

Pesquisa FAPESP nº 2021/04556-0
ENTREVISTA COM
Cidade: Lodz (Lodzkie, Polonia)
Entrevistado: L2, 40+ anos, ativista
Entrevistador: Rodrigo Sartori Bogo
Local de realização da entrevista: Bar/cafeteria

TRANSCRIÇÃO

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- So L2, is that the pronunciation right?

L2

- It's [name].

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- [name], okay. First things first, for the recording, I would need you saying your full name and saying like "I'm willing to participate".

L2

- Yeah, sure. So, my name is L2, this is the formal name, L2, and I'm totally willing to participate in this interview.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- Okay, thank you so much. So, we had some off-recording talks and like already explaining my research to you, in off-topic. So, because normally I introduce the interview like explaining..

L2

- Yeah, you don't have to repeat yourself.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- Exactly. So, my first question to you, to start is... you can give a personal profile, your profession, your history, and how did you get in touch with participatory budgeting and participation in general?

L2

- So, with the participation itself, we started in 2012, I guess, with the public consultations. I was working for the NGO at that time. It was earlier, it was 2010 probably, because 2012 we started working on the first participatory budgeting. As an NGO, we were asked by the municipality to organize a campaign, promotional campaign, educational campaign, information campaign, just to sell the idea of the participatory budgeting to the citizens of Łódź. So, this is the beginning. We were leading those campaigns and providing knowledge to people for like four or five years. Then I was at 2015-16 probably, I was a part of program council for the participatory budgeting in Łódź, so I was responsible for the innovation in the participatory budgeting. This didn't work well, but well I was a part of it. Then I switched the sectors. I went to the city of Gdynia, where I was working in a laboratory of social innovations. I was also responsible for the participatory budgeting, but from the municipality point of

view. Then after one year and a half, somewhere around 2021, I came back to Łódź and was employed in the municipality in the city of Łódź, the city hall, in the department of also innovations and then in the department responsible for the participatory budgeting and public consultation. So, I was working here for three years and after that, well, I gave up changing the world through the municipality. That's not going to happen and currently I'm working for Habitat for Humanity Poland. Yeah, and this is the basic line. In the time between 2015 and 2020, well, 2023 really, I was also working with the Ukrainian organizations on training representatives from Ukraine, from different cities. It was like 17 different cities, how to organize the participatory budgeting in their reality. So, this is the basic context.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- One thing that is interesting, like one of the reasons that I got to study Poland at first is how influential Polish PBs are in East Europe. So that's interesting that you are, at least, part of that, because we could see like in Ukraine or in other countries that are close by how the new wave of Polish PBs influence this region.

L2

- This is not only funny, this is pretty, well, somehow wicked because the Ukraine has the idea of participation itself in a very good way, in the way they are helping each other and looking at the other person from their own person's shoes. And it's a bit different in Poland, which is a young capitalist country where participatory budgeting was... the idea was understood as a way of spending money, not helping each other. So next goal for you, it should be going to the Ukraine and see how it's going there because probably their mentality and the mindset is more similar to the original one from Porto Alegre, I guess. - **Hmm, ok.** - This is my imagination. I haven't been to Porto Alegre and just read about it.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- Okay, interesting. And so, you have a very heterogeneous experience with PB, you are participating in different ways. And at a time you where the NGO, what was the objective of the NGO? What was the goal like?

L2

- Well, our goal for like two first years of creating the campaign, the participatory budgeting campaign, was to invite as many people, the citizens of Łódź, to join us in this procedure as it was possible. So, what we were focusing on was informing how the procedure works and promoting the procedure itself. So, we were telling people "hey, we've got like 20 million zloty and it would be nice if you could help us spend it on your common space in your city, you just have to prepare your project and then decide through voting and it can be your space". After two years, our focus changed a bit and this was also the line of conflict with the municipality, because we've noticed that we've perfectly sold the tool. It was like a really, really good success. We were expecting in the first participatory budget like 60 projects, max. And there were more than 600, I guess, 40.000 people voted. So, it was like for the city of 700.000

people. It was pretty, pretty good success. There was also the saying that the first participatory budgeting is the best way of promoting the second one. So, the second one should be the success. The first one we'll see. And we got the success at the very, very beginning. But after two years, we discovered that we are promoting the tool that is like... the people do not understand what they're doing. You see, we checked, we thought that the basic idea behind the participatory budgeting is whether the project that is being implemented in the city is answering for the needs of the people living around the project. And it appears that it has no connection. The projects are from schools, are from big institutions, not necessarily helping and supporting the communities that they were meant for. So we gently suggested to the municipality that we are doing a great job promoting and informing, but what we are lacking is education. And we do need, like very need, we are in need of the citizens' education. And that was that moment when we discovered that you can talk about very effective participatory budgeting in Western Europe, where you've got the citizens' democracy, when the people know that they can co-decide and work together in order to change something, and we are too young for that as a country. We are thinking about our own point of view, and we are not really able to switch it for the wider perspective, like community perspective. So, we tried to focus on that point of view. And this was the moment when the municipality told us that they are really happy about the effects of participatory budgeting, because the numbers are high and you can see them, you know, finally we are an innovative city amongst other cities in Poland. So, they were not really eager to change anything, and the numbers were more important than the quality. So that was that moment when we stopped cooperating with the municipality of Łódź and then I went to Gdynia.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- And then when you came back to work here in participation, like inside of the municipality, what were the challenges and the things that you saw from inside?

