

Article

## How Context Matters: Challenges of Localizing Participatory Budgeting for Climate Change Adaptation in Vienna

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### Abstract

Participatory budgeting originally aimed to promote greater political representation and resource distribution for vulnerable populations. As it globally circulates, however, existing literature points out that its local interpretations and implementations often fall short of proper tools and mechanisms to advance its emancipatory potential. So far, the roles of different actors, objectives, and toolkits that contribute to diverging local experiences and outcomes have been widely studied. In contrast, extant research has rarely addressed the implications of different spatial contexts and their challenges—and the implicit potential—considering the distinctive institutional arrangements and opportunity structures at the urban scale. This article investigates how the policy idea of participatory budgeting landed in Vienna at the district level in 2017 (Partizipatives BürgerInnen-Budget), its outcomes, and how it evolved into a city-level project for climate change adaptation (Wiener Klimateam). It explores how the local institutional and structural conditions—including the political backing for such initiatives—influence the motivations, expectations, and experiences among different governmental stakeholders at multiple governance levels, shaping place-specific outcomes of participatory budgeting. It unpacks the specific opportunities and constraints of the deployed participatory tools in budgeting processes, according to three core values of democratic governance (legitimacy, justice, and effectiveness). The conclusion discusses the potential trade-offs between these three dimensions and argues that the current form of participatory budgeting in Vienna may increase legitimacy in the process but have less of an impact on the effectiveness of the delivery and the empowerment of vulnerable populations in the outcome.

### Keywords

citizen participation; multilevel governance; participatory budgeting; social justice

### Issue

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### 1. Introduction

Since the late 1960s, progressive scholars and grassroots movements argued in favor of more open and participatory urban policymaking, encouraging the state bureaucracy to directly engage with citizens and, thus, facilitate new governance mechanisms to accommodate emerging social needs. While social scientists have since made different and competing judgments on participatory and

deliberative (collaborative) governance (see Silver et al., 2010), expectations of citizen participation and its institutionalization for enhancing democratic values have persisted for decades, indicating that “the issue of democratic procedures remained pertinent” (Fainstein, 2010, pp. 27–28).

Despite the growing inclusion of civil society in public decision-making worldwide, there is considerable evidence that citizen participation—without a proper

organizational design and structure—may limit deliberation to exclusive social groups and, thus, produce policy outcomes that are biased toward partial interests (see Warren, 2009). In response, some have argued that the pursuit of social justice in participatory processes must entail tailored attention to those who benefit less from the existing system of resource distribution. They must also foresee status recognition rather than the equal treatment of all in open communication (see conscience of planning in Banerjee, 2007; the just city in Fainstein, 2010; and equity planning in Krumholz & Hexter, 2018). Contrary to the conception of deeper democracy as the normative standard in just politics (see collaborative planning in Healey, 2006; see also commons planning in Marcuse, 2009), they contend that the naive trust in the power of citizen participation disregards existing socioeconomic problems and institutional constraints, which might work against achieving equitable impacts in the outcome.

Similarly, a growing body of governance research has challenged the conception of horizontal and networked communication as a normative must on which social justice is built, or grassroots social movements as the principal force of social change (cf. Healey, 2012; Innes & Booher, 2015; Mayer, 2009). In contrast, it acknowledges the mutually reinforcing effects of collaboration between citizen and government capabilities (van Meerkerk, 2019), combining both institutional and social innovation (Eizaguirre et al., 2012), and enabling more affirmative public-community relationships as well as effectiveness in action (Stout & Love, 2017).

Furthermore, this area of scholarship has increasingly shed light on the diversifying settings and qualities of participatory mechanisms, generating differentiated pathways and outcomes of citizen participation in its real-world implementation (see Hendriks, 2014). In light of increasing policy mobility at the global scale, such contextual dimensions are gaining more relevance in today's networked policymaking (Cucca, 2022), in particular, the organizational aspect of collaborative governance aimed at designing forms of equitable citizen participation (see Bianchi et al., 2021). While similar participatory toolkits travel between neighborhoods and cities, in fact, existing literature points to increasing ambiguities behind their potentially diverging contexts, whereby—albeit with similar aims, objectives, and target groups—outcomes may significantly differ (see Harris & Moore, 2013).

Empirically, this article uses Vienna's two participatory budgeting processes, Partizipatives BürgerInnen-Budget (2017–2021) and Wiener Klimateam (2022–2023), as a research window through which to look at the context-bound opportunities and constraints of incorporating civil society into urban policymaking in general, and their transformative role in climate change adaptation in particular. Despite the intense transnational spread of participatory budgeting since the 1990s, the literature shows that its emancipatory potential does not always travel to different places (Montero &

Baiocchi, 2022). This is especially true in European and North American cities, where liberal political organizations push forward top-down budgeting processes that often lack accountability and transparency (Touchton et al., 2022). In this light, extant research has so far focused on the role of different actors, objectives, and toolkits behind the differentiated local outcomes in the European model of participatory budgeting (see Bartocci et al., 2019; Cabannes & Lipietz, 2018).

In contrast, this article places the challenges of designing participatory budgeting within the city's distinctive political opportunity structure that is anchored at a specific layer within the multilevel governance hierarchy: the neighborhood level. We refer this structure to the contextual circumstances providing the policy process with the specific level of capacity for implementation and change (see McAdam, 1996). It regards this particular institutional as well as structural context, within which participatory policies unfold, as a critical element of the budgeting process, impacting their outcomes. This context-sensitive approach serves two purposes. First, it fills the knowledge gap in the existing literature, which rarely connects diverse spatial contexts, and focuses exclusively on a single—external or internal—condition behind localizing participatory budgeting (Bartocci et al., 2022). Second, it embeds Vienna's current budgeting model in its spatial and regulatory contexts, considering the aim of making citizen participation more equitable for the disadvantaged, even though context-sensitivity remains an underplayed aspect of Vienna's participatory policymaking (Ahn & Mocca, 2022).

