

A LOCAL LEVEL PARTICIPATORY BUDGET MODEL PROPOSAL AND FIELD RESEARCH FOR THIS MODEL IN TURKEY^{1,2}



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ABSTRACT | This study aims to present a model proposal for the applicability of participatory budgeting in Turkey, which is practiced in many cities around the world, and to reveal the outlook of this model in Sakarya province of Turkey. The study was prepared with a mixed methodology using both quantitative and qualitative methods. A questionnaire survey was used as a quantitative method and a semi-structured interview was preferred as a qualitative method. The study encourages the active participation of citizens in the policy-making processes of local governments, contributing to a more democratic and inclusive understanding of governance. The participatory budget model created within the scope of the study is expected to be applicable in many provinces of Turkey. In the study, it was concluded that the participatory budget model proposal was welcomed positively by citizens and municipal administrators living in Sakarya.

Keywords: Participation, governance, participatory budget, municipality, Turkey

JEL Code: H72, H79, H82

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¹ It has been declared that the relevant study complies with ethical rules.

² This study was produced from the doctoral thesis titled “Creating a Smart Budget Model for Public Expectations in Local Governments (A Case Study on Sakarya Metropolitan Municipality)” Compliance with the ethical rules of the relevant study has been declared.

TÜRKİYE’DE YEREL DÜZEYDE KATILIMCI BÜTÇE MODELİ ÖNERİSİ VE BU MODELE YÖNELİK ALAN ARAŞTIRMASI



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ÖZ | Bu çalışma, dünyanın birçok
şehrinde uygulanan katılımcı bütçenin
Türkiye’de uygulanabilirliğine yönelik model
önerisi sunarak, bu modelin Türkiye’nin Sakarya
ilindeki görünümünü ortaya koymayı
amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma, nicel ve nitel
yöntemlerin birlikte kullanıldığı karma bir
yöntemle hazırlanmıştır. Nicel yöntem olarak
anket uygulaması; nitel yöntem olarak da yarı
yapılandırılmış mülakat tercih edilmiştir.
Çalışma, yerel yönetimlerin politika oluşturma
süreçlerinde vatandaşların aktif katılım
gösterdiği, daha demokratik ve kapsayıcı bir
yönetim anlayışına katkıda bulunmayı teşvik
etmektedir. Çalışma kapsamında oluşturulan
katılımcı bütçe modelinin, Türkiye’nin birçok
ilinde uygulanabilir kılınması beklenmektedir.
Araştırmada, katılımcı bütçe modeli önerisinin
Sakarya’da yaşayan vatandaşlar ve belediye
yöneticileri tarafından da olumlu karşılandığı
sonucuna varılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Katılım, yönetim,
katılımcı bütçe, belediye, Türkiye
JEL Kodları: H72, H79, H82

1. INTRODUCTION

Traditional budgeting processes in public administration represent an approach in which citizens are largely excluded from decision-making processes. This has led to criticisms against the efficient and fair use of public resources. Participatory budgeting, as an innovative approach that encourages citizens' participation in decision-making processes regarding the use of public resources, has gained an important place in both academic circles and public policies in recent years. Participatory budgeting is considered as a tool that not only ensures the inclusion of citizens in economic decision-making processes, but also strengthens governance principles, increases accountability and builds social trust.

First introduced in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 1989, participatory budgeting has since been adopted by many municipalities in Europe, North America, Asia and Africa. Major cities such as New York, Paris, Madrid, Berlin, Madrid, Berlin and Seoul have implemented participatory budget processes, encouraging the active participation of citizens in local government decisions. This process increases transparency and accountability in governance while better meeting the needs of the community, particularly in areas such as urban regeneration, infrastructure projects, education and health services.

The widespread adoption of participatory budgeting is based on the fact that citizens not only vote, but also take an active role in local governance processes by submitting proposals for public expenditures. This model is seen as a tool that strengthens democratic governance and enables different socio-economic groups to have a greater say in local governance.

The main purpose of this article is to reveal the model of participatory budgeting, which is implemented in many cities around the world in line with the preferences of citizens by using technology, and to concretize the appearance of this model on the basis of Sakarya Metropolitan Municipality, which includes participatory budgeting in its strategic plan and creates an e-participation module.

For this purpose, three research questions were identified.

1) How are participatory budget practices realized in cities in different parts of the world?

2) What is the outlook of participatory budgeting in Sakarya Metropolitan Municipality?

3) Based on the successful examples in the World and the case of Sakarya Metropolitan Municipality, what is the participatory budget model that could be implemented in Turkey?

The article aims to bring together the theoretical foundations of participatory budgeting practices with concrete examples of its implementation,

and to present a unique approach that will contribute to the democratization process of local governments in Turkey. In this mixed-method study, quantitative data were collected through a Likert scale questionnaire and descriptive analysis was conducted using SPSS software. Qualitative data were analyzed by the researcher himself. In the quantitative phase of the study, a survey was conducted with 752 residents of Sakarya. In the qualitative phase, in-depth interviews were carried out with six department heads and branch managers directly involved in the participatory budgeting process at Sakarya Metropolitan Municipality.

In the study, firstly, the concept of participatory budget is discussed, then successful participatory budget practices from various countries around the world are analyzed. The empirical part of the study analyzes the perceptions of citizens and the views of municipal administrators on this model and its implementation. Based on this, a participatory budget model for Turkey is proposed.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Participatory Budget

Increasing citizen participation in public administration is recognized as one of the most fundamental elements of democratic governance systems. Modern public administration not only focuses on the efficiency of service delivery, but also aims to encourage citizens' active participation in governance (Goldfrank, 2006). In this context, citizens having a say in decision-making processes ensures that public policies are more transparent, accountable and better meet the needs of society (Dias et al., 2019). The participatory budget, which emerged as one of the important tools of this participation process, offers an approach that gives citizens a direct say in the use of public resources. The inclusion of citizens in local budget processes contributes to increasing democratic consciousness and responsibility in society, while at the same time strengthening trust in governance (Figueira & Pereira, 2022). In this way, the needs and expectations of different segments of society are more effectively reflected in budget decisions and a fairer approach is adopted in the allocation of resources (Un-habitat, 2004).

