youth services unit defined. Furthermore, in both cities authorities used institutional power to define the criteria for acceptable proposals which clearly directed the scope of the submitted proposals. In Tampere, for example, the maximum funding of €1,000 per winning proposal obviously favored small scale projects, such as school events instead of city-wide projects.

Ownership of the action undertaken

Regarding the action undertaken, interviewees from both cities addressed two major issues – education and recognition. The educational value of PB was observed from the view of learning about one's role in one's 'local reality.' In Lublin's TPB, importance was placed on supporting families and building social bonds. Parents were perceived as participatory facilitators who not only help children gain knowledge and social skills but also transmit their thoughts into real actions:

> We assume that it is fun to involve children (--) to show them a positive civic attitude. (--) This may translate later into other actions. (--) A two- or three-year-old child will not even vote, but a four- or five-year-old can sit down with their parents, who explain to them what projects have been submitted and what can be done in their district. (Local Officer, Lublin)

The YPB in Lublin encourages children and youth to recognize the impact they can have on their everyday surroundings and how they can influence the activities that occur there. Children and youth were seen as key experts in the field who could identify the deficits in local policies and actions. At the same time, however, our informants indicated that the significant challenge in the YPB was to teach children and youth how to prepare proposals, as they often did not yet possess the required technical skills.

In Tampere, some teachers included PB as part of the schoolwork. For example, students at local vocational school participated in PB as part of their school assignment on project management. Their proposal, a winter game tournament, won funding and students organized it for pupils of the nearby elementary school.

In Tampere, the educational value was evident from the view of enhancing social skills and the understanding of collective action. According to the interviewees, the underlying aim of mobilizing the young is intertwined with encouraging a sense of community and the 'common good': 'They did not even think that they could apply for money for themselves. It was a starting point that they apply for the money to be able to provide something for others' (schoolteacher, Tampere). Having fun was inevitably linked to collective action: the interviewees indicated that succeeding together required an element that tied individuals to one another.

Children and young people have the power to come up with an issue, develop it into a proposal, and – if they succeed in receiving a grant – implement it. Engaging young people by giving them a free hand increased their responsibility for their activities. In Tampere, interviewees recognized that when young people feel they are doing their own project, they really commit to it.

The second important element that may encourage ownership of an action is public acknowledgment (Young 2000). In this context, the informants from both cities emphasized that giving credit to children and young people and recognizing their work rewards them; these gestures create meaning for their actions. In Lublin, the acknowledgment was manifested *inter alia* at YPB pre-meetings, where children and youth could discuss their proposals with city experts or in activities that were successfully implemented. In Tampere, the manifestation was constituted by an invitation to introduce projects at the *Massipäivä* and in successfully implemented projects: It's very important for the inclusion of a young person that one has a feeling of belonging somewhere. (—) One becomes heard and seen and sees what one can accomplish (civil servant, Tampere).

Ownership of decision-making

In Lublin, decision-making in PB differs based on PB type. In TPB, children and young people have the same rights as adults to submit and to vote for projects. The winning proposals must meet formal conditions established by the City Hall and then receive the most votes. This situation, however, revealed conflicting views about meeting legal requirements and recognizing children's agency: 'I think that if this was not about meeting legal requirements, city council would not support the involvement of children in PB' (local officer, Lublin). Additionally, some councilors questioned children's ability to make reasonable decisions:

> I took part in the meeting of one of the city council's committees, and one of the councilors indicated that when a child is one year old and has voting rights, it is an absurd situation and that he does not want to live in such a city. (NGO member, Lublin)

This statement must be interpreted in a political context. Since the mayor and his team, including ruling party councilors, were encouraging democratic development, the criticism came from opposition politicians. The situation was different with YPB, where no one questioned the agency of children and young people. At the same time, these groups were not given the right to choose the winning projects, which was carried out by a jury composed of representatives of YCC Lublin, the Team for Children and Youth (an NGO working for young people), and the Mayor's Proxy for Children and Youth.

In Tampere, the young were granted a legitimate role as decision-makers about PB funding. The decisions were made at *Massipäivä* by an appointed jury comprised of approximately 10 young people. The youth services unit issued an open call to serve on the jury and selected its members. All interested applicants were selected for the jury. Civil servants from the youth services unit met the jury three to four times before the *Massipäivä* event to discuss the PB procedure and the criteria that proposals must meet to win favor with jury members. At *Massipäivä*, the jury evaluated projects' feasibility, such as the financial resources being requested.