L2

- I was working for like 10 years, more than 10 years in participatory budgeting and participatory, social participatory before coming back here. So, I thought that my knowledge and my experience would be a good starting point for implementing some changes. I was said that the municipality, my director, gave me a free hand to implement some changes in order to get better results in participatory budgeting. When I was starting to work in the municipality of Łódź, I had this perspective that I'm not going to change the world and the municipality itself in the first year, probably not in five or seven years. After three years of working, I was sure that the change would take like 15 years, and I do not have that time. I'm really too ambitious for the structure, like the municipality. So, I decided to change my line of work and I'm not working anymore in the participation area. I'm changing the Habitat for Humanity Poland and currently in order to influence them, to implement the participation into thinking about social rental mechanisms, for example.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- That's interesting, especially because like, habitation and habitats in general, they were a big deal in participatory budgeting in Brazil back in the day. - Yeah. - And not anymore, for a few reasons. But for example, one of the cities that I'm comparing with Lodz, that is Araraquara, they had two periods of PB, one from 2001 to 2008 and now from 2017 until now. The current government lost the last election, so we don't know if they will still be running PB next year, but there are two timeframes. In this first time frame, there was a lot of investment in housing through PB. And here in Łódź, is there any discussion on housing?

L2

- No, it wouldn't be possible with the participatory budgeting. There were three basic conditions you have to... your project has to get in order to become one legible to the voting. And it has to be in a common space that is owned by the city. So, like, you know, the squares, streets, institutions as well, so you can create something inside the institutions that are open for people. It has to be okay with the law and it has to be possible to be organized, implemented during one year. These were the three main conditions. So, the housing, well, there was a possibility that common houses, social housing, all the houses and buildings that the city owns them. It would be probably possible to get some changes through the participatory budgeting, but in order to be open for all the people, it cannot be like for one family. So, this wasn't really possible.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- And also the time frame for one year, normally housing, even like rehabilitation. It will take more than a year.

L2

- Yeah, yeah. But as you probably noticed, there are lots of buildings here that need refurbishment, remodeling. And with the money in the participatory budgeting, probably it would be possible, but it won't be possible because of the accessibility. I mean, all the project has to be accessible for all the people that are paying taxes. So, there are citizens of Łódź, the citizens, they don't have to pay taxes. I mean, for the students who are coming from different cities, they do not have to be the citizens of Łódź formally, but they can also vote. Still, if it's not accessible for them, we've got one family who are locking their door with their own keys, it's not accessible for the rest of the society. It wouldn't be possible to organize such projects in Lodz.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- OK, makes sense. And one thing that is important for me is how the design changes or is discussed and everything, like the design of PB. And to my knowledge, the design never changed, right? Since the implementation in 2013, the design is the same.

L2

- That's not necessarily true, but the changes are not in the basic structure, but they're cosmetics. And let me explain to you why. In 2016, 2017, well you have to check that out. The government decided to put participatory budgeting in the national law, and that was not a good idea. It was the previous government, and I was from the meeting with the representatives from the government who were trying to create those, how do you call it, the bill. Well, to put the participatory budgeting into the law and they have, like, this motivation, it was negative. They were not trying to create an effective tool for participation, because they didn't understand what participation is. They were trying to put some... this one is going to be hard for me because of my English. - **It's alright.** - They were trying to... how do you call it in that language? OK, let me check that for you, this might be a crucial word for you.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- OK.

L2

- Well, that's simple as that. They were trying to limit the way people were spending money because they were sure that the opposition is spending people's money using the participatory budgeting for their own projects. One of the arguments were [that] in one of the cities the representatives of the other party was building tennis courts with the money from participatory budgeting and this should be illegal, this is wrong, this is using public money for their own interest, and we have to limit it. So, they created a structure which is very stiff, I mean, you cannot do anything about this structure... Well, you can. There are some cities that are really creative, but when you're talking about participatory budgeting there is always those three parts. There are projects that need to be created by people, they need to be analyzed by the municipality of the city, I mean the municipality itself, and then there should be a voting. So, there is no chance, no part in the national law giving you opportunity for deliberative mechanisms, for example. There is no part of co-creating projects altogether. I mean you can do some meetings; you can do some... but that has no meaning looking from the perspective of the law. Everything you do at this basic level, you need to put this on the project, this project has to be analyzed and then has to be voted. You cannot move from this. There is an example of the city of Dabrowa Górnicza when they thought... because they were doing really innovative things before it was even fashionable. I mean, they started participatory budgeting later than Lodz I guess, but they created their own ways. So, they were doing the assemblies, they were talking about the project and if there was a yes from the people in the assembly, they were creating the project without the voting. So, it was possible to create deliberative participatory budgeting. After the bill passed, they had to do it according to the governmental law. So, they created two budgets. One was participatory budgeting, which was with the structure put in the bill and the second one was the deliberative participatory budgeting, which was something different, it was another line of spending money and talking with the citizens. They get a minimal amount of money which is also stated in the bill for the "big" participatory budgeting, and they were still organizing the deliberative process in... - **In parallel, right?** - In parallel, oh yeah, that's the word. So, that's Dabrowa Górnicza. So, in Lodz, we were trying to avoid some of the regulations, but that's cosmetics. You can

