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Fostering democratic pedagogy? The participatory budget in Lisbon (Portugal)

ABSTRACT: Social participation is a tool to strengthen peoples' autonomy and ability to decide upon public issues. It is also an educational and learning tool. In recent times, new forms of social participation have emerged such as the participatory budgets. These foster democratic participation and contribute to more transparent and efficient ways of governing. The participatory budget of Lisbon is an interesting example of municipal social organisation and participation involving learning.

The main research question of this article is as follows: how is the participatory budget of Lisbon fostering social learning? Data collected by the use of semi-directed interviews and documental analysis showed that social learning occurred through peoples' commitment and involvement in local public political issues. However it did not boost the development of an effective democratic participatory experience.

KEYWORDS: Social learning, democratic pedagogy, commitment, participatory budget, democracy, participation.

Social participation and social learning: participation as democratic pedagogy

Democracy, as stated by Borrego et al. (1992), is a project in which everyone may participate through dialogue following ideals of justice, equality and liberty. This is based on a process involving dynamic building committed with permanent dialogue aiming at solving conflicts that may occur in personal and social life. Therefore, it is not just a political option but a life project. Learning's role is directed at establishing peoples' commitment to participate in social transformation of a place, a region, a country. In order for people to take

decisions, simply having an opinion might not be enough. There is the need of foster personal understanding of citizenship to transform places and settings. In this process the use of a democratic pedagogy is essential. The development of critical awareness (Freire 1986; Caride, Meira 2001) through learning favours participation in society as people may analyse difficulties raised by the social system. For this reason it is important to allow dialogue and establish spaces of communication in town as means of democratic development.

A democratic and social learning model intends at creating spaces of dialogue and consensus making, fostering democratic participation, allowing access to arenas of decision, of decision-making processes, considering peoples' interest and needs. The lack of settings for participation can be considered a dead end that does not allow people to make their way. It raises risks of paternalism, authoritarian governance and vertical decisions. It may lead to the submission of citizenship and of development of peoples' autonomy denying the possibility of building a society of transformation agents (Camacho 1998). For this reason, democratic pedagogy entails participation as a way of life.

Within the scope of democratic societies, social participation is a tool to strengthen peoples' autonomy and ability to decide upon public issues (Schugurenski 2004). Social participation means a process of social change. It involves reflection and decisions on social, cultural, civic and political policies and projects. It assumes the direct involvement of people in the identification of social needs; the reflection upon and discussion of specific public priorities; and the monitoring and evaluation of decisions already made and implemented projects. Individual dimensions are important, but social and collective dimensions are essential in the accomplishment of social transformation (Valderrama-Hernandez 2013a).

Furthermore, social participation may support functional citizenship. People are considered consumers or clients of existing formal participatory procedures. This reinforces existing power relations and prevents significant social changes. Following normative patterns, participation means intervening through channels and procedures established by a formal administration as a way of legitimising public social action. Control of power by formal administration hinders the development of new knowledge and the creation of innovative ways of participating that may arise from citizenship action (Valderrama-Hernandez 2013b).

Social participation is also an educational tool. It assures individuals' development and autonomy when each person is the main actor and responsible for his/her decisions. Opportunities to participate when decision-making is at stake are balanced between experience and reflection upon what happens and

has happened; it includes an educational dimension when new and innovative social and collective practices are developed. These practices aim to foster social changes, when social participation occurs at a local level (the neighbourhood and/or civil society organization). It implies developing a number of tasks and taking an active part in a process of social action, in co-management and shared responsibility processes (Montañes 2004; Valderrama-Hernandez 2013b).

It includes learning citizenship (Schugurenski 2004). By means of a participation pedagogy, it follows a process beginning with the practice of everyday life situations; it continues with reflection upon a problem or need, the definition of ways of achieving social change and the development of such processes; and ends with an evaluation of the participation process, considering the emancipatory dimension of what has been achieved (Valderrama-Hernandez 2012).