In participatory budgeting practices, information is usually provided on the use of public resources and citizens identify priority needs and make suggestions. These proposals are then evaluated and a certain portion of public resources are allocated according to the citizens' decision. This process provides a structure that strengthens not only resource allocation but also democratic participation of the society (Narter, 2012). This method increases democratic consciousness in the society and reinforces people's interest in public processes and the culture of participation. By expressing their views on budget decisions, citizens feel that

they are part of the process, not just spectators. This allows the public to have more say in the environment they live in and positively affects their interaction with local governments (Ebdon & Franklin, 2006).

The basis of participatory budgeting is that municipalities seek direct input from citizens in financial decision-making. As one of the most important actors in the participatory budget process, municipalities increase effectiveness and efficiency by allocating resources in line with the wishes of citizens by including them in the process (Brun & Lapsley, 2017).

Apart from municipalities, mukhtars, civil society organizations and city councils are important actors in the processes of voicing and negotiating citizens' demands in the successful implementation of the participatory budget process (Nylen, 2002). In participatory budget practices, mukhtars have duties such as listening to the common needs of the people of the neighborhood, conveying these demands and the problems of the neighborhood to the municipality, and representing the people of the neighborhood in determining spending priorities by participating in budget meetings (Piper, 2014). For this reason, it can be said that civil society organizations act as a bridge between local governments and citizens in participatory budgeting. Civil society organizations are expected to create a strong link between citizens and local administrators in order to make participatory budgeting feasible. They should also be active in the participatory budget process, listening to citizens demands and conveying them to the municipality (Demediuk et al., 2011). The city council's being active in this process is also highly influenced by the attitudes of local administrators. For this reason, it is important for municipalities to take the opinions of the city council during the budget process (Fung, 2015).

2.2. Participatory Budget Examples from Selected Countries

Participatory budgeting was first implemented in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 1989 and has since attracted the attention of local governments in different countries and has been implemented in many cities around the world in the context of sustainable development goals (Gret & Sintomer, 2004).

Porto Alegre, the first example of participatory budgeting, is known as the city that initiated the idea of citizens' involvement in the local government budget. In the participatory budget process in Porto Alegre, meetings are organized at the neighborhood level. In these meetings, citizens express their priorities on how resources will be used. The proposals created as a result of these annual meetings become part of the local budget (Abers et al., 2018). The Porto Alegre model has inspired many municipalities around the world with its positive results such as strengthening social justice, citizen participation in infrastructure projects and

poverty reduction.

As another example, in Spain, participatory budgeting has been adopted as an important tool to strengthen local governments' ties with society, especially in large cities such as Madrid and Barcelona. In Madrid, every citizen can contribute to the budget through an online platform, while in Barcelona, prioritization is based on local needs. In both cities, participatory budgeting is carried out through digital platforms (Allegretti, 2013). The practices in these Spanish cities are exemplary in terms of integrating modern technology into democratic processes.

In the United States, especially large cities such as New York and Chicago are among the local governments that actively implement the participatory budget process. In New York, a portion of the budget allocated by the municipality is used in line with the recommendations of neighborhood representatives and citizens. As a result of these suggestions, e-voting is used for prioritization. In Chicago, citizens share their budget proposals through neighborhood meetings and online participation tools (Kasdan & Markman, 2017). The implementation of participatory budgeting in the US is considered an effective method to strengthen democracy and involve the public more directly in decision-making processes (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2012).

In the UK, especially in London and Manchester, participatory budget practices are carried out through meetings organized at the neighborhood level and online platforms. The UK government also encourages such practices by providing funding to local governments for participatory budget processes (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011).

Italy is another case in point, where participatory budgeting is practiced extensively in large cities such as Bologna and Milan. In Italy's participatory budget model, community meetings are held at the neighborhood level. In these meetings, citizens identify local needs and make budget proposals. In Milan, the municipality allocates some of the funds allocated to the participatory budget process to special projects for youth, women and people with disabilities (Bassoli, 2012). In Italy, citizens can directly contribute to the financing of projects or submit proposals.

In Turkey, participatory budgeting as a management tool that encourages democratic participation is not yet fully established at the widespread and institutional level. However, some municipalities have implemented this process in limited pilot projects to ensure citizens' participation in budget decisions. These projects aim to establish a strong link between local governments and society and strengthen governance.

Participatory budget implementations in Turkey were carried out in Çanakkale and Bursa provinces. In both provinces, tools such as neighborhood

meetings, workshops and surveys were effectively used to solicit citizens' views, identify their priority needs and guide projects with a common mind. However, these positive beginnings did not transform into a long-term and sustainable participatory budget culture (Ulugöl, 2018). One reason for this may be that the participatory budget approach has not yet found a clear and comprehensive framework in legal regulations.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on participatory budgeting reveal how this practice is handled in different municipalities and local governments. It is important to mention these studies in order to reveal the originality of this study.

