

Pesquisa FAPESP nº 2021/04556-0
ENTREVISTA COM L3
Cidade: Lodz (Lodzkie, Polônia)
Entrevistado: L3, 40+ anos, administrador
Entrevistador: Rodrigo Sartori Bogo
Local de realização da entrevista: Cafeteria

TRANSCRIÇÃO

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- Alright, L3, so I started to record. The first thing that I should do, it's part of the process, is basically explaining to you my research broadly. I know we already mailed about that, but it's part of the process. Basically, I'm studying how the impact of participatory budgeting happens in cities that are considered mid to large size, like mid-sized cities. I know Łódź in the context of Poland is a big city, but in comparison there it's like basically the same size of the other cities I'm studying from Brazil and from the US. It actually is the biggest one of the four, but there is this discussion of how the size of the city and the capacity of the municipality can influence the results. The most important thing to me is to see how the different types of design of PB change the results, because the four PBs I'm studying have different types of design. I got Łódź one of my case studies because it's interesting for me too to see this process of spreading of PB from Brazil to other countries and how this relates to Brazilian cases too. And now Poland is one of the most important in the world because you have like a lot of PB cases running, a national law that has lot of discussion about it, but it's happening. So that's the way that things are turning right now. And for the bureaucracy of the research, I need you to state your full name and say that you agree to being recorded.

L3

- Okay, my name is L3 and I agree to be recorded.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- Perfect. So, the first thing I would need is like you give your personal profile, like what's your profession, your professional experience in regard to PB and how is your work with participatory processes in general?

L3

- My experience is connected with NGO and City of Łódź. I worked in these two sectors. I started in NGO and then the thinking about participation came to my mind and also to my colleagues which are members of different NGOs. We met together and we decided to do something with the quality of local democracy because we saw that many wrong decisions have been made in Łódź and it was neglected during a period of time, from 2005 and 2010. It was 13 years ago, I think. And we saw that people are not involved in some decision-making process, that don't have tools, they don't conduct consultations with citizens, and everything goes wrong in this field. So, we first tried to talk with people from our city office about implementing some consultation regulations. We know that some cities in Poland implemented such kind of local law, for example Krakow, Słupsk. It was a document which describes step by step how consultations look like, about topics that could be consulted with citizens, about type of models of consultation of this public or these little groups, for example workshops and things like

that. Also, one of the important points of this document was the feedback for citizens, because many people are not involved in local cases on decision-making process because they, as they say, they don't know what happens after they propose something, or they send some information to office or something like that. So, we knew that consultations have to be responsible for most citizens. So, it was... and all of the responses have to have some explanation, for example, if the city decided not to...

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- Apply some project or something like that.

L3

- Yes, they have to explain why. And it's a process that you get the feedback and, for example, could learn how city works. And it was important because some people think that decisions maybe are easier from the perspective of local, you know, citizens and often people in city office don't have an opportunity, don't have a chance to... maybe not a chance, but a possibility to do some project because of some other things we don't know from this perspective. So, the most important thing is to have the information how the city works and people should learn through these processes. And one of our councilors decided to prepare a project and regulations of consultation and put it on the discussion on city council meeting in Łódź. And it came very quickly, because it was like an easy step, it appeared like an easy step. We prepared some documents, this document with some friends from grassroots organization and this councilor really understood us, the necessity of implement such regulation, and he had a backup from his party, and I think others also. So, it came quickly, but generally, as we saw after a few months maybe, only [a] document does not change nothing [laughs], because if you want to organize consultation you have to have a budget, you have to get experts involved with activities, costs too, and you should think about this like a process, like this educational process and things like that, but we thought that we don't have partners in city as city workers because maybe they don't [didn't] understand us or maybe they don't have a special dedicated place which are responsible for this kind of communication and participation with citizens.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- Sorry, just for me to understand this was back in 2010, 2011 and this moment when we started the implementation, right? - **Yes, 2010.** - So, did you see at that time that there was like a barrier, it was difficult within the municipality to have like this, with technicians, with the people inside the city to have... to put these ideas, right?