It has a learning dimension, in the sense that social change includes a process of collective and coordinated learning. Webler, Kastenholz and Renn (1995, p. 445) argue that social learning means more than just individuals learning in a social situation. Other people with diverse personal interests, but common collective interests, may come together to reach an agreement on collective action to solve a mutual problem. Therefore, “Social learning refers to the process by which changes in the social condition occur – particularly changes in popular awareness and changes in how individuals see their private interests linked with the shared interests of their fellow citizens”. It involves the acquisition of knowledge (“cognitive enhancement”), which includes:

- learning about the state of a problem (information and knowledge);
- learning about the possible solutions and the accompanying consequences (cause-effect relations, predictions);
- learning about other peoples’ interest and values (information, explanation);
- learning about one’s own personal interests (reflection);
- learning about methods, tools, and strategies to communicate effectively and reach an agreement (rhetoric, decision theory, small group interaction);
- practicing holistic or integrative thinking” (Webler, Kastenholz, Renn 1995, p. 446).

Social learning also requires “moral development”. People act in the interests of all and develop a sense of self-respect and responsibility towards themselves and others as well as moral reasoning and problem solving skills which enable individuals to solve conflicts as they arise; and a sense of solidarity with the group. People become capable of taking on the perspective of others, of le-

arning how to integrate new cognitive knowledge and cooperating with others in solving collective problems (Webler, Kastenholz and Renn 1995).

In recent times, several local social participation experiences have been observed within the scope of formal representative democracies. They set out to promote new management models, namely at the local level, such as in towns or cities. The implementation of shared decision-making processes with the local population has brought about significant transformations in peoples' lives, in social learning and in citizenship learning. In some situations, new forms of social organisation have emerged, as is the case of the participatory budgets (Valderrama-Hernandez 2013b).

Participatory budgets: fostering democracy

Democratic experiences (Santos 2003) that seek to reinforce democracy through social participation have been widely discussed across a broad spectrum of countries. These experiences have generated the invention and effectiveness of new forms of fostering social change through social participation and the development of social learning. Direct participatory decision-making processes have led to changes. These are based on political decentralisation and on the transfer of public decision to people, in general, regarding matters that are considered local problems or projects of interest by local residents (Dias 2014a).

Democratic experiences, such as the participatory budget, have been driven by and grounded in a set of core principles, such as democracy, equity, access, community participation, fairness, education and transparency (Pinnington, Lerner, Schugurenski 2009). However, these experiences have branched into different directions. Some have given rise to a public survey on specific issues; others have required an in-depth participation, through co-management and co-responsibility procedures in public administration in the development of local policies (Dias 2014b).

Participatory budgets may be defined as new ways of broadening and furthering democratic participation by means of participatory practices. According to Santos, they are “extraordinary learning and democratic processes” (Santos 2003). They are based on “inclusive processes of deliberation” concerning real needs and decisions that may affect many people (Schugurenski 2004). Moreover, Pinnington, Lerner and Schugurenski (2009) suggest that a participatory budget is a democratic process of deliberation and decision-making by which people allocate a budget to the needs they identify generally at a municipal level. There is a shared decision-making process and governance involving the (local) government and civil society.

In general, participatory budgets are based on formal procedures by which the local population decides or supports the decision-making process when specific public resources, for example financial, are available (UN-HABITAT 2004). They are grounded on a set of common foundations: diagnosis, deliberation, collective decision-making, execution and monitoring (Pinnington, Lerner, Schugurenski 2009). In participatory budgets, social participation is derived from information regarding an issue; discussion and reflection upon ways of considering this issue; and awareness raising procedures that culminate in voting on different proposals for spending public money. People become the main character of public administration decision-making. New forms of governing public resources, based on direct participation, foster the definition of policies and political aims for a specific territory. According to Dias (2014b), participatory budgets represent a “new social grammar”: they involve the State and civil society and consolidate the local dimensions of development.