Demirkaya (2010) aimed to raise awareness on participatory budgeting. In this direction, attention was drawn to neighborhood meetings, city council activities, monitoring and satisfaction surveys in the implementation of participatory budgeting in Turkey. Bassoli (2012) analyzes participatory budgeting practices and governance arrangements in Italy. Uysal (2013) in his study, employed the participatory scenario technique to develop improvement strategies for historic urban areas. Varcan et al. (2013) examine the conceptual framework of local governments and propose a theoretical framework for participatory budgeting applications. Baiocchi and Ganuza (2014) discuss the emancipatory potential of participatory budgeting and analyze its effects in practice.

Dikici (2015), based on the participatory budget practices of Çanakkale Municipality and Uşak Special Provincial Administration, investigated its applicability in all municipalities. Dağlı (2017) aimed to determine the attitudes and perceptions of managers in Bandırma and Çanakkale municipalities towards participatory budgeting. In the study, it was concluded that there will be differences according to the approaches of managers towards participatory budget implementation in Turkey. Koç (2017) states that when participatory practices in Turkey are evaluated in terms of financial transparency, these processes are not sufficiently effective.

Çoban (2019) examined the role of city councils in the budget process. As a result of the survey conducted with city councils, he stated that the councils are an important stakeholder of the budget process and that participatory practices have increased thanks to the councils. Doğan (2020) addresses the social experience dimension of participatory budgeting by examining the effects of the process on the administrative and legal structures as well as on the social fabric.

Taş (2021) theoretically analyzes the participatory budgeting system and evaluates its practical effects through a study conducted with the residents of

Kırıkkale. Allegretti and Koçdemir (2021) comparatively examine participatory budgeting practices in Turkey and Portugal in their study. Akcan (2022) examined the positive and negative aspects of the relationship between participatory budgeting and fiscal autonomy and concluded that participatory budgeting is a practice that supports fiscal autonomy. Ataer (2022) points out that due to scale and temporal challenges, participatory budgeting practices in Turkey face difficulties in transitioning from representative democracy to direct democracy. Looking at the studies conducted in the last year,

Taşkın (2023) examined the methods used in participatory budgeting to strengthen participatory democracy. In this direction, he concluded that integrating technology into the budget process is a way to improve participatory democracy by taking the “Neighborhood Assembly” application put into operation by Antalya Muratpaşa Municipality as an example. Guluzade (2023), in his study, determined the attitudes of citizens living in Baku towards the participatory budget and the willingness of citizens to the budget process through a survey. In the study, it was determined that citizens have a positive attitude towards the participatory budget and that they want to participate in the process if this budget method is implemented in the city. In his study, Yediren (2023) examined the examples of participatory budget practices in municipalities in Turkey and concluded that the current practices on participatory budgeting in municipalities in Turkey are insufficient. Demirkılıç and Topal (2024) examine the development of e-participatory budgeting, an enhanced version of participatory budgeting supported by digital tools. Their study evaluates the current status and potential of e-participatory budgeting processes in Turkey. Arslan and Uygun (2024) analyze the effects of the budgeting process on participatory budgeting in private hospitals, using the example of Ankara province.

Studies indicate that participatory budgeting has been both conceptually discussed and empirically examined through implementation cases. Research in Turkey shows that such practices largely remain confined to the local level and face difficulties in developing a structural and sustainable participatory framework. Although mechanisms such as city councils and neighborhood assemblies exist, participation is often symbolic, highlighting the need for more transparent and inclusive models to foster active citizen engagement.

4. METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

In the study, mixed method, quantitative and qualitative methods are applied together as a method in order to raise awareness and perspective on the participatory budget implementation, which has been increasing in recent years.

The universe in the quantitative part of the study consists of citizens over the age of sixteen residing in Sakarya, the main actor of the participatory budget process. According to 2023 data, eight hundred and fifty-five thousand people over the age of sixteen live in Sakarya. At the 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error accepted in Social Sciences, it is predicted that the sample should be at least 384 people according to the universe (Sekaran, 1992). Here, the participants were reached by using random (convenience) sampling method, one of the non-probability based sampling methods. Accordingly, the questionnaire was applied to 752 people. Since such a study had not been conducted before, the “Expert Panel” was utilized in the preparation of the survey questions. A total of eight personal information questions were included in the questionnaire to determine demographic characteristics. There are also twenty-six statements prepared according to a five-point Likert scale. The data related to the questionnaire were analyzed by revealing the mean and standard deviation values of the participants' responses to each statement.

In the study, “semi-structured interview” technique was utilized among qualitative research methods. Basically six questions were prepared to be asked to the participants in the interviews. The population of the semi-structured interview application of the study consists of people who are directly related to the participatory budget process in Sakarya Metropolitan Municipality, which is the main sample of the study. Here, the participants were reached by using purposive sampling method, which is one of the non-probability based sampling methods. The participants consisted of six people in total: Advisor to the Mayor of Sakarya Metropolitan Municipality, Head of the Strategy Development Department, Deputy Secretary General, Head of the Department of Mukhtar Affairs, Smart City Branch Manager and Non-Governmental Organizations Branch Manager. During the interview, both audio recordings and notes were taken with their permission. While analyzing these data, the descriptive method was applied and the findings were discussed under three headings in line with the answers given by the participants to the questions.

There are four limitations in total in this study. These are;

- 1-The study is limited to Sakarya province only.
- 2-The study is limited to citizens living in the determined province.
- 3-The data collection tools used in the study are limited to statistical methods and the date range in which the study was conducted.
- 4-The limitation of the semi-structured interview study was experienced at the point of making an appointment with the people to be interviewed due to the fact that the interview dates were close to the 2024 local elections. For this reason, an appointment could not be made with the mayor; instead, the mayor's advisor,

who is also the president of the city council, was interviewed.

4.1. Ethical permissions for the study

In this study, all the rules specified in the "Directive on Scientific Research and Publication Ethics of Higher Education Institutions" were followed. None of the actions specified under the second section of the directive, "Actions Contrary to Scientific Research and Publication Ethics", have been carried out.