change the idea of how you vote. You can eliminate the paper voting, for example. The paper voting created a huge problem, because the schools, for example, were using their pupils to get the votes. The pupils and the children were running through the streets with the cards, and they were like "Okay, we are looking for a vote because we are trying to get a new board in our class and would you like to help us?", so the people were like "Of course, I'm going to sign it for you". This is not legal to collect the data, that as the first thing. The second thing was that people didn't really know that they were taking part in the participatory budgeting procedure. There were thousands of votes, like 15.000 of the paper votes of people who, probably, in the vast majority, didn't even know that they were voting in the participatory budgeting. So, you could eliminate it with local law, but still, it's voting. As you probably know at this stage of your PhD, voting is not good for democracy. It's not the best method of making decisions, right? Especially if you are in a city, in a country that is not used to think about others as a part of one community. We are not thinking about it. We have this myth in our heads that success is owning two cars, a flat for every person, member of the family, and to be better than the neighbor. We are not able in this world situation... we are not able to be better than our neighbor. We need to cooperate with the neighbor in order to survive in longer terms of course. I thought that it would be a good idea to use participatory budgeting to teach these perspectives, there cannot be 700.000 egoists in one city, we have to, like, create groups and the group can decide what to do, but this group should think about other groups and their needs in order to create a better world, a better city for everyone. I am no longer working for the municipality, so you can think how this worked. It didn't.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- The next question I was going to ask you is about the participation. I would like your opinion on the quality of the participation here, on this PB.

L2

- In the PB?

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- Yeah, within the PB basically. I know there is a system of participation here, a lot of participatory programs, but I would like your opinion because I was there today, in the Urban Affairs Office, at Tuwima 10.

L2

- I used to work there.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- There are a lot of programs, but from outside I can't say if they are connected or not. How does that work?

L2

- That's a complicated question. Mostly the participatory budgeting has done something we didn't expect to happen. After 10 years of participatory budgeting, there were those voices throughout the municipality and the community that the participatory budgeting is not working at all. This is like a myth, this is just to promote the city, not for the citizens. But in 2012, when we were starting with the participatory budgeting, Lodz was at the second last place in the surveys according to the people's activism in the field of participation, social help, social work, we were like there was nothing happening here. After 10 years, we still have from 500 projects to 1.500 being implemented [submitted, he means] in the participatory budgeting. It depends on the year; it depends on how the form looks like because it has changed many times. Sometimes it was simpler, so more projects, sometimes it was more difficult, so there were less projects, but still there are the same amount, around 1.000 projects [submitted] every year. Nothing happened when you take this criteria as a matter of change. In 2012 we started it and in 2020, if you look at the participatory budgeting, it's in the same place. There are like hundreds, even thousands of people who are criticizing, constructively very often, who are criticizing the city municipality, who are talking, who are discussing topics, who are somehow engaged with the city. So, yeah, the participation itself created a platform of discussion, well, it opened the eyes of the citizens that they do have their voice, that the space is not like in communist city and before 1989 in Poland, my flat is my flat and other is someone else's, it's like governmental property and I have nothing to say about it and they are doing what they want and I might be happy, I might not be happy. We are never happy because Poland this is, Polish people are rarely happy [laughs]. So, yeah, we were not discussing things happening around us, after the participatory budgeting, we've started discussing it. So, this is the change. We could use, from the beginning, participatory budgeting as a tool that would be an educational tool for supporting the citizens' democracy. We didn't do that. We created the tool, we gave the tool to the people and the people were like "okay, we can use it, but we don't really know how" and they are still using it without the knowledge why they are doing it. But they are doing it and slowly, slowly, they are learning that this is the basic process of creating a community with the money from municipality and supporting each other, helping each other to create the projects that are too small, not too visible for the municipality to be organized by the city, the whole city itself. I mean the city should think about enormous streets throughout the city, but not necessarily about one brick in a square somewhere, somewhere on a block of flats, because that's really small, this is not the scale. The participation in the city was somehow ignited with the participatory projects, like budgeting, like conversations, probably with the citizens' assembly as well, but it's like working on this basic level, on the citizens' level, and the municipality has its project. There is money in this project, so people are taking part in it, but this is like two parallel paths that are not very often crossing. One of the crosses, it was war, Ukrainian war, so you could see that there were... I was working with this first group of city representatives responsible for supporting and helping the refugees. So there were four of us working, not necessarily according to law, because the city has its procedures, the procedures were not ready, when they said to us that "do whatever you can to make this happen, to find shelter for those people, to help them financially, to find food and drink for them, but we cannot really know about it, because we have to prepare the procedure,

we need to have the local law implemented before we can do anything". And we could see that people were like "okay, you've got the participation money, and we are here to help, so we can now just... I have a car, contact me with someone who has, for example, some food, and I can, with my car, I can take the food, and we can all together go and help the refugees somewhere else". So, this was one of the crossings, right? The crisis is the ideal situation for the participation to be throwing. But it stopped, it's like... now it's like, this potential disappeared, the city didn't use the potential really, there are several groups working together, there are NGOs who are still working with the potential, but as you can see, there is participatory budgeting, there was a final of last edition... yesterday?

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- Monday!

