

GREEN QUOTAS IN PARTICIPATORY BUDGETS OF CITIES WITH COUNTY RIGHTS

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Purpose: The aim of this article is to identify cities with county rights in Poland that, within their participatory budgets for 2026, have allocated green quotas - funds intended for the implementation of pro-environmental projects.

Design/methodology/approach: To achieve the article's objective, an analysis was conducted of resolutions, ordinances, and regulations defining the functioning of participatory budgets in 66 cities with county rights in Poland.

Findings: The analysis revealed that only 9 out of 66 cities with county rights allocated green quotas in their participatory budgets, suggesting that this solution remains marginal and lacks national standardization. Among the cities that adopted this approach, there are significant differences in the percentage share of green quotas in the participatory budgets, as well as in per capita and per square kilometer allocations.

Research limitations/implications: The analysis is limited to cities with county rights, excluding smaller municipalities, which narrows the research perspective. The findings may serve as a starting point for a broader debate on the role of participatory budgets in implementing local pro-environmental projects.

Practical implications: Introducing a requirement to allocate green quotas in participatory budgets should be considered, as it may enhance the effectiveness of financing local pro-environmental initiatives.

Social implications: Mandating green quotas in participatory budgets could increase environmental awareness and strengthen community engagement in environmental protection efforts.

Originality/value: The originality of this study lies in the comprehensive analysis of resolutions, ordinances, and regulations governing participatory budgets in all 66 cities with county rights in Poland, specifically for the 2026 budget year.

Keywords: participatory budget, green quotas, pro-environmental initiatives, cities with county rights.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

Climate change is one of the most serious challenges of the 21st century. Long-term climate observations indicate a continuous warming trend, manifested in the rise of the average global air temperature. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the global average temperature has increased by 1.1°C compared to the pre-industrial era (IPCC, 2023). Estimates suggest that if current levels of greenhouse gas emissions persist, the global temperature could rise by 3-5°C by the end of the 21st century (Państwowe Gospodarstwo Wodne Wody Polskie, 2025). As a result of rising global temperatures, a number of adverse changes in the natural environment are being observed, such as ocean warming, increasing acidification, glacier and ice sheet melting, and the thawing of permafrost in polar regions. Climate warming also contributes to the intensification of extreme weather events, including storms, hurricanes, tornadoes, squalls, and heavy rainfall leading to floods (Hajto et al., 2021). The consequences of climate change are not limited to environmental degradation but also include significant social, economic, and health impacts (Muras, 2018).

Due to the growing importance and multidimensional effects of climate change, various actions are being taken to mitigate it. These include the implementation of climate policies (Rozwadowska, 2023; Bera et al., 2025), the development of renewable energy sources (Gayen, Chatterje, Roy, 2024), the adaptation of infrastructure to new climate conditions (Pamukcu-Albers et al., 2021), and the promotion of sustainable lifestyles (Instytut Rozwoju Myśli Ekologicznej, 2024).

Climate action can take place at the global, national, regional, and local levels. Increasingly, society is being engaged in initiatives aimed at combating climate change. One of the tools that enables residents to actively participate in such efforts is the participatory budget, within which funds can be allocated for pro-environmental initiatives – so-called green quotas.

The aim of this article is to identify cities with county rights in Poland that, within their participatory budgets for 2026, have allocated green quotas – resources designated for the implementation of pro-environmental projects. Achieving this goal will allow for an assessment of the extent to which local governments incorporate environmental issues into the process of social participation.

2. The essence of participatory budgeting

Participatory budgeting aligns with the philosophy of local government functioning as a community of authorities and residents of a given territorial unit. It is a tool that allows residents to co-decide on the allocation of a portion of the municipal budget for specific

purposes. On one hand, participatory budgeting activates society; on the other, it helps tailor city management more closely to residents' needs. The main goal of introducing participatory budgeting is to involve various social groups in managing local affairs, build social bonds through the implementation of shared ideas, and rebuild citizens' trust in authorities (Rzeńca, 2018).

