In Participatory Budgeting we Trust? Fairness, tactics and (in)accessibility in participatory governance

Abstract

Participatory budgeting (PB) is a significant innovation in democracy and local development. PB provides the opportunity for citizens to engage in processes of deliberation and decision-making upon the allocation of public funds. As new critical discourse emerges surrounding this model of local government spending, a significant area warranting investigation concerns how trust, and indeed mistrust, factor into PB. Through an analysis of interviews with residents and Council staff engaged in PB processes in a county in the north of England, we highlight the ways in which issues of trust can impact on participation in these initiatives, and also strengthen relationships between voting delegates, project teams and local government. This paper argues that increasing the perceived accessibility, and reconsidering the inclusion of mass membership groups in PB, might help to create progressive, effective and trustful participation.

Introduction

Participatory Budgeting (PB) has become a popular approach for supporting local democracy through promoting the participation of non-elected citizens in determining the allocation of public budgets (Swaner 2017). First developed in Porto Alegre, Brazil, during the 1980s as a mechanism to redistribute power within underprivileged communities (Baiocchi 2005), PB has been adapted and adopted in many other nations. In the United Kingdom (UK), PB was introduced by the then incumbent Labour government in the early 2000s and has since become

an important tool of successive UK governments. PB has come to the attention of researchers studying the value it brings to governance and communities - highlighting benefits of civic engagement and community cohesion (e.g. Cabannes 2004; Souza 2001; Wampler 2012). However, PB is also recognised as potentially reinforcing existing power imbalances and creating tension in communities (e.g. Zepic, Dapp and Krcmer, 2017; Lerner and Secondo 2012).

The objective of the research project from which this paper emerges was examine the relationships between PB and trust - particularly interpersonal and institutional trust. Trust and participation in political processes are intimately entwined. A lack of trust between citizenry and public officials might lead to ambivalence towards participating in democratic processes. Yet mistrust might also promote healthy skepticism around issues of governance and stimulate political involvement. In the specific instance of PB, its origins in Porto Alegre were a response to deep mistrust from citizens towards local and national government; indeed, recent work has highlighted the mediating role of PB in repairing trust between citizens and public authorities (Swaner 2017). However, there is still a limited understanding of the role trust plays in PB processes, the impact that PB might have on trust between citizens, public officials, governmental institutions, and between groups of community members.

In this article we examine these issues through an analysis of 27 interviews conducted with citizens and staff of a local government authority living and working in County Durham, UK, a geographical area where PB has been used extensively since 2009.

Participatory budgeting - its motivations and discontents

In the UK, central government has been devolving power and responsibilities to local authorities through Acts of Parliament that include the Localism Act (2011) and Community Empowerment Act in Scotland (2015). Such legislation commits local authorities to engage communities and residents in decision making around public fund allocation. PB is one policy tool that, it is claimed, empowers communities by engaging them in democratic processes that can improve local public services (PB Network 2015).

There have been documented problems with PB however. This includes low levels of participation (Zepic, Dapp and Krcmer, 2017) and failure to engage more than the 'usual suspects' – that is, citizens who are already politically active and mobilised (Lerner and Secondo 2012, 1). Furthermore, PB has been critiqued as limited to local policy making, thereby reducing the amount of time that activists are able to dedicate to regional, national or global problems (Wampler 2000). Concerns have also been raised about complexity and politics within the budgeting process, including the power relations between citizens and local governments (Wu and Tzeng 2014); and a lack of sustainability in PB's current top-down format, if it is to contribute to 'another possible world' of people-friendly politics (Sintomer, Herzberg and Rocke 2008, 164). This latter argument rests on the belief that PB is a form of 'civic engagement in disguise' and operationalised as a policy device rather than used as a policy instrument that legitimately re-orients relations between authorities and citizens (Harkins and Escobar 2015: 13).

Despite these acknowledged tensions, much literature (e.g. Cabannes 2004; Souza 2001; Wampler 2012) agrees that PB is an important means to promote community development and civic engagement. While the literature on trust within PB is limited, of relevance is the Scottish

Government's report that promotes PB to explicitly "instill a sense of ownership, trust and connectivity" between local people and within their communities (O'Hagan, Hill O'Connor, MacRae et al. 2017: 1). Similarly, Swaner's (2017) study of PB processes in New York noted the role of PB in improving relationships and levels of trust between volunteer budget delegates and local government officials.