L2

- Yeah, and it went quiet, like, okay, so these are the projects that won, people were like "okay, those are the projects, that's great", and they came back to their houses, their communities, and they were doing their stuff. So, yeah, two parallel realities, the city believes in the reality they are creating from the media, that participatory budgeting is such a great tool for people, and the people are like "okay, well, maybe it's not that great, but we cannot really choose because this is the only tool we have in order to change our reality". So, it's not working as perfectly as you might think while reading about Poland and Lodz. I've heard from people from Lithuania that Poland is such a great example of participatory tools, and they would like to learn from us. Well, this is not... I mean, the tool is as it is, but we are not implementing it because we can, we are meant... the government made us, every city is obliged to have participatory budgeting. So yeah, we've got lots of participatory budgeting. Are they successful in terms of numbers, projects, people attending meetings and taking part in voting? Probably yes. Do they really address the needs of the people? I don't really think so, but just like to preserve it, that's my intuition. Could they work better? Well, definitely yes. Like, totally yes.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- What you just said is very interesting for me because one of my main focus of the research is seeing how the design of the processes influence the territorial results, right? So, do you think that if the design changes, the territorial results could change also? What do you think about that? Like how they are territorially spread or...?

L2

- Yeah, like totally. I mean, Lodz is a specific city. We've got a block of flats, as you probably noticed, we've got these old buildings in the city center, we've got new buildings, new housing for single families on the outskirts. We've got different kinds of communities living in different parts of the city. And it might be a good idea to adjust the participatory budgeting not to the urban architecture of the city, but to the people living in the smaller groups. And you know, as far as I'm concerned and I know the

participatory budgeting after 10 years should evolve into different kind of tool. Like for example, we've got also in the city, this is called, I have to remind myself the Polish name, I think, Zietwo Obronatelska, Citizens Initiative. So, you can apply for money. Simple as that. You're preparing the project to 10.000 Polish zlotys, you can give it to the city municipality and if you have your own work included in this project, this is okay, we can give you the materials, but you need to give your work in order to create, for example, I don't know, the bench on the square in the middle of the city. And it's working. It's like 1% of the participatory budgeting. Participatory budgeting is like 35 million [zloty] currently and the initiative has like 200.000 zlotys. The idea behind the participatory budgeting was to support those communities, the small communities, like people who are in need of a bench because they are old, because they have a long way from the bus stop to their flat. And it would be nice for them if carrying the bags from the shop, they could sit in the middle, on the bench, just to take a breath and to, you know, not to get too tired. With the participatory budgeting, it's impossible to do this. And with the initiative, it is possible. So, yeah, the participatory budgeting should be changed according to the local communities, the structure, the demographic structure. The city is getting older. In Polish we call this very often the "silver tsunami". So, the population is getting older and older. Participatory budgeting should be adjusted somehow to help the older people to be able to access all the spaces that are meant for them. You know, like this also pretty obvious case that in the park, lots of parks in the city, people are often thinking about, "Okay, let's put a playground for the children in the park." That's awesome. But somehow those playgrounds are very often empty. Why? Because most of the children come to the playground with their grandparents and those people, because of their age, they need a toilet. Without the toilet, they are not able to sit there on a bench looking at the child for like three, four hours straight. They need to come back and rotate from home. So, the public toilet becomes a need. And we are not thinking in this category, right? We are not thinking about the needs of society, the population. We are thinking about the project itself. It's nice to have a playground, we can make a photo, we can put the photo in social media and then Lodz is a great place for children. But the population is getting older, and the children might not be the most important group we need to focus on, right? So, the needs, the thinking about the needs should be a new perspective for the participatory budgeting, the urban space, the quality of the space, the ecology, the climate crisis. You should be able to change the budgeting and the participation itself in order to direct it into a good spot and good solutions. And we are still in the same place. We are still making... 10 years, we are making playgrounds. How Poland is making playgrounds. Awesome! How many playgrounds can you have in one country?

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- I got you, I saw that in the parks. I saw that by the projects list, but also people from the municipalities told me, "The parks, they receive a lot of money from PB", so I went to the parks. I walked into like four or five parks today just to see the projects. And you see a lot of playgrounds too, and most of them are empty, it's the same thing that you told me.

- But how many toilets have you seen?

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- Very few. I saw toilets just in... what's the name of the park? I don't remember. It's one that has like a huge playground, like a very huge one and there's like two or three... it's on the west side of the city.

L2

- West side of the city, near the new manufacture... no, that's not the west side, the northern side. Okay, Napiuskiego Park?

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- Maybe. I should show you on the map later. You know, my Polish is very limited, so I normally don't remember the names. But one thing that you said, like PB is not addressing the local community needs, it's an interesting phrase because there's a concept that was born with PB in Brazil that's the "inversion of priorities". -**Yea!** - And this idea that both political and financial priorities, right? So, people who are in the periphery, they're saying, "No, this is what I need." So, they have both, like they have the money, the money goes from the center to the periphery and also the power. And do you see that happening here in PB?

L2

- Well, it does happen because the money is still like from the central point, it's provided to the local communities, but not in the way they would expect it to be. - **Okay.** - Yeah, so it's not that... you know, if you have... this is maybe an idea for you. If you would analyze the projects that are not being voted, but that were... what do you do with the project? You can...

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- Propose it?

L2

- Yeah, you can propose it. So not the project... if you look at the list of the projects that were proposed for one of the local communities, local... I'm going to check the words for "gilnica" because this is important to be something different than community.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- From the 36... districts?