Against this background, our analysis situates Vienna's approach to participatory budgeting among other international and European models, unpacking the conjoining contextual factors that underpin its processes and outcomes. Its specific institutionalization process, which has been upscaled from the district to the city level over time, provides new insights into “how [participatory budgeting] can work in different settings and at different institutional levels” (Bartocci et al., 2022, p. 15). To consider its broader spatial dimension, this article asks how three analytical elements (structural conditions, policy design, and political opportunity structure) contribute to the place-specific potential and challenges of localizing participatory budgeting for climate change adaptation within Vienna's multilevel governance setting.

The remainder of this article proceeds as follows. First, Section 2 outlines its theoretical frame. This is followed by Section 3 on the case study setting and Section 4 on the methods and data that are used. It then presents the major empirical findings in Sections 5 and 6. They will unpack the participatory mechanisms within our cases and their varying capabilities to advance three core values of democratic governance: legitimacy, justice, and effectiveness. Finally, it concludes with some final remarks and suggestions for future research.

## 2. Social Justice Through Citizen Participation and How Participatory Budgeting Might (Not) Enhance It

One of the earliest and most frequently cited examples of justice-enhancing citizen participation is participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil (1991–2004). In brief, participatory budgeting refers to a democratic process, both economic and political, where community organizations in the city's poorer neighborhoods or the residents themselves define local governance priorities, plan and manage fiscal resources, and oversee the effective implementation of those budgetary decisions (de Sousa Santos, 1998). In Porto Alegre, new investment priorities that represent urgent local needs—for example, the improvement of basic public services—provided structural incentives to those in the impoverished neighborhoods, facilitating the participation of underrepresented social groups and, as a result, allocating budgetary resources to the city's poorest areas (Marquetti et al., 2012).

Since the success of the Porto Alegre model, the core concept and idea of participatory budgeting have traveled to thousands of cities across the world. Increasing mobility notwithstanding, its global circulation has trade-offs. Existing scholarship has raised concerns about its diffusion as a best-practice toolkit, uprooted from the historical context of the invention, only to serve other governance priorities that represent the political interests of government actors in the Global North (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2017) as well as the Global South (Sintomer et al., 2012). Despite its innovative democratic potential (Abdel-Monem et al., 2016; Cabannes, 2015, 2021; Swaner, 2017), only a few were able to fully achieve the substantive political and economic empowerment of the disadvantaged, limiting its transformative capacity to an “abstract discussion of the general principles at play” (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2014, p. 42; see also Cabannes & Lipietz, 2018; Nez, 2016).

This line of research has developed conceptual models and normative expectations on the diverging processes and outcomes of localizing participatory budgeting, seeing existing sociopolitical and socioeconomic conditions as an important source of such differentiation (see Sintomer et al., 2016; Wampler et al., 2021). For example, earlier participatory budgeting in Latin American cities, combining top-down and bottom-up mobilization, shared common deliberative features and emancipatory principles with a similar socioeconomic profile (Goldfrank, 2007). In contrast, participatory budgeting in European cities mostly features a vertical organizational structure with a strong role played by left-wing politicians and activists, while varying in socioeconomic conditions (Touchton et al., 2022). The differences within the European experience lie in existing democratic and participatory traditions, influencing the diverging dynamics of participatory budgeting (Sintomer et al., 2016). Nevertheless, the shared concern in the European experience continues to be the organized interests of those

behind its local implementation, advancing communication and deliberation in the governance process rather than the empowerment of the disadvantaged in the actual outcome (see Bartocci et al., 2019; Cabannes & Lipietz, 2018).

This weakness of the justice-enhancing mechanisms in its localization is not only affected by different motivations, logics, and instruments, but also by some important practical challenges that government actors face. On the one hand, disadvantaged citizens may not possess the appropriate knowledge, local language proficiency, and expertise concerning governing complex urban issues, such as climate change adaptation, to make their contribution to participatory budgeting anything meaningful. On the other hand, cities and their institutional actors represent only one of many scales within the complex governance system. Therefore, their capacity to intervene in structural problems, transform existing institutional arrangements, and, as a result, overcome inequalities is very much limited within the particular territorial context under scrutiny. From the mid-2000s onward, in fact, the joint effect of overrepresentation of civil society organizations and decreasing institutional capacity among municipal actors reinforced a steady decline of participatory budgeting in its place of origin: Brazil (Coleman & Cardoso Sampaio, 2017; de Paiva Bezerra & de Oliveira Junqueira, 2022).

Concerned with diverging experiences and outcomes of the ubiquitous shift toward participatory governance, scholars in the governance literature also employed normative frameworks for evaluating the diverse possibilities of participatory programs and their designs. Fung (2006), for example, formulated a three-dimensional institutional design space, as an interpretative frame to analyze the particular potential and limits of varying participatory designs in relation to “who” (participants), “how” (communication/decision-making), and “what” (authority/power). The way participation is designed along these three points will influence its capability to advance legitimacy, effectiveness, or justice, because “particular designs are suited to specific objectives” (Fung, 2006, p. 74). These analytical dimensions allow us to connect the specific mix of actors involved (who) with the mechanisms in policy design that frame the participatory process (how) and contextual conditions within which claims are made (what). The result is the specific sociopolitical and socioeconomic opportunity structure tied to the specific territorial context.

In this conception, justice-enhancing reforms diminish political inequality by expanding the “who” and “what” dimensions of institutional design, advancing the needs of those who are ill-served by existing institutions and public policies from dealing with a particular urban problem (Fung, 2006, p. 72). Accordingly, such reforms may require a substantive political objective and structural incentives that redistribute power and resources to a specific target group and area. In this case, the “how” is different from other instruments promoting

effectiveness (e.g., administrative decentralization) or legitimacy (e.g., public meetings and hearings). The latter two demand more intense communication and negotiation between citizens and public actors.

