

The 2017 Migrant Workers Participatory Budgeting Project – Deciding leisure activities in Taoyuan, Taiwan

Problems and Purpose

In response to the growing disenfranchisement and ostracization of migrant workers in the city of Taoyuan, the Department of Labour pledged to organize Asia's first participatory budgeting project specifically for migrant workers - the 2017 Migrant Workers Participatory Budgeting (MWPB) Project. This project allowed migrant workers to make proposals for leisure projects which promoted migrants culture, art, and sport.

The problems faced by migrant workers in Taoyuan were representative of the shared experiences of migrant workers across Taiwan, who, due to their non-citizen status, reported a sense of exclusion from the democratic process and society in general.

In this experimental project, the Department of Labour, identified five key aims for the project to address.

Their aims were to:

- (1) Give disadvantaged groups who lack political representation an opportunity to speak out by participating in the policy and decision-making process.
- (2) To improve the governmental effectiveness of public service by exploring the public needs
- (3) To change the thinking of civil servants on migrant workers' issues and facilitate administrative innovation.
- (4) To establish relationships based on trust between migrant workers and government, and to build a multi-cultural and human rights friendly environment.
- (5) To establish positive interactions and synergise relationships with stakeholders to innovate public governance models [1].

Background History and Context

Taiwan has a short history of participatory budgeting, after it was introduced as part of the 2014 mayoral elections in Taipei, with experimental programmes in New Taipei City, Taichung, and Kaohsiung, since.

Taiwan, formally known as the Republic of China, experienced a number of transformative changes following the end of Martial Law in 1987. Under pressure from socioeconomic modernization and the growing strength of the opposition, the

leader of the Kuomintang (KMT), Chiang Ching-kuo, begun to facilitate the process of transformation from 'soft authoritarianism' to democracy [2]. The domination of the KMT within Taiwanese politics was thus open to democratic challenge, however in the nation's first open presidential election of 1996, the KMT candidate, Lee Teng-Hui won convincingly, indicating that the KMT had successfully adapted to the new pluralistic system.

Despite the relatively quick and peaceful transition, critics argued that the quality of democracy in Taiwan was low, with a high degree of inequality, political divides along ethnic lines, and a marginalization of minority voices [3]. However, since initial reservations about the quality of Taiwan's democracy, there were strong indications that Taiwan's democracy had 'deepened' by the start of the 21st century. Progressive political issues became regarded as non-trivial, and debates surrounding progressive policies gained salience within all cleavages in society [4]. This trend was reflected in the election of the first non KMT president, Chen Shui-bian of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), in 2000. Currently the position is held by Tsai Ing-wen of the DPP, Taiwan's first female president.

Although citizens of Taiwan have clearly been empowered by the democratic transition, the picture for non-citizens is more complex. Currently Taiwan has a migrant worker population of over 700,000, with 100,000 living in Taoyuan [5]. These migrant workers are from a multitude of ethnic and national backgrounds, the vast majority from other nations in South East Asia, primarily Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, and the Philippines.

Increases to the number of foreign workers in Taiwan, doubling from 300,000 in 2001 to 625,000 in 2016, has resulted in increasing level of discrimination and social exclusion for migrant workers [6]. The threat of competition for blue collar jobs, combined with cultural illiteracy, has meant that public support for government action to limit the working rights of migrant workers has grown in recent decades. For example, a regulation requiring female born guest workers to undergo pregnancy tests, which contravenes international law, was only recently overturned due to the efforts of NGOs fighting for minority rights [7].

The media portrayal of female migrants in particular has also served to undermine their status as equals in Taiwanese society, with repeated focus on their role and victimization in human sex trafficking. These media portrayals are in direct contrast to that of male migrant workers, who frequently are reported as perpetrators of sexual crimes and a threat to Taiwanese women [8]. Considering this, the project was seen as a way to challenge media portrayals of themselves by participants and alter any of the pre-conceived biases of the local citizens.

The decision to use Participatory Budgeting to empower migrants was largely the result of it's increased adoption as a democratic innovation by other cities in Taiwan since its introduction in 2015 by the Mayoral candidate for Taipei, Ko Wen-je [9].

Organizing, Supporting, and Funding Entities

The MWPB Project was funded entirely by the Taoyuan City Government's Department of Labour – this included the financial resources to organise the workshops and voting process, as well as the NT\$500,000 to the three proposals with the most votes. The decision to bear the entire costs of the project was due to the commitment of the head of the Department of Labour, Wang An-bang, to the success of the project.

In order for successful implementation of the project, 'Trained Facilitators' were required for two key reasons. First, linguistic barriers between participants meant that in order to effectively communicate with each other and the public officials, translators were needed. Secondly, Facilitators were able to guide the workshops and ensure that each proposal was given equal attention and all voices were heard. Furthermore, Facilitators were responsible for outreach during the selection phase, adopting a policy of visiting migrant areas to promote the project face-to-face.