L2

- Let's call it district. Because, you know, the budget is for the whole city and the 36 districts. If you look at the list, in one of the parts... any of the districts, there are very often... I'm going to make it easier, but

you can analyze it for your needs. There are like 100 projects, 99 of them address the need of road infrastructure. And one is a new playground... not the playground, a new football place for the local school. Which one is going to win? The school. Or the one... the unicorn is going to win. Why? Because it's funny. We are still lacking this education I told you before. We are not understanding the process we are taking part in. So, you've got 99 needs and one project that is funny, that has an institution behind it, that has better promotion, better title even. It's sometimes so basic thing. And this one project is being realized next year, and these 99 needs that are pointed out to the city municipality, there's nothing happening with them. So, yeah, this is like the question I don't know the answer for. Is it okay that we are losing these 99 people's initiatives? Somebody wrote this project, right? Somebody has that need and nothing happening. They can of course put it on another participatory budget. It's year, after year, after year. And you know, we can see the situation that you have in one district, on one street, there are two people with two projects that are really similar. One bench is near my block of flats and this other one is similar. And those people, those leaders, they're called leaders in Łódź, they hate each other. Because the guy there on this other block of flats, the block is higher, so they've got more tenants, so they've got more votes and he's stupid because his bench is going to win every time. And during my work here we were like trying to...

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- This is a sense of competition, not cooperation, right?

L2

- Yeah, yeah, basically. So, yeah, we are sending... I mean, the municipality level is still providing money for every 36 districts. Is it a good way of spending the money, of spending it? Well, no, not really. It can be done better. But nobody is interested in doing better as long as the system works as it is.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- Yeah, do you think that maybe face-to-face meetings or assemblies could be a... not necessarily a solution, but could make the process better?

L2

- Yes, of course, because you can meet the person, the neighbor with the other bench, right? And you can talk to him. My favorite conflict with the city space is two guys arguing about whether in the empty space in the middle of a further housing area should be a parking lot or the playground. And the funny story is that the guy who is thinking about the playground has kids but also has a car, and the guy who is thinking about the parking lot has a car but also has kids. So, their needs are pretty similar, their priorities are a bit different, but they are not talking to each other. If they are not talking, they do not know their own perspectives. They can switch their perspectives; they can create a solution that is good for both of them and then ask the participatory budgeting for helping and supporting financially. Still, there are no deliberative... well there are some, but the procedure itself is not giving you the opportunity

to create systemic way of creating a dialogue between people in a community, between communities, between populations and so on and so on. And we are in a crisis. It is impossible to spend as much money and to create all the projects that we need. For example, the department that is responsible for roads in Łódź, they have counted two years ago how much it would be to repair all the roads in our city. It would be like 25 [billions, actually] million zloty. The budget for the whole city, for every aspect of the city functioning, is currently less than 5. Not millions, billions.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- Ah, ok, 25 billion to...?

L2

- The budget for the city is 5 billion. So, you know, this is only one need. And we have got 700.000 people with their needs. And if we are all egoists, we are not able to function as a city, right? So, this is my perspective on participation, and this is why I cannot really advocate for the participatory budgeting as an effective solution for the... for nowadays situation.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- Okay, okay. That's interesting. And talking about money, this is a very fond topic for me because one of the main debates about, like, PB is... not necessarily PB in Poland, but PB as a tool, in Brazil also, is the amount of money that is discussed. Okay, how can we be effective with... because, okay, the name of the process is participatory budgeting. So, the budget is at the core of the process, right? So, what do you think about the amount of investment that is here in Łódź? Like, 35 million zlotys. I know this is one of the biggest in Poland, including per capita measure, I think it's the second one in per capita measure or the third, something like that. But do you think that's enough? Do you think that's good?

L2

- I think it should be less.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- Less than that? Okay.

L2

- You know, have you heard about Enerhodar? That's small, it's a small city in Ukraine with enormous [Zaporizhzhia], one of the biggest in the, probably second biggest in the world atomic...

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- Nuclear powerplant?

L2

- Nuclear plant, yeah. So, I was there two times, and I was providing them the training sessions about participatory budgeting. And the first time I went there, I was trying to explain to them what the idea of participatory budgeting is, and they told me, some guys just stood up and told me that "sorry, we are really sorry. We need to go for two hours from this meeting because where there is a shop in our city and near the shop there is a bench". Coming back to the bench is participatory budgeting [laughs]. "And this bench is pretty important for our babushkas", like this old lady sitting there, "they were always sitting there, the bench just collapsed, and we agreed, three of us agreed to repair this bench". And they went. And I was like "you know what, I'm trying to explain to you the basics, the basic idea behind the participation, and you've got it here. It's like those three guys who are helping someone else with their own resources, this is like the basic idea. You've got the need, there are people who can provide help with the need, it's happening". You know, this is better than we know. It's about the crisis in Ukraine. It was 2015. And the second part was even funnier because they had a problem with the city council, they couldn't make the assembly. I mean, the city council was not working at all, they couldn't make any decision. And I told them that "you know what, you do not need a city council to prepare and to implement the participatory budgeting, because the participatory part is more important than the budgeting part. So, if you take all the money you have in your pockets right now, how much would it be?", and we've collected like 700 hryvnias. It's nothing. But it was enough, and we were like "okay, what would you like to do about this space we are meeting? Yeah, well, there is a ceiling to be reviewed, there is a nice promenade, and it would be nice if there was something happening, there was some place to sit." And with the 700 hryvnias we've created a project like engaging all the community that we were meeting in the library and the librarian said that they can provide the electricity and a small radio, so there was some music. Someone said that he has no money with him in his pockets, but he's got like for these wooden pallets, so he can provide this. Someone said "okay, I'm good at knitting, so I can provide some cushions for that". And next month after this meeting they've sent me photos of the space, the new public space, they created with their own hands, with their own participation, asking friends, asking friends, friends, friends, making the network, the potential of the community. They created the space. It was without the money, like totally. They've done it with their own hands. In here, the people are greedy. We are creating, I am presenting my project, and it needs to be implemented as I thought about it. This is wrong. This is, it cannot be. You need to make it cheaper; you need to make it better and there's no discussion about how the project can be made better. There's the discussion whether the project was made as was expected or whether the citizens are going to be complaining about it. The money for me is not important. We do not need to spend such amounts of money in order to create projects that work on participation, on the community development. Well, you have to basically answer what do you need the participatory budgeting for. Do you need it for the investment? The city knows what to spend money on, right? But if you need it for investments, okay, as much money as possible. But if you want to create a community, that community, not a group of people living together in one space, you don't need money. That's why I think it's not about it. And you know, this is funny because you are telling me that other countries are getting in the same trap of thinking about participatory budgeting from the perspective of the budgeting. This is a trap. We do not need money to talk to each other and to help each other and