Existing experiences contribute to the construction of more transparent, efficient and democratic ways of governing. These are spaces for citizenship learning and the distribution of political capital (Schugurenski 2004; Santos, Avritzer 2003; Dias 2014a, 2014b). Several kinds of participatory budgets may be encountered – there is no single model. In general, these various types depend on the political determination of local public authorities; the presence and interest of civil society, clear and shared formal procedures set by local public authorities; and the availability of financial resources (UN-HABITAT 2004; Allegretti, Antunes 2014).

The first participatory budget was developed in Porto Alegre (Brazil) in 1989. Santos (2002) states that this was an urban initiative geared towards the redistribution of the city’s resources among more vulnerable social groups through participatory democracy. It was an innovative procedure and was designed to break away from the authoritarian political tradition in public policies. Its purpose was to establish participation dynamics according to co-management procedures of public resources, namely public budget, and to foster public government co-responsibility in the implementation of collective decisions (Valderrama-Hernandez 2012).

The participatory budget of Porto Alegre may be regarded as a practice that was the outcome of social actions deriving from the Paris Commune and the Soviets, mixed with local participation practices (Valderrama-Hernandez 2012). It was based on a political and social challenge to get people together in territorial assemblies and to promote critical dialogue with municipal civil servants in the decision-making process. Citizenship sought to foster real participation, through the collection of important information, and by establi-

shing the needs of those living in the city and neighbourhoods. Organised citizenship emerged as a significant outcome. The opportunity of being part of political and technical decisions through social networks contributed towards enhancing the intergenerational nature of the participatory budget and established new democratic main actors who had formerly lacked a voice and a setting to express their opinions and desires (Santos 2002).

Other experiences, such as Kerala (Thomas Isaac, Heller 2003; Valderrama-Hernandez 2013a), showed the importance of a consultation and discussion process in social, cultural and environmental domains. The population demanded solutions and concrete decisions from the State and local authorities. This revealed that it was possible to conceive solutions through a public political commitment. The creation of an administrative structure assured the continuity of political decentralisation and enabled the local population to discuss development projects.

The Seville participatory budget revealed the importance of collective and public commitment in the creation of solutions for social problems affecting sectors of the local population. This experience fostered participation in the management of public policies through an administrative structure based on direct participatory assemblies. In these assemblies, people discussed and decided upon the accomplishment of specific projects. This fostered continuity of the participatory budget over some years, and enhanced its learning and emancipatory dimension. Participation became an exercise of citizenship, involving the development of skills in order to participate actively in social life. It implied constructing, accepting, criticising, practicing norms for living together, democratic values, having rights, freedom, responsibility and civic duties, to defend ones' own rights and those of others (Valderrama-Hernandez 2012).

Methodological direction

The aim of this article is to answer the following research question: how is the participatory budget in Lisbon fostering social learning? Allegretti and Antunes (2014) claim that the Lisbon participatory budget represents a significant social participation experience. However, unlike this article, their analysis is mainly centred on administration procedures and not on social learning.

In order to focus on fostering social learning dimensions, the analysis included in this article is based on a qualitative and comprehensive approach (Lichtman 2006). To this end, the case study (Yin 2009) research technique was selected, and the analysis focuses on the case of the Lisbon participato-

ry budget from 2008 to 2016. Particular attention has been paid to the 2013 edition, when interviews were conducted with individuals who presented projects that had been subject to vote.

Several data collection techniques were selected such as the documental analysis (Lichtman 2006) of official reports published from 2008. The analysis of such reports and the interview with the city council civil servant responsible for the participatory budget in 2013 (Interviewee 1) set out to understand the developments achieved in the frame of formal social participation procedures made available by the local municipality, such as the principles underlying the participatory budget, the amounts attributed to successful projects and the tools used to expand the profile of project presenters.

Additionally, a convenience sample was selected and four semi-structured interviews (Seidman, 2006) – with Interviewees 2, 3, 4 and 5 – were conducted with individuals who had proposed projects in the same year, of which only two had been successful. Questions referred to their motives for presenting a project, the problems and opportunities involved in designing the project, having it put to vote and the global assessment of the social learning developed. A content analysis (Neuendorf 2002) of data was performed for the identification of main features concerning social participation within the scope of formal procedures, opportunities and constraints to social learning.