A notable feature of this project was the outsourcing of the organizational aspects to NGOs. The Serve the People Association and Taiwan Reach-Out for Democracy were the largest NGO's involved, however they were assisted by the smaller groups 1095 Studio and SEA Migrant Inspired. The impact of the decision to outsource the execution of the project to NGOs by the Department of Labour is discussed in more depth in Analysis and Lessons Learnt.

Participant Recruitment and Selection

In order to participate in the MWPB Project, applicants had to either be a citizen living in Taoyuan or be a migrant worker from Vietnam, the Philippines, Thailand, or Indonesia [10].

The recruitment process was the responsibility of the relevant NGOs, who decided to take an approach which could reach potential participants through social media and physical means. A combination of posters, Facebook posts, and word of mouth, encouraged interested individuals to attend two information sessions, or project seminars. One on the 20th July 2017, specifically for Filipino and Vietnamese workers, and the second on 27th July 2017 for Thai and Indonesian workers [11]. Both of these seminars gave more detailed information on how the project would run and what the final aims were.

Following these seminars, two workshops ran on 17th September and the 1st October. In total 149 participants (the nationality breakdown of which is shown below) were involved across the workshops, their discussions enabled by 28 facilitators and 21 students aiding with administrative work [12].

Nationality of participants

Nationality	Workshops
Indonesia	49
Philippines	54
Thailand	15
Vietnam	12
Taiwan	19
Total	149

Table 1 [13]

Methods and Tools Used

In order to effectively conduct the MWPB Project, the organizers decided to pursue a multi-channelled approach which combined face to face deliberation with an e-democratic and physical vote, as this would allow for more comprehensive proposals to be developed and make voting easier. Despite Taiwan's short history of Participatory Budgeting, the success of recent projects guided the MWPB Project. The 2015 Experimental Project of Civic Deliberation had adopted a similar method as the MWPB Project, with initial introductory seminars followed by more detailed discussions in a Resident Assembly to develop proposals, and then a final vote [14]. One key difference however between the projects was that the 2017 MWPB decided to not use any system of representatives which excluded participants at the deliberative stage, in contrast to the 2015 Project.

The voting system used to decide which 3 proposals to be selected was as follows. After participants had selected the final 13 proposals at the second workshop, the voting window was opened on the 26th October and ran until 13 November. Voting could either be done online or in person, with a number of voting stations set up on multiple weekends across the city during the voting window. A plural voting system was adopted and was open to the public, where voters could vote for the 3 proposals they liked best. The 3 proposals with the most votes would receive funding and be implemented and the results were revealed on the 27th November. An additional incentive to voting was entry into a lottery draw for prizes of electronic goods upon completion of voting, the draw for which was done on 28th November.

One crucial aspect of the MWPB Project was the use of translators. Since the linguistic proficiency of either Mandarin or English as a common language varied greatly amongst the migrant workers participating, a number of adaptations were made to the project. For the initial introductory sessions, one was dedicated to Filipino and Vietnamese workers, with the seminar running twice, once in each language, with the second for Thai and Indonesian workers following the same format. Furthermore, during the deliberation sessions, translators and interpreters were assigned to groups in order to allow for more effective communication of ideas between migrant groups, as an essential aspect of the project was different migrant groups gaining cultural education and insight. Throughout the entire project, posters, Facebook posts, and all forms of verbal information release were done in Mandarin, Thai, Vietnamese, Filipino, Indonesian, and English, in order to ensure no groups were disadvantaged.

What Went On: Process, Interaction, and Participation

Once participants had registered their interest in attending the introductory sessions, the first seminar ran for Filipino and Vietnamese workers on 20th August with the second on 27th August for Thai and Indonesian workers, both on a Sunday. Both of these seminars ran from 2pm till 4pm and utilised multi-channel interpretation technology so the participants could fully understand the details of the plan. Although specific attendance numbers for each introduction seminar were unavailable, both sessions reported a higher than expected turnout - the informality of this stage meant that unregistered arrivals on the day could be accommodated. The content of the seminars was designed to introduce migrants to what participatory budgeting was and how it could benefit them, and encouraged them to begin formulating ideas for leisure activities that could be further developed at the next stage. It also made them aware that each project would be voted on at the final stage in order to decide funding. Snacks were provided to the participants and they had the opportunity to ask questions to the organizers. This stage, by design, began the process where migrant workers from different ethnic backgrounds could begin proposing and exchanging ideas, as the success of any of the proposals at voting time would involve convincing other groups.