L3

- Yes, they weren't prepared for this kind of processes and it was a new thing for them and I don't know if the city has its own ambassador who will take care of this kind of thing, but after this, of course, some consultations were organized in Łódź and we took part in some of them and it was a good step forward and it was a change, of course. But after a few years we realized that consultations are not this form

which could engage people for longer time and make them believe that their vote counts, because consultations weren't binding, you can go to the meeting with officials, you can say some things and of course you can also get feedback, but it could change nothing. For example, for many people, they perceive this as some kind of "ok I came to city office and tell what I think but I know that it will change nothing", so we saw that really, it's not that way, consultations are alright, but if we want to strengthen the civic society, we have to have strength tools. And we found the idea of participatory budgeting... I remember my friends from the NGO, we have this idea, and we wrote a project to Fundacja Batorego in implementation on participatory budgeting in four districts in Łódź. In this ten years ago... fourteen years ago, we got 36 little local districts, and every district has their own budget. For example, 50 thousand, 100 thousand [zloty] something like that, it depends on people living there... - **The size and the population.** - And that wasn't some huge budget, yes? They, specifically on this budget you can do some local renovations, some playgrounds or some initiatives for local community, but we thought that it's good to start from this little things because the process is most important, if we can engage local people and it could be really like binding voice, they can choose the project and they will see the result, they will believe that their voice counts and it's worth to take part in some decision making process in local community and then we believe that it will increase some quality of local democracy. We started to talk with these local councilors, Fundacja Batorego of course gave us a green light and said that we can do this project, and we got funds for that, so it was very good information.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- So, this first project in the four districts was applied from your NGO, not from the city office? Your NGO that ran the process and did everything, like the organization, the voting and everything and later when the city office looked at that experience they were like "hmm this is interesting", that's what happened?

L3

- Yes, that's right. And then we were talking with local councilors and... local councils have 15 councilors, and they also vote for involving in project and it was hard to convince them to take part because, as they said then, "we are councilors and we are deciding what we are talking about, I have to decide if people [have the] right to decide how to spend 15.000, whole budget from our district, really? What are you talking about?" [laughs]. We forced, you know, that people don't understand this level and then...

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- So, there was a conflict with the [local] councilors at the time?

L3

- There was a conflict, but finally we found four districts which were some open minded, tried to do something new, maybe believed in people's imagination and power and said "ok let's start, maybe could be something new and could change the things about our district because we don't really know what people thinks, what they need, we met once a month and people really know what they want to change

in their local community", so we started to do the participatory budgeting for districts and I remember that we had then low budget for promotion, some brochures, we got some meeting with people but it was hard to get proposal of projects. So we got, we support people, but we were some like two people from our organizations and some city councilors which were supporting but generally they were like standing beside and looking what's going on and how it works [rather] then support citizens to write a project for local community, but the process started and people wrote for three or four projects for one district, so it was maybe not too much but it was always something that you have to choose from, so it was a good start I think and we tried to do voting during the meeting, so it was very different from this process we got right now.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- There was a face to face voting?

L3

- Yes, because now you can vote by internet, but we thought that it could be better to meet people together because they could choose between other projects, and they have to listen the author and share their opinions and discuss about the necessity of this project or importance. And we thought that it's main important thing to get a place to people to share their ideas and vote. [Polish word] We are voting, you know what you vote for, and it works like that, but sometimes we got too much people in the meeting, yes? So, it was a minus of this process, but I think that it was good that everyone has to listen to the author, so they could vote, really they could think through about his vote so we did it and people chose the first projects and after few months we can observe the creation of some investment. I remember one street in one of the districts, it was always flooded during intense rain and after the renovation everything changed and we got a photo with a car deep in the water and we got a photo later what happened, and it was very... it was a great change, yes? It's one local street and it shows how people can change a local community by themselves. And we got this experience and we made a brochure after we finished the project, when we wrote some experience of our meeting with city councilors, with groups, local communities and some whole process of voting and project creating, because we were making project also on meetings with people so we people are voting for example fairs, for most important fields and in this field they choose ideas for concrete projects, so it was whole process and we wrote it in our brochure and we also started to discuss with city councilors, with vice president and some... we asked two or three councilors who are also district councilors, so they we thought that they could be our ambassador in the field of the city and also they understood the barriers and some things connected with local communities. So, we also involved people from NGO and we met some group 10 or 15 people and we were working about idea of recommendations to create a whole city tool for whole district projects, to make some broad mechanism. And after that we got this brochure book where we wrote about this whole thing and we put it in the... these two local councilors... city councilors, because city councilors have power to decision making process in whole city, so we knew that we have to talk with city councilors about implementing participatory budgeting here. So, we prepared this book, and

