

## Review Article

## “Citizen Participation in Budgeting Theory”

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Citizen Participation in Budgeting Theory.

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## บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้เป็นการวิจารณ์งานเขียนของคาโรล เอ็ดดอน และเอมี แฟรงคินซึ่งได้ทำการศึกษาองค์ความรู้ในเรื่องการมีส่วนร่วมของพลเมืองในกระบวนการงบประมาณไว้อย่างน่าสนใจหลายประการ ประการแรก เอ็ดดอนและแฟรงคินได้อภิปรายถึงองค์ประกอบ 4 ประการที่มีความสำคัญต่อกระบวนการมีส่วนร่วม ได้แก่ สภาพแวดล้อมทางการเมืองการปกครอง การออกแบบกระบวนการ เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในกระบวนการมีส่วนร่วม ตลอดจนเป้าหมายและผลลัพธ์ที่ต้องการให้เกิดขึ้นจากการนำกระบวนการมีส่วนร่วมของพลเมืองมาใช้ในกระบวนการตัดสินใจในเรื่องการงบประมาณ ประการที่สอง เอ็ดดอนและแฟรงคินค้นพบว่าจุดอ่อนขององค์ความรู้ในเรื่องการมีส่วนร่วมในกระบวนการงบประมาณที่สำคัญก็คือการทำให้แนวคิดนี้เกิดผลได้จริงในทางปฏิบัติ ดังนั้นเพื่อให้กระบวนการงบประมาณแบบมีส่วนร่วมสามารถนำไปประยุกต์ใช้ได้อย่างเป็นระบบและมีประสิทธิผล เอ็ดดอนและแฟรงคินจึงได้นำเสนอตัวแบบ “การมีส่วนร่วมของพลเมืองในกระบวนการงบประมาณ” ซึ่งเป็นการผสมผสาน

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องค์ประกอบ 4 ประการของการมีส่วนร่วมเข้ากับทฤษฎีระบบ ภายใต้ตัวแบบ เช่นว่านี้ เอ็บดอนและแฟรงคินเชื่อมั่นว่าจะทำให้การวิเคราะห์อิทธิพลของปัจจัยนำเข้า (เช่น บริบททางการเมือง รูปแบบกระบวนการ และเครื่องมือที่ใช้) ที่มีต่อเป้าหมายและผลลัพธ์ของกระบวนการมีส่วนร่วมมีความชัดเจนยิ่งขึ้น อย่างไรก็ตาม ผู้วิจารณ์กลับมองเห็นว่าสิ่งที่เอ็บดอนและแฟรงคินพยายามนำเสนอ นั้นยังไม่ครอบคลุม โดยเฉพาะในส่วนที่ทั้งสองละเลยที่จะอภิปรายถึงจุดอ่อนของการมีส่วนร่วมในกระบวนการงบประมาณ และมองข้ามความสำคัญของโครงสร้างส่วนบนที่มีความสำคัญต่อการตัดสินใจในเรื่องการงบประมาณในหลายกรณี เช่น ในวิกฤติการณ์ทางเศรษฐกิจ หรือในช่วงที่มีภัยพิบัติซึ่งต้องการการตัดสินใจที่รวดเร็ว ทันเหตุการณ์ จากผู้ที่มีประสบการณ์สูง เป็นต้น

### Abstract

*Carol Ebdon and Aimee L. Frankin examine the knowledge of citizen participation in budgeting theory. They discuss four elements that are believed to influence the participation process (i.e. the governmental environment, the design of the process, the mechanisms used to elicit participation, and the goals and outcomes desired from participation in budgetary decision making) and identify several practical problems in applying citizen participation in budget processes: conditions in the political environment may limit the commitment of city officials in seeking or using input; it might be difficult to learn about complex public budgets; mechanisms applied in budgeting may often foster one-way communication, not be institutionalized, and occur too late; and finally, goals are seldom articulated in advance, differences among participants lead to varied*

*expectations, and costs may exceed benefits in terms of changing allocations.*

*The authors also find some weaknesses in the theory; that is, no systematic effort has been made to uncover interaction effects and to extend the theory to make it more robust. In order to strengthen the knowledge of participatory budgeting, Ebdon and Frankin introduce an impact model of citizen participation in budgeting, which is a combination of the three key elements that represent the inputs (environmental, process design, and mechanism variables) and process activities (each element's indicators) that lead to different outcomes (goals and outcomes of participation variables). This model provides several hypotheses that may be tested in future research, such as hypotheses regarding the relationships between each of the inputs and the outcomes, and the interrelationships between independent and dependent variables (how changing the combination of activities changes the different types of outcomes).*

