

# Knowledge Acquisition and Meaning-making in the Participatory Budgeting of Local Governments

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**Abstract:** The participatory budgeting of Brazilian municipalities is one of the most publicized examples of democracy-in-action that fosters citizenship knowledge acquisition in local government. This research adds two new perspectives to the participatory process. The first one demonstrates how knowledge is acquired and shared, and which are the new contextual conditions for this acquisition to happen, which we call, the knowledge acquisition process. At second, we explain the meaning-making process as a subjective way to acquire knowledge about oneself, the others, and the democratic systems. Citizens, public servants, policy-makers, and politicians acquire new meanings for the role they play in local government and become reengaged on democracy through the ontological change from representative to participatory and deliberative democracy. In this qualitative research, our methodological bricolage relies on the triangulation of methods (i.e. documentation review and observations of behaviors and procedures; in-depth-interviews; and, focus groups) and sources (i.e. comparison of cases, and stakeholders). The bricolage deconstructs these social actions on their constituents, vis-a-vis hidden intentions; instruments; and, implementation. Among the several Brazilian cases, this longitudinal study (i.e. 12 years) concentrates on five of them. Our findings suggest that the participation in the process allows for a change on individuals' understanding of democracy, enhances citizenship knowledge acquisition, reframes the meaning of citizenship, and improves the quality of relationships among the stakeholders involved. In the participatory budgeting, citizens learn, what critical theory calls "to emancipate". They act as if they were members of an ideal kingdom of ends in which they were both subjects and sovereigns at the same time, which guarantees citizenship engagement, learning and development.

**Keywords:** participatory budgeting, citizenship knowledge acquisition, citizenship meaning-making, local government, critical-emancipatory reasoning

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## 1. Introduction

In this historical moment in which political parties' polarization seem to be the rule observed in so many jurisdictions like in Catalunya, Spain; in the Brexit process in the United Kingdom; in Canada through the new movement of Wexit; or, finally, to the super polarized impeachment attempt against Trump in the United States, a moment of reflection on the real, or initially intended, meaning of democracy seems appropriate. The Participatory Budgeting (PB) of Brazilian municipalities is one of the most publicized examples of democracy in action which fosters citizenship participation and development (Abers, 2000). This new form of local democracy has its seminal successful experiment by the end of the 1990s in needy neighborhoods (*barrios* in Portuguese), often slums, in the city of Porto Alegre in the South of Brazil. The city council of Porto Alegre delegated the part of the budget without lawful allocation (e.g., salaries) to the citizens, empowering them to prioritize the use of it (e.g., infrastructure, housing, education, health, social assistance, etc.). The art resided on justifying the use chosen, given the restriction of resources facing a high demand. The Porto Alegre case has been nominated by the 1996 United Nations Summit on Human Settlements as an exemplary "urban innovation" among the best 40 practices around the world, standing out for demonstrating an efficient practice of democratic resource management. From this initial democracy-in-action experiment, the participatory process has been taking place in more than three hundred Brazilian cities. The participatory process has been interpreted as a kind of project with a wider radical purpose that aims to secure social change and citizenship development of matters regarding impactful aspects of people's lives (Hickey and Mohan, 2005). Today, virtually all political parties have had their own experience in Brazil. Yet, these experiments have crossed borders when, for instance, in 2009 the Brazilian they became the benchmark for the implementation in the city of Chicago on its 49<sup>th</sup> ward at first, followed by wards 5<sup>th</sup>, 45<sup>th</sup> and 46<sup>th</sup> (Chicago\_City\_Hall, 2012). In Europe, Portugal created the InfoOP (or Participatory Budgets Information System) at a worldwide scale in order to support, manage, monitor and evaluate the processes of Participatory Budgeting (InfoOP, 2019). Instead of providing a ready-to-cook recipes, InfoOP offers operational aids and ensures better structured PB processes, based on the high quality of their participatory approaches. InfoOP website is translated into five idioms and describes the efforts in more than ten countries.

In Canada, other experiments were initiated in the provinces of Quebec (Patsias et al., 2013) and, more recently, British Columbia (Fung, 2015).