that's the, like, making it very, very simple. That would be the basic idea of participation itself, right? My opinion.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- Okay, nice to hear that. And considering all these actors, these agents that are together in PB, around PB, did you see any conflicts or tension between, like, city council, mayor, people working in PB, local community?

L2

- Yeah, of course. There are lots of conflicts. The conflicts in the community I told you about. Those are the conflicts that are happening because of the lack of communication. We do not talk to each other, the neighbor is a good neighbor when it's poorer and, yeah, he's got some problems in his life, so that's a good neighbor. If he's successful, that's, we don't like each other, this is like Polish mentality. At the level of departments of the city, of the municipality, there is also a race for funds from the participatory budgeting. I mean the department responsible for sport activities and sport infrastructure, they are, without hesitation, they're promoting their own project. You know, there is a city, of course there are some citizens who are responsible for the project, who is presenting the project. But if the project is good from the perspective of the department, the department is supporting it. So, this is like not really a good idea, I mean it's a great idea for the department, but not a good idea for the participation. And those departments are under vice presidents, so there is a quarrel of vice presidents who can do what with the participatory budgeting. So, there are like big institutions, the sports institutions, which are the sports hall, those recreation centers. Somehow, I mean the people are presenting the project, they're promoting the project and then there is a vice president telling that this should be legal for them to promote this project. And there is another president who says that no, that's perfectly fine because this is their department. But your projects under your department, that should be forbidden, so there are lots of tensions. Well, the tensions are basically about the money. And you see that the municipality of Lodz has this moment when they thought it would be a good idea to use the participatory budgeting in order to fund the schools. With this detour, you see the city itself is helping schools with money, supporting the infrastructure, supporting the teachers and so on. At one moment, when they saw that the municipality, well, the power level, the presidents, those who decide, when they've noticed that most of the money from the participatory budgeting is being spent on the schools, they cut the money, the structural money from the department, sending it to schools. So, you see they were spending the same amount of money, but with the participatory procedure. So, the people have the participatory budgeting, schools still receive the same amount of money, the public relations of the municipality were awesome because the numbers of people voting were this high and everything worked well. If you look at the money fluctuation, but still, we are not talking about the participatory, we are talking about the way of budgeting in a very crazy way. So yeah, this is like lots of tensions, this is like creating a race, not cooperation. And not only on this community level, but also on this municipality department level as well. And antagonizing both departments and the community, they are not in the dialogue with

themselves, they are fighting with each other in order to create... Yeah, they've got every part of the participatory budgeting institutions and people have their own vision how should this work and how should the effect look like. And those are different visions, and they cannot really negotiate common views. No, they are... we are doing it this way, we are unhappy. You should do it this way, we won't be able to do this, we are unhappy. Yeah, having fun.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- And what's interesting for me from that talk is that in the Porto Alegre model, the model that was the major one in Brazil, is not anymore. There are still a few cities that do it, but it's like a minority. We have the participatory budgeting council that is made up mostly of citizens. So, this council is for discussing the projects and making decisions. So, in this scenario... and these people who are in the council are elected from the citizens. In this scenario, you have like, okay, the citizens have much more power in developing the projects... of course, you have to talk with the technicians, but who makes the decision, if a project is going to be done or not, is the council. And here I see by the way the framework is done by the law, especially the national law, is that no, who takes the decision about the projects are the technicians, right?

L2

- Well, there is a council.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- There's a council too, but this council...

L2

- Is made of politicians, the politicians are making the decisions. The meetings of the council look like a meeting of three sides. So, this is the citizens that are responsible for the project itself. The clerks and representatives of the city would be responsible for realizing the project next year if it's passing the voting. And the third part is politicians who are listening to both sides and deciding whether the project has a green light or not. The main rule, most of the time, is that they are talking only about the projects that have the negative recommendation from the departments and the specialized units. So, if the unit says that something is impossible, the politicians are asking why it is impossible and what we could do in order to make it possible with the company of the authors of the project. So, this is how it looks like. There is another council that is not that broadly communicated, which consists of directors and city secretaries. I mean, this is the most important vice president. And they have the power to decide whether the project is on or not, and they are doing it with the closed doors. So, this is not okay for the participation of the side again, but this is like another cabinet they are doing it. The council, there is a council, the council is working pretty well because this is the only moment when you can negotiate and you can meet the expectations. You get to know the point of view of the city specialist why your project is not possible to be realized. And you can, from the other side, you can also hear the problems the

citizens have or the need they have, he has, she has, that this project is going to be an answer for. So, yeah, we have the council there.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- And considering all we talked about until now, do you believe that PB in Lodz tackles urban inequalities? Like focus on urban inequalities or changes urban inequalities?