Alongside the jury, the audience at *Massipäivä* (pupils and students from schools and children from day care) received 'PB notes' that they casted as votes for the projects they wanted to support:

> The little ones from primary school were so excited; they experienced their role as very responsible. They interviewed the projects in a similar way as the jury. There were three girls who asked, "Well, what are you going to do with the money? Why is your budget like this?" (Civil servant, Tampere)

When making its final decision about the allocation of funds, the jury considered the votes of the audience. Paper notes, as a material element, concretize the ownership of children and young people: despite not being considered capable of, for example, voting in parliamentary elections, children and young people in Tampere's YPB are granted full civil rights, not excluding the ability to allocate public funding. However, this does not happen without adult control:

> Of course it depends on the teacher to talk about this opportunity, to tell about the schedule and what it [PB] requires. And to make sure that there is a working group for this that includes people that one can trust to implement the process. (Schoolteacher, Tampere)

In Tampere, the facilitators recognize their position but do not consider it as problematic. They consider their role as sharing information and supporting participation of the young. However, they failed to identify the problematics of the children and youth PB as an adult-initiated and adult-led institutional process where facilitators execute power, for example, by using their institutional position to include participation in PB as part of the curriculum or submitting proposals on behalf of small children without reading or writing skills.

Functions of ownership in the inclusion of children and young people

In this article, we have discussed youth PBs from the view of inclusion as ownership. Based on our data we argue that, from the viewpoint of PB facilitators, promoting ownership has four relevant functions when inclusion of children and young people is encouraged in local governance.

First, encouraging ownership is considered a legally appointed task in supporting the inclusion of children and young people in society. In both cities, legislation guides the duties and tasks of PB facilitators, especially local authorities, to provide tools for participation. In Lublin, inviting children and youth to local governance was related to changes in the national law, but it was local authorities and community activists who determined the size and scope of the actions undertaken. City officials, although it was

controversial to some, emphasized that children and youth are full citizens and thus have the right to decide on activities undertaken in the city. In Tampere, the motivation for initiating youth participation was found in the youth law, which mandates tasks for local administration to enhance the participation of youth. Additionally, in Tampere, authorities wanted to support the self-motivated participatory action of children and young people in local governance.

Second, supporting ownership may help identify issues that children and young people encounter in their daily lives and surroundings. This function seemed to have a particular importance in Tampere, where PB facilitators promote the youth PB to provide a channel to attract public attention to issues that occur in schools or during leisure time and need to be improved. In Lublin, PB facilitators underlined that incorporating children and youth in participatory procedures gave adults new insight into the world of this group.

Third, encouraging ownership potentially enables the development of tools to support children and young people in their journey toward adulthood. In Tampere, PB facilitators consider projects that young people and children submit and implement in PB to be helpful in responding to the challenges these groups face. PB can be an instrument to initiate tools for authorities to support young people and children in the challenges of their daily lives, such as improving the sense of community in schools. In Lublin, PB facilitators pointed out that, due to their own commitment, children and adolescents gain new civic skills and knowledge about the political process. Equally important is the ability to prepare and submit proposals, cooperating with other actors, such as city officers or teachers, and voting. According to the PB facilitators in Lublin, these factors contribute to strengthening social inclusion. However, PB is only one way to gain knowledge of the challenges that children and young people face, and it represents the views of particular, active group of adolescents.

Fourth, encouraging ownership may help support children and young people with their schoolwork. In Tampere, children and young people usually participate in PB as part of school assignments. As facilitators noted, constructing a link between schoolwork and out-of-school activities produced with the PB may motivate pupils and students to finish their classes and work together as a team. In Lublin, PB is not a school task, but many projects such as playgrounds were developed in cooperation with kindergartens and schools. That not only builds relationships between teachers and young people but shows young people how their commitment can transform their immediate surroundings. Importantly, in some cases the involvement of children and youth influenced their relations with parents and triggered the parents' interests in local political and community participation.

However, in the context of youth participation, promoting inclusion through the ownership of young people's engagement brings up the relation between ownership and status differences: being included does not always entail having one's views considered (Holdo 2020, 1353) as the case of youth PB in Lublin has shown. Having the kind of agency to act as a fully-fledged co-shaper of participatory spaces requires already a level of necessary social skills, knowledge, and motivation from participants but it is also dependent on other actors in the process, in our case, PB facilitators. As architects of participative frameworks, the facilitators are vested with powers to create dynamic spaces, where boundaries of participation can be negotiated, the agency of participants can become recognized, and where people can claim the roles of actors (ibid.). However,

in both cases children and youth were not granted a fully powerful role in the PB design, defining the issues and topics of proposals, or in the undertaken actions. This evokes a question whether promoting inclusion through ownership can ever be a genuinely equal process because of status differences and hierarchies of actors involved?

Conclusions

Traditionally, the state and local authorities are considered architects of participative frameworks. The introduction of PB potentially changes the situation. Although the procedures of participation are generally regulated by authorities, both the funding decisions and modes of implementation depend on the citizens who participate. In principle, the 'participatory strategy' of inviting children and youth to PB or creating a separate PB for them goes one step further and affects the process, issues, action undertaken, and decision-making.

In our study we scrutinized how the facilitators depicted the involvement of children and young people in PB through the concept of *ownership*, which we distinguish as the crucial element of inclusion from the view of facilitators (see Table 1). Studying this is important, we argue, to recognize how inviting citizens into decision-making may increase democratic legitimacy without democratizing or making participatory processes genuinely inclusive (Cruikshank 1999). By utilizing the notion of ownership, our analysis critically conceptualizes how to separate participatory processes that do offer inclusion and those that just give that appearance.