Ethics committee permission information

Name of the ethics review board = Sakarya University

Date of ethical assessment decision= 21.12.2023

Ethics assessment certificate number number= E-61923333-050.99-316798

5. FINDINGS

Since the mixed method is used in the study, the findings of both qualitative and quantitative data are evaluated separately and then a comparative analysis is made.

5.1. Findings of Qualitative Data

The findings of the qualitative research were tried to be interpreted under the headings of "Participatory Budget Approaches of Municipal Administrators", "Views of Municipal Administrators on Participatory Budget Implementation in Sakarya" and "Views of Municipal Administrators on the Interaction of Participatory Budget Actors in Sakarya". In this part of the study, the common answers given by the participants are organized and presented.

5.1.1. Participatory budget approaches of municipal administrators

The first two questions in the interview study were "What does the concept of participatory budget as a part of smart governance mean?" and "What are your views on the positive and negative aspects of participatory budget?". It can be said that the common views of all participants on the participatory budget are that it arises from the constitutional right to budget, that citizens decide how to use public resources, that the service demands of the stakeholders in the city are received with the governance approach, and that digital technologies are included in the participation process. In addition, in their approaches to participatory budgeting, participants emphasize that this practice will improve democracy, use resources more efficiently and respond to the demands of the neighborhood. On the other hand, in the implementation of participatory budgeting, the different education levels of citizens, lack of digital literacy, and the abstention of some citizens are mentioned as factors that make the process difficult.

5.1.2. Municipal administrators views on participatory budget implementation in Sakarya

Questions 3, 4 and 5 of the questions asked in the interviews aim to reveal the outlook of the participatory budget in Sakarya Metropolitan Municipality. Sakarya Metropolitan Municipality's smart city strategy includes service prioritized participatory budget implementation. In the responses to the third question, "What are the objectives of this practice?", the main opinion of the participants was to determine service priorities, to provide effective service with limited resources, to respond to the demands of the neighborhood and to ensure local democracy with the participation of all stakeholders.

The fourth interview question asked to determine the views of municipal administrators on participatory budget implementation in Sakarya was "How is the participatory budget process carried out in Sakarya Metropolitan Municipality?". The main opinion in the answers given by the participants is that the participatory budget is included in the strategic plan of the municipality and the opinions of citizens and other stakeholders are taken in the services to be realized. However, in line with the answers given, it can be said that service priorities are determined through events such as fairs and festivals, meetings held in public spaces, interviews with disadvantaged people, citizen surveys, digital platforms such as web pages and social media, and the beyaz masa unit.

Question 5 of the interview questions is "How is digital technology utilized in the process of smart-participatory budget preparation according to citizens' expectations? What would you suggest to increase citizen participation in governance by using technology? The main opinion of the participants was that the budget process is managed through e-surveys, e-voting, mobile applications, websites and social media platforms in order to learn citizens' demands for priority services. In terms of suggestions to increase participation, online panels and forums, citizen-oriented projects and e-portals are at the forefront.

As a result, it is emphasized that participatory budgeting is implemented in Sakarya in order to create the service priority set of the municipality in the fiscal year in line with the wishes of the citizens in line with the principles of smart governance, which is a requirement of the smart city.

5.1.3. Municipal administrators views on the interaction of participatory budget actors in Sakarya

The sixth and final question asked in the interviews aims to reveal the relationship between the municipality and participatory budget actors in the participatory budget process and the suggestions for improving this relationship. In this context, "Does Sakarya Metropolitan Municipality include civil society

organizations, mukhtars and the city council in the budget preparation process? What would you suggest to strengthen the participation of these stakeholders in the process?”.

According to the responses of municipal administrators, civil society organizations hold online and face-to-face meetings with both citizens and municipal administrators, and carry out joint projects with the municipality. Mukhtars, on the other hand, can communicate directly with the mayor to convey their service demands, convey the wishes of the people of their neighborhood through surveys and mukhtar demand forms, and participate in governance through their own digital system. However, it was also mentioned that the Sakarya City Council, the other stakeholder in the budget process, has only a youth council, so projects are organized for young people and other segments of the society are unable to convey their service demands to the City Council. It can be said that the suggestions for more active participation of these three actors in the budget process while determining service priorities are concentrated on webinars, virtual forums, the creation of digital platforms for CSOs, the allocation of special budgets to mukhtars' offices in order to meet small-scale services of the neighborhood, the establishment of neighborhood assemblies that increase the participation of citizens, the establishment of a women's and children's assembly in the city council to receive priority service requests, and the active use of social media to increase the recognition of the city council in the public.

5.2. Quantitative Data Findings

The validity and reliability of the scales used in a study are important for research results. For this reason, the research questions were tested for validity and reliability before starting the research. In this study, the most commonly used Cronbach's Alpha value was examined during reliability analysis. When the Cronbach's Alpha value is 0.60 and above, the scale is considered to be reliable.

Of the total 26 items in the questionnaire, the reliability coefficient of the statements revealing the “participatory budget approach” was found to be 0.713, the reliability coefficient of the statements revealing the “opinions on the participatory budget in Sakarya” was found to be 0.915, and the reliability coefficient of the statements revealing the “opinions on the interaction of participatory budget parties in Sakarya” was found to be 0.787. In this case, it is accepted that the questions used in the research are reliable.

5.2.1. Statistical findings

The demographic characteristics of the citizens participating in the survey were determined in terms of gender, age, education level, employment status,

whether they are members of non-governmental organizations, whether they are members of the city council, duration of residence in Sakarya and place of residence.