Discussion of data collected

Participatory budget experiences have existed in Portugal since 1998. Nevertheless, that of Lisbon is a particularly interesting example. It was officially launched in 2008 with a deliberative procedure. This fact was considered a significant advantage. As referred to by Interviewee 1, “People feel that this is not just presenting ideas. Things in fact happen afterwards”. The Lisbon participatory budget had nine consecutive editions on an annual basis up until 2016. It was also developed in the capital of the country, which had a strong impact on other towns and cities in and beyond national territory (Allegretti, Antunes, 2014). Today, Lisbon is the largest city in Portugal with approximately 564,000 inhabitants.

As noted by Pinnington, Lerner and Schugurensky (2009), in the establishment of many participatory budgets, public officials seeking ways to deepen democracy initiate such processes. Interviewees have referred to a general feeling of depreciation concerning politicians and public policies:

People today are further detached from political parties than in the past. They do not recognise themselves in political parties' proposals, in the

way they act. Of course, they do not find other public arenas to participate either. There is a lack of responsibility when people have to show up, participate and even vote. (Interviewee 5)

This was also the case with regard to Lisbon. In 2006, a municipal crisis led to the resignation of the Mayor and mid-term elections. The new municipal government minority coalition agreed on the need to improve public participation by organising innovative forms of governing. Decentralised meetings were geared towards collecting peoples' opinions on the requirements of city council intervention over the following years. The participatory budget was the result of another decision, and its purpose was to create a space for dialogue with local residents. It was seen as an innovative practice in public administration but gave rise to some criticism:

This was something totally new having citizens deciding upon what had been considered city council domains of decision. In fact, when people voted in municipal elections they had already made their decision. Why ask them again? (Interviewee 1)

From 2008, when the participatory budget was launched, rules were created and later adapted according to the needs and problems encountered by the city council. This indicated a highly valued "experimentation nature":

These are processes that cannot be closed. Everything that involves participation, should maintain an experimental nature. If rules are set and no changes are considered, the participatory budget is over. This is the risk faced by the city council. (Interviewee 1)

The maximum amount a project can be awarded and domains in which projects can be presented are examples of changes that have occurred since the participatory budget was established. Currently, successful projects can be awarded 150,000 euros or 500,000 euros. In 2008 and 2009, projects had to be presented online; as of 2010, the participatory assemblies were held in each parish in order to involve those who were not keen on presenting projects online. In participatory assemblies, individuals can present projects with the support of municipal civil servants, where they back up the design of the concept and share ideas with other people also interested in presenting similar projects. Furthermore, in this setting, compliance with the rules of the participatory budget is guaranteed. The participatory assemblies have also contributed to a major change in the characteristics of project presenters and voters. Voters are both males and females (with similar percentages). However,

age influences the participation in the participatory budget, namely in the presentation of projects. Today, most hold secondary and higher education, and are resident and/or working in Lisbon. Additionally, many are under 35 years of age; however, when the presentation of projects was conducted online, the vast majority of applicants were younger individuals with higher education.

In spite of these changes, Allegretti and Antunes (2014, pp. 7–8) argue that the participatory budget still seems to serve the purpose of presenting ideas while failing to enable “citizens to play a role in the co-planning of the implementation or even in the active control of the process”. From this perspective, the participatory budget appears to foster functional citizenship, following normative procedures defined by the city council, which is a way of legitimising the municipal intervention in several areas (Valderrama-Hernandez 2012).