This social and political innovation has been analyzed from a myriad of perspectives and methods such as: a model for public governance (Sintomer et al., 2016); best practice of deliberative democratic theory (Baiocchi, 2001; Ganuza and Baiocchi, 2012); applied theory of social and local democracy (Sánchez, 2002; Dias, 2002; Dutra and de Mesquita Benevides, 2001); an educational approach to citizenship (Herbert, 2008); democratic story-telling (Bocatto and Perez-de-Toledo, 2008); a case study description and analysis (Azevedo, 2005; Genro and de Souza, 1997; Bocatto and Perez-de-Toledo, 2012); a human resources management approach to local governments (Bocatto and Perez-de-Toledo, 2017) and, a descriptive comparison of cases (Ribeiro and Grazia, 2003). The common interpretation found in the literature (Baiocchi, 2001) about reasons for its implementation is related to a combination of beliefs (e.g., “Citizens have the right to be empowered”) or instrumental intentions (e.g., “If we empower citizens they will vote for us”). No matter which lenses are chosen to describe and/or interpret the participatory budgeting, the process is a social innovation because it creates ‘social facts’ (e.g., practices, norms, lifestyles) with the capacity to exert an external compulsion on the individual (Hochgerner, 2011). The change in context, or the “catalyst that triggers the endeavor”, as Bardy and Rubens (2017) calls it regarding intellectual capital development, changes behavior and interpretation of individuals’ role in society.

This paper highlights two new perspectives of the participatory process that exert this individual external compulsion to acquire knowledge, to change, and to act. The first one demonstrates how knowledge is managed and conveyed and, most importantly, why it is shared. In the participatory budgeting, citizens learn, what critical theory call, to emancipate (Habermas, 1966). They act as if they were members of an ideal kingdom of ends in which they were both subjects and sovereigns at the same time which guarantees citizenship engagement, learning and development. We call this first perspective, the knowledge acquisition process of the participatory budgeting, which is in the line of questioning of authors like Baiocchi and Ganuza (2014) who highlights the relevance of citizens’ emancipation. The second, regards the process of meaning making in which, for example, advances public service. Public servants often labelled negatively ‘technocrats’ become facilitators of the process. Servants use their expertise and previous experiences to add information to the decision-making process made by and for the citizens. Citizenship and local government redefine their meanings becoming now related to social action, vis-à-vis. citizenship participation and deliberation, and wealth redistribution.

## **2. Epistemological framework**

To rely on what is called a convergent methodology (Campbell and Fiske, 1959), or a “*bricolage*” of methods (Lincoln and Denzin, 1994), seems appropriate. The procedure of *bricolage* helps to complete information that is missing in previous analyses of participatory research. In this respect, we add to the literature a clearer interpretation of the reasons ‘why’ the participatory budgeting process is created, and description of ‘what’ and ‘how’ the experiment becomes a knowledge acquisition process and fosterer of participants meaning-making. We are assuming that participatory actions are social actions, and that social actions are constructed intentionally (Anscombe, 1963; Searle, 1995). These intentions become narratives, and instruments are created from these narratives *in order to* achieve the intentioned outcomes. As a result of these assumptions, we propose a two-steps interpretative moment: first, a historic-hermeneutical analysis capable of uncovering these intentions through the description of pre-conditions and interpretation of narratives that led to the PB experiment; and, second, a critical-emancipatory moment that will allow us to interpret narratives based on individual’s subjective knowledge acquisition and meaning-making. These interpretative research questions are related to “what” knowledge is acquired about citizens’ own existence and humanity, “how” citizens acquire this knowledge about themselves and others, and “why” they learn what they learn. The answers provide evidences of self-reflection of the individual participant fostered by the contextual pre-conditions. This critical reasoning starts with an emancipatory interest, a kind of epistemological grounding that assumes that the human actions under study are actions that lead to a good, humane and rational society (Habermas, 1966).

Regarding the meaning-making process, in specific, we interpret participants knowledge acquisition and development through a framework that comes from existential and the humanistic philosophy and psychology. For that purpose, we rely on Bocatto and Perez-de-Toledo (2007: p.128) “existential-humanistic learning” definition: “Existential-humanistic learning is the never-ending process in which individuals freely and responsibly actualize their meaningful potentialities after reflective thought based on their subjective-objective dialog. In organizations, this process starts with an invitation that includes every internal and external

stakeholder.” The existential-humanistic framework applied to knowledge acquisition assumes that humans have bio-psycho impulses, structures and limitations which can be contextually influenced. Despite such *a priori* features and *a posteriori* influences, it is assumed that humans are free to take decisions. To be clear, we are using Maslow’s definition of self-actualization and as well his description of contexts in which self-actualization is fostered. Yet, we are applying Frankl’s Existential Psychology framework for the meaning-making process interpretation. Self-actualization is described by Maslow et al. (1970: p.151) as “the desire to become more and more what one idiosyncratically is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming.” Self-actualizing people demonstrates a greater acceptance of themselves, others and nature than non-actualizers. They recognize their own and other deficiencies, and are more problem-centered, more concerned with undertaking tasks that will benefit others, less introspective and more task-oriented than non-actualizers. Actualizers are more capable than non-actualizers of perceiving the truth in many situations and of detecting dishonesty and fakery in others. Finally, they are less guided by stereotypes and prejudices in their judgements. In terms of contexts in which this tendency seems to emerge, Maslow et al. (1970: p.277) describes them as: “...this would almost surely be a (philosophically) anarchistic group, a Taoist but loving culture, in which people (young people too) would have more free choices than we are used to, and in which basic needs and meta needs would be respected much more than they are in our society... would be more honest with each other than we are, and would be permit people to make free choices wherever possible. They would be far less controlling, violent, contemptuous, or overbearing than we are...” We believe the participatory budgeting is a context similar to Maslow’s description.