Trust and political participation

Definitions of trust are informed by the nature of the relationship in which it is developed and maintained—whether these are interpersonal, systems-based such as involving a technology, or societal (Jones and Moncur, 2018). Trust formation is dependent on the presence of both risk and uncertainty (Cheshire, 2011 in Jones and Moncur 2018). In the act of trusting, an actor is uncertain whether another's trust is warranted. Development and maintenance of trust is therefore dependent on interactions taking place over time, and with satisfactory outcomes for all involved (Kaase, 1999) with 'the expectation that arises within a community of regular, honest and cooperative behavior, because of commonly shared norms' (Fukuyama 1995, 26). As such, trust is both a relational and rational action (Levi 2003), and vital to societal functions (Rotter, 1980).

Trust in the context of political participation has both institutional and interpersonal aspects. While it is taken for granted that trust in government institutions is a normatively good thing, and healthy for a well-functioning democracy (Gustavsen, Pierre and Røiseland 2017), Hardin (1999) argues that liberal democracy is, to a great extent, constructed on the basis that governments should not, and cannot, be trusted. Trust in government is multifaceted and complex (Christensen and Lægreid 2005) and might be related to political efficacy, citizen involvement, and participation in politics (Gerwing and Cox, 2017). More than this, trust in

government is necessarily a vertical relationship as it is based on dependency rather than equality (Fennema and Tillie 2001). Indeed, many citizen engagement initiatives around participation in politics are considered a way to decrease levels of mistrust in government and to educate people about government activities (Franklin and Ebdon 2004), rather than necessarily providing more equitable decision making.

Trust and politics have interpersonal aspects as well. Citizens may (mis)trust both the system and individual actors they encounter and observe (Christensen and Lægreid 2005). Arguably, mistrustful people may consider the political system – or specific individuals within it – to be corrupt, which may weaken their motivation to participate. However, low levels of interpersonal trust can encourage higher turnout, as lack of trust may motivate people to take action to diminish the damage they fear others may inflict. **Interpersonal trust is of particular interest to PB due to its purported role in promoting political participation and 'the expectancy held by an individual or group that the word, promise or written statement of another individual or group can be relied upon' (Rotter 1967, 65; Putnam, 1993; 2000). As we will discuss further in the findings, in the context of PB it is not just trust between citizens and government that come into play but also matters of trust arising from the votes and actions of other local citizenry.**

In sum, trust clearly has implications for political participation (Harder and Krosnick, 2008). The dynamics between forms of trust and the nature of political participation however, could be better understood (e.g. Crepaz, Jazayeri and Polk 2016). Both trust and mistrust have roles to play in a democracy, as does the absence of trust – or at least 'healthy skepticism' – until such time that there is sufficient evidence for placing trust in an individual, group or institution (Levi 2003, 96).

Methodology

In order to examine trust in PB in depth, we conducted participatory-observation and semi-structured interviews in County Durham, UK. In 2009, County Durham's 7 District Councils were abolished as Durham County Council became a Unitary Authority, responsible for all local government functions within its area. As part of this reorganisation, 14 Area Action Partnerships (AAPs), with boundaries locally agreed, were developed to give local residents and organisations an opportunity to feed into decisions about how services are provided (Durham County Council 2013). The aim was to ensure that the services of a range of organisations, including the county, town and parish councils, police, fire, health, and voluntary organisations, meet the needs of local communities by focusing their actions and spending on issues identified as important by them (Durham County Council 2013).

The importation of PB into Europe has been highly differentiated, relying not on one agreed set of procedures but on multiple approaches (Sintomer, Herzberg and Rocke 2008). Indeed, Durham County Council has experimented with several formats across the AAPs, partly in recognition that local needs and contexts must shape the approach used. The most common PB models across the county are 'community grant pots' and 'devolved funds', where a local government grant is presented to communities for directed expenditure. Community groups submit proposals for projects to spend the grant on, and a selection board comprising local government officers decides which ones are 'fit for funding', deliverable, and meet the necessary criteria. These selected projects then go forward to a PB event involving a public vote to decide which ones will receive funding. The most common format for the public voting event in County Durham is the 'Market Place' (see Table 1 for key features), which provides an informal opportunity for applicants to present their projects to prospective voters through the provision of a display board.