The idea of participatory budgeting first emerged in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre in the late 1980s (Krenjova, Raudla, 2013). The concept was developed by urban movements opposing the authorities and was primarily intended to empower society and remove part of local governance from military control. The essence of participatory budgeting was to conduct public consultations during which decision-makers and residents jointly determined the directions of urban investments. Ensuring a constant flow of information about the progress of implemented tasks was also important. The successful implementation of participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre was made possible by the simultaneous occurrence of three factors: grassroots initiative, strong support from local authorities, and approval from central authorities. The introduction of participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre proved to be a great success. By 2008, it had been implemented in about 200 Brazilian cities, covering over 44 million residents (Krasnowolski, 2020).

In Poland, the idea of introducing the first participatory budget appeared in Sopot in 2010, initiated by the Sopot Development Initiative¹. Initially, the idea did not gain much support among city officials. However, thanks to intensive educational and promotional efforts by the Sopot Development Initiative, the City Council eventually passed a resolution introducing the participatory budgeting mechanism (Szaranowicz-Kusz, 2014). Out of several hundred projects submitted by residents, a dozen or so were selected for each of Sopot's four districts, along with 22 city-wide projects. In the vote on the first edition of the participatory budget in Sopot, 2410 valid votes were cast out of over 32,000 eligible voters. As a result of this first edition, the following investments were implemented:

- design work for a bicycle path from 3 Maja Street to Ergo Arena,
- completion of investments near Łokietka Street 49-55,
- permanent installation of benches at the market on Polna Street,
- renovation of stairs from 23 Marca Street to the church,
- installation of new benches on the way to the church,
- construction of a multi-space parking lot near the kindergarten in Brodwinio.

Initially, the participatory budget in Sopot was treated as an experiment, which unexpectedly gained traction and quickly earned recognition in other cities. Just a year later, participatory budgeting began operating in Elbląg, Poznań, and Zielona Góra (Leśniewska-Napierała, 2017).

¹ The Sopot Development Initiative is an informal group working in Sopot to implement the demands of sustainable development and increase residents' participation in decisions that affect them.

Until January 30, 2018, there were no legal provisions defining or regulating the functioning of participatory budgets in Poland. Participatory budgets were created solely based on the general statutory powers of local government units. It was only with the adoption of the Act of 11 January 2018 (Ustawa z dnia 11 stycznia 2018 r.), which entered into force on 31 January 2018, that the principles of operation of the participatory budget were indicated in individual local government acts (Ustawa z dnia 8 marca 1990 r., art. 5a; Ustawa z dnia 5 czerwca 1998 r. o samorządzie powiatowym, art. 3d; Ustawa z dnia 5 czerwca 1998 r. o samorządzie województwa, art. 10a). According to the Act of March 8, 1990, on municipal self-government, cities with county rights are legally required to create a participatory budget annually. Moreover, in these cities, the participatory budget must amount to at least 0.5% of the expenditures listed in the most recent budget execution report (Ustawa z dnia 8 marca 1990 r., art. 5a, ust. 5). In other local government units, both the creation and the amount of the participatory budget are voluntary.

The participatory budgeting process typically includes several stages. The first involves determining the amount of funds and the rules for budget implementation. Next, residents submit their project proposals. These are then verified by the local administration, and a list of eligible projects is prepared. In the fourth stage, residents vote, and finally, the winning projects are included in the local government's budget plan (Dolewka, 2015).