Regarding meaning-making, in 1985, Viktor Frankl wrote “Man’s search for meaning”. The work presents original evidences of human’s intrinsic drive for meaning and, consequently, suggests a framework to orient human and social actions towards meaningfulness. Frankl (1966; 1985) develops a theory that deals with these kinds of ontological and epistemological concerns by integrating science and humanities. The author called the approach logotherapy (*logos* is the Greek word for meaning). The theory focuses on studying the meanings of human existence and on how humans search for such meanings. In this sense, the author opposes the mainstream thinking of his *époque* by advocating that “[...] mental health is based on a certain degree of tension, the tension between what one has already achieved and what one still ought to accomplish (...) We should not, then, be hesitant about challenging man with a potential meaning for him to fulfill. It is only thus that we evoke his will to meaning from its state of latency” (Frankl, 1985: p.127). Yet, Frankl understands that all people are questioned by life and they can only respond to life by being responsible. Thus, responsibility is the very essence of human existence and the main drive behind the search for meaning. The meaning-making drive, as an ontological assumption, would orient human and social actions towards (Frankl, 1985: p.130): first, “creating a work or doing a deed”; second, “experiencing something or encountering someone”; and, third, “adopting the correct attitude towards unavoidable suffering.”

### 3. Methodology

Although limitations are several, any form of *bricolage* considers criteria for reliability, consistency and generalization. Once epistemological assumptions and research strategy are expressed, triangulation of methods, sources, and comparison of cases are made and theoretical sampling is considered, limitations are somehow mitigated. So, in order to describe the process, we use the methodological tools of comparative case study analysis (Yin, 2009), documentation review and observations of behaviors and procedures (Hodder, 2003), in-depth-interviews (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995; Wengraf, 2001) and focus groups (Krueger, 2009). The first step of our *bricolage* is to choose, or sample, cases (i.e. cities) in which participatory budgeting processes take place. In fact, the investigation of the same democratic instrument (i.e. the PB) in different settings (i.e. cities) provides distinct sources of information about different intentionality. Therefore, following the technique of theoretical sampling (Glaser and Strauss, 2009), the cities chosen were selected for both their similarities and their differences because theoretical sampling needs to pay attention to relevance and purpose.

As far as relevance is concerned, this selection process ensures that the substantive topic addressed is similar which, in case of being replicable and extendible, assumes the status of “emerging theory” (Eisenhardt, 1989: , p. 537). In this case, the cases chosen must inevitably have implemented or have been implementing most of the sub-processes and management activities involved (e.g., meetings, trainings, elections, timetables, deliberative polls, and so on). For purpose, the cases are different in terms of number of inhabitants, location, and mainly, their maturity level. Whereas the similarities of the cases guarantee the presence of the practices, the differences demonstrate stability of conditions and elements, and replication of functioning.

More than three hundred cities in Brazil have already experienced the PB process in the last two decades. At present time, over one hundred cities are running and actively registered in the Participatory Budgeting Brazilian Network (Penteado and Hosokawa, 2017). Among these several possibilities we concentrated on five cases, two of them with indirect assessment (i.e. we built on distinctive examples of initial experiences analyzing secondary data) and three of them through direct exploration. The cases analyzed indirectly are Porto Alegre, the first and iconic participatory budgeting in Brazil, and São Paulo, the description of its first year of implementation. Directly explored we have: city 1, the city of São Paulo subsequent years; city 2 Campinas; and city 3, Belo Horizonte.

For sample similarities, the three cases directly explored belong to Brazilians' southeast states; all of them are large and metropolitan cities with a highly industrial economic base. The value of such election relies on the possibility of considering three contexts for interpretations of the intentions embedded on them. Knowing that: 1. all three cities were being governed by the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers Party in Portuguese), which was born from the Union of the Metallurgic Workers, and has a long history of defending labor from the "owners of the capital"; 2. social movements of large cities have often similar demands; and, 3. the cities belong to the two most industrialized states of the country; can generate more accurate interpretation in terms of similarities, that is, what is consistent in the phenomenon versus what is unique to each case.