Table 1: Data on Demographic Variables

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	346	46
Female	406	54
Age		
16-26	140	18,6
27-37	184	24,5
38-48	201	26,7
49-59	166	22,1
60 and above	61	8,1
Education Level		
Primary education	17	2,3
Secondary Education	35	4,7
High School	119	15,8
Associate Degree	177	23,5
Bachelor's Degree	280	37,2
Postgraduate	124	16,5
Employment Status		
Public Official	276	36,7
Private Sector	143	19
Freelancer	80	10,6
Student	91	12,1
Housewife	54	7,2
Retired	78	10,4
Not working	21	2,8
Other	9	1,2
CSO Membership		
Member	380	50,5
Non-member	372	49,5
City Council Membership		
Member	23	3,1
Non-member	729	96,9
Residence Period		
0-10 years	174	23,1

11-20 years	143	19
21-30 years	164	21,8
31-40 years	116	15,4
41-50 years	83	11
51 and above	72	9,6
Place of Residence		
Central Districts	468	62,2
Other Districts	284	37,8
General Total	752	100

Demographic data on the respondents are presented in Table 1. According to the table, the distribution of participants by gender is close to each other. When these data are evaluated, it can be inferred that there are sufficient number of participants from both genders. The age group with the highest number of participants was the 38-48 age group. This is followed by the 27-37 age group. It can be accepted that the majority of the participants are young citizens. It is seen that the respondents generally consist of people with a high level of education. This situation leads to the belief that the respondents will not be unfamiliar with the participatory budget issue. Therefore, it is thought that healthy answers were given to the survey questions.

Looking at the distribution of the participants according to their employment status, the highest participation rate belongs to public official with 36.7%, followed by the private sector with 19%. Again, the high number of participants who are members of CSOs can be considered a positive indicator in terms of the level of awareness in the participatory budget process in Sakarya. When we look at the distribution of the participants according to whether they are members of the city council or not, it is seen that the rates are far from each other and council members are in the minority. The majority of the participants consist of those who have been living in Sakarya for the last 10 years with a rate of 23.1%. The number of participants living in the center of Sakarya is higher than those living in other districts.

Table 2: Mean Values of Citizen's Participatory Budget Approach

Question	Mean	St. Deviation
I would like all citizens to participate in the process when the municipality determines service priorities.	4,03	,978

I would like to participate in neighborhood meetings organized by the municipality to determine service priorities.	3,29	1,214
In the process of determining the service priorities of the municipality, I would like to express my preference digitally (SMS, web page, social media, e-survey, etc.).	4,03	,987
In the process of determining the service priorities of the municipality, I would like to express my preference physically on the ballot.	2,89	1,30
I would like the municipality to take only the opinions of citizens when determining service priorities.	2,86	1,29
I would like the municipality to take the opinion of mukhtars when determining service priorities.	3,64	1,00
I would like the municipality to take the opinions of non-governmental organizations (associations, foundations, trade unions, professional chambers, etc.) when determining service priorities.	3,89	,915
I would like the municipality to cooperate with the city council (an organization that listens to the wishes of citizens and enables them to participate in governance) in determining service priorities.	3,95	,844

In order to evaluate the responses to the survey questions, it is necessary to start with the statements that reveal the citizens' approach and interest in the participatory budget. The averages of the responses to these statements are important in revealing the interest of citizens residing in Sakarya in the participatory budget process. Based on these averages, it is concluded that the majority of the participants want citizens, mukhtars, civil society organizations and the city council to be involved in the municipality's budget process. Another result is that the participants are willing to participate in the neighborhood meetings held during the process of determining priority services. This shows that they are conscious of neighborhood meetings, which constitute the first step of participatory budgeting. Finally, it was concluded that the majority of the

participants preferred digital platforms such as the web, social media and e-surveys instead of ballots when expressing their prioritized services. Accordingly, it can be said that citizens have a high level of awareness on smart budgeting.

Table 3: Mean Values of Citizen's Views on Participatory Budget Implementation in Sakarya

Question	Mean	St. Deviation
Municipality spends its resources in line with citizens' requests.	2,78	1,22
Municipality acts in cooperation with citizens in its services.	2,80	1,22
Municipality prioritizes the requests of disadvantaged groups when determining service priorities.	3,42	1,22
Municipality organizes neighborhood meetings that ensure citizen participation while determining service priorities.	2,60	1,22
Municipality organizes events such as fairs, festivals, etc. to learn the preferences of citizens while determining service priorities.	3,13	1,30
Municipality meets with citizens in public spaces such as mosques, coffee houses and shopping centers to learn their wishes.	3,26	1,26
The Municipality identifies service priorities by conducting citizen satisfaction surveys.	2,80	1,30
The Municipality allows citizens to vote online to prioritize services.	2,56	1,27
While determining service priorities, the Municipality learns citizens' preferences through digital media (SMS, web page, social media, etc.).	3,15	1,33
Requests submitted to the Municipality are effectively evaluated through the beyaz masa and taken into account in determining prioritized services.	3,21	1,24
The municipality provides opportunities for citizens to submit their requests directly to	2,74	1,27

the mayor.

Municipality informs citizens about the services planned for the neighborhood through posters, brochures, sms, social media and web pages.	3,47	1,24
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These statements are the statements that address citizens' views on the participatory budget implementation in Sakarya. Thus, it was tried to see how citizens perceive the participatory budget implementation and their satisfaction status. It is also important to see the relationship between the activities carried out by municipal administrators while determining service priorities and the opinions of citizens on this issue.