Participatory budgets can fund any projects that fall within the responsibilities of the local government unit. For example, projects may concern the following areas (BO2025 podstawowe informacje, 2025):

- education – organizing workshops, preventive classes, purchasing books, games, educational aids,
- transport and traffic organization – building bike paths, sidewalks, road repairs,
- culture – organizing festivals, concerts, fairs, art classes, film screenings, theater performances, exhibitions,
- public space – purchasing benches, trash bins, bike racks, developing squares and green areas,
- sports and recreation – building sports fields, playgrounds, dog parks, outdoor gyms, organizing sports events and activities,
- health and social policy – organizing preventive health screenings, installing defibrillators, promoting social integration,
- greenery and environmental protection – planting trees and shrubs, installing air quality sensors, solar panels, managing rainwater.

In practice, participatory budget funds are divided into various types of pools. One criterion is territorial. For example, in Lublin, there are district and city-wide project pools. District projects serve the residents of a specific district, while city-wide projects address the needs of multiple districts or are not tied to a specific area (Zasady Budżetu Obywatelskiego..., 2025).

Another criterion is the project's value. In Leszno, for instance, funds are divided into small and large projects. A small project is an investment not exceeding 350,000 PLN, while a large one exceeds 350,000 PLN but does not surpass 800,000 PLN (Uchwała nr VII/117/2024). Funds can also be divided thematically. In Przemyśl, for example, projects are categorized into three types (Budżet Obywatelski 2026, 2025):

- category I – construction and modernization of neighborhood infrastructure,
- category II – social, cultural, educational, or sports activities,
- category III – community integration activities held exclusively within neighborhoods.

Within the thematic criterion, so-called green quotas can also be identified. The term green quotas, as used in this study, does not have a standardized definition in the existing literature. Therefore, for the purposes of this paper, green quotas are understood as a portion of participatory budget funds allocated specifically for the implementation of pro-environmental projects – that is, initiatives aimed at facilitating urban adaptation to climate change, improving the condition of the natural environment, and supporting the well-being of animals. Projects implemented with funds from green quotas may include, among others, the planting and maintenance of vegetation in urban green areas, the construction of rain gardens, as well as the renovation and modernization of existing green space development.

Green quotas are also referred to as green budgets, climate budgets within participatory budgeting, or simply funds for green projects. Green quotas within participatory budgets should not be confused with independent green budgets, which are separate financial instruments – their funds are not part of participatory budgets. Independent green budgets, functioning outside of participatory budgeting frameworks, exist in cities such as Lublin (W koronach drzew..., 2025) and Katowice (Zielony budżet, 2025).

3. Methods

To achieve the objective of this article, an analysis was conducted of resolutions, ordinances, and regulations defining the principles of participatory budgeting in selected local government units. The subject of the analysis included documents related to participatory budgets planned for implementation in 2026. The selection of cities whose documents were analyzed was based on the criterion of having the status of a city with county rights. This decision stemmed from Article 5a of the Act of March 8, 1990, on municipal self-government, which stipulates that cities with county rights are legally required to establish a participatory budget. The analysis covered documents from all 66 cities with county rights operating in Poland.

As a result of the research, the study identified which of these cities allocate green quotas within their participatory budgets, i.e., funds directly designated for the implementation of pro-environmental projects. Additionally, the following indicators were compiled:

- the share of green quotas resources in the total value of the participatory budget,
- the value of green quotas resources per person,
- the value of green quotas resources per square kilometer of city area.

4. Results

The allocation of green quotas in participatory budgets for 2026 remains a rarely used practice among cities with county rights. Based on the analysis of publicly available documents, only 9 out of 66 such cities (13.64%) decided to allocate funds specifically for pro-environmental activities within their participatory budgets. These cities are: Biała Podlaska, Chełm, Gdańsk, Gdynia, Jelenia Góra, Kalisz, Koszalin, Poznań, and Włocławek.