In this view, a participatory approach to climate justice should provide equitable distributional outcomes—prevailing over legitimacy and effectiveness—to disadvantaged communities that are especially vulnerable to the impact of climate change. The resulting institutional adaptation might address inequalities in the participatory process and enhance capabilities in the outcome (Fainstein, 2015; Schlosberg, 2012; Steele et al., 2012). Policies promoting climate justice need political and economic empowerment of disadvantaged communities beyond bargaining and deliberating to ensure real restructuring of governance priorities based on their underrepresented needs. Advancing the capabilities of disadvantaged communities vis-à-vis the impacts of climate change must address the uneven concentration of decisional power to resource-rich participants and substantiate proper economic and power redistribution to the city's poorer residents.

### 3. The Case Studies Context

The participatory budgeting cases analyzed here are embedded in the particular governance structure. From an institutional perspective, Vienna enjoys considerable administrative freedom, being both a municipality (*Gemeinde*) and a regional government in a federal state (*Bundesland*). This allows its institutions to develop robustness to withstand external crises but also limits decision-making power to the governing coalition, the city administration, and public sector organizations (e.g., Housing Fund, Local Agenda 21, and Urban Renewal Office) in the policy implementation. This tendency has compounded bureaucratic obstacles to meaningful inclusion of civil society in participatory programs, which often fall short of proper mechanisms and tools to ensure equitable opportunities for its vulnerable populations (e.g., non-EU migrants, youth, and older people).

Vienna's neo-corporatist governing system and its top-down policy-making style have been often considered an obstacle preventing the full-fledged participation of non-institutional actors in the policy process (see Novy & Hammer, 2007). Coinciding with the city's long-term structural transformation (see Kazepov & Verwiebe, 2022), however, a series of administrative reforms has incrementally opened up diverse pathways to grassroots participation, and rescaled considerable urban governance responsibilities down to the district level.

Since the late 1980s, in fact, Vienna's 23 districts have had full or partial jurisdiction with their own budget to self-govern small-scale urban issues, such as street greening and maintenance, coordinating citizen participation in localized urban projects with decentralized public offices. Despite growing political responsibilities, their financial resources are limited. Their total budget (circa

€248 million in 2021, 1.5% of the city budget) depends on the city's income and municipal tax revenue rather than a specified percentage of the city government budget, which is unevenly distributed to each district based on their structural conditions (e.g., population and road network) and the tasks specified by the city (e.g., green space and road management).

These two trends—the growing responsibilities of the city's districts and new institutional platforms for citizen participation—also extend to the effort to address climate change issues. Since the 1990s, a transition to sustainable energy and transportation and the reduction of urban heat islands became, among others, the city's most urgent environmental priorities, facilitating a policy shift toward an ecological approach to urban planning that rolled out new modes of collaboration for small-scale green infrastructure development.

One such effort is citywide participatory budgeting for climate change adaptation (2022–2023)—Wiener Klimateam—which aims at transforming citizen inputs into needs-oriented climate measures at the district level. Currently, district officials are fully responsible for planning, managing, and maintaining urban green space. Wiener Klimateam was kicked off in three districts (Margareten, Simmering, and Ottakring) in April this year. Its budgeting process involves five stages: (a) on/offline idea submission; (b) expert idea screening; (c) face-to-face co-creation; (d) project selection; and (e) implementation.

In our analysis, we will focus on the first two districts, where district-level participatory budgeting—Partizipatives BürgerInnen-Budget—already took place in previous years (2017–2021). This specific temporal dimension of the Vienna case enables a cross-case comparison between the two neighborhoods not only in terms of specific ideas, needs, projects, and requests, but also the deployed participatory tools, the idea selection processes, and the financial support for project implementation.

In design terms, the participatory instruments deployed in both Partizipatives BürgerInnen-Budget and Wiener Klimateam are slightly different. Partizipatives BürgerInnen-Budget exclusively relied on online participation and communication. This reflects the general trend toward online participatory budgeting in most European cities since the late 2010s as a solution to low turnout and high opportunity costs in the traditional budgeting process (Wampler et al., 2021). Wiener Klimateam combines both online and offline instruments at different stages of the overall budgeting process, using extensive onsite information events and a digital platform to collect budgeting ideas, and face-to-face meetings to co-develop selected ideas into concrete projects. As witnessed by other examples of “e-PB” (Stortone & de Cindio, 2015), such a hybrid form of participatory budgeting is also gaining increasing popularity elsewhere, especially targeting middle-class and younger residents in wealthier areas (Touchton et al., 2019).

In structural terms, both case districts diverge with respect to demographics, residential density, heat exposure, green spaces, and public transport connection. Margareten is a central district with a comparatively high population density and a limited amount of green space. Simmering, in contrast, is a peripheral district, characterized by large urban development projects, modest population density, and an adequate supply of green space. The main environmental issue here relates to transport, characterized by an above-average share of commutes and longer distances to public transport stops. Both districts also differ in socio-economic aspects. Margareten can be characterized as a middle-class district with an above-average share of well-educated residents and a moderate average net income, whereas Simmering can be characterized as a working-class district with a substantially lower education level.

These contextual dimensions might produce district-specific challenges that Wiener Klimateam could address through the participatory processes in Margareten and Simmering. We assume that they may influence who participates in the idea submission process and what claims are made as a result. In turn, this will affect the extent to which the districts can effectively manage the budgeting outputs for longer-term environmental impacts. To consider this, we reflect also on previous experiences with Partizipatives BürgerInnen-Budget in both districts. This will also allow us to disentangle the democratic elements of both budgeting designs in question. Therefore, our analysis attends to the relationship between the small-scale socio-spatial contextual conditions, the specific policy design, and the resulting opportunity structures influencing the specific patterns of citizen inputs from the case districts.

#### 4. Methods and Data Collection

Methodologically, we draw inspiration from mixed methods approaches, deploying a “convergent design strategy” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017, p. 68). Accordingly, we collected and analyzed qualitative and quantitative data independently, and then merged the two to combine the results.