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[Table 1 near here]

Our research involved initial participant observation at PB events in County Durham between October and December 2015. The first author attended three Market Place events held at a local authority owned building, a community college, and a leisure centre. Each event attracted between 250 and 900 attendees and distributed just under £25,000 to £40,000 of funds to between 10 and 25 participating projects each. The researcher's participation varied, but the majority of their engagement involved observation of activities and interactions of people at these events. This observation extended beyond the main presentation hall to the count room, where votes were tallied. All observations were written up in the researcher's field diary on the day of the event. Although PB coordinators had sanctioned the researcher's attendance, groups and attendees were unaware of the first author's researcher status. This covert role was important in both reducing distortion of results (Hertwig and Ortmann 2008) and not disrupting the normal flow of the events. Furthermore, the number of people at each event meant that there was 'an inevitable degree of covertness' (McCurdy and Uldam 2013, 11).

Attendance at the PB events was also a primary method of participant recruitment for semi-structured interviews. Initial conversations were followed up post-event and interviews scheduled, with 27 interviews conducted. Eleven were interviews conducted with Durham County Council employees; nine were representatives from bidding projects; and three were County Durham residents who had not engaged with PB. The remaining four interviewees were PB event volunteers, involved in AAP forums or other statutory services engaged in PB. The researcher interviewed all participants individually with the exception of two community centre leaders who requested a joint interview. We used purposive sampling to recruit those we saw to be involved in PB and snowballing to recruit less visible interviewees. Interviewing a range

of relevant actors placed emphasis on the value of 'local' knowledge (Bracken, Bulkeley, and Whiteman 2015, 1295) of a range of people who have different levels of involvement in PB.

Following the completion of data collection, we conducted thematic analysis of data (Braun and Clarke, 2006) from which the following themes were generated: fairness; eligibility; tactics; and (in)accessibility. Each of these themes is discussed below. Of course, due to diversity in the implementation of PB across counties let alone countries, the singularity of the case study should be considered with response to other institutional designs. To protect anonymity, participants and community groups have been allocated pseudonyms.

Trust, mistrust and the reparation of trust in PB

Fairness

A common challenge when involving citizens in local decision making is that people are often self-interested actors (Glaser and Hildreth 1996), struggling to put aside their own interests and make decisions to the benefit of other residents in their community. Issues around perceived self-interest come through in our data, with PB coordinators acknowledging that supporters of certain projects turn out in numbers to vote for their own project. Many interviewees perceived that the higher the mobilisation from a community group (the number of people encouraged to attend the PB event and support the cause), the more likely the group is to receive funding:

> "A project can come forward for participatory budgeting that you think is an amazing project [but] with a small group of people…it's not a minority group but it's something that people aren't going to pick up. If you've got that up against a school project, yeah, or a youth club project, that basically has got hundreds of people that will be going

along for that, that's going to win over that one, even though that other one's probably a far, far more beneficial project." (Aaron, PB coordinator)

Other participants echoed Aaron's concerns. Max, who had proposed projects for funding via PB, recognised this dichotomy; that the process was less concerned with supporting the represented cause, and more about competitively mobilizing membership to promote winning:

"Participatory budgeting is all about numbers of people, yeah. And what we did, because everyone else was doing it, and that's the only reason, and I'm not saying I agree with it, yeah, all our gym members were asked if they would go to, on the day, yeah, to the open day, and vote for us please, and that's how we did it, and that's how everybody else does it."