Before the second stage, participants with a potential proposal were asked to complete a form (online or downloadable) which outlined the rough details of their proposed leisure activity, who would be coming to discuss it further at the next stage, and who would represent the proposal at the presentation stage. Additionally it was also made clear that in order for the proposals to be considered, the named representatives were required to attend both upcoming workshops. Once these forms had been completed, participants were asked to attend the first workshop on

Sunday 17th September to discuss the proposals in more depth within each group and with other groups. The workshop ran from 10am till 4pm, and the organizers provided food throughout. In total 70 migrant workers attended, offering 21 proposals, with a key element of the deliberation being the groups rotating round to different discussion tables in order to explain their proposals to the other groups [15]. Some groups had prepared elements of their proposals to show to the other groups, for example one group proposing a food festival brought a variety of traditional Indonesian dishes to share with everyone.

A second workshop was organized for the 1st October, again running 10am till 4pm. However, the purpose of this meeting was slightly different. At this workshop, each proposal was discussed in more depth with representatives of the city government. The purpose of this was to ensure the proposals were feasible, within the \$NT500,000 budget, and to aid in the formal planning. Through this process, the original 21 proposals were reduced down to 13, which were then finalized with the representatives of each proposal producing a short video explaining why their proposal should be voted for. This marked the end of the deliberation stage and voting began on 26th October.

Influence, Outcomes, and Effects

The MWPB project aimed to accomplish 5 key objectives:

- (1) Give disadvantaged groups who lack political representation an opportunity to speak out by participating in the policy and decision making process.
- (2) To improve the governmental effectiveness of public service by exploring the public needs
- (3) To change the thinking of civil servants on migrant workers' issues and facilitate administrative innovation.
- (4) To establish relationships based on trust between migrant workers and government, and to build a multi-cultural and human rights friendly environment.
- (5) To establish positive interactions and synergise relationships with stakeholders to innovate public governance models.

Although the nature of these aims was qualitative and therefore difficult to assess through data, the project was almost universally heralded as a success. The participants reported very positive assessments of their experience, with 51% very satisfied, 42% satisfied, 7% average, and 0% dissatisfied or very dissatisfied [16]. In addition to this, in a Youtube review of the project, participants shared their views on the process and gave it high praise, particularly for the way it allowed them to explain

why their culture was important to other groups [17]. A main impact was therefore an increased sense of pride in their own group identity, which was clearly translated into the fact that those who participated were willing to give up significant time and energy proposing their ideas.

In terms of the outcome of the final vote, things ran smoothly and 3 winners were selected. The voting results, and national identity of those who voted are displayed below.

Voting number of each nationality

Nationality	Voting (persons)
Indonesia	814
Philippines	486
Thailand	454
Vietnam	1010
Taiwan	285
Total	3049

Table 2 [18]

Number of votes for each proposal

Number	Title	Number of votes
1	Indoor Football Game	1392
2	Mobile Legend Online Games & Dart Competition	620
3	Chinese Classroom for Vietnam Migrant Workers	1170
4	Mr & Mrs Migrant Workers	934
5	Beauty Pageant on 10/20 Vietnam Women's Day	819
6	International Muay Thai Competition	1836
7	Vietnam's New Year Festival	1325
8	Volleyball, Basketball Tournament	1432
9	Singing & Dancing	974
10	Football Game	1375
11	Arts Exhibition	698
12	3 Times Culture Tour	896
13	4 Countries Migrant Workers Festival	1106
Total		14577

Table 3. [19] It should be noted that the total given here includes voters who did not attend the project, or of different nationalities to that given in Table 2, explaining the discrepancy in total number of votes.

From the voting, the winning project was the Muay Thai Competition, with the Indoor Football Game and Volleyball, Basketball Tournament coming in 2nd and 3rd retrospectively. As planned each proposal received NT\$500,000 dollars budget, although the total amount needed for all the proposals to be implemented was only NT\$1,000,000. The winning proposal, Muay Thai Competition, was formalized after a meeting with the Department of Labour on 30th January 2018, and conducted on 10th June later that year, being regarded as a success. The city Mayor, Cheng Wen-Tsan, who was highly supportive of the MWPB project throughout, was noted in attendance of the competition, as were 40 contestants [20].

Returning to the goals of the project outlined above, it was a success in terms of aims 1, 2, 5. However, as will be explored further below, it can only be judged to be a partial success in terms of aims 3 and 4, due to the decision to adopt an 'outsourced model' of PB.

Overall however, the project was a success, and was internationally recognised as such, winning the IODP award in 2018, a core explanation for which was the pioneering focus on migrants and the multi-linguistic nature. Building on the success of the 2017 MWPB project, the Taoyuan Municipal Government decided to repeat the project, this time under the name of 2018 Migrant Workers Friendly Measures in Taoyuan. This project followed the same format, with 2 introductory sessions, followed by proposal workshops and then a vote. The main difference between the 2017 and 2018 projects was that proposals were allowed to be less leisure focused; for example participants could propose training or care initiatives.