In both Lublin and Tampere, PB undoubtedly enhances involvement in local governance. Importantly, it allows for going beyond the well-known institutions of representation, such as youth councils (cf. Kay and Tisdall 2013). Additionally, through children and young people's PB, both cities not only try to find new routes for participation but seek to better understand the needs of this group and equip it with important civic skills as well.

However, our cases raise questions for further study about the constitutional aspect of participation, particularly the extent of the degrees to which young members of society can determine the rules of their engagement and their genuine impact on governance,

Table 1. Dimensions of ownership in Lublin and Tampere.

Cities	Lublin	Tampere
PB introduction	2013 – Traditional PB (TPB) 2019 – Youth PB (YPB)	2017 – Youth PB (2020 – Traditional PB)
Ownership of the process	PBs designed by local administration with an NGO	PB designed by local administration
Ownership of the issue	To both types of PB people can submit projects on matters important for children and youth, however in YBP special importance on projects recommended by Youth Council. Critique on the issues 'taken over' by adults.	Children and youth propose projects they prefer, facilitators influence what topics are favored and accepted
Ownership of the action	Facilitators as educators, youth as consultants & experts in identifying local deficits	PB enhancing collective action and social skills, facilitators as gatekeepers of youth participation and sharing of knowledge on PB, youth as experts in implementing PB activities
Ownership of decision-making	TBP – voting on proposals by all city residents YPB – decision-making by an appointed jury (City Hall, Youth Council, NGO)	Decision-making by an appointed jury (children and youth)

and whether promoting ownership in participation can have other than empowering effects (Curato, Hammond, and Min 2019).

In Lublin, promoting PB was mainly an outcome of changes in the national law and was organized as an institutionally-driven top-down process dominated by adults, with some broader assistance of children and youth in the case of YPB (see Table 1). Adolescents mainly played the role of 'consultants' and 'experts', which calls into question their ability to articulate deep-rooted problems (cf. Baiocchi and Ganuza 2014). On the contrary, PB in Tampere was designed by adults, but children and youth were given the freedom not only to prepare proposals but to select the winning projects as well. Moreover, PB was linked with politics to varying degrees in the two cities under discussion. In Lublin, it became a part of the political debate, whereas in Tampere, the democratic potential of PB was not viewed in political terms but was seen as a tool to encourage children and young people to become more capable members of their local communities.

In examined cases, the framework of participation was constructed by local authorities instead of giving children and youth a free hand to design a PB process of their liking. Thus, it is important to identify possible tensions in *status differences that may encourage power imbalance* between actors, as we will have a better chance of understanding why people engage in or disengage from participatory processes. This is crucial in terms of providing the methods, spaces, and tools of interaction that citizens of all ages consider meaningful. This entails however that relations between participants, the structures and processes of decision-making are explicitly acknowledged by participants (Ritchie et al. 2004). Therefore, we emphasize further analyzing the experiences of children and young people for reflecting whether the structures created by adults are experienced as inclusive and are 'owned' by the participants themselves.

In both cases, children and youth participated within *a framework that limited the scope and scale of their participation*. The small amount of funding granted for winning proposals easily directs children and youth to envision their participation from a narrow frame; to cover 'minor' and very local issues possible to implement with small grants instead of reaching out to city-level or broader societal issues. This evokes a question whether we want to educate children and youth to learn that they can influence on issues that require only minor investment and touch upon very local level of citizenship.

Additionally, our study shows how difficult it is to go beyond consulting people and to create a framework that is based on genuine dialogue, mutuality, and integration (Taylor and Percy-Smith 2008). This is crucial, as the available literature also suggests that the ostensibly noble and democratic motivation of authorities often conceals a desire to create tools and instruments characteristic of symbolic participation, including above all the legitimacy of earlier decisions (Boswell 2009; Holdo 2020).

Our results indicate that the level of genuineness of participation can be linked with promoting (youth) participation as a form of civic education or pedagogization. In this context, both approaches pose a risk of comprehending participation from the facilitator perspective (cf. Body, Lau, and Josephidou 2020, 11; Cahill and Dadvand 2018), instrumentally and individualistically (Biesta and Lawy 2006), hence potentially weakening participants' ownership of their participation.

Therefore, we argue that inviting citizens, including children and youth, to join key authorities and NGOs in becoming co-developers of the means of their inclusion requires acknowledging them as capable social and cultural beings. Furthermore, it demands respecting their choices, characteristics, and collective ties to develop practices in which participants feel ownership. Only then can these practices translate into genuine participant empowerment (Cruikshank 1999) and better community development.

Note

1. Polish local government is divided into 16 regions, 380 counties (66 cities with county rights and 316 rural counties), and 2478 municipalities. PB has been introduced in all cities with county rights.

Disclosure statement

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