First, we conducted a content analysis of the policy advertisements and interviews with key actors in media and four preparatory documents declaring the objectives, goals, and deployed methods behind Partizipatives BürgerInnen-Budget and Wiener Klimateam. This first step identified (a) the institutional and structural contexts, from which both budgeting processes emerged; (b) their anticipated political and social aims; and (c) the specific participatory designs and mechanisms.

Second, nine expert interviews were held with the key institutional stakeholders both at the city and district levels, capturing their varying motivations, expectations, and practical experiences from the two budgeting processes. Based on a hybrid approach to thematic analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006), elicited data were

coded and classified into thematic units for correspondence with some pre-established categories (legitimacy, justice, and effectiveness), identifying their perceived (in)abilities to advance the anticipated policy objectives (democratic learning, just climate protection, and governance innovation).

Third, we collected more than 1,100 citizen inputs from the budgeting processes in both districts, which were submitted online (<https://partizipation.wien.gv.at> and <https://klimateam.wien.gv.at>). These were then coded and quantified for (a) the number of citizen inputs; (b) their thematic focus concerning environmental, social, traffic, or political issues; and (c) the number of received votes (see Tables 1 and 2).

Fourth, we analyzed socio-structural and environmental administrative data at the smallest available scale for both districts. Basic indicators on place-specific social (educational level and share of foreign citizens) and environmental conditions (heat exposure, population density, green space availability, and transport access) were calculated and mapped, using a geographic information system.

Lastly, following Fung’s (2006) analytical approach to democratic governance, we interpretatively integrated the coded qualitative data on expert attitudes and perceptions with the tabulated data on the citizen inputs and the identified structural conditions in both case districts. For legitimacy, we analyzed how recruitment procedures and selection tools influenced the participation rate in the budgeting process. For justice, we analyzed how the overall participatory design facilitated the specific thematic patterns of the citizen inputs as well as their (uneven) spatial patterns in underserved areas of the city’s environmental policies. For effectiveness, we analyzed how the district actors perceived the feasibility of the implementation of citizen inputs based on their institutional capacity and financial resources within Vienna’s multi-level governance setting.

#### 5. Localizing Participatory Budgeting in Vienna’s Districts: First Steps

Vienna’s first participatory budgeting was launched in Margareten in 2017. Due to lacking financial commitment at the city level, the district council used its budget to organize and implement the budgeting process, adopting the city’s existing participatory tools and using its online platform. The formal procedure of the official budgeting cycle included (a) online idea submission, (b) feasibility evaluation by the district committees, (c) selection by the district parliament, and (d) implementation. District-level participatory budgeting took place four times in Margareten (2017–2020) and twice in Simmering (2018–2021), using the identical format for recruiting and engaging with citizens, as well as selecting and implementing submitted budgeting ideas.

One of the major motivations behind implementing participatory budgeting among the district actors was



to enhance citizen participation in district politics for those without voting rights—e.g., foreigners and youth (see Stadlmair, 2020). Both districts feature an above-average share of foreigners and, as a result, a gap in electoral participation has continuously increased. However, the experience that the district actors share points to the difficulties of maintaining representativeness in an open-to-all online participatory format. In fact, participation biases resulted from the self-selection of residents and lacking interest among the more disadvantaged groups. The emerging concern was related to the idea submission process, and it is being dominated by a few individuals and organized groups, limiting the participatory process to the “internet-savvy (and well-educated) middle-class.” With recruitment tools mostly limited to online advertisement, the anticipated objective of narrowing the distance between ordinary citizens and district politicians—and thereby enhancing legitimacy—was hampered by low participation rates, especially in Simmering with a higher share of the low-educated, benefiting from only around one budgeting idea per 1,000 residents, as opposed to 3.2 in Margareten.

Such participation biases further reduced the thematic and geographical range of the submitted bud-

geting ideas to very specific urban issues and areas (small-scale greening and new urban designs in the northwest of Margareten and the south of Simmering; see the Environment and Social in Table 1). Despite the general motivation to locate new urban challenges in their respective district, the shared experiences among the respondents indicate the evident shortcomings of indiscriminate open-to-all participation, which was perceived as less useful in addressing the underrepresented issues—and thus advancing social justice—in mainstream politics. In fact, the submitted ideas actually reflected existing structural problems in both districts less (e.g., lack of green space, high heat vulnerability, and population density in the south of Margareten and in the center and north of Simmering; see Maps D, E, and G in Figure 1). The shared understanding of the thematic bias was not only because the district actors believed that “middle-class” interests would reinforce the social exclusion of others, but also that citizens—without prior support—generally lack knowledge about complex governance issues involving political, social, and technical expertise.

Indeed, the budgeting process solicited a range of ideas that complement the general aesthetics of good

