

Reflections by Tom Cohen
from [PB Network Unconference 2015](#)
26th October 2015, Birmingham

**PB Conference Workshop on
PB using non cash resources?**

On Monday 26th October 2015 over 70 people attended the UK PB Network conference in Birmingham. The conference was designed for academics, practitioners and those who want to learn a little more about PB in terms of the process, the results and the successes. Following a series of short informative keynote speeches, the participants opted to attend a series of workshops. This blog is about my Unconference pitch.

I asked:

“Is there a way for PB to move on from a discussion about the allocation of resources to a broader deliberation concerning the full set of government interventions, including policies, laws etc?”

My question was, in part, motivated by my research on bringing climate change impacts into PB. UCL is currently consulting on its carbon strategy using a tool based on the idea - <http://www.degreesofchange.co.uk>

We concluded there are reasons, both good and not so good, for the fact that PB currently stays in the world of budgets: citizens can relate to the spending of money (because we all have to budget); and politicians feel they can control how much power they are surrendering. The involvement of citizens in the development of regulation/legislation would inevitably imply a messier discussion and not one that would necessarily appeal to citizens in the same way as does PB. Politicians, meanwhile, may be nervous about where such a venture might lead.

Central to our inquiry is whether budgets are a natural *gateway* into the wider democratisation of government. For citizens, much of the appeal of PB surely lies in the fact that the things being discussed feel tangible – decisions tend to result in projects, often in the form of services and infrastructure which those citizens can then use. It is not obvious that citizens who have become enthused by the idea of installing new play equipment would suddenly show an increased interest in the bye-laws controlling access to parks. But that doesn't mean that such a transition couldn't be encouraged and supported. More to the point, does anyone have a better suggestion concerning the engagement of citizens in discussions about local legislation?

Whilst we didn't light on a cast-iron example from the world of government of the transition we sought, we were told of an encouraging case from the community sector. Citizens had started out allocating funding to local renewable energy projects but, over time, their deliberations became broader and now encompass longer-term finance and strategy. This at least suggests that such a transition is not an unnatural one.

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