(Max, PB participant)

Max goes on to explain that "the general public vote then is usually only a small portion of the overall vote", recognising that few of the people who voted for a particular cause may not already be affiliated with it in some way. In line with this, a number of interviewees noted that the PB events were akin to a 'beauty pageant' or 'popularity contest'. Meanwhile those groups who are not quite as "savvy" (Daisy, PB coordinator), but who have a worthy cause, may not secure as many votes. It is in this sense that Daisy, like Max, considers that PB is not "the fairest way of allocating funding", as projects are not assessed on their individual merits and those potentially offering greatest social and community benefits get overlooked.

In light of some of these concerns, some AAPs have refined the voting process. In many PB processes attendees must now vote for a set number of projects, most commonly three, to

enable their votes to count. If an attendee votes for fewer, or more, then their voting slip becomes void. This was an attempt to 'level the playing field':

"I think without that, the successful applicants would be your primary school with lots of kids, or something like that, so the mass membership clubs would probably just secure all the funding. But I think they don't when you force people to think of other projects, and that's where we've seen projects go quite high up, when on the face of it you'd think they'd never be successful – like the new projects, we've had Alzheimer's cafes and stuff like that…people I guess have thought about where they're going to put that second vote, and they've come out quite well."

(Robert, PB coordinator)

Generally, PB coordinators and participants explained how the change from one vote to three votes increased fairness, and therefore trust, in the process. However, for some the new voting system did not resolve these issues. A perceived flaw of the introduction of three votes is that it assumes that voting attendees only have loyalty to one project, and that the second and third vote is neutral; that is, any group has an equal opportunity to secure the second and third vote from the public. However, this is not always the case:

"For me it wasn't difficult [deciding who to vote for], because, until recently I was a local school governor, so I had very close connections, in the recent past, with a couple of other projects that were there that day…And at least one of the other community groups I knew very well, one of the local residents groups. So for me there was no difficulty – in fact I didn't even spend very much time going round looking at the stalls…because my mind was made up beforehand, and, erm, although I went round

and chatted to people that I knew, I didn't make a point of going looking at every single stall and making a really rationale judgment."

<div align="right">(Ellen, PB participant)</div>

Here, Ellen explains how her decision of which three projects to vote for was made before looking at all options, and still heavily influenced by the networks of people and organisations she was already familiar with. In the fieldwork, it was noticeable that although some attendees did stop and talk to the stallholders to ask questions about the proposed projects, "many people flitted around the stalls hurriedly, or skipped certain stalls if people were huddled around blocking the view" (Anon[1]'s field diary). This is problematic in the sense that the effort that groups exert, and the time that they dedicate to PB, both at the event and in preparation of the event, may be wasted.

Eligibility

Putting eligibility criteria in place for bidding organisations is integral to ensuring fairness in PB. Such criteria can help to regulate the decision-making processes that allocate scarce resources (Wampler 2000):

"There's usually an amount of criteria, for which we're asking for things like bank statements and accounts, and constitutions and what have you. For us to be able to be quite certain that we're not making a mistake…so we're minimising any risk. Because at the end of the day, what we do is we deal with public money, and woe betide you if you ever misallocate public money."

<div align="right">(Joseph, PB coordinator)</div>

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[1] Anon denotes the first author's initials

However, it was notable how this initial stage of the PB process - which in some ways was there to mitigate a lack of trust of community organisations being able to deliver on projects they may get funded - was in itself highly trust-based:

> "Whilst yes we do check their documents, and you know there is a robust process, some elements of it are - we trust that when they tick that they've got a safeguarding policy, they actually have a safeguarding policy…so there's an element of trust"

> (Daisy, PB coordinator)

This apparent ambiguity of the checking procedure led to some misgivings around the PB process. This was partly because it was felt that these procedures benefitted larger charities that were well positioned to provide evidence of meeting these criteria, were implicitly trusted more than smaller organisations, or were circumnavigating certain rules:

> "By allowing charities [to participate] that do have – national charities – who have a lot of money. Because, when we applied, we had to prove that we only have so much in the bank. And obviously the bigger charities, they had over that amount. We followed the rules, and others weren't."