On the other hand, for sample differences size is considered: case 1 with 16 million inhabitants presents a "problematic" initial implementation of the PB; case 2 with 1.1 million people presents a total of four years of development (one mandate); and, finally, case 3, which resembles Porto Alegre's case, with its 2.5 million inhabitants is a continued case of success (i.e. four consecutive mandates). Yet, process maturity levels are considered: as the study of the developmental aspect of knowledge acquisition is a secondary interest of this investigation the ideal strategy is the longitudinal study and, thus, we have been collecting and recollecting data since 2004. Additionally, as the longitudinal strategy needed the information about the initial stage of this implementation, the material collected from city 1 focused only in its first year of implementation. The additional data was discarded. The data collection of cities 2 and 3 happened on July-September 2004. It has consisted in observing meetings, interviewing participants, and collecting, besides the literature reviews, documents referent to its PB (e.g., instructional manuals, magazines, flyers). On 2006, new data was collected (i.e. new interviews especially with non-participants on the processes), which permitted to the fulfillment of some lacuna (e.g., the frustration citizens felt once the process were discontinued by a new elected mayor). Yet, the Participatory Budgeting Brazilian Network was created in 2007 with the objective of facilitating the communication among the several initiatives in Brazil and in the world. In 2018, the secondary data of new PB processes was collected and no additional information was found that would collide with the findings and conclusions made so far. As a curiosity, electronic voting, the "Digital Participatory Budgeting", was introduced in some of the cities, a process of social-mediatization of democracy that seems to foster engagement and that is also described by (Zolkepli et al., 2015). Fifty interviews, seven focus groups, and several observations were conducted.

Finally, in order to collect data about the meaning-making process, a particular kind of questioning is used. This procedure mimics in social science what is extended applied in the interpretative theories of Psychology. Erskine has been developing this kind of methodological tool. The author argues that (Erskine, 1997: p.22): "The process of inquiry involves the therapist being open to discovering the client's perspective while the client simultaneously discovers his or her sense of self with each of the therapist's awareness-enhancing statements or questions." The objective is to, at first, observe citizen's discussions and discourses and/or, secondly, to incite through the way the interviews are structured information about the subjective legal interdependencies created in the process of self-reflection. The "awareness-enhancing statements or questions" uncover the assumptions (and potential change in assumptions) that happens in the mind of the interviewee and are related to knowledge-acquisition and existential and humanistic psychological drives presented here in the theoretical framework. Thus, the hypothesis is that through respectful exploration of the interviewee phenomenological experience, interviewees becomes increasingly aware of what is lawful in the social and human action and what is ideologically frozen. The process of inquiring is as important as the content acquired. The interviewer's questioning has to be empathic with the interviewee's subjective experience to be effective in discovering and revealing the internal phenomena and in uncovering the assumptions and criteria for taking decisions.

## 4. Findings

The findings will be subdivided into two groups: citizens' knowledge acquisition process, and citizens' meaning-making. The interpretation of each aspect follows the findings. Although, this sub-divisions facilitates the report, we reinforce that the aspects are part of a phenomenon that should be considered on its entirety. We illustrate what we observed to be the key intentions the social actors involved in this participatory experience have. The intentions are: 1. To integrate government and civil society through participation and deliberation; 2. To recognize that the citizenship has the right to manage their own resources (and acquire knowledge from this process); and, 3. As a result, to change the way their own citizenship is interpreted (including politicians, policy-makers, public servants, and citizens).

### 4.1 The participatory budgeting as a knowledge acquisition process

In this descriptive historic-hermeneutical analysis, the main research questions regarding citizenship knowledge acquisition are related to: "if" some knowledge is acquired, then "What" is acquired? "Which" managerial practices are used? And, "How" they are implemented? This is the descriptive aspect of knowledge acquisition which describes context and processes. Some extracts of interviews are presented below followed by their interpretation.