we gave it to every councilor we put it on the shelf in city, got some documents, his own documents, so we hoped that everyone could look at this kind of model, kind of... - **Program!** - Program, and after that some city representatives came interested about implementing this process, we got new president [mayor] and president was open minded for involvement for activities from doing projects with people and we came in the right moment I think, because it was new beginning and we... - **Good timing.** - Good timing and the president really want to show that she is open minded, and she wants to implement new regulations. And somewhere between this process I changed my job from NGO to city office because [the] city was looking for a person who would like to cooperate with non-governmental organizations and I sent my application and things changed that I became a city worker and when president has to decide about implementing participatory budgeting, she offers me to keep the process going in city and to prepare regulations with important stakeholders, with city councilors, with NGOs and try to organize it in a broad way. So, I started this job at that moment.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- And the NGO that you were working on before that was an NGO focused on public participation, in social activism, what was the main focus of NGO at that time?

L3

- Main focus was supporting other NGOs in some financial things, in some management, projects writing and things like that, and participation was the topic which became popular then, I think they are doing participatory things until now, so...

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- And are you born here? - **Yes.** - Ok, so you are local, you know the city a lot. Considering that then you moved to work in the city office, and you had this process of making the appointments and making this dynamic between city council office and the NGOs and everything, what do you think about the PB that was implemented in the end? Because the experience you said in the districts is quite a bit different than the PB that was implemented at the time in the city-wide and it's the same design, right? I know that it had a few changes, but what is your evaluation in regard to this design, that is the one that is today?

L3

- As it was implemented in the first year of course we were happy and generally excited about this process but of course we saw some... Sorry.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- No worries, no worries. Take your time.

L3

- We saw that many things have to change in this process. Not so many, but we knew that the process is dynamic and we should evaluate year by year and we were focused about our aims, for example, one of our aims was inclusion, so we have to communicate to all group of people not only this activities of people who are on the other all meetings in city, but also to people who are not involved. My aim was education. People have to learn about how the city works and to prepare some things on their own, projects, and we are asking ourselves if this process we are conducting is connected with these aims. It's only a good way, so we thought that some things have to change because we saw in the first edition that people has no place to discuss, for example, about the projects, and it was very important for us and we tried to change it, but it was also connected with budget for this kind of meetings for organization time. City has to create new structure inside, structure of dialogue, structure of people who are organizing meetings and it was hard from beginning, because everyone was talking about the voting and "what we can do if people will not come to the meeting? We will have 15 or 100 voices, it's not too much, it's not optimistic for us because we want to involve much more people in the city" and I understand that but the most important thing for us was the process, discussion and effectiveness of decision-making process. We have to avoid that people are voting for project with best titles or a project they don't know nothing about this because on the website you get two sentences about that, and you vote quickly because you don't have time. So, we were focused about change, about meetings and deliberation time for people and we tried to change it, but I think it's hard to change to this day. City officials are focused on the results, like how many people were voting this year, this is the main result. So, it's hard to discuss about the quality of these votes because this is the most important thing, if you got your aim different than ours, but if you got your PR aim that you can show it on the press conference that you involved this year 100.000 of people, you show yourself as someone who is doing great things, yes? And I understand that it's good to have so much people involved, but we were discussing that it's not the main aim, it depends how the process looks like and we tried then year by year implemented some different things in the model but it was harder year by year. After a few years of implementation, the city representatives decided not to involve NGOs into the process. So, they...

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- Cut the NGO's off?