> (Tabitha, PB participant)

The measures put in place by PB coordinators are sometimes met with public suspicion and negative sentiments. Tabitha's belief here – which was based on hearsay and rumor - that national charities were in attendance is refuted by Joseph (a PB coordinator) who states that bank accounts for all organisations are checked to ensure that bidding groups possess less than a certain amount of money. As Freitag and Bühlmann (2009) point out, if an authority allows

certain actors to receive privileges (in this case access to funding that they are not eligible for), or there is a perception that certain actors receive privileges, mistrust between individuals is more likely to develop. In this particular instance mistrust was created not by a lack of adherence to rules, but a sense that local charities connected to larger national bodies or organisations were less in need of support than independent, and smaller, groups.

Eligibility criteria was not only applicable to projects, but also to voters who must live, work, study, or volunteer in the AAP area that was hosting the PB event:

> "Most of the time we get people who genuinely, they come in, and they're eligible. We do get the odd one who suddenly, when you ask them and they say 'oh, well I'm in' - and we do rift with them, we try to encourage them to say…'do you volunteer at all?', 'do you attend or support?' – Because some people might come from Bishop Auckland on the day to vote for somebody, but if we can't find a connection with them, then we will disqualify them. And if they do have a connection, we will take it on trust that, yes, they do…and if it looks like they are making one up, usually that's when they'll [the team] come and call me, and I'll come out and I'll ask them and I'll just say 'look, it's not worth it'."
>
> (Joseph, PB coordinator)

Here Joseph notes how there are no clear rules on determining the eligibility of a voter, and much of the work is driven by a feeling of whether they are "making [it] up" or not. Indeed, it becomes clear through the interviews that not only are there no clear rules for eligibility, the data with which to determine eligibility is inaccessible to PB co-ordinators (if it exists in the first place). While in some respects the lack of eligibility rules exists to support inclusivity of

a broad range of citizens who have direct involvement in the local area, it has the potential to further promote misapprehensions around the fairness of the activity, especially if – as noted already - one group invites people from outside of the local area to participate in a vote. Further, this problematises the notion of eligibility as a 'positive marking scheme', whereby AAP coordinators are trying to find reasons to include people in the vote, even though they may be ineligible.

Tactics

Above, we described a tactic that groups used in which they coordinated their membership, friends and family to attend and vote. However, a variety of other tactics were employed when groups aimed to attract votes from unknown individuals. The AAPs supply each bidding group with a pre-event pack that contains posters and flyers to promote the event and their project. Using this pack, some groups undertook publicity campaigns. Durham County Council (2015), in its PB Toolkit, notes that such campaigning is at the discretion of the group. Margaret discusses her use of these promotional tools:

> "A lot of people don't know what we do. So I think the fact that we had posters in the shops and things like that…Last year there was an old man come down to vote, and he said to one of the girls "well, I'm voting for yous because you're the only ones that's taken the trouble to put a leaflet through my door"."
>
> (Margaret, PB participant)

In Margaret's case, she saw the value and the direct impact of her charity's promotional campaign on prospective voters, especially given the relative lack of promotion that other

groups engage in. Certain groups, however, went beyond using what was contained within the pre-event pack as promotional tools, which often led them to successfully win votes:

> "One of them [winning projects] had put an advertisement on a bus. Now okay, it sounds like a big amount of money, but actually it was a local bus company so it was probably about 25 quid. But they'd thought about doing that, and they'd done a telemarketing kind of thing where they'd rung people up beforehand and used those kind of things, so some of the other organisations didn't think that was fair."
>
> (Sadie, PB coordinator)

Such efforts to 'win' funding relate to what Wampler (2000, 26) describes as one of the 'potential drawbacks to PB', that community leaders may compete amongst themselves over scarce resources. Wampler (2000) recommends that government must adapt the rules to promote solidarity and reduce competition. Although Sadie reflects that other organisations considered more extravagant promotional activities 'unfair', for Blake, competitiveness is central to the spirit of PB:

> "The idea is participate. Don't come along and stand and talk to your pal about 'have you seen those people over there' and 'what do you think they're doing?', come along, and as people come in greet them, participate in the event, which leads to budgeting, play nicely, and maybe somebody will give you their second or third vote…So it's like a networking event, it's a market place. If you run a boot sale you don't sell anything by not shouting out what you've got."
>
> (Blake, PB coordinator)