According to the Charter of Principles, the Lisbon participatory budget seeks to promote the social (informed, active and responsible) participation of citizens in local governance. It sets out to guarantee the intervention of the local population in decision-making when distributing public resources within municipal policies. Its target is to contribute towards “civic education”: it allows citizens to integrate individual problems into broader issues of common interest. It also encourages local residents to understand the complexity of local problems and to develop participation attitudes, competences and practices (Article 2, line 1, in Resolution 506/CM/2008, Carta de Princípios do Orçamento Participativo do Município de Lisboa [Charter of Principles of the Participatory Budget of the Municipality of Lisbon]). The Charter of Principles of the participatory budget was one of the first documents to be published: rules of the process were established, the deliberative nature was agreed upon, and the main aims, such as the promotion of participation and the non-exclusion of anyone from the process, were defined. In spite of its importance, this Charter was written by the city council and was not based on a procedure by which people could decide upon its content according to a participatory decision-making procedure (Valderrama-Hernandez 2012).

The Lisbon participatory budget is based on an annual cycle, beginning in spring, when proposals are made online on a specific website or in decentralised assemblies held in city parishes. During summer, the proposals are under technical analysis and evaluation by municipal technicians. After an open complaint period, a final list of projects is published. The voting period for projects takes place in autumn. The public presentation of the successful projects closes the participatory budget annual process; the projects are then integrated in the City Council’s Plan of Activities and Budget for the following year (CML 2016; Allegretti, Antunes 2014).

A documental analysis of the reports of the various editions of the participatory budget in Lisbon reveals the extent and diversity of the areas of municipal intervention covered by the projects. “All kinds of projects are presented” and this is considered an advantage as it transforms the participatory budget into “an open process” (Interviewee 5). This fact is mainly linked to the reasons why people present a project. As referred to by all the interviewees, ideas emerged when a local problem or need was encountered, concerning issues that “should have been solved by the city council, but were still awaiting attention” (Interviewee 2). Moreover, a number of projects mentioned ideas that the city council “had never thought about” (Interviewee 3), innovative changes that residents felt were required in a city that needed to update itself in terms of recent technological and scientific changes. These were the “nice ideas”, the “ambitious ones” that are beyond what the “city council usually accomplishes” (Interviewee 3). Just the fact that project presenters are motivated and deeply involved in a process of disseminating the projects and getting a maximum number of votes is an achievement in itself.

The first participatory budget in 2008 was launched with under 100 projects subject to vote; from 2009 to 2016, approximately 200 proposals were voted on each year. There were 5 successful projects in 2008, but since 2012 over 10 projects have been awarded. In 2008, 2,802 votes were given to the projects presented. The number of votes went on to increase to 51,591 in 2016. Up to 2011, the maximum amount awarded by the city council to the participatory budget stood at 5,000,000 euros. However, due to structural adjustments, the rules imposed by the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund to public administration in Portugal, financial constraints have since triggered a reduction of this maximum amount which is now fixed at 2,500,00 euros (CML, 2016).

Table 1. Distribution of projects, votes and investment amounts from 2008 to 2016

Year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Projects subject to vote	89	200	285	228	231	208	211	189	182
Successful projects	5	12	7	5	15	16	13	15	17
Votes	2,802	6,827	14,915	17,902	29,897	35,909	36,032	42,130	51,591
Investment (€)	5,130,176	4,935,000	4,500,000	4,600,000	2,375,000	2,475,000	2,428,000	2,500,000 (estimated amount)	2,500,000 (estimated amount)

Source: data retrieved from <http://www.lisboaparticipa.pt/edicoes-antiores> on 27.01.2017.

In general, the projects presented conveyed a “municipal amplitude” (Interviewee 1). This means that although projects have a local dimension, on many occasions this may not suffice for a project to be successful and attract a large number of votes, as referred to by Interviewee 1,

Because it is too local, a very interesting project may not have the number of votes to win. Projects need to be ideas for the whole city and not just for a parish or a neighbourhood.