#### Evidences of pre-conditions

(Interview 10 with a coordinator and public servant of city 2): Interviewer: *"Describe the before and after the PB process."* Interviewee: *"Before the PB what happened? The money of the city used to stay in the central barrios, that is, with the richest. One of the reasons for that is that people don't see the reality of the barrios, because the periphery of a city with 1 million people is far from the center or because people and I mean the richest don't care much about this reality. What we did was to take the money from the center and send it to the periphery."*

Interpretation: The participatory budgeting succeeded due to a combination of values and rationality. We find that the conceptual change from representative to participatory and deliberative democracy is much more important than its face-value suggests, that is to say, these new intentions solve one of the worst problems affecting this country and other countries alike, namely, the lack of a sense of priority and accountability in the use tax payers money which, in its worst manifestation, leads to favoritism and corruption. In that sense, this research provides new information applied to local governments' management adding value to what Burgoyne, Pedler and Boydell (1994) has discovered on corporations. Yet, the fundamental change on the conditions was the transference the city-council's right to manage the budget (i.e., the councilors who used to have the fiduciary responsibility over the budget use) to the citizens. The transference is the social innovation that legitimizes the implementation of this participatory experiment. The way the process is envisioned is similar to what (Kyakulumbye et al., 2019) called "empathetic participatory design" as it creates knowledge that has meaningful application.

#### Evidences of processual knowledge-acquisition

(Interviewee 1 of city 2): Interviewers: *"Please, describe a typical meeting and what you learned there."* The interviewee *"... We went to the Assemblies, and always on the meetings, because the delegates have, when possible, to be present at the meetings, so we have always been present, we followed everything. In the meetings we learned to deal with public finance, to know how works the organization chart and flowchart of the government, how the procedures work, the spider's net, how everything works, so we are an ordinary citizen who had no notion about nothing and now there we will see what is happening: the government assumes an immense debt getting tied to it [...] all of these come from years after years, for example, now you are hired only by public selection but before you could become a public servant by indication of someone which swelled the City-hall [...] so all these things have happened and today, thanks to this Fiscal law the regularize the expenses, things like this cannot be done [...] so we learn all of these. We deal with all the people which make part of the departments, the water or transportation departments, for instance. We talk to the engineers about the subjects: Why the busses take so long to pass, why this, why that?"*

Interpretation: The intention citizens have to follow the participatory process and optimize decisions and implementations through empowerment that replaces bureaucracy, inevitable, leads to democratic knowledge acquisition. There were no communication problems, and thus no knowledge sharing issues, which is partially

explained by the leadership profile, that is, democratic leadership. The desire for self-development prevented the feeling of being exploited. The number of sub-processes involved were not thought to be excessive, but they fitted the PB's purpose (i.e., to prioritize the budget and supervise works implementation). Therefore, the PB opened several knowledge acquisition opportunities.

Evidences of new knowledge-acquired

(Interview 4 with a public servant of city 3): Interviewers: "What is the novelty in this PB process?" Interviewee: "In the begging of the PB we found out that people wanted to prioritize let us say the construction of an avenue in the barrio and then the construction was made however linking 'no place with nowhere'. We found out this problem and worked with them in the sense that every project should be a part of a bigger project for whole barrio. They agreed. On the other hand, the City Hall used to build things without considering citizens' opinions, using only the technicians' opinions. The citizens proved we were wrong in many circumstances. For instance, we were building a street in front of a gas station and the delegates from that barrio told us that the way out of the gas station was wrong, we changed it, and everybody was pleased."

Interpretation: Neighborhoods' representatives and public servants had equal status in the discussions, although the final decision power relies on the citizens. These ideal-speech situations function exactly like the "public sphere debate" Habermas proposes (Goode, 2005). This equality promotes individual thought and interdependence (Kasl et al., 1997) and, in effect, brings different thoughts together, resulting in new meanings and decisions commonly by consensus. The sub-context enhances productive dialogue, as Isaacs (1993) advocates. The clear orientation of the "team" towards the social good also resembles Senge's (1997) ideas on teamwork in learning organizations and what Cordery, Mueller, and Smith (1991) describe as "autonomous workgroups". The participatory decision-making is in accordance with Edmondson's (1996) ideas about the construction of a learning atmosphere tolerant of mistakes. Moreover, by being open to feedback and improvement the PB institutionalize a procedure which gives voice for all the affected, as a result it improves the participants sense of community as De Piccoli, Colombo, and Mosso (2004) observe.

The comparison of cases in the early stage with those in advanced stages demonstrates considerable longitudinal development. The managerial aspect of citizenship knowledge acquisition is understood as a process of self-development (for citizens, policy-makers, politicians, and public servants) and accumulation content (i.e. project conceptualization, application, knowledge acquisition, new application, new knowledge acquisition and so on). This knowledge acquisition process of a citizens implementing the process is explained as in the following (see figure 1): the first group of participants in the PB start the process in T0. However, they do not start "from zero" knowledge because, as the findings reveal, they base their actions on previous experiences and models of other cities, in the Brazilian cases, Porto Alegre.