L2

- You mean like, yeah, what do you mean with urban inequalities?

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- Like, for example, differences...

L2

- Spatial or social?

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- Both, like spatial and social, yeah.

L2

- Well, spatial for sure, because that money that are connected to the participatory budget, they are changing the urban space. And every change is connected with getting the higher standards and the accessibility, for example, is a standard right now. Like according to law, there needs to be accessible parts of every project, every pavement, every public space. There needs to be, you know, no higher grants for the people with disabilities, easy access for the elderly people. So, yeah, it's changing the space with the new norms and new standards. OK, that's awesome. Socially, I have honestly no idea. Probably, probably yes, because there are lots of people who are, well, by accident and not necessarily because of the participatory budgeting, but, yeah, there's participatory budgeting, so there are many things going on like parallelly that connected to the participatory budgeting. I know that elderly people are learning new technologies, so this is somehow bringing them back to the main discourse and the main... like, the information flow so they can provide their knowledge and their abilities, and they can again participate in modern society living. Somehow, yeah, for sure. In my dream, participatory budgeting would be a tool that can help people from different groups, the financial groups, the poor and the rich. - **The income groups.** - Working together in order to create something nice for them as well. But, well... even not... this is pretty radical. Taking a step back, it would be nice if participatory budgeting would show to the rich people the perspective of poor people and other way around, so they can like "OK, this is not the, he's not poor because he's lazy, he's poor because his life was not as successful as mine, so we can... but he's got the great idea so I can support him in ideas, we can create something for him". Yeah, commune. It's not happening, not as much as I would like it to happen. But you know what? There are projects that are

created by NGOs that support poor people, that support animals, that are connected with the ecological and climate crisis, and participatory budgeting makes this problem visible. I mean, people who are voting can see the project. They can see the, throughout the project they can see the problem. So yeah, so we are educating by like... I'm going to find the word for it because this is the fourth time I'm thinking about it.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- Yeah, of course.

L2

- Well, the translation says that... accidentally, ok. You know, so like collateral fixes.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- Yeah, like this spillover success.

L2

- Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's not meant to be, but it's there, so it's nice.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- I can see. And when you talk about like this integration between different social classes, like low income, high income, etc. It's possible to say, like, maybe justice? What I'm looking at is, do you think that PB is not necessarily how it's done, but it's idea, the idea of participatory budgeting focus in territorial justice?

L2

- Well, well, yeah, definitely, because there is no... The participatory budgeting is not for some people, from one of the groups, [is] for all of them. So it is about justice, it's about equality in a space that is called public, so the public is creating this accessible for everyone space. So, for sure.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- But do you think that is being achieved here?

L2

- Yeah, yeah, you know, I mean, it's hard to say because I don't have any data to support my intuition.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- No, but your opinion, what you think about.

L2

- My opinion is that... It's working pretty good for the people who are not living in these closed blocks of flats with their own gardens. Because every project that is created with participatory budgeting needs to be accessible, as I told you. So, if they want to create something, they need to... they do know that other people from the other side of the wall or the fence would go there and would use it as their own. I mean, that's something that is common. So yeah, definitely. And maybe even the other way around, if there was no participatory budget, the public space might be more less democratic. I mean, they might be influenced by the people who have money, but having money means that they can give you conditions. So, we can do this playground, but it's going to be restricted for the kids from our block, for example. So participatory budgeting is preventing that. Yeah, I think I think it's pretty flattening the structure when talking about public money, it's not dedicated for any of the group, it's creating accessible space, and this is pretty important. It's not favorizing any citizens. It can help particular groups, for example, you can create projects that are for people with disabilities and those do not need to be accessible. I mean, get this right. It's not that everyone is to have a disability in order to use some of the projects that are created. Otherwise, it's not accessible, so it cannot be in PB. It can be. People with disabilities have their own category, the projects can be realized, even though they're not for everyone. So, this is like something that's also right.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- I was about to finish, but you said something that caught my curiosity. You said there are like this gated communities or people who are not living that vividly in public. So gated communities or this kind of new way of living, way of housing is common here? Like huge?

L2

- Yeah.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- And that's it recent?

L2

- That's like for the last 10 years, 15 years, probably. It's hard to say. The new block of flats that are being built, they always have a fence around, small gardens or not the gardens, but the like this way, [French word]. That's French word with their own like this... How do you call it? Intercept... - **Intersections?** - No, no, no, with this tool, you can call the flat...

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- Oh, OK. OK. - **Intercoms!** - Yeah, yeah, intercoms.

L2

- And again, the national law let the people owning big companies building those flats for developers. Let them do it with enormous scale everywhere almost. And basically, there is a kind of a war between the city municipalities, people who are trying to plan urban structure and the people who own money and can create housing. So, they're creating housing everywhere without any looking at the documents and the idea behind the urban order. And this is like a new fashion that I'm leaving on the... I'm going to check the word. It's going to be like obvious word again [laughs].

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- No, it happens.

