

Cross Party Group on Social Science

Minutes of the Meeting held 12 December 2018

Present: Daniel Johnson (DJ), Andy Wightman (AW), Morag Campbell (MC), Suzanne Fitzpatrick (SF), Angela O'Hagan (AO), Oliver Escobar (OE), Nick Bibby (NB)

1.0 Welcome

DJ welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2.0 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes were adopted without changes. Prop, DJ; Sec, AW.

3.0 Presentations

3.1 Angela O'Hagan (Glasgow Caledonian University)

AW explained that she had come to academia from activism and because of an interest in the issue of budgeting for social justice. She now chairs the Scottish Government's Budget Advisory Group.

She suggested that it is not 'overloading the budget' to ask budgets to live up to the expectations and values of wider society – who earns what, which work is rewarded and so on.

She explained that Scotland leads the way in terms of having structures in place in this area but, by contrast, lags behind other countries in terms of the legislative underpinnings. While there has been progress in this area, budgets are ultimately political beasts and the politics can get in the way.

It is worth noting, said AO, that Scotland is a small polity, which can afford to be a 'policy entrepreneur' and there is considerable international interest in Scotland's use of equalities audits within the budget process.

There are also interesting developments in terms of making outcomes much more transparent and allowing parliamentary committees a much clearer scrutiny in terms of holding Government to account.

There are examples such as Andalusia and Iceland that have introduced gender budgeting at a national level as have cities such as Barcelona and Berlin.

3.2 Oliver Escobar (University of Edinburgh)

OE asked what representative democracy can learn from deliberative and consultative democracy. He explained that work currently being undertaken in relation to budgets is part of a wider interest in democratic innovation.

Participatory budgeting (PB), like many other innovations in this area, comes from the global south – Brazil in this particular case. In Porto Alegre they found that involving people in discussing the trade-offs involved in budgeting built consensus. As it spread around the world, it changed. In some places it lost its social justice edge - even in authoritarian regimes, PB has been introduced to help improve service delivery.

Scotland arrived late at the PB ball, after it was already happening in England.

Contrary to popular belief, PB was a bottom-up process in Scotland and Scottish Government has supported it only latterly. Support has come from different parties in Scotland with CoSLA and Scottish Government agreeing that "at least 1%" of local government budgets should be allotted by PB.

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In Brazil PB was coupled with redistributive measures. Engaging communities in ways that pretends they are all the same can actually be a retrograde step and so PB needs to take account of the realities faced by different communities.

3.3 Questions

Discussion focussed on several issues how top level scrutiny of the budget within parliament can usefully meet bottom-up PB. There was a feeling that there was little room in Scotland for current practices to be genuinely transformative as PB tended to be seen as an exercise in awarding grants rather than changing how government and councils do business. DJ suggested that the opaque nature of budgeting within police and health boards did not help involve anyone.

4.0 New Members

4.1 Scottish Policy Innovation and Research Exchange (SPIRE)

NB reported that the Scottish Policy Innovation and Research Exchange was a new organisation that was being set up to help social scientists and policymakers work together more effectively. He added that he would be its first director. SPIRE was adopted as a member of the CPG.

5.0 A.O.C.B.

There was no other business.

6.0 Close