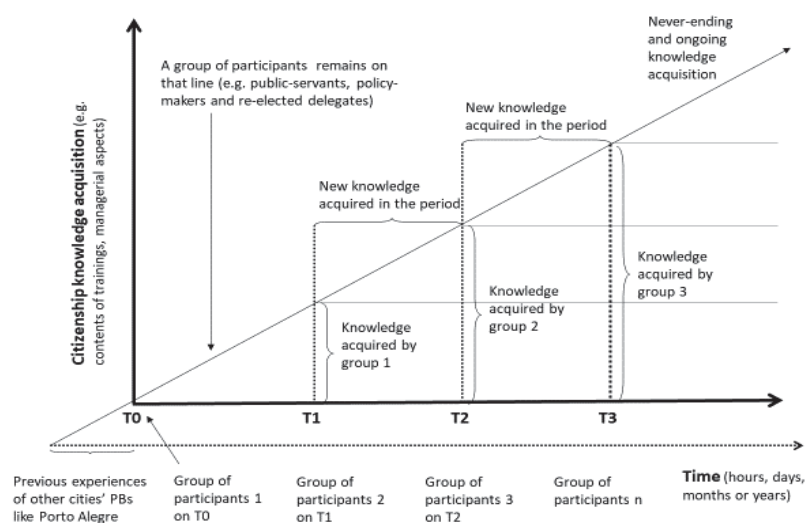


Figure 1: Knowledge acquisition by accumulation of content and creation of new content

The first group, then, acquire past content and learn about past processes of sequential developmental practices (e.g., budgeting, project management, how to conduct meetings for deliberation) they are supposed to mimic

(although contextual idiosyncrasies are inevitable). At the end of the first period, or the first year of implementation, the group has accumulated new past and idiosyncratic knowledge. Some of the participants of that group such as public servants, policy-makers and delegates remain in the PB while new members enter it in the second year. Thus, the knowledge accumulated by the pioneers is transferred to the newcomers. The new members have now three sources from which the knowledge acquisition comes from: firstly, the standard training on contents and processes; secondly, from the past experiences of the remaining ones; and, also from the possibility of making new discoveries and innovating, that is to say, while they participate they will learn from idiosyncrasies and novel solutions that flourishes from new problems, solutions, thoughts, etc. Figure 1 summarizes citizenship knowledge acquisition through the accumulation and the creation of new content and about the functioning of processes. There were no relevant differences among the cities at different developmental stages, which suggest that the PB process can represent a quasi-axiomatic social action. In other words, whenever a participatory budgeting process takes place it can be assumed that most of its practices will follow a similar evolution.

Regarding the second goal of this paper, the interpretation of the way citizens, including public-servants, create and give new meanings for their citizenship and jobs (i.e., their meaning-making process), the assumptions of an existential-humanistic learning framework applied to knowledge acquisition (described above in the epistemology item) were found in the evidences. For instance, the decision-making process observed, either by the political party or by the participants, was not instrumental per se nor relativist in terms of ethical decision-making. The decisions were taken within clear framework that considered responsibility and rationality, evidence based, as core values. Although there were egocentric impulses, social pressures, attempts of manipulation and corruption, as a rule observed, the decisions were based on fairness and rationality (or evidence-based argumentation).

An example of the fairness and rationality are the narratives of the mayor and the PB coordinator of city 2 in which they say repeatedly that money historically went to the richer barrios and that the PB process was an instrument to change this path by awarding budget money to the needy citizens. This new rationale is quite important for Brazilian, on of the worst countries in the world in terms of social differences, because the poorer people seem to accept their condition as if it was something given, rigid and unchangeable.

#### 4.2 The participatory budget as citizens' meaning-making

In this interpretative critical-emancipatory analysis, we rely on Frankl's orientation about where to find meaning in life as we have discussed above. Some related extracts of narrative are presented below followed by their interpretations.

##### Evidences for "creating a work or doing a deed"

(Interview 2 with a policy maker, city councilor, of city 2) The interviewers ask: *"Why the participatory public management is different? (awareness-enhancing question)"* The interviewee answers: *"In fact, the distinction between us and other types, the old type of policy makers, is that we are not afraid to talk to the people. Like I said, when the processes are open, and participants can discuss, they confront us, and we learn from their different opinions and perspectives. In a representative democracy, policy makers are elected and after that they disappear."*

Interpretation: the narrative provided by this councilor addresses a new work meaning and orientation that is more participative, which consequently changes his deed towards the responsibility of listening, learning from and given feedback to the population. He compares this new work meaning with what he calls "the old type" as if the present model is an evolutionary managerial approach.