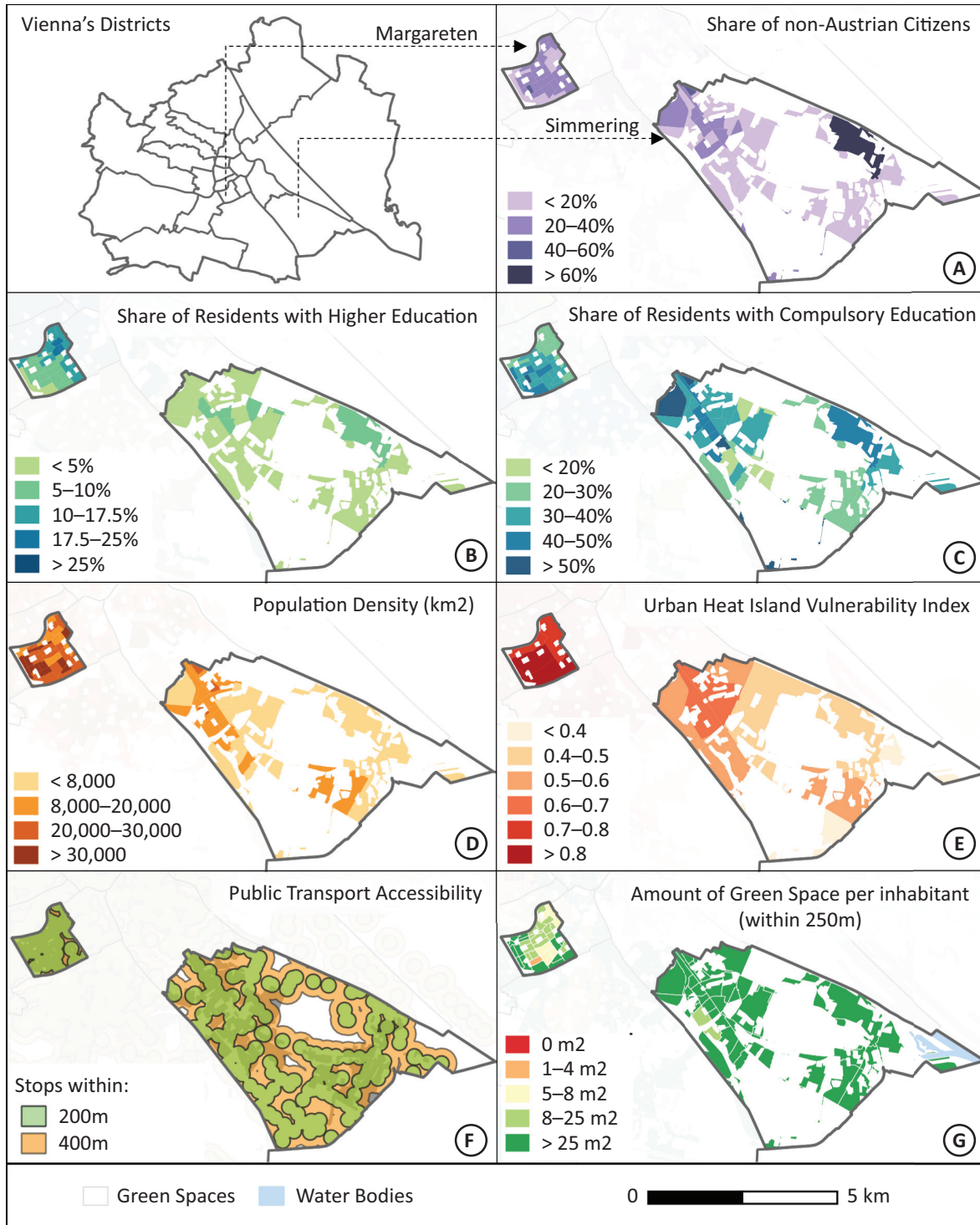
**Table 1.** Submitted budgeting ideas in Margareten (2017–2020) and Simmering (2018–2021): Top five.

Submitted Partizipatives BürgerInnen-Budget Ideas (Total and Top Five)					
	Total	%		Total	%
Margareten			Simmering		
Environment	78	29.3	Environment	56	21.8
<i>of which</i>			<i>of which</i>		
Street trees	22	28.2	Green space	12	21.4
Green space	9	11.5	Street trees	12	21.4
Dog waste	6	7.7	Green stops	8	14.3
Gardening	6	7.7	Flower strips	3	5.4
Flower strips	4	5.1	Odor pollution	3	5.4
Social	83	31.2	Social	47	17.9
<i>of which</i>			<i>of which</i>		
Cultural events	15	18.1	Cultural events	10	21.3
Sport facilities	15	18.1	Children	5	10.6
Seating	7	8.4	Street art	4	8.5
Children	5	6	Water fountain	3	6.4
Public toilet	4	4.8	Consumption	2	4.3
Traffic	104	39.1	Traffic	150	58.4
<i>of which</i>			<i>of which</i>		
Shared zone	15	14.4	Public transport	24	16
Bicycle parking	13	12.5	Bike path	21	14
Speed limit	10	9.6	Speed limit	15	10
Bike paths	8	7.7	Traffic light	13	8.7
Traffic lights	7	6.7	Car parking	11	7.3
Total	266*		Total	257 <sup>†</sup>	

Notes: \* One entry in the category Politics excluded in the analysis; <sup>†</sup> five entries in the category Politics excluded in the analysis. Source: Authors’ work based on data from Bezirksvorstehung Margareten (2019) and Bezirksvorstehung Simmering (2021).

neighborhood life in both districts, such as street tree planting, green space creation, and hosting cultural events (see Table 1). Among the respondents, however, its complete openness in the idea submission was perceived to have stimulated no particular input

that addressed urgent problems detrimental to the well-being of the urban poor. Budgeting ideas for urban greening in both districts were heavily centered around revitalizing existing green spaces and street tree planting in commercial streets in the northwest of Margareten



**Figure 1.** Selected structural differences in Margareten and Simmering. Source: Authors' calculations based on socio-demographic data from Stadt Wien—Wirtschaft, Arbeit und Statistik (2018) and environmental data from Stadt Wien—Stadtentwicklung und Stadtplanung (2019) and Stadt Wien—Stadtteilplanung und Flächenwidmung (2021); open data on urban heat island vulnerability is based on calculations by Stadt Wien—Energieplanung (2021) and public transport accessibility by Wiener Linien GmbH & Co KG (2021).

and the south of Simmering, where population density and urban heat island vulnerability are comparatively lower and access to green urban infrastructure is higher (see Maps D, E, and G in Figure 1). Similarly, the demands for community-building initiatives were concentrated on cultural events limited to selective locations in the northwest of Margareten and the south of Simmering, where not only such activities already exist, but are also repeatedly submitted by the same participants in every budget cycle. In contrast, fewer budgeting ideas focused on the south of Margareten and the north of Simmering, where the shares of non-Austrian citizens (see Map A in Figure 1) and residents with lower levels of education (see Maps B and C in Figure 1) are higher.