An analysis of the rules for creating participatory budgets in these cities shows that the projects submitted under green quotas primarily concern planting vegetation, establishing and maintaining flower meadows, and revitalizing parks, squares, and other green areas. In Gdańsk, Gdynia, Koszalin, Poznań, and Jelenia Góra, it is also possible to submit projects related to rainwater management, such as creating rain gardens or building retention reservoirs. Projects may also include animal welfare initiatives, such as sterilization and microchipping programs or creating habitats for birds and insects. These types of initiatives can be implemented under green quotas in Biała Podlaska, Koszalin, and Jelenia Góra. In Gdynia, Chełm, and Koszalin, it is also possible to submit educational and social projects aimed at shaping pro-environmental attitudes among residents. This indicates that green investments are treated not only as changes in urban space but also as tools for social impact. Additionally, in Gdynia, projects related to bicycle infrastructure that support CO₂ emission reduction, as well as the development of recreational infrastructure and small architecture, can be submitted – provided that their implementation aligns with environmental goals (Obwieszczenie Rady Miasta Biała Podlaska z dnia 4 marca 2025 r.; Regulamin Budżetu Obywatelskiego Miasta Chełm, 2025; Uchwała nr V/29/2019; BO2025 podstawowe informacje, 2025; Regulamin Jeleniogórskiego Budżetu Obywatelskiego na rok 2026, 2025; Regulamin Budżetu Obywatelskiego Miasta Kalisza na 2026 rok, 2025; Uchwała NR VII/67/2024; Uchwała Nr XVII/318/IX/2025; Uchwała Nr XXIV/100/2020).

The amount of funding allocated in 2026 for pro-environmental projects within participatory budgets in cities with county rights varies significantly (Table 1). To better illustrate this issue, it is useful to refer to the share of green quotas resources in the total participatory budget of each city with county rights.

Among the analyzed cities, the highest share of green quotas resources was recorded in Gdańsk, where it amounts to 22.63%, translating to over 5.6 million PLN allocated for pro-environmental projects. A relatively high share is also observed in Włocławek (16.05%), Jelenia Góra (13.92%), and Poznań (12.78%). In contrast, relatively low shares were recorded in Koszalin (5.98%), Biała Podlaska (4.74%), and Gdynia, where it is only 0.79%.

Table 1.

Value of participatory budgets and green quotas in cities with county rights in 2026

Cities with county rights	Participatory budget [in PLN]	Green quotas [in PLN]	Share of the green quotas in the participatory budget [in %]
Biała Podlaska	2 850 000.00	135 000.00	4.74%
Chełm	2 800 000.00	280 000.00	10.00%
Gdańsk	24 911 819.00	5 636 508.00	22.63%
Gdynia	12 637 621.00	100 000.00	0.79%
Jelenia Góra	4 310 000.00	600 000.00	13.92%
Kalisz	5 100 000.00	530 000.00	10.39%
Koszalin	5 020 000.00	300 000.00	5.98%
Poznań	31 300 000.00	4 000 000.00	12.78%
Włocławek	4 765 000.00	765 000.00	16.05%

Source: Author's own elaboration.

In analyzing green quotas in individual cities with county rights, it is also worth considering the value of funds allocated for pro-environmental projects per person (Figure 1). This indicator shows the extent to which local governments engage in environmental efforts per resident, which may reflect local priorities and concern for residents' quality of life.

Gdańsk is the clear leader in this ranking, allocating 11.53 PLN per person for pro-environmental projects. It is followed by Jelenia Góra (8.09 PLN), Włocławek (7.69 PLN), and Poznań (7.46 PLN). The lowest values were recorded in Koszalin (2.85 PLN), Biała Podlaska (2.51 PLN), and Gdynia – only 0.42 PLN per person.