L3

- Yes. Because of the political, some... [Polish word], we were the city of activists always, and there was a lot of people who often telling straight what they like in Lodz and what they don't like in Lodz. And some officials had a problem to force negative comments, and they start to perceive people from NGO like "oh, they are... so all of them are, you know..." - **Too much critical?** - Yes, criticism and things like that, "they have political aspirations and criticize us, they want to change us. So, they have political aspirations", and it was very hard to communicate because the main thing of this dialogue was the confidence and not to divide us from sides. You are from the city [office], you are from NGO, you are from city council and if we started to divide for some groups it [will] stop to work. And it was simple to

go through, to go forward, because some political I can say persons in city office because it looks like that. And think about these political nuances, some fields which are not interesting to us. So that year, I don't know, it was 2015 or 2017, they decide to organize budget, participating budget by themselves. They were not a process that we were sitting together behind the table and thinking what to change this year. But only city workers decided how budget will look like. They were [organizing a] consultation for two weeks, the project of regulation, and you can send us propositions but it was, you know, everything was clear right now. It wasn't have a chance to differ a lot, to change most important things in the process. So, it works like that today. I'm not working in the city office right now for few years. But it was hard for me, because I was in the position that I have to... I perceived myself as a person who could conduct open dialogue with both sides. And at one moment at this level I realized that it's not necessary for my management, for those people who are governing. So, it was hard to continue.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- So, did you leave in 2022?

L3

- I left from different, very different cases, things, because I generally wasn't, I was involved at the start, mostly. Then I was in this group which are year by year working about changes. But generally, I was, my work focused on relationships with NGOs, some financial things, some programs, different programs of relationship with city between NGOs. So I was, for example, as you can say, fulfilled by [laughs]. I know that I did everything what I could and doing this and starting to continue things that you don't believe that could end effectively. It was nonsense, yes. So that's what I decided and budget still going and it's organizing year by year. But now it's, I think, looks like the same like 5th or 7th year they go out. We got voting via internet, we got 150 for example projects in the level of city level. It was even hard for me to write these titles and these few sentences about this whole project. So, I know that generally people could have the same problem. But they are voting like that, it's easy, you can sit down at home, you can find your 15 minutes and take a look at the site. Of course it has a good site in spite of voting, but I don't think it solves the most important things. We are not choosing the most important for city projects like that.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- What do you consider the most important things?

L3

- Could you repeat the question?

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- Yea. What do you consider are these important things that the PB today is not addressing?

L3

- Some social, some things about groups of minorities, for example. Some things connected with revitalization of cities, some ecological projects, for example. I'm sorry I got lack of words, but it has to change in the field of public transport. We got a few good projects of organizing public transport differently, bicycle roads and supporting sustainability in Lodz. But I think that they don't have a chance with some projects like... good PR and promoted well, often even from city officials. Because everyone could send their own project and city officials also can. We saw that some projects have real support from city officials but not only, maybe I'm just saying too much, maybe it's my experience, not always positive. But not considering what is important because I think that as I said before, people will realize themselves what is most important if they have the opportunity to listen to themselves and to discuss this. And of course, maybe someone said that we don't need a bicycle road and supporting project for people with some physical problems or mental health or something like that. Because I want to do a playground in my... Of course, I can understand that but it's good to have a chance to meet people who think differently, because it broadens our minds. It has to see that we are not alone in this city and our idea is maybe not the best. Because people got real problems about which we were not thinking about and we are not conscious that they exist. So, then you can cooperate, you can change your mind, you can say "Okay, my project... I can support your project, I can leave my project, I know you can't leave, I heard what you say and it's really thing which is most important than mine, because I have 200 meters or one kilometer from my place or other playground or pitch or something like that." So, I think it's most important in PB.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- Okay, that's interesting. And who do you think that benefits most from PB in Lodz? And by who, I mean social group or area of the city, something like that?