L2

- OK. Residential estate. So, you're living in a closed residential estate with your own piece of grass, which is really small, but with the parking lots underneath and you somehow feel better than people living in the old buildings like the ones that are not reformed for many years at city center. Yeah, this is like a classical situation right now, but it's going to change soon. Yeah, people cannot really afford those flats, because they're getting more and more expensive. It's not possible to buy one square meter of the flat right now from their salary, monthly salary on this middle level, so it has to end. We'll see what happens.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- So there's a lot of pressure from the real estate market to... - Yeah. - And you see that in Lodz?

L2

- The pressure is on the governmental level, so the government is going to let those investors to build. And the cities, the cities are trying to stop building as many as ugly... Yeah, it's not about building flats. Flats are good, but about this kind of flats. - **Yeah, yeah.** - Dividing the space that should be public space. We had this discussion around the place I live in, there is an idea prepared by architects, the city architects and the urban office. It's called... No idea how to translate it.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- You can say in Polish, no problem.

L2

- I don't remember the name in Polish right now... [word in Polish]. So, this is like an idea that all the structure of one of the blocks, city block, should be divided with passages that lets you to communicate from the block with small places like small parks. You know, so the place would be for living as well, not only I mean, living like spending time there, not only living in your flat and then work-flat, work-flat. So, to be a good public space and all the developers that are building their buildings there, they are not really happy about this idea because it means that there are people not from their blocks walking

around. And what's more, somehow funny, it's paranoid really, that the people living in all buildings in this area, they do not want those passages as well. So, the people from those flats, those closed estate places won't come to their neighborhood. And again, you've got... it's not about in Poland, it's called developer. So, it's like a developer of a block of flats. It's called developer. Developer is a person as you can reconfirm the name. The people who are not happy about a block of flats being built in their neighborhood, it's often like you are living in a block that has 15 meters high and next to you there is going to be a block 40 meters, for example. So, there is no light coming to your windows anymore. Again, the people living in the neighborhood for a long time, they are thinking about this investment as a developer, there is one very bad developer. They are not thinking about people who are going to be living there, so they are not thinking about the neighbors. They are thinking about something that is bad, something that is dangerous for them. And this is one person, the person is called developer, and we need to get rid of them because he is dangerous. There are lots of people living there, lots of networks that are created there. Nobody is thinking about it. Another problem, another... maybe in your another PhD [laughs].

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- [laughs] Yeah, of course. Urban space and urban transformations are... You can have one PhD per city basically or even per neighborhood because...

L2

- Per neighborhood probably.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- Yeah, it's so complex and it's like a network of relations that is so complex.

L2

- So, for the end, I am going to tell you a story which is connected to participatory budgeting because one day I went for the meeting about the participatory budgeting. And I am going to check for you the name of the structure, the urban structure. So, as you probably noticed, the tenements in Łódź have their gates and there is a small...

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- Internal space, yeah.

L2

- Internal space. So, I knew that I was going to the place in one of the... not those nice streets. So, it was pretty dangerous place but well, that doesn't matter. And I missed the tenement, so I took the turn in the wrong gate, and suddenly I found myself in a small inside space with an enormous guy, like this fat two meters high guy standing in front of me and asking me not politely what the hell am I doing here?

And this guy was there... he was a bit drunk of course. The question was not "what are you doing here", but he was like "what the fuck are you doing here? Get the fuck out of here." And I was like "you know, I am looking for the organization because I am there appointed to do... For the meeting about participatory budgeting." "The participatory budgeting? What the fuck is a participatory budgeting?" "You know, this simple mechanism that shows you that if you have your friend and both of you cannot really afford a beer because you have not enough money, altogether if you put this in one pocket you can buy a bottle of vodka." And he was like "okay, I can see the idea. And you know what, I am sitting here because this is my place, this is our place. My community built it. This is the umbrella we stole from the Piotrkowska Street, this is the benches and the table we created with our own hands, and I am sitting here and I am making sure that nobody who comes here does not destroy our world." You know, in this small building, on this small gate, in the middle of the city... There was a guy who understood participation better than many, many, many city clerks, representatives, politicians... Even us. Because they were there, they had their needs, they found the means, they realized projects that somehow responded to the need, and they were happy living together without the people coming from outside. They were self-sustained even though they did not have a budget. Of course, stealing is not good, yeah, right. But they have got their own culture codes in their world, stealing from somebody who is richer is okay. Like different, you know, different mindsets. It is not better, it is not worse, it is different, like totally. And they were there as an example of participation in a small community group, self-sustainable group, happy to be living together even though there were some students living there coming from different cities... And they were like living in the middle of probably hell with locals like this, you know, this drunk, fat guy is probably... Lots of other strange situations there. But they were doing it, they were a community. And yeah, this is even with all the problems that are in the community, this was the best example in 2013 that I found our participation and that made me sure that it can work. How can we switch from the small community to the whole city? That is the question. I have not found the answer after 15 years of working in... Still looking for it.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- Okay, nice, nice. So, I think I am finished. I would like to first thank you in the name of my university, my PhD is in São Paulo State University in Brazil. So, I am going to also reinforce how this is all scientific character, and this is all scientific information. So, I will never write who you are in my dissertation, in my papers, but I use just this information as data. So, in the future if you need anything, I will be available.

L2

- That's awesome. If there is anything that would not be understandable and you would have any more questions, feel free to ask. If there is any need of putting my name and part of your work, just give me a sign and I shouldn't have problem with it. But maybe not with the matters that I am not really happy about the municipality... ah, I don't care really. Yeah, happy to help before and now still happy to help.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- Thank you so much!

L2

- My pleasure!

Fim da transcrição