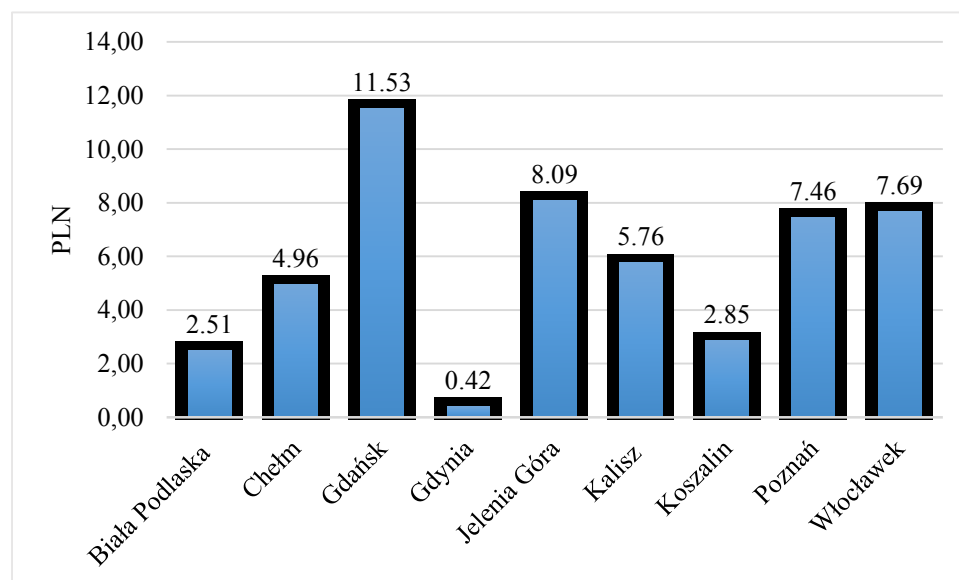


Figure 1. Value of green quotas resources per person in cities with county rights in 2026.

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Another important aspect of the green quotas analysis is the value of resources per square kilometer of city area (Figure 2). This indicator helps assess how pro-environmental funds are spatially distributed across urban areas. It complements per capita data by showing whether the territorial size of a city is reflected in the scale of green investments. It may turn out that large cities allocate relatively small amounts, which could indicate insufficient spatial coverage of residents' needs.

Calculations show that Poznań allocates the most green quotas resources per unit of area, with 15,267.18 PLN per km². Other cities high in the ranking include Włocławek (9,000.00 PLN/km²), Gdańsk (8,252.57 PLN/km²), and Kalisz (7,681.16 PLN/km²). The lowest values were recorded in Gdynia (255.75 PLN/km²), Biała Podlaska (2,755.10 PLN/km²), and Koszalin (2,830.19 PLN/km²).

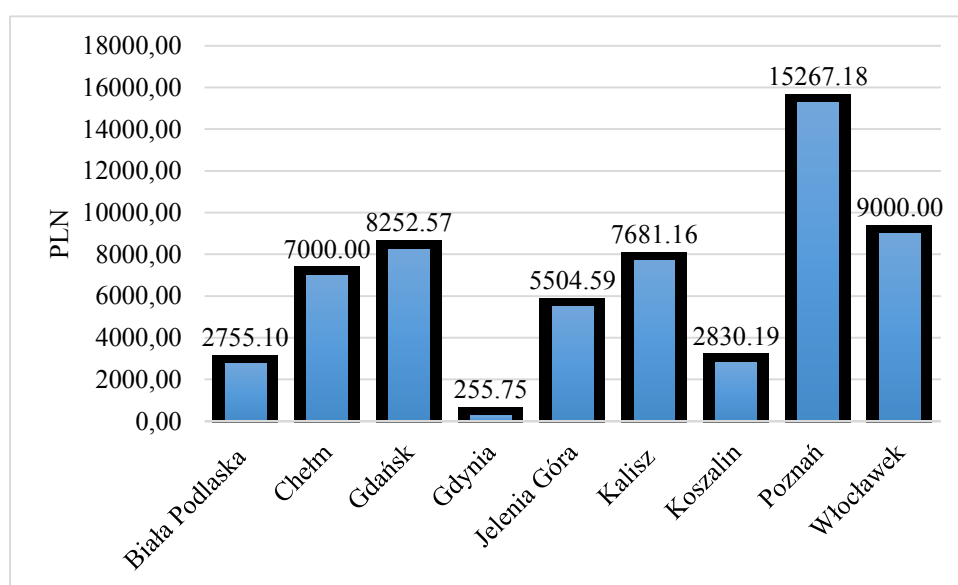


Figure 2. Value of green quotas resources per km² in cities with county rights in 2026.