L3

- I don't know. I think there are some different groups. You get different projects in different fields. You get some projects that many people say that this kind of project could not be voted on in participatory budgeting because it's a renovation of school. "Renovation of school has to be done by the city themselves and it's not for deciding for people, it has to be done". Okay, I can understand that, but it's some basic thing and people... if participatory budgeting is a process where people decide about the importance of how to spend public money, they have the opportunity to vote on this kind of project too. Because of course it's basic, of course we can discuss that it's only 1% of whole budget or 4% of whole budget, it's too little, yes, of course. But I will not exclude some projects from voting because people are smart and they could choose, but the main thing is to give them space to discuss, but I am not answering your question [laughs].

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- No, it's all right. You can keep talking, no problem.

L3

- I don't know really who benefits too much. We got some authors from which year by year sending their own projects and they win year by year. For example, support for homeless cats, we get the project, and some kind of animal support. - **Animal care, right?** - Yes, animal care. And year by year this project has support from citizens and the beneficiaries are the people who are involved in the activist in the field of animal care. But also few years ago some NGOs of public spaces, arrangements, some projects, cases like that. But I don't know, schools maybe, people say that schools gain most of the budget because renovation of schools is important and it's not good as I said before to put it in participatory budgeting. It would be... maybe it's not good in this kind of model, but if we have some more money in PB and we could think about PB, about the prioritized areas, that you get education, that you get transport, that you get environment and things like that, you can vote in dividing fields. But it's different model totally.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- So, do you think if the design changes the results like the territorial results could be better? - **Could be bad?** - No, better, better. What do you think?

L3

- Maybe. But I think that we always have to look for the best option and I think that we got the same options from 10 years right now and it would be great to change our thinking and to try something new. Maybe start from basic discussion and create something new from the beginning. Maybe.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- And one thing that you said is important to me. What do you think about the amount of money in PB? It's like, this year is 35 million zloty. I knew that some years ago it was 50 million, but it cut a little bit. Do you think that's enough? Do you think that should be more? What do you think?

L3

- I think that should be more, but this could also have to be connected with changes in the whole process. Because we can have two times more, three times more budget and big weight, but the most important thing is how we spend it and how the decision-making process looks like. In this model I would be afraid that some groups who have the power of promotion will win. Not that this project is most important in our city, but this is good, and it sells very well because it's new, you know, some architecture or something trendy. I would be afraid to do this because we have to think about the whole process and it's necessary, but of course people have to have the opportunity to decide about a bigger amount of our budget. One percent or four percent... of course, there are some expenses which are hard to decide, you know, it has to be a field of discussion. But generally, the main project also has to be consulted, maybe, with people.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- When you were at the city office, did you see any connection of PB with other programs of participation? Or with urban planning, or there is a connection or is it like, PB is something and the rest is another thing that's not connected? What's your opinion on that? - **Sorry, could you repeat because I'm a little bit tired.** - Of course, and we are ending already. I have just three more questions. The first one is when you were at the city office or from your evaluation now, do you think that PB is connected to other programs in Łódź or is it very isolated? What's your opinion on that?

L3

- I think it's isolated, it's not connected, and it has to be connected, but it's not. It's like, you got 50 million, 35 million and decide how to spend it.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- It's not like... yeah, I know that they told me, I talked to the people in the city office, we have the votes, and we pass it to the green areas department, to the transportation department and everything, but there is no connection to urban planning for example.

L3

- No, to strategy, to priorities of cities. We got this kind of idea, but it was never accepted.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- Well, you said about the priorities of the city and other aspects, and I would like to know your opinion. Do you believe that PB here in Łódź tackles urban inequalities, like the inequalities in the city? And by inequalities, I mean income or social inequalities, this kind. - **Inequalities?** - Inequalities.

L3

- How I could understand, ah, nierówności [inequalities], right?

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- If PB deals with that in some way.

L3

- You asked me if PB...

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- Has any influence on the urban inequalities in the city.