##### Evidences for "experiencing something or encountering someone"

(Focus group 3 with three public servants of city 3) The interviewers ask: *"Please, tell me about the perception of your own development, as professionals, after participating in the participatory budgeting (awareness-enhancing statement)."* The member three responds: *"I have been working in the process for the last four years only. I had no knowledge about the process before, but when we start to know and to live the process the feedback is great. You engage on a body-to-body relationship. The citizens are thankful to us. They do not see you as a technician or a public servant but as a friend, as someone who will clarify things. This is very good; it is day-by-day feedback of thankfulness. Our dedication is*

*enormous. The problems we find we try to overcome. We work along with the community. There is our role as public-servants, but we are also members of the community. I expect to stay on this department because this is what I like to do. Every day I learn more and in the next ten years I want to have all these capacities developed because I am only starting to learn.” (interviewee laughs...)*

Interpretation: The interviewee is actualizing what once were her potentialities. Yet, she is helping to develop the potentialities, never used, of other. The participatory process creates a condition for productive relatedness by putting together the population and the servants. The process permits a different care and respect, less technical and more humanized, less politically oriented and more oriented to the community needs and aspirations. As a result, new meanings emerge.

The servants add to their public role the roles of a friend or a member of the community. Some systems of thought, like Fromm’s, would argue that these evidences reflect relationships of mature love.

Evidences for “adopting the correct attitude toward unavoidable suffering”

(Interview 1 with a participatory budgeting delegate of city 2) The interviewers ask: *“Did you find any difficulties?”* The interviewee answers: *“In our case, things were not easy because, despite of the fact that we were asking for our pavement for the last fifty years, we did not obtain it in the first attempt.”* The researchers ask: *“And what did you tell the people?”* The interviewee answers: *“Well, we had to start all over again, explaining to them that other barrios were prioritized because they were in worse conditions. Most of them did not have sewers and the children used to drink water from the dirty streets. Everybody understood that and this year we finally got our asphalt.”*

Interpretation: the unavoidable suffering refers to, for instance, the certainty of death and the meanings one gives for life when facing it. Therefore, it is hard to find in this managerial endeavor representative evidences for this more personal matter. However, as it is evident in the extract just mentioned the interviewee demonstrates an effort to avoid the unnecessary suffering, or the naïve one. We mean by that, his deed, as a barrio leader, was to terminate his community’s unnecessary suffering. In fact, the responsible act can be noticed by his support to the prioritization of the sewer system for other community before asking for their asphalt.

The three cases studied follow the ideals of the democratic process. Within a legal environment, the process compels the citizens to take decisions with sovereignty and transparency, permits freedom of speech, ensures that power changes hands regularly, gives a voice to all members of society and treats them equally. Yet, the democratic process forces the public power (considering the public administration and the politicians) to account for its decisions and to be transparent, and adds the reflections and experiences of the communities to the public power’s own decisions.

Besides this initial meaning-making process interpretation, the longitudinal strategy of the methodology provides a complementary interpretation of knowledge by accumulation. In effect, what was found is related to unexpressed potentialities (i.e., self-actualization), or of becoming something humans are. Thus, an attractive metaphor to convey this kind of learning and knowledge acquisition is the “figure” and “background” exchange used by the Gestalt Psychology. In this metaphor, there are human potentialities that are active or in figure, and there are human potentialities in background or not active on an “standby mode”. Before the PB process starts, most of the potentialities would be in the background because the individuals are only striving to survive in an adverse environment. After the process starts, potentialities start to flourish and be actualized becoming figure. It is important to mention, however, that before the PB few individuals were already actualizing potentialities like those involved in social movements. Conversely, during the PB process not all the individuals took the opportunity the process provided to self-actualize, there was no knowledge acquisition in this group. The after phase represents the institutionalization of certain practices in a new context, which gives support to the self-actualization process. In other words, this phase institutionalizes humanity. Figure 2 below shows the different characteristics of citizenship meaning-making through the longitudinal strategy.