Blake argues that the higher the degree of participation, the higher the likelihood of securing funding. Implicit in Blake's statement is that to be successful you have to compete. This is something that certain groups who were unsuccessful in securing funding learnt. See the exchange with Tabitha below:

> Tabitha: "With it being the first one, we've learned that next time, we'll know."
>
> Anon: "What sort of things do you think you'll do differently next time?"
>
> Tabitha: "Be more forthcoming. Instead of letting people come to you, and just sit back, just like be out there, and 'come on', type thing. Because we were like 'oh we'll let them come to us', type thing, and not pester them. Because I don't like being pestered myself, but I think that I'm going to have to stand in front of the table and just shout – not shout – but, you know – be more…Even though I'm not very good at that, I'll just have to do it."
>
> (Tabitha, PB participant)

Possibly the main tactic to attract voters on the day of the PB event was through the display boards. Each group was allocated the same size and type of display board, to ensure fairness, yet this did not deter groups from maximising the appeal of their boards:

> "[We] put some photos on of things that we did, things that we were looking to get, a bit of information about us, and really sort of made it as glam as we could, to try and pull people to try and have a look to see what we do…so we just put tinsel around ours…it was just really to sort of make it stand out a little bit."
>
> (Margaret, PB participant)

In an attempt to attract members of the public to her cause, Margaret decorated her board with a range of materials. The tactics employed by biddings projects were framed by an ethos of learning, and often tactics were inherited from groups who had been successful in previous years or, like Tabitha above, were realised from unsuccessful attempts to secure funding. Such tactics ranged from decisions about the 'best place' to stand in the hall, through to what content to include on display boards, to how to engage with members of the public. Indeed, from the fieldwork at marketplace events those organisations that had the most striking displays and were more outwardly engaged were generating the most attention. The first author further noted that the visual appeal of the board impacted on perceptions of who was the worthiest cause to vote for, as it could reflect the effort that certain groups had put in: "My votes were swayed by the attention to detail that some groups had shown on their display boards, and the creativity and neatness of the boards too" (Anon's field diary).

(In)accessibility

Voter turnout is an often-debated concern around political processes, and is a key concern in studies of PB as well. In Durham County Council's (2015) PB Toolkit, 'accessibility' is positioned as one of the core values of PB to ensure as broad and diverse voter participation as possible. The toolkit notes that 'those wishing to get involved in PB activities must be given good and clear access to information and processes', particularly in terms of how they can participate at different stages of the PB process (Durham County Council, 2015, 3). Considering physical accessibility, Durham County Council (2015) notes that some residents may struggle to attend PB events if the venue is in a rural area, or that vulnerable or elderly citizens who struggle with mobility may be unable to attend if distance to travel is too far. In an attempt to combat some of these issues, certain AAPs offered transport to their PB events:

"There was two buses [last year] and they kind of went – they had two separate routes each, but there were a handful of people that used those buses, and you kind of think well, those buses are going backwards and forwards – I think there were three runs in the four hours for each bus, which obviously cost an awful lot of money…this year instead of providing the buses, we just put a tagline on our posters, just saying if anybody requires transport let us know, we'll book you a taxi, and we didn't have a single person come forward for that."

<p style="text-align: right">(Nadia, PB coordinator)</p>

It is notable here how, while physical access to PB events can be deeply problematic for some members of the population, the realities of public funding means it is increasingly difficult to support those with mobility or transportation limitations to attend these events. Furthermore, it was noted how the timing of events meant it was difficult for a wide range of people to participate and give their vote. As such, while Wampler (2012) notes that citizens from traditionally excluded groups are often able to use PB programs to introduce new ideas into the public sphere and into more formal political areas, certain traditionally marginalised groups are relatively excluded from PB:

"The unfortunate thing for us is that a lot of our members, well, all of our members are special needs, so they can't come to vote. Even families, they've got so many things on or, you know, they might be a single parent family, or the father's at work and the mother can't leave the child, or they're in a residential home, and they can't come to vote…me and all of the staff sort of feel that we are a bit…for us, we're at a bit of a disadvantage.