This situation is especially relevant when it comes to going from an idea, that is usually related to a local problem or need, and turning it into a project for the city: “to go from a problem that is mine to a project that can be good for the entire city” (Interviewee 3). Hence, some interviewees have stressed the importance of having a strategy when proposing a project and then gaining the highest number of votes:

When you think about a project, you have to think about the way to get the votes. To show your project to the largest number of people, to motivate people to vote. (Interviewee 4)

Some of the activities mentioned by those whose projects had received the highest amount of votes were the use of personal contacts, Internet networks (Facebook, for instance), creating an Internet site with information on the aims of the project, persuading people to vote and making public presentations. The “municipal amplitude” of a project is especially relevant for projects claiming the highest amount of funding (500,000 euros) which need to attract the highest number of votes. For instance, in 2016, the two winning projects of this financial category received 9,477 votes (the Caracol da Penha Garden) and 8,666 votes (the sports building of Carnide) respectively (CML 2016). These votes were rather expressive when we consider the size of the parishes in which they will be implemented. According to Allegretti and Antunes (2014), the figures referred to in the above table express a participatory budget that has been maturing over time and currently points to “an optimal performance in terms of growth and rooting in the territory”, an opinion shared by another Interviewee:

The city council has a good view of what people want and it is not just what we, in our offices, want for Lisbon. It is what people need. Because we are in our offices, we have ideas, but they might not be what people living in the city need, what those in the street think and want. Bringing everyone together is a big plus for the city council. (Interviewee 1).

Even so, some criticism of the process is expressed by Allegretti and Antunes (2014): its procedure model favours “a formula similar to an ‘idea contest,’ where there is little room for the discussion of proposals”. However, Dias (2014a, 2014b) claims that in spite of this situation, participatory budgets are strategies for drawing local residents closer to municipal administration. This opinion was also shared by the interviewees who referred to the participatory budget as a “best practice” (Interviewee 5), a “very good thing” (Interviewee 1), especially given that projects “appear to happen” (Interviewee 3). Therefore,

If the participatory budget in Lisbon is cancelled that will be a pity! (Interviewee 2)

To “exercise citizenship”, “to be active” in local areas (Interviewee 3), “to be attentive to the local problems of a neighbourhood and of a city” (Interviewee 4) were some of the ideas expressed; the interviewees’ opinions reinforced the “personal but especially the social benefits” (Interviewee 2) that could be achieved by the participatory budget. Hence, the Lisbon participatory budget is important for the strengthening of democratic formal procedures and the fostering of social participation (Santos, Avritzer 2003; Schugurenski 2004). Participatory budgets in Lisbon have influenced social learning, namely as far as those who have presented proposals are concerned. According to Webler, Kastenholz and Renn (1995), social learning occurred when citizens stated a local problem; identified a possible solution; assessed other peoples’ interest and values and their own personal interests through reflection. Social learning has also emerged as an outcome of the methods, tools and strategies employed in the communication of proposals and of how sufficient votes were attained to receive the available public financial resources. This process has offered multiple entry points and levels of commitment for peoples’ involvement in local public political issues.

However, it also sheds light upon a number of limitations that are typical of other European participatory budgets, such as the high degree of experimentation and the sparsity of investment in co-decision (Allegretti, Antunes 2014). Complementarily, unlike the observations made by Pinnington, Lerner and Schugurenski (2009), according to existing data and interviewees’ representations, those with more pressing needs and whose involvement in local municipal affairs has come up against barriers are not the most committed to presenting proposals. In fact, the data presented by Allegretti and Antunes (2014), as well as the interviewees themselves, showed that many of those presenting proposals were already well-informed, active and responsible indi-

viduals, several of whom had already been involved in non-governmental organisations and civic life before engaging in the participatory budget. It should also be noted that the dominant educational level of these participants was secondary and higher education and many of them were high income earners. Additionally, in terms of moral development, some limits were identified, namely some problems in creating a sense of self-respect and responsibility towards oneself and others, regardless of how the proposals might impact one person's personal interests or value (Webler, Kastenholz, Renn 1995). Many of the proposals were "too close to these individuals' needs" since, according to the interviewees, it was very difficult to have a local (and personal) problem and need and turn it into a sufficiently persuasive city project capable of attracting votes.