In this article, Carol Ebdon and Aimee L. Frankin examine citizen participation in budgeting theory. They discuss four elements that are believed to influence the participation process, aiming to identify some weaknesses in the theory and suggest ways to improve our knowledge of participatory budgeting. Based on these objectives, there are four main research questions underlying this article. First, what do we know about citizen participation in the budget process? Second, what do we suspect? Third, what are the gaps or the missing links in our knowledge? And finally, how can we move theory forward?

In order to determine what we know about budget participation, Ebdon and Frankin review the extant literature and discuss four categories of common elements deemed critical to structuring budget participation. Three of these elements are employed in the paper's theory as independent variables: the governmental environment, the design of the process, and the mechanisms used to elicit participation. The fourth element used as a dependent variable is the goals and outcomes desired from participation in budgetary decision making.

The first element, governmental environment, consists of four important indicators: structure and form of government, political culture, legal requirements, and population size and diversity. These indicators affect citizen participation in the budgeting process in several ways. First, communities with a council manager as a form of government are more likely to seek citizen input because they employ a full-time professional. Second, a city's political culture might condition perceptions among politicians, officials, and citizens concerning the need for participation. Third, state laws often dictate what cities will do (e.g. in Kansas, public hearings must be held after publication of the maximum amount of budget and tax levy). Finally, larger cities are more likely to formalize the participation process because heterogeneity creates demand for increased access.

The second element, the process design, contains a variety of considerations, such as timing, type of budget allocation, participants, and gathering sincere preferences. Timing, for Ebdon and Frankin, is important because input that is received late in the process is less likely to have an effect on outcomes. The uses of input in the participatory process

also vary by types of resource allocation, while the participant-selection process should concern collective and representative rather than individual interests. Moreover, input should be a true expression of the willingness to pay (or make a trade-off).

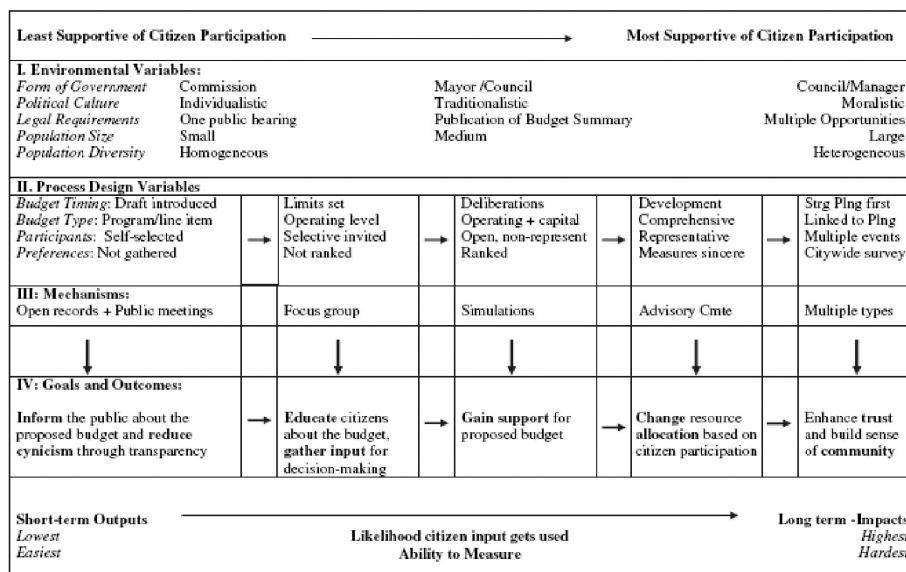
The third element, mechanisms that have been used to elicit participation in the budget process, includes public meetings, focus groups, simulations, committees, and surveys. Each mechanism has both strengths and weaknesses. For example, public meetings are not very good at providing citizens with direct influence, but they can be used as forums for preliminary information sharing. Focus groups tend to be a selective method, but they can be used to gain in-depth opinions regarding budget preferences. Budget simulations reveal sincere preferences because they require participants to make trade-offs to balance the budget. Advisory committees are the best method for informing participants about budget issues, but participation through these committees is limited and costly both in terms of time and effort. Surveys can be useful for understanding the satisfaction and needs of citizens at large, but they may not show the intensity of an individual's opinions regarding services.