It is seen that the citizens who participated in the survey positively agreed with the statements that the municipality gives importance to the preferences of disadvantaged groups while determining service priorities, organizes fairs and festivals while determining service priorities, learns the demands of citizens in public spaces during the budget preparation process, receives priority service requests of citizens through digital methods such as web pages and social media, evaluates the service requests of citizens by the beyaz masa unit, and informs citizens about the services to be realized in the fiscal year both through physical tools such as posters and brochures and through digital tools such as sms and web pages. Therefore, it can be said that the relevant stages of the participatory budget model were successfully implemented in the budget process in Sakarya.

However, the level of participation in the statements regarding the organization of neighborhood meetings that ensure citizen participation, the ability of citizens to convey their demands directly to the mayor, the municipality's conducting citizen satisfaction surveys and organizing digital voting to determine the priority order of services remained low.

The reason why respondents expressed a negative opinion on the statement regarding neighborhood meetings may be that they were not informed about the time and place of these meetings and that they were held at a time that was not convenient for them. Again, the reason for the negative viewpoint on the statement that citizens can directly convey their demands to the mayor may be the difficulties that respondents experience in making appointments to meet with the mayor and the fact that their service requests are not directly listened to by the mayor.

In this context, considering that neighborhood meetings are an important practice in the participatory budget model in terms of coming together with

citizens and listening to their demands, that it is necessary to create platforms where the mayor can learn the service priorities of citizens throughout the process, and the importance of using survey practices and digital systems, it can be stated that the participatory budget process in Sakarya is insufficient in these stages.

Table 4: Mean Values of Citizen's Views on the Interaction of Participatory Budget Actors

Question	Mean	St. Deviation
Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are effective in conveying citizens' demands to the municipality.	3,30	1,21
Municipality takes the opinions of CSOs in the process of determining priority service areas.	3,14	1,23
City Council is effective in conveying citizens' demands to the municipality.	2,58	1,22
Municipality consults with the city council on the services to be provided.	2,45	1,19
Muhtars play an active role in conveying the service priorities of the neighborhood to the municipality.	3,45	1,21
Municipality meets with mukhtars to learn about citizen demands while determining the service priorities of the neighborhood.	3,45	1,22

These statements in the questionnaire form are the statements that address citizens' perspectives on the interaction of participatory budget actors in Sakarya. Thus, it was tried to reveal the communication of citizens residing in Sakarya with participatory budget actors. Looking at the averages of the answers given by the participants, it can be said that the positive viewpoint that civil society organizations are successful in conveying the demands of citizens to the municipality and that the municipality consults the opinions of CSOs in the budget preparation process is intense and there is a high level of agreement. However, based on the averages, it is thought that the city council does not play an active role in the participatory budget process. In the background of the negative views on this statement, it can be said that the city council was established in the city in accordance with the legislation, that it only provides services for young people because it is a youth council, and that there is no organization within the district municipalities. Mukhtars, another actor in the participatory budget process, are believed to play an active role in this process.

5.3. Evaluating Qualitative and Quantitative Findings Together

The combined evaluation of the questionnaire and interview studies was evaluated within the framework of both groups' "participatory budget approaches", "their views on participatory budget implementation in Sakarya" and "their views on the interaction of participatory budget parties in Sakarya".

First of all, when the survey analysis of the citizens residing in Sakarya and the responses of the interviewed municipal administrators are evaluated together, it is seen that they have a participatory budget approach in the same direction. Since both citizens and administrators have high awareness of participatory budget practices, it can be said that they do not have difficulties in implementation.

When the answers given by the citizens participating in the survey to the statements aimed at evaluating their views on participatory budget implementation in Sakarya are evaluated together with the views of municipal administrators on this issue; it is possible to say that they are mostly in the same direction, but they made different statements to some statements.

Citizens and municipal administrators differ in their views on the use of satisfaction surveys to determine service priorities. While approximately 52% of respondents express negative opinions, municipal administrators state that such surveys are conducted to assess municipal performance and citizen satisfaction and are used in the five-year strategic plan. Administrators also note that citizens are asked to evaluate the importance of services and municipal success. This divergence may stem from citizens' limited awareness of these practices, as many do not regularly follow the municipality's website or social media accounts.

It is also possible to say that about 60% of the respondents disagreed that digital voting was used to prioritize services and expressed negative opinions. Municipality administrators, on the other hand, stated that digital voting has so far only been used to prioritize services for young people in the disadvantaged group of 16-26 years old. The reason why citizens and administrators have different perspectives on this statement is that only 18% of the respondents consisted of young people in the relevant age group, so 82% of them could not participate in these votes or were not informed about them.

When the responses of both citizens and administrators to the statements that constitute the last scale of the survey, which aim to evaluate the participants' views on the interaction of participatory budget actors in Sakarya, are evaluated together; it is possible to say that their perspectives are in the same direction. In this context, it can be said that in Sakarya, civil society organizations and mukhtars are considered successful in determining service priorities, while the

city council is considered unsuccessful.

6. PARTICIPATORY BUDGET MODEL PROPOSAL

The proposed participatory budgeting model has been constructed based on the data obtained from the field research. Each component of the model has been matched with corresponding field findings, thereby reinforcing the validity of the proposed structure. The model's suitability for implementation in Turkey has been tested and justified in light of the data collected directly from the field.