Thus, this participatory approach appears to be a good strategy for collecting projects from Lisbon's residents, however it does not boost the development of an effective democratic participatory experience. Indeed, it appears to be closer to a "consultation" through the channels established by formal administration for participation. It does not appear to integrate clear processes of social (direct) participation geared towards the social emancipation of broad sectors of the local population. It somehow devalues the education dimension of social participation and learning, owing to the lack of a critical social pedagogy expressed by its formal procedures. In spite of its relevance, it appears to be more in line with a consultation process, and promoting social participation according to formal procedures defined by public administration but constraining direct democratic participation, social learning and citizenship learning (Valderrama-Hernandez 2013b).

Final considerations

In this paper we have discussed the participatory budget of Lisbon, taking the theoretical frameworks of Valderrama-Hernandez (2012, 2013a, 2013b) regarding social participation and of Webler, Kastenholz and Renn (1995) referring to social learning as its backdrop. In spite of its innovative character and significant procedural dimensions for fostering social participation, some criticism has been raised when referring to the implementation of shared decision-making processes with the local population and social learning and citizenship learning (Schugurenski 2004). However, such criticism by no means detracts from the importance of participatory budgets; these democratic experiences (Santos 2002) are aiming to foster direct participation and social learning. Participatory budgets have a significant impact on "the demo-

cratic and participatory reinvention of the State” (Santos 2002); they can open new spaces for articulation and decision-making with the State and civil society. These new spaces may promote strategic planning and reflect the complexity of problems and needs of different social groups. This strategic planning may create participating towns and cities, in which dialogue is the first step in an important process of power distribution among social groups that did not formerly have the opportunities to express their voices (Valderrama-Hernandez, 2012).

From this standpoint, participatory budgets may become an effective element of re-politicization and a way of supporting the innovative procedures of sharing responsibilities among social groups. Participation and social learning are important dimensions in the collective competencies of producing and planning to be achieved with formal administration organisations. This might serve to establish new governments that are more attentive to the ideas and needs for promoting direct citizenship, and linking political, civic, social and cultural aims. Participatory budgets may also play a significant role in decentralisation processes supported by social learning and targeting community intervention and the improvement of life quality. They may foster the creation of innovative spaces of deliberation, analysis of new trends and of critical thinking of democratic values. To this end, new methodologies are sorely needed in order to establish public policies that may open innovative decision and management arenas, with less bureaucracy and higher levels of participation. Within this scope, recognition of the importance of the local dimension is central, particularly in formal, non-formal and informal education processes, when considering the complexity of social life and the diversity of matters that are involved (social, economic, cultural, political, civic and environmental) (Valderrama-Hernandez 2012, 2013a, 2013b).

Citizenship needs to be built on a political and civic commitment of people with others’ interest and needs. According to Crossman (1997, p. 56), “the success of democratic institutions depends on the existence of a minority of active and responsible democrats strong enough to make institutions function”. There is no institutional democratic system based on lack of civic and political intervention. As argued by Zubero (2007), democracy is “democracy in action”, that starts on citizenship committed with people. Therefore, there has to be active and responsible people, willing to make social and political changes. Participation shows a social learning process in the development of citizens committed to political public issues.

When considering spaces of participation in towns such as the participatory budget in Lisbon, it is possible to argue that these contribute to the

creation of “learning cities”. These are not just territories in which people live and relate to each other, but are places of concrete and collective living and of daily life existence. Though, they can also be considered places in which we imagine new (more equitable, fair and free) social prospective and opportunities of development. How can democratic pedagogy be fostered? Educational democracy, according to Gelpi (2004) can be achieved by positive discrimination of places in which children can learn how to participate, but also by the establishment of cultural and social places in which everybody can decide upon public local relevant issues. Pedagogy as a school of democracy favours decision-making and the strengthening of citizenship. Processes such as the participatory budget of Lisbon is based on participatory assemblies that allows the creation of collective places in social structure and allows the establishment of networks; peoples’ ideas and projects are voted and eventually implemented. This enlarged process of social intervention has a learning dimension, favouring the analysis of reality directed at social transformation that might be relevant for many others. Then, individuals look at each as citizens, bearing identities, civic rights and responsibilities and valuing the human being.

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