A clear thematic difference was observed among the traffic-related ideas, reflecting the specific structural challenges in both districts (see Traffic in Table 1). While both districts are extensively covered by a public transport stop within a 200-m distance (see Map F in Figure 1), some parts of Simmering feature lower public transportation coverage throughout its low-density neighborhoods (see Map D in Figure 1). In contrast, Margareten features high-speed traffic going through its densely built residential buildings. Accordingly, the most submitted traffic-related ideas (shared road spaces by vehicles and pedestrians in Margareten and public transportation connection in Simmering) correspond to the specific structural problems that differently characterize Margareten (e.g., high-traffic affected residential areas) and Simmering (e.g., low public transport connectivity). However, the district actors perceived them as neither the most urgent nor important issues that elevate the living standards of the disadvantaged in the deprived neighborhoods of their respective districts (e.g., low standard housing conditions and social integration of migrants).

A lack of adequate information and guidelines in the submission phase is another major implication for its effectiveness. While Vienna's districts maintain governance responsibilities over a wide range of policy fields within their jurisdiction, their ability to produce effective policy outputs from citizen inputs faced a few practical limitations. The city's administrative decentralization has rescaled the decision-making authority in urban planning to multiple governance actors, creating a gap in their coordination, who operate—while often disconnected—within a single policy area. For example, sidewalks and public spaces are the financial responsibility of the districts, but their maintenance is the responsibility of the city's municipal departments. In contrast, the responsibility of cycling and traffic infrastructures lies fully at the district level, while the technical competencies remain at the city level. This increasing institutional complexity undermined the overall quality of the generated citizen inputs and, thus, the abilities, knowledge, and skills of the district actors to engage in meaningful citizen-state interaction in the budgeting process.

Furthermore, the simultaneous budget decentralization put increasing financial pressure on the district

actors in the determination of allocating limited district funds. Therefore, the district actors faced great budget challenges to effectively align priorities and allocate resources for implementing the accepted budgeting ideas. This is the reason for, despite the highest submission, the low acceptance rate of traffic-related ideas for implementation (23.1% in Margareten and 15.3% in Simmering), which require not only a substantial amount of financial resources to change physical infrastructural arrangements, but also a long-term strategic plan involving different public and private stakeholders whom the district governments share planning responsibilities with. For example, creating shared zones in the high-capacity streets of Margareten requires consent from the city or—depending on the speed limit—the federal government, whereas expanding the public transportation infrastructure in Simmering is the sole responsibility of the city government and its own holding company.

## 6. Upscaling Participatory Budgeting in Vienna: Targeting Climate Change Adaptation

While the budgeting process was already in place at the district level, the planning of participatory budgeting at the city level began in 2020, which targeted climate change adaptation and mitigation in three pilot districts. These included Margareten and Simmering, which scored highest in the selection process based on four criteria: the urban heat island effect, socioeconomic inequalities, life satisfaction, and green space accessibility. In contrast to the district-level budgeting process, the new governmental environment surrounding this city-level project implies far greater financial resources and institutional capacities with the potential to enable more extensive and effective collaboration between citizens and public actors at a higher governance level.

With a budget of €13 million between 2022 and 2023, the annual policy cycle includes (a) online/offline budgeting idea submission (April–May), (b) feasibility evaluation by the city's municipal departments (June–July), (c) co-creation workshops for selected ideas (August–October), (d) final selection by citizens' juries and open-to-all online voting (November–December), and (e) implementation (December). As of October 2022, more than 1,000 budgeting ideas were evaluated based on positive climate and social impact assessment, (legal) implementation feasibility, and interest alignment with the city's policy agenda in urban development, which are currently in the co-creation phase.

Strong political commitment and financial resources at the city level—mediated by an extensive information campaign—resulted in more intensive participation from citizens in the idea generation phase, enhancing the communicative (how) and participant dimension (who)—therefore legitimacy—in the budgeting process. In comparison to the previous model, new recruitment tools in Wiener Klimateam, including extensive media coverage, offline information events, and involvement of local



multipliers (e.g., Local Agenda 21 and Urban Renewal Office), resulted in a much higher number of idea submissions in both Margareten and Simmering. More than half of the submissions addressed environmental issues (56.9% in Margareten and 62.5% in Simmering). In less than two months, it generated more than 600 inputs in both districts with the number of average submissions per 1,000 residents at 13.92 in Margareten and 2.97 in Simmering, exceeding about 520 budgeting ideas collected between 2017 and 2021 in the entire period of the district-level budgeting process. During the 50-day idea generation phase, the number of submissions in both districts showed a steady increase. This increase in the number of climate-related budgeting ideas led to thematic diversification.

Given its thematic focus on climate change adaptation, one remarkable differentiation in the submitted ideas was the share of submissions relating to energy issues in the environment category, 18.2% in Margareten and 22.8% in Simmering, (see Share Submission for Energy in Table 2), with solar panel installation making up around a tenth of all environment-related ideas in both districts (8.5% in Margareten and 10.7% in Simmering). Although the demand for green space and street trees remained relatively high, especially in Margareten (17.6% and 10.9% of all submissions related to the environment), other budgeting ideas represented the specific structural challenges characterizing each district, for example in Simmering, where a lot of inputs point to the need for greening existing brownfields and extensive road networks.

Despite the thematic diversity reflecting their distinctive spatial contexts, the share of the votes that the budgeting ideas received online remained similar in both districts (see Share Votes and Average Votes per Submission in Table 2). This is related to some more general criticalities in the idea selection phase, regarding the emancipatory dimension (what)—therefore justice—in the budgeting process.