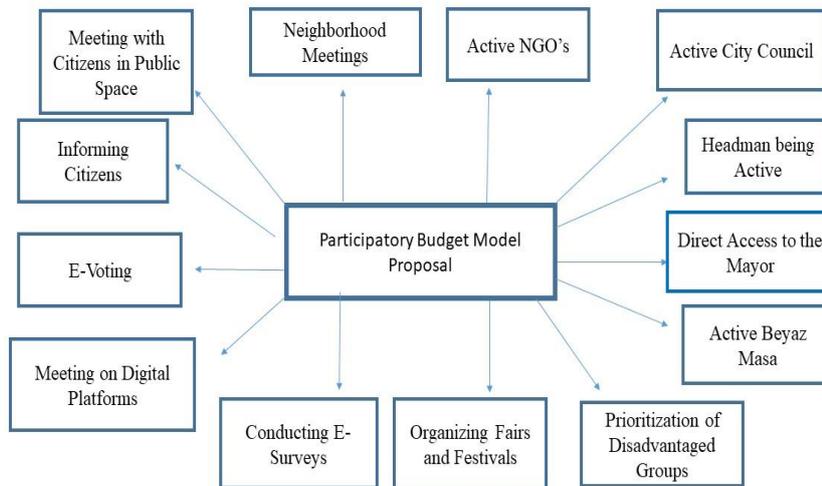


Figure 1: Participatory Budget Model Proposal

Source: (Figure was constructed by the authors.)

The model emphasizes citizen engagement in public spaces as a key component of participatory budgeting, particularly in small and medium-sized municipalities in Turkey, where such settings foster trust and direct interaction. Field findings also highlight citizens' demand for clear and accessible information on budgeting processes, underscoring the need for effective communication tools. To address the neglect of neighborhood-specific issues, the model recommends neighborhood-level meetings as democratic platforms for

identifying service priorities and ensuring their direct consideration in budget planning. Overall, comprehensible budgeting processes are essential for effective participation.

Young participants and working individuals frequently reported difficulties in attending physical meetings. This finding highlights the necessity of enabling participation through digital tools. E-voting, in particular, enhances accessibility and contributes to the democratization of the process; hence, it is incorporated into the proposed model.

Municipalities can establish dedicated digital platforms that enable direct communication between citizens and local governments throughout the budgeting process. Especially in municipalities serving large geographical areas, online meetings conducted via such platforms significantly facilitate public engagement in budget discussions. Moreover, e-voting features implemented on these platforms should allow citizens to directly determine budgetary priorities.

A considerable portion of the public, having become accustomed to digital tools in the post-pandemic period, now perceives online meetings as more accessible. This is further supported by survey results, which reflect a favorable attitude toward digital participation. Consequently, to ensure continuous and inclusive engagement, digital meetings have been integrated as a necessary component of the model.

The field study also revealed that e-surveys are effective tools for gathering input from a broader audience. Citizens expressed that being able to voice their opinions through simple and accessible methods made them feel like active participants in the process. These practices allow for the direct identification of public needs and priorities.

Interviews revealed that social events organized by municipalities contribute significantly to strengthening public relations and encouraging civic participation. To foster a culture of participation, it is essential for municipalities to maintain visible and approachable public engagement, which can be achieved through instruments such as festivals and fairs (Bland, 2017). These events not only bring citizens together through enjoyable activities but also serve as platforms for presenting budget-related projects and gathering public opinions. In this way, public involvement in the budgeting process is facilitated.

Field data further indicated a prioritization of services for groups such as individuals with disabilities, women, and the elderly. There was a strong consensus on the necessity of developing specific policies for these groups to ensure inclusiveness in participatory budgeting. Considering the needs of disadvantaged groups in the participatory budgeting process is crucial for achieving social justice. Prioritizing groups such as persons with disabilities, low-

income citizens, youth, children, and women ensures equitable access to public services across all segments of society. Incorporating the needs of these groups into budget priorities enhances their access to public services and promotes social equity (Sinervo et al., 2024). Moreover, their participation in decision-making processes helps eliminate structural barriers that deepen inequality. By amplifying the voices of disadvantaged groups, participatory budgeting mechanisms can contribute to building a fairer and more sustainable society (Falanga et. al., 2021). Therefore, the proposed model recommends prioritizing these groups.

The effective utilization of the “Beyaz Masa”, the mechanism through which citizen requests submitted to the municipality are collected and analyzed, is of significant importance for maintaining continuous communication with the public. In the field study, many participants stated that the Beyaz Masa operates effectively. Based on this finding, the model includes a recommendation to sustain and further strengthen the Beyaz Masa’s effectiveness. Improving the efficiency of the Beyaz Masa enables the municipality to offer timely and effective solutions to citizens’ concerns. Citizen demands can be considered during budget planning, allowing for the creation of budgets aligned with public needs. The Beyaz Masa units provide a platform where citizens can express their concerns equally and find resolutions, thereby contributing to the reduction of social inequalities.

A considerable number of citizens reported feeling excluded from the system due to their inability to directly reach the mayor. This issue was interpreted as a weakness in terms of local democracy. Therefore, the model recommends the establishment of direct communication mechanisms. The mayor is one of the most critical actors in the participatory budgeting process. The degree to which the mayor adopts and supports the participatory budgeting model has a direct impact on the development of a participatory culture in the city (İzci, 2014). Direct access to the mayor increases citizens’ trust in local governance. Citizens should be able to share their opinions and suggestions regarding the budget directly with the mayor either by making appointments or through “public days” held on designated dates. This ensures that public concerns and recommendations reach the highest authorities directly (Bornemann & Christen, 2019).

The active involvement of urban stakeholders such as non-governmental organizations (CSOs) and city councils in participatory budgeting processes enables local governments to work collaboratively with citizens and better understand their needs. These communities are organizations that possess in-depth knowledge of local problems and demands (Jaramillo & Wright, 2015).

Therefore, they can regularly convey citizens' demands to municipalities and offer guidance in needs assessments and budget allocation. Mukhtars, as direct points of contact between citizens and municipal administrations, serve as crucial intermediaries. By communicating the primary needs of their neighborhoods, headmen should ensure that residents' demands are reflected in the municipal budget.