L3

- If it has, it's a program. It's like, you know, this project won, and it was connected with some social inequality in the field of, you know, changing some stereotypes or something like that. Okay, but it's only that it has some votes, which has enough votes to implement it. Not that it's with some kind of program. But as we said about strategic aims and things like that, it's not connected with some field like this too. [Speaking in Polish] So, sorry, but I know some words, but I can't find it.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- No, it's alright, I know, I know how it is. Okay, do you want to say more about that, or can I pass to the next question? - **You can ask.** - Great. There's this idea that's originally in PB, especially in Brazil, that PB should deal with social justice or territorial justice in my area. Because I'm a geographer, right? So, I focus more on like the space and territory and social relations in space. So, do you believe that PB in Lodz focuses on territorial justice?

L3

- I would be... it would be great if it has the kind of, you know, background. I always perceive participatory budget as a tool which could solve the main problems, inequalities, and support the minorities and some solving the most basic problems and to eliminate the inequality in the city. And it was like Brazilian model, the first Brazilian model, yes, and it's a very good option, yes. But our Polish, not only in Lodz, but in participatory budgeting in other cities, look similarly. So, our Polish model is not based on this point of view.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- So, do you think that this objective of social justice is not being achieved here through PB?

L3

- Yes, it's kind of how we understand the social justice, yes. For someone you can point out some project which solves some local problems, and it could solve some things, you know, little things. But it's not the whole, you know, model which are based on some ideas who don't have these aims written. Sometimes I wonder if our rules, you know, changed and we think differently with the city of Lodz, management and people from NGO. If the city knows for what reason they are organizing this kind of participation because I think that on that one day they forgot why the participatory budget was implemented and for whom we are organizing it and what has to be done in this kind of tool. So, I think that it's hard to say but I think that now it's, you know, it's not supported by vision or evaluation and year by year we are doing the same process. I don't see the future with this kind of conducting, some kind of model which is not evaluated by looking for aims, to listen to people who want changes and to not connect with social problems, to connect with strategic aims of the city. And it's like, you know, you have your own budget, you can decide, of course it's good that it is, but it could be much stronger and much effective tool if we could think about it like that you can change some social problems or some broad aims.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- Nice. And sorry, just something that popped into my mind. Do you think that this has any relation to the national law? Like PB being implemented in the national level had any influence in how PB here is kind of stuck today? Do you think that there is a relation?

L3

- I don't know if the national law can change locally, you can change locally I think, your participatory budget, not looking at your national law. If you want to change it and have to implement deliberation, you can do this, you can avoid some procedures and as we were implementing PB in Lodz, there was no law and some councilors said "okay, but we can't implement it, but we don't have a national law that provides people that their voice will be binding for us. No, we can only consultate" and some people, lawyers said "yes, it's not impossible, we can do this because we don't have a mechanism in the national law". But we came to the idea that councilors say "okay, but you can vote, and we can decide that we will vote like your opinion is, so we can just do an agreement and that you can avoid some things". Good will is an important thing in participatory budgeting, but if you want to change, if you want to do something good, you can do this and you always can find a good way.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- Okay, L3, do you have any more comments, something that you think that you would like to talk, that is missing in the interview, do you have anything more to say?

L3

- When do you plan to finish your work?

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- Next year! This is my last fieldwork, so this is the last data I'm collecting. So next year, I will be back to Brazil next week, I will start to finish the writing, so I'm probably going to defend in April.

L3

- Okay, so you have plans to... now, Lodz is the first city you are describing?

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- It's the last one. I already did fieldwork in other cities. I did it in the US last year and the other two in Brazil this year. So, it's interesting because when we are talking, I'm comparing it with the other cases already, because it's already everything in my mind. For example, what do you say... I think I would just like to do the last bureaucracy; I can stop the recording if that's okay for you. - **Okay.** - And just to say that I'm very thankful for your time. I'm thanking you in the name of my university in Brazil, São Paulo State University. Just to reinforce that all this talk, all this information is scientific data, so I'm not going

to put your name on it, it's just like someone from Lodz. And you know, everything you need later, you can text me, you can mail me, and we keep in touch.

L3

- I'm curious what your work is when you finish, how you do the summary, how you could match these cities together. If it's possible, you can of course send me information, maybe it could be accessible online, this material. But I will be curious about what you brought.

Entrevistador (Rodrigo)

- Of course, let me just finish it here.

Fim da transcrição