<p style="text-align: right">(Margaret, PB participant)</p>

Margaret here alerts us to how notions of accessibility are multifaceted and complex in nature.

This is not to claim that the PB events or the venues they were held in were inaccessible per se; indeed, venues were wheelchair accessible and had staff on hand to assist. However, as Margaret makes clear, having access to PB events was tied to a wider range of factors such as the time of the day events were held, the availability of support for participants to reach it, and indeed the lifestyles, routines and pressures of specific members of the population. The issue of inaccessibility was even more widely constructed by other participants. For example, Blake reflected that:

> "We exclude from society, probably by perception, we exclude from PB events, probably by perception, those people who actually don't think it's for them. And the point of it, it really is for them. The beneficiaries are the people who don't vote.
>
> (Blake, PB coordinator)

Blake's argument was that the imagined beneficiaries of PB are often those who do not vote. Clearly, the desires of those who do not 'need' certain services but attend PB events may be different from the genuine needs of those who do not attend. Further, one may deduce from the comment from Blake, above, that the PB events were failing to engage more than the 'usual suspects' (Lerner and Secondo 2012, 1). There was indication of this from other participants:

> "The people who turn up to that public forum are not the people who are in poverty and dire straits or whatever, which is this neighbourhood [points out of window]…The people who turn up and vote bring their own agenda with them about what's important.

So crime and safety is important, because they're scared that their posh house is going to get burgled."

<div align="right">(Bernice, PB participant)</div>

"I just think like you've got to really think about who is actually going to turn up and vote for it, and whether it's gonna go to the right place…I mean, who – who normally votes, who normally votes really? Is it the people who need it the most? Or is it the people that have the time?"

<div align="right">(David, County Durham resident)</div>

Bernice believes that those who attend PB events are wealthy and concerned primarily with issues of protecting their wealth. In a similar vein, David (a non-participant of PB) questions whether those who attend PB events are in need of funding, or simply have the time to attend and participate. The comments of David and Bernice are particularly striking in relation to other participants feelings that the make-up of groups and citizens involved in local PB activities were diversifying:

"The university this year was really present. And a couple of articulate groups who didn't get any money were really miffed that Durham University got funding. They have a right as much as anybody else, because you live, study, or work in a city, that's how you get to do your stall…The PB event is becoming a broader church."

<div align="right">(Blake, PB coordinator)</div>

The University and its students would be considered 'unusual suspects' as they are reported to seldom attend Council events in County Durham. While, from the Council's perspective, it was

positive that they were engaging student groups in PB, some of the unsuccessful bidding groups were frustrated that the local University had been allowed to participate. They believed that there were alternative sources of funding for these groups, including the University itself which was viewed to be wealthy and well-financed, instead of depriving other groups – with more limited networks – from opportunities to secure funding.

Discussion

In this paper we set out to examine the relations between trust and PB, as an example of promoting citizen involvement in governmental decision making and the allocation of public funds for the public good. While the literature on PB has highlighted the potential for PB to bring benefits for trust within communities and between citizenry and institutions, our findings highlighted a high degree of mistrust and suspicion around how PB processes were handled, how fellow citizens acted and voted in marketplaces, and concerns around how the results of PB activities spoke to the values of inclusivity and equality that were supposed to underpin the process.

The findings of the analysis presented in this paper highlight that trust in local government, like national government (Christensen and Lægreid 2005), is multifaceted and complex. None of our participants stated a wholehearted trust or mistrust of the PB activities; and indeed, as noted earlier, mistrust can be productive in promoting engagement in political and civic activity. However, in our data, for many participants, a lack of trust in the process and by association the groups and citizens involved in it, fueled negative sentiments around the value of PB. Notably, in some cases mistrust was founded in rumor and misinformation; however, these would be backed up by experiences certain participants had around being excluded or poorly served by PB processes, with evident processes affirming preexisting misgivings.

Moreover, the perceived and actual ambiguities in the PB process – such as how bidding parties were checked, or how eligibility to vote is determined – fueled concerns further. Greater clarity and consistency around these procedures might go some way to instilling greater trust in the process, or at least ensuring 'healthy skepticism' does not lead to complete disengagement from PB, should PB continue to be used.