First, the level of technical knowledge implied in the submitted idea influenced the online voting results. In fact, most technical issues related to climate change adaptation require relevant knowledge and expertise of trained professionals that ordinary citizens do not have. This has great implications for guiding the budgeting process toward the most urgent needs of those at risk from climate change. In total, traffic-related ideas (pedestrian zones and shared road spaces by vehicles and pedestrians in Margareten and cycling infrastructure in Simmering) remained the most popular among the voters, in terms of the votes per submission (see Average Votes per Submission for Traffic in Table 2). Among environment and social-issues-related ideas, however, the most perceived priorities were given to the ideas with low technical content, such as small-scale streetscaping, environmental awareness building, and do-it-yourself urban projects. For example, although higher in submission number, energy-related submissions (e.g., solar

panel installation) shared lower average votes (see Average Votes per Submission for Energy in Table 2) than other environmental topics, such as worm bins, flower strips, and street gardening, among others, which require less technical knowledge and expertise from average participants to choose in the voting phase (see Average Votes per Submission for Greening and Recycling in Table 2).

Second, the timing of submission has a great influence on the number of votes the budgeting ideas receive on the online platform. In terms of participation, the lengthy online submission process indeed maintained a steady increase of citizen inputs throughout the idea generation phase, reaching a 25.2 average number of submissions per day in the last nine days (as opposed to 6.8 in the first 10 days). In terms of selection, however, the simultaneous online voting process resulted in participants favoring the budgeting ideas that were posted in the earlier phase. The most popular ideas—with a few exceptions—were posted in the first few weeks. Whereas the budgeting ideas received 17.9 votes on average in the first 10 days (16.2 in Margareten and 19.5 in Simmering), those submitted in the last nine days gained considerably less attention, scoring only 3.4 votes per submission (2.8 in Margareten and 4.1 in Simmering).

To these criticalities, we add a concern about the translation of selected budgeting ideas into concrete policy outputs—therefore effectiveness—with substantial longer-term environmental outcomes. The concern is about the capabilities at the district level to manage the budgeting ideas once they are implemented. While the €13 million budget and the collaboration with the city administration imply crucial political support to the initiatives, which was not given in the previous experiences, the districts still undertake the maintenance of the selected inputs with the same level of financial and political resources outside Wiener Klimateam. Such concern about the sustainability of the budgeting ideas was directed toward small-scale streetscaping, traffic infrastructure, and urban greening, which fall under the full responsibility of district governments.

Related to this, there is also the timing question. The city's goal is to produce concrete planning outcomes from the selected budgeting ideas until 2023. This implementation timeframe is perceived by the district actors as a major obstacle to realizing meaningful outcomes of citizen participation with effective climate actions. Indeed, creating a climate-change-mitigating (green or traffic) infrastructure would require a long-term strategic plan with effective coordination mechanisms that connect public decision-making not only with citizens but with all relevant public and private stakeholders with diffused responsibilities at multiple governance levels. Along the communicative (how) and authority/power (what) dimensions, the district actors still need to manage top-down delivered budgeting outputs with limited technical expertise and direct authority—a legacy emanating from Vienna's long-run decentralization process.

**Table 2.** An overview of submitted ideas\* and number of votes in Wiener Klimateam in two pilot districts.

<b>Most Submitted Wiener Klimateam Ideas</b>											
	Total Submissions	Total Votes	Share Submission (%)	Share Votes (%)	Average Votes per Submission		Total Submissions	Total Votes	Share Submission (%)	Share Votes (%)	Average Votes per Submission
<b>Margareten</b>						<b>Simmering</b>					
Environment	165	1,006	100	100	6.1	Environment	197	1,714	100	100	8.7
<i>of which</i>						<i>of which</i>					
Greening	113	695	68.5	69.1	6.2	Greening	138	1,318	70.1	76.9	9.6
Energy	30	139	18.2	13.8	4.6	Energy	45	293	22.8	17.1	6.5
Recycling	18	155	10.9	15.4	8.6	Recycling	8	78	4.1	4.6	9.8
Construction	3	8	1.8	0.8	2.7	Construction	3	11	1.5	0.6	3.7
Traffic	57	460	100	100	8.1	Traffic	61	533	100	100	8.7
<i>of which</i>						<i>of which</i>					
Transport	46	424	80.7	92.2	9.2	Transport	34	377	55.7	70.7	11.1
Service	7	24	12.3	5.2	3.4	Service	11	72	18.0	13.5	6.5
Regulation	3	8	5.3	1.7	2.7	Safety	11	65	18.0	12.2	5.9
Safety	1	4	1.8	0.9	4.0	Regulation	4	11	6.6	2.1	2.8
Social	67	212	100	100	3.2	Social	56	340	100	100	6.1
<i>of which</i>						<i>of which</i>					
Public utility	30	81	44.8	38.2	2.7	Public utility	32	238	57.1	70.0	7.4
Social care	17	56	25.4	26.4	3.3	Social care	8	44	14.3	12.9	5.5
Cultural event	12	41	17.9	19.3	3.4	Economy	7	42	12.5	12.4	6.0
Economy	5	24	7.5	11.3	4.8	Responsibility	5	7	8.9	2.1	1.4
Campaign	3	10	4.5	4.7	3.3	Cultural event	3	7	5.4	2.1	2.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>290<sup>†</sup></b>	<b>1,679</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>315<sup>†</sup></b>	<b>2,591</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>8.2</b>

Notes: \* 24 entries from the total submissions excluded in the analysis; † one entry in the category Politics excluded in the analysis. Source: Authors' work based on data from Stadt Wien—Energieplanung (2022).

## 7. Discussion and Conclusions

This contribution situated the potential and limitations of Vienna's participatory budgeting for climate change adaptation within the specific contextual dimensions, from which it is designed and implemented in two case study contexts. Our analysis compared the designs, processes, and outcomes of two participatory budgeting programs at the district and city levels. This particular setting was chosen to investigate the influence of the multi-level governance arrangements at the city level vis-à-vis the policy design and structural conditions at the neighborhood level. Their specific challenges were analyzed through Fung's (2006) three dimensions of institutional design space (who, how, what). This interpretive frame provided a way of looking at how the changes in budgeting designs over time influenced the communicative (legitimacy), emancipatory (justice), and governance (effectiveness) dimensions in relation to existing structural and political conditions of the case districts.