Analysis and Lessons Learned

The 2017 MWPB Project was primarily concerned with ensuring that foreign migrant workers in Taoyuan were given a voice, and role, in deciding how public funds were spent on leisure activities. In this respect, it was a complete success, implementing an effective plan which resulted in all who were interested being able to participate and fairly decide how the funds were spent.

Another method of assessing the impact of the project is by using Graham Smith's concept of 'Democratic Goods' [21]. In terms of Inclusivity, the MWPB Project allowed previously marginalised groups, in this case migrant workers, to not only become involved in the institutional decision making process of democratic society but to also have an *equal* chance to influence outcomes. Additionally, the project

broke through a number of barriers to inclusion, such as wealth and language, which is crucial in order to have true inclusivity. It must also be mentioned that the project successfully enabled participants to feel included amongst each other. By enabling intercultural dialogue, migrant workers from different nationalities were able to foster social bonds and understand commonalities. The participation of Taoyuan nationals was also highly beneficial as it contributed to bridging the gap between nationals and migrants [22]. The only potential limitation in terms of inclusivity, was that migrant workers from other backgrounds were not allowed to apply, and thus still remain marginalized and cut out of the decision-making process. However, the decision to limit the nationalities which could apply to the four largest migrant groups in Taoyuan was understandable, as having it open to all groups would have meant finding more interpreters and conducting more introductory sessions in different languages, which may have reduced the efficiency of the project by making communication channels more complex. It should also be highlighted that the decision to use online voting assisted the project in being inclusive, as it meant workers who may have lacked the financial resources to travel to vote in person, were still able to vote.

Not only did the project encourage high levels of Inclusivity, but also demonstrated good Transferability. The project was designed to follow the Public-Private-Partnership Model in which strong links are created between local communities and local organizations, enhancing trust and facilitating coordinative skills [23]. Furthermore, the MWPB Project's decision to conduct deliberation in the mother tongue's of the participants was a necessity in order to reduce communication barriers [24]. As such, similar projects could be implemented across other cities in Taiwan, or across many cities globally where there high numbers of migrant workers experiencing marginalization. The low cost of the project model would also increase viability in terms of replicability, as even public administrations with tight budgets could implement similar schemes. The crucial component, if the 2017 MWPB Project is to be used as a framework, must remain ensuring that the empowerment of non-citizens remains the focus, and the process is not overly influenced by local populations. In terms of scalability however, this project would likely suffer if applied province or nationwide, since the core strategy revolves around local engagement. Instead it would be better to run multiple projects running in parallel if the success of the project wished to be imported by central governments. Cabennes highlights how Participatory Budgeting is most beneficial for disadvantaged groups when combining approaches tailor made for the social groups they intend to benefit [25], whilst also avoiding being influenced by party politics. The separation from political influence was clear in the case of the 2017 MWPB Project, as the organizational actors involved were either from NGO's or from the local bureaucracy, both of which had no incentive in directly manipulating the process. The creative decision by organizers to 'go to where people are', talking to them in person about their experiences, was also essential in building trust in the beginning of the process.

Unfortunately however, there was one issue with the project, which applies to all PB schemes implemented in Taiwan. Wan's analysis of Taiwan's 'outsourced' model of PB highlights how this can restrict the effectiveness of PB. Under this model, identified as exclusive to Taiwan, the government 'contracts' the structure and process of PB to NGOs or teams led by scholars [26]. Although Wan concludes that the 'outsourced' model did not hamper the 2017 MWPB Project, he suggests that it still imposes structural constraints on PB, as ultimately the contractors cannot initiate any administrative reforms which could make future PB programmes more successful [27]. Furthermore, although initial results may be better by contracting out the process, due to the inexperience in running PB projects within the civil administrations, by doing this the government's ability to conduct PB is never improved through iterative means. Instead, as Wan suggests, city staff should become far more involved in the process on the ground and gain experience which can be used to develop more efficient frameworks for public governance [28]. Despite this, there is room for evolution of PB practises in Taiwan, and the 2017 MWPB Project should be seen as an excellent guide of how to implement the 'outsourced' model Taiwan has developed. Overall, the project demonstrated how the marginalized and disadvantaged can greatly benefit from participatory budgeting, especially from small scale projects designed to value the process of organic deliberation and cultural discussion rather than simply focusing on deciding budgets.

See Also

More details on Participatory Budgeting: <https://participedia.net/method/146>

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External Links

<https://www.facebook.com/2018MWPBinTaoyuan>

Notes