The field research also revealed that many participants emphasized the necessity of involving neighborhood headmen in the participatory budgeting process as local representatives. Thus, the model envisions an active role for headmen. CSs, as the organized voice of the people, can enhance civic engagement in the process. Interview findings indicated that cooperation with CSOs is already taking place to a reasonable extent.

In summary, although the proposed participatory budgeting model was inspired by international practices, the components of the model were shaped by the findings of field research-including surveys and interviews conducted within this study to ensure its relevance to the Turkish context.

The local government system in Turkey has undergone significant legal and institutional developments in recent years with regard to citizen participation. However, it is also acknowledged that the effectiveness of participation in practice remains limited. This situation demonstrates that the proposed model is designed to fill existing gaps and, in this sense, aligns with the realities of local governance in Turkey. The following points support the argument that the model is both valid and appropriate for implementation in Turkey:

Grounded in Local Public Opinion: The proposed model is not an abstract design solely derived from theoretical literature. Rather, the structure of the model is directly informed by the findings obtained from the field research conducted as part of this study. The needs, demands, and deficiencies expressed by citizens during interviews are directly reflected in the model. Furthermore, the perspectives of municipal officials also played a critical role in shaping the components of the model.

Compatibility with Turkish Legislation and Practice: All elements of the model are compatible with Turkey's current local government legislation and institutional structures. For instance, mechanisms such as the active involvement of muhtars and CSOs, the inclusion of the City Council, and the use of "Beyaz Masa" services already exist as legally supported institutions in Turkey. This enhances the practical applicability of the model.

Learning from Similar Initiatives, Not Copying Them: Although certain components of the model are inspired by successful examples abroad, they have not been copied directly. Instead, they have been adapted to the sociopolitical,

institutional, and administrative characteristics of Turkey. The model has been redesigned through a localization process based on the data collected during the fieldwork and by considering the dynamics of Turkish municipalities and citizen engagement practices.

Compatibility with the Local Culture of Participation: In Turkey, the culture of civic participation generally develops through direct contact and face-to-face interaction. Elements of the proposed model-such as neighborhood meetings, gatherings in public spaces, and direct access to the mayor-have been specifically designed in accordance with this cultural structure.

7. CONCLUSION

As a democratic mechanism that enables citizens to directly participate in the budgeting process of local governments, participatory budgeting is important for increasing the inclusiveness of public institutions and building public trust. Increased implementation of participatory budgeting in decision-making processes can contribute to the progress of local governments with a focus on sustainability.

Since participatory budgeting is not formally embedded in Turkey's legal framework, this study proposes a context-specific model to strengthen citizen-local government interaction. The model emphasizes neighborhood meetings, active involvement of civil society organizations, mukhtars, and city councils in setting service priorities, accessible communication channels with mayors, mechanisms to convey citizen demands, inclusive practices for disadvantaged groups, and the use of digital tools to identify priorities and inform citizens about municipal services.

The findings indicate that, despite certain criticisms, citizens in Sakarya generally hold a positive view of participatory budgeting, while municipal administrators regard it as a strategic tool for sustainability, efficient resource use, and social inclusion. Given that the study is limited to Sakarya, future research should test the proposed model in municipalities of different sizes to enable comparative and more comprehensive analyses. Increasing citizen participation in Turkey is of great importance for strengthening democratic governance and ensuring that public policies are more inclusive. In this regard, the following recommendations may contribute significantly to the development of participatory practices:

- *Organize Public Awareness and Information Campaigns:* Municipalities should undertake awareness-raising initiatives to better communicate participatory budgeting processes to citizens through social media

platforms, brochures, seminars, and local events. These efforts would enhance transparency and foster a culture of participation.

- *Conduct Regular and Accessible Citizen Meetings:* Regular meetings should be held in public spaces and neighborhoods to provide citizens with opportunities to express their opinions, concerns, and suggestions directly. Such forums can facilitate meaningful dialogue between local authorities and the public.
- *Implement Educational Programs to Encourage Youth Participation:* Educational and workshop activities focused on participatory budgeting and local governance should be organized in schools and youth centers.
- *Promote the Exchange of Best Practices Among Local Governments:* Successful examples of participatory budgeting across Turkey should be shared among municipalities.
- *Adopt Flexible and Gradual Approaches in Participatory Budgeting Processes:* Mechanisms that allow for varying levels of citizen engagement should be designed to accommodate different capacities and interests.
- *Collaborate with Local Media to Broaden Public Engagement:* Partnerships should be established with local television, radio, and newspapers to produce informative content about participatory budgeting.
- *Facilitate Participation Through Social Media and Mobile Applications:* The use of digital tools such as surveys, suggestion platforms, and informative content shared via mobile applications and social media can simplify citizen involvement and make the process more accessible to diverse populations.

8. CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

There is no conflict of interest between the authors.

9. FINANCIAL SUPPORT

This study did not benefit from any funding or support.

10. AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

YK: Idea;

YK, FT: Design;

FT: Supervision;

YK: Collection and/or processing of resources;

YK: Analysis and/or interpretation;

YK: Literature review;

YK, FT: Author of the article;

FT: Critical review

11. ETHICS COMMITTEE STATEMENT AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS

The principles of the ethics committee were followed in the study and necessary permissions were obtained in accordance with the principle of intellectual property and copyrights.

In this study, all rules specified in the “Directive on Scientific Research and Publication Ethics of Higher Education Institutions” were followed. None of the actions specified under the second section of the directive, “Actions Contrary to Scientific Research and Publication Ethics”, have been carried out.

12. USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) TOOLS

In this study, artificial intelligence tools were used solely for the purpose of language editing.

13. DATA AVAILABILITY

Data supporting the findings of this study can be obtained from the corresponding author upon request.

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