Our case offers a novel example to study the current trend of participatory budgeting in European cities. First, Vienna's top-down approach—which is increasingly common worldwide (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2017)—features a strong presence of organized groups in the public sector, such as urban planning offices and Local Agenda 21, who play an active role in guiding the idea submissions and selection, as well as co-creation in the budgeting process. Currently, such a “corporatist” model of participatory budgeting is not widespread in Europe (Sintomer et al., 2016). Second, Vienna's budgeting design—combining online and offline tools at different stages—contributes to building knowledge about such a hybrid form of participatory budgeting, which is gaining popularity in wealthier cities, but often lacking in opportunities for intense engagements from citizens (Wampler et al., 2021).

Our findings uncovered the joint effects of structural conditions, policy design, and political opportunity structure at a particular urban scale, producing place-specific processes and outcomes of localizing participatory budgeting. It showed that greater political and financial commitment at a higher governance level may enhance the legitimacy of the budgeting process by substantiating deliberation (see Citizen Input from Phase 2 in Table 3). However, its open-to-all recruitment strategy and selection method of voting may not produce an emancipatory outcome for disadvantaged communities by increasing self-selection biases. Furthermore, the implementation of budgeting outputs without enhancing the institutional capacities of district actors may undermine their effectiveness in achieving longer-term social impacts. Indeed, it is the combined influence of such conjoining contextual factors, framed by the local spatial dimension of the policy-making process, that actualizes the globally circulating policy ideas and principles into a situated local experience (see Kazepov et al., 2022). In other words, the context, wherein local demands and policy responses encounter each other, shapes the very (in)ability of pol-

icy actors to achieve their anticipated objectives behind localizing a traveling policy idea, because while the idea can travel beyond its place of origin, its contextual conditions cannot.

There are a few caveats to these results. First, given that Wiener Klimateam is ongoing, our research is limited to the inputs and activities that were undertaken in the idea submission phase. Second, due to the lack of administrative data on participant demographics, its emancipatory dimension was measured by the thematic patterns of the citizen inputs and their geographic locations in the case districts. While the uneven spatial patterns of the budgeting ideas in line with structural inequalities still indicate inherent selection biases in the budgeting process, the specific socioeconomic background of the participants would complement the argument made in this article. Furthermore, a meaningful evaluation of its outcomes and impacts should follow the end of the implementation phase.

Nevertheless, our analysis of the submitted ideas, in comparison to the previous district budgeting process, fills one important knowledge gap in the existing literature. So far, extant research has mostly focused on a single structural or institutional domain of localizing participatory budgeting, rarely combining multiple contexts of its spatiality into an integrated analysis (see Bartocci et al., 2022). While various types of contextual factors shape the local impact and effectiveness of governmental programs, such contextual influences are often treated as mere background information in the analysis (see Hayduk et al., 2017; see also Montero & Baiocchi, 2022). Future research on participatory budgeting needs to knit together diverse spatial and also temporal elements of the policy in question, to fully grasp its place-specific process and outcome, emerging from the combined effect of the structural, institutional, and policy design environment.

In conclusion, the current budgeting format of Wiener Klimateam may require alternative recruitment and selection strategies to promote equitable climate change adaptation. Because open-to-all participation, in reality, attracts a wealthier and better-educated “self-selected subset of the general population” (Fung, 2006, p. 67), justice-enhancing participatory budgeting must provide equitable opportunities in the process, especially to those who are excluded from regular modes of participation. Indeed, citizens' juries—stratified random samples representing the district demographics—ultimately decide the budgeting outputs in the final voting phase. However, this representativeness advances the legitimacy of implementing pre-screened and expert-co-created ideas, and not so much the empowerment of more disadvantaged communities in the overall budgeting process (see Table 3).

In this light, the future budgeting process may benefit from more targeted recruitment that invites specific social groups—or their representatives—in the areas most at risk from the effects of climate change, whose

**Table 3.** A summary of budgeting processes in Margareten and Simmering according to the institutional design space.

Participatory Design of Partizipatives BürgerInnen-Budget					
	Citizen Input	Process	Participants	Authority/Power	Communication/Decision
Phase 1		Idea generation	Self-selected	Advice/consult	Develop preferences
Phase 2	177*	Idea screening	District administrators	Direct authority	Technical expertise
Phase 4	87*	Selection	District politicians	Direct authority	Technical expertise
Phase 5	46*	Implementation	District politicians	Direct authority	Technical expertise
Participatory Design of Wiener Klimateam					
	Citizen Input	Process	Participants	Authority/Power	Communication/Decision
Phase 1		Idea generation	Self-selected	Advice/consult	Develop preferences
Phase 2	556 <sup>†</sup>	Idea screening	City administrators	Direct authority	Technical expertise
Phase 3	152	Co-creation	Experts/self-selected	Advice/consult	Develop preferences
Phase 4	65	Selection	Citizens' juries	Direct authority	Aggregate/bargain
Phase 5	To be determined	Implementation	City/district administrators	Direct authority	Technical expertise

Notes: \* Yearly average; <sup>†</sup> 24 entries from the total submissions excluded in the analysis. Source: Authors' work based on data from Bezirksvorstehung Margareten (2019), Bezirksvorstehung Simmering (2021), and Stadt Wien—Energieplanung (2022).

empowerment must follow sufficient information about the governmental environment in general, and the budgeting process in particular. This accompanying approach to participatory budgeting may not only help to streamline citizen inputs to align with the anticipated objectives of policy actors, but also enhance the competencies of ordinary citizens for meaningful engagement and participation in the decision-making process. Without such design principles, local experiments with participatory budgeting may not overcome the well-known limits of citizens' participation, succumbing to a thin celebration of diversity and openness in public decision-making.

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### Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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