Source: Author's own elaboration.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The analysis shows that green quotas in participatory budgets remain a rarely used solution among cities with county rights – those units that are legally required to establish participatory budgets. Only 9 out of 66 such cities have allocated green quotas. This indicates that a systemic approach to financing pro-environmental initiatives through participatory budgets is not yet a common practice among local governments. The absence of national standards and guidelines means that decisions to allocate funds for environmental projects within participatory budgets depend solely on the individual priorities of local authorities.

In the cities with county rights that have chosen to allocate green quotas – Biała Podlaska, Chełm, Gdańsk, Gdynia, Jelenia Góra, Kalisz, Koszalin, Poznań, and Włocławek – there are significant disparities in the share of green quotas in the total participatory budget, the value of green quotas per capita, and the value per square kilometer. For example, Gdańsk plans to allocate over 5.6 million PLN for pro-environmental projects in 2026, which constitutes 22.63% of its participatory budget – the highest percentage among all analyzed cities. However, Gdańsk does not achieve the highest value of green quotas per square kilometer, in this regard, it is surpassed by Poznań (15,267.18 PLN/km²) and Włocławek (9,000.00 PLN/km²). This shows that a high percentage of green quotas does not necessarily translate into a significant improvement in environmental conditions, especially if the city has a large area or population.

It is also worth noting that in some municipalities, green quotas are used more broadly than just for infrastructure investments. They also include educational and social projects, and in some cases, animal welfare initiatives.

Similar conclusions were reached by B. Martela, who in his analyses focused primarily on identifying cities that allocate green quotas within participatory budgets, the value of these funds, and the thematic scope of the implemented pro-environmental projects. The analysis covered cities with more than 5,000 inhabitants and encompassed the years 2020-2022. Based on the conducted research, it was established that out of 575 cities included in the study, 282 implemented a participatory budget, and among them, only 17 allocated green quotas. The share of these quotas in the total participatory budget ranged from 3.8% to nearly 41%, with the median value amounting to 10%. Furthermore, the research indicated that in most cities, pro-environmental projects were understood as tasks involving the creation and modernization of green areas as well as the maintenance and planting of vegetation. Less frequently, applications under green quotas concerned small-scale water retention and water management, organization of events, or animal care and protection (Martela, 2023).

Given the infrequent allocation of green quotas within participatory budgets – as confirmed by both the author's own research and external studies – as well as ongoing climate change and the growing need for local environmental protection efforts, it seems justified to consider the standardization of the practice of establishing green quotas within participatory budgeting frameworks. Introducing a requirement to allocate green quotas could significantly contribute to the systemic support of pro-environmental initiatives at the local level and help raise ecological awareness and strengthen community engagement in environmental protection efforts. However, it should be emphasized that implementing such a solution should be preceded by broad consultations with local governments and residents to ensure that diverse needs, socio-economic conditions, and the organizational capabilities of individual local government units are taken into account. Equally important would be the development of standards, criteria, and stages for introducing green quotas within participatory budgets. It would also be necessary to define guidelines regarding the minimum level of funding, eligible

thematic areas for pro-environmental projects, as well as examples of best practices and tools for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of implemented actions.

Only an approach based on cooperation among central government, local authorities, and civil society can lead to the successful implementation of sustainable mechanisms supporting balanced development. Strengthening public participation and citizen involvement in climate and environmental protection efforts should go hand in hand with ensuring transparent procedures, adequate resources, and institutional support for local initiatives. Such a system could become a permanent component of urban policy and a practical tool in counteracting the adverse effects of climate change.

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