The last element comprises five potential goals and/or outcomes for budget input: informing public about the purposed budget, educating participants on the budget, gaining support for budget proposals; influencing decision making, and enhancing trust and creating a sense of community. However, evidence from previous studies shows that obtaining these goals and outcomes is problematic. For instance, while there is consensus that goals should be clearly articulated by the decision makers before the process begins, goals may vary among actors and over time.

In order to explain why participation is apparently not uniform in the budget process, Ebdon and Frankin identify several practical problems and gaps in knowledge. The first practical problem they discuss is that conditions in the political environment may limit the commitment of city officials in seeking or using input. City officials may question the need for input or lack of access, or they may find it difficult to use input to shape budget decisions. Second, in the process design, it might be difficult to find a group of representative citizens willing to commit the necessary time and effort to learn about complex public budgets. Third, the mechanisms applied in budgeting may often foster one-way communication, not be institutionalized, and occur too late. The last practical problem relates to the goals and outcomes of participation, where goals are seldom articulated in advance, differences among participants lead to varied expectations, and costs may exceed benefits in terms of changing allocations.

In budget theory, several gaps in knowledge also exist. According to Ebdon and Frankin, even though the studies relating to participation in budgeting are numerous, they are mostly case studies drawn from surveys intended for broader purposes and do not investigate the interaction between variables. Almost all studies, in addition, have focused their attention on cases at the city-level, while study participation at multiple levels of government is rare and needed. Another weakness in theory building is that there is little empirical knowledge about the goals and outcomes of participation, and at the same time, the studies of citizen participation that exist lack conceptual precision—there are a number of cases in which participation is designed around the budget, but broader input throughout the year may also be useful in the budget process.

In order to improve the knowledge of participatory budgeting and to suggest how to move theory forward, Ebdon and Frankin have developed the impact model of citizen participation in budgeting. This model is a combination of the three key elements that represent inputs, process activities, and outcomes. Inputs consist of environmental, process design, and mechanism variables, while process activities are each element's indicators that lead to different outcomes. Outcomes (or goals of participation variables) range from one of the easiest and quickest outputs that can be achieved—informing the public—to the ultimate impact desired, enhancing trust and building a sense of community (Figure 1). In the authors' opinion, this model of participation can serve as a tool for designing a coordinated set of studies to systematically test the implied causal relationships (e.g. the examination of the bivariate relationships between each of the inputs and the outcomes) and to see how changing the combination of activities changes the different types of outcomes (e.g. the investigation of the interrelationships between independent and dependent variables).



Strg Plng. = strategic planning; Represent = representative.

**Figure 1 Impact Model of Citizen Participation in Budgeting**

Overall, this article is excellent in terms of discussing and questioning the knowledge of participatory budgeting, as well as in recommending a systematic model to improve the theory. However, Ebdon and Frankin's view on citizen participation in budgeting theory, in my opinion, is too optimistic. They consider only the benefits of public participation in the budgeting process, while ignoring its nature, in which some top-down elements are necessary in several circumstances. In both practice and theory, a budgeting process normally combines some top-down and some bottom-up elements (Bozeman and Straussman, 1982). One of the main arguments in favor of a top-down approach is its advantage in creating a broader understanding and support of aggregate fiscal policy issues among decision makers. Also, a top-down budgeting is essential when there is



a revenue problem or a defined budget crisis that requires reduction in expenditures. In this respect, top-down budgeting is thus necessary for establishing and monitoring total expenditure levels (Ljungman, 2009).

When discussing the key elements in the design of the budgeting process, Ebdon and Frankin also overlook the negative effects of “the most open processes,” those that make all decisions in plain public view. It is true, as Ebdon and Frankin claim, that participation in open budget processes may enhance public’s feeling of trust in the government and build a sense of community. Nevertheless, open budget processes are also more open to interest-group pressure. The budgeting, in such a case, may be influenced by the more active citizens rather than by representative and collective ones. Instead of creating cooperation, the encouragement suggested by the authors for the use of participation in budgeting may constrain officials and produce conflict among citizens with different interests. In order to make their points even more clear, I would suggest that the authors discuss public budgeting in a broad sense as well as pay deeper attention to some of the negative effects of participatory budgeting.