While ambiguities in the process might be considered issues pertaining to institutional trust, there was also significant mistrust from institutions towards citizenry. Adaptations to the PB voting process in certain AAPs – such as incorporating a three-vote rule – highlighted a lack of trust in citizens making judgements around voting that go beyond a preference for causes they are personally or organizationally aligned with. While this might at some level be seen as an example of governing institutions having a lack of trust in those that are governed in making informed decisions, it was clear from our data that these practices did occur. Furthermore, where groups had their members, relatives, and close social relations vote for them, the result was inter-group and interpersonal mistrust among citizens. Pape and Lerner (2016) have highlighted how participant self-interest can go against the equity goals of PB, and our findings highlighted how this can lead to a strong sense of injustice by smaller groups bidding for limited PB funds. Establishing more elaborate voting protocols could go some way towards remedying these issues; but as our findings noted do not resolve them completely. Furthermore, the indication from some participants is that, no matter what rules are established for voting, there will always be mistrust around the local people putting aside their biases to vote for the "worthiest" cause. Fundamentally, there is a lack of public and meaningful deliberation over the causes being voted on.

The issues of mistrust in the process were, in part, a result of the competitive aspects of PB. The origins of PB in Porto Alegre placed emphasis on public assemblies where priorities around the allocation of significant amounts of public funds were debated, discussed and decided on. The PB process observed here was rather different, inasmuch as it focused not just on the devolving of decision making around public fund allocation to local citizens, but the proposers of how to spend those funds were also members of that community. The process itself unavoidably leads members of a local community working against one-another in order to successfully win a vote. Moreover, their competitiveness was over increasingly scarce resources and relatively small amount of money which, during a period of 'austerity politics' (Ahrens and Ferry 2015) in the UK, could be seen as a way of scaffolding the community and voluntary sector to fulfill roles that were previously funded by the state or the public sector. In many respects, our findings highlighted that mistrust in PB came from mistrust of the tactics and strategies other groups used, and from pluralistic notions of a "good cause" and what it means to do "social good".

Finally, ideas around what was seen to be a worthy or unworthy cause were tied to issues of diversity and inclusivity in PB. Our findings highlighted the ways in which AAPs and organisers of PB activities attempted to make them accessible to diverse members of the public. There was pride from AAP members and council staff around how they had ensured venues were physically accessible, had provided transport for rural or isolated citizens, and had seen more than the 'usual suspects' participate in bidding, and voting, for PB projects. Yet there were clear tensions around these conceptualisations of access and the perception of PB being an accessible process, for some members of the community. People may feel excluded by PB due to historical conflicts and disagreements with public institutions or other community members, or if there is a perceived lack of support for people with certain communication

abilities or cognitive impairments, or if the times for marketplace events and voting make it impossible to attend. Furthermore, some people clearly still see PB, and the types of projects that are funded, as "not for them"; perceptions that are reinforced when they see groups associated with well-resourced institutions or national charities succeed to the detriment of smaller or more marginalized groups.

Conclusions

The research project from which this paper emerges set out to examine the relationships between PB and trust - particularly interpersonal and institutional trust. As Justwan (2015) notes, the consequences of trust, and arguably mistrust, are better understood than its causes. Of course, this paper presents a single case study of trust in PB. As such, we call for further work which critically explores the processes by which trust is crafted and evolves through PB, thus contributing further to understandings of the 'micro-politics of PB' (Moir and Leyshon 2013, 1002). By demonstrating their trustworthiness to the public, local government can strengthen their social connection with citizens and thus encourage more active civic engagement (see Jackson and Bradford's 2010, discussion of trust and confidence in the police). Yet more critical however to growing trust in and around PB activities is how the concerns around inclusivity and the competitive nature of certain forms of PB processes is managed. It appears that addressing the question of who benefits from PB, why they should benefit, and how is critical to ensuring the process is fair, just and worthy of giving their time to and granting their trust in. Through considering these concerns – and opening up to a more critical discussion around who accesses and who is excluded from PB – the greater its potential to contribute to Sintomer, Herzberg and Rocke's (2008, 164) vision of 'another possible world'.

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