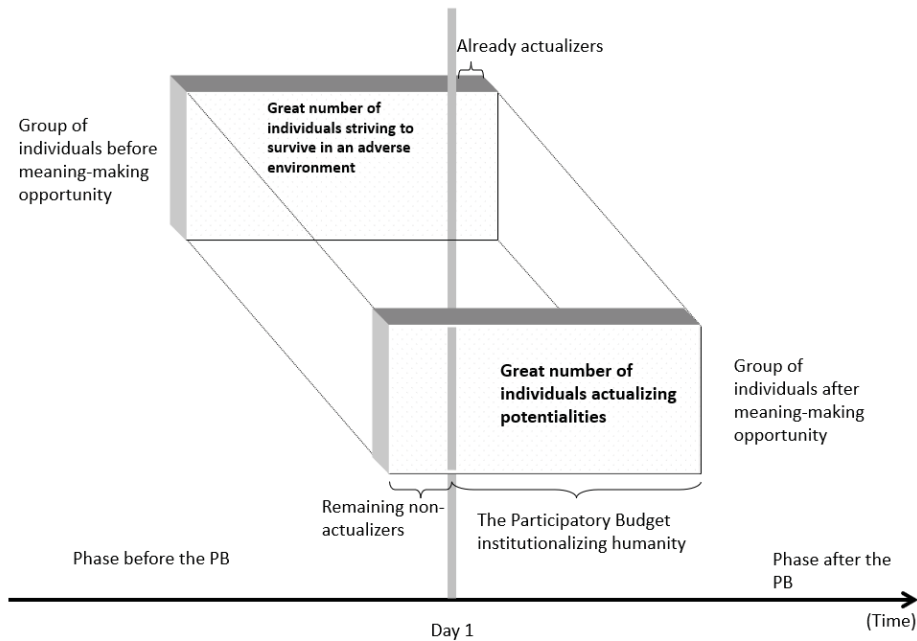


Figure 2: Citizenship meaning-making understood as potentialities in figure or background

## 5. Discussion and contributions to the practitioner

We have argued that the participatory budgeting in Brazilian local governments is a social innovation because it transforms the *status quo* and meanings of local governance and political power. New social facts and practices emerge forcing the change on individuals' understanding of the democratic process, enhancing citizenship knowledge acquisition, developing new skills, reinterpreting the meaning of citizenship, and improving the quality of relationships among the stakeholders involved.

The analysis of citizenship knowledge acquisition through the assumptions of critical theory and humanist and existentialist psychologies and philosophies seems to highlight individual and social features and aspirations often neglected by knowledge management and public management literature. The proposed epistemological view in which participants subjectivity is addressed leads to the use of critical-emancipatory reasoning as a coherent interpretational framework. This epistemology explores the subjective-objective dialectics the process elicits in the mind of the participant. Moreover, the perspective from which subjectivity is presented, i.e. bio-psycho *a priori*, differs from the way knowledge acquisition has been focusing subjectivity (i.e., acquisition of content) instead of a detailed description of how the social construction of new mental models about citizenship are made. In this sense, the perspective used is less Popperian, that is, detached and value free, and relies more on Maslow et al. (1998) advocacy for epistemologies that recognize contexts that a capable of freeing humankind, bringing individuals closer to each other, helping their individualization, and fostering critical capacity.

PB processes provide not only a democratic atmosphere but also empowers citizens to take democratic decisions about issues that affect their community. Shared power allows free decisions but also means taking responsibility for making good and well-thought-out decisions. The PB process is responsible for providing a decision-making process that is legitimate to all participants and fair to the city. In other words, it is not just the beneficiaries who perceive the process as being fair but also the non-beneficiaries. Sharing power but coping with restrictive resources results on the need to set up a robust and justifiable decision-making criterion. There are two main criteria: first, everybody (or every barrio) is important and eligible to participate, and second, the neediest are prioritized and receive most of the PB's resources. The self-reflective process fostered by discussions and decision-making is evident in the desire to participate, despite the process impossibility of benefiting all. Thus, the meaningful change from the representative democracy to the participatory and deliberative one may yield preference to the latter, similar to Fishkin and Luskin (2005) argument in favor of a meaningful exercise of democracy through deliberation. As well, it reinforces and helps to interpret what O'Neil (2003) hypothesizes about the occurrence of citizenship knowledge acquisition through the process of taking meaningful decisions on the basis of deliberation.

This research provides as well theoretical and practical information by studying how and why some individuals actualize their potentialities and learn how to become better citizens and, ultimately, better social actors. Without such ontological and epistemological considerations it would be difficult to understand how and why people with limited skills, that is, the lack of managerial knowledge or project management or negotiation skills and the considerable level of illiteracy, can efficiently manage huge amounts of monetary resources and be able to please everyone.

Still, the description of the process of knowledge acquisition by content accumulation (i.e. training, story-telling) leads to the practical idea that in every participatory effort basic training about topics of interest and socialization through telling stories about other experiences of participatory situations can make the endeavor more efficient and effective. Citizenship participation demonstrated to be a powerful instrument of knowledge acquisition, learning and resources optimization, besides it creates an environment of trust and respect of human dignity. The mutual trust we find in our study is another evidence of what Lopez-Fresno et al. (2018) found in negotiations that have trust as a mediator for collaborative decision-making and knowledge sharing. Practitioners could take advantage of such information and foster in other organizational settings the participatory decision-making, inviting to the deliberation table all the interested stakeholders.

In general, the PBs analyzed integrate what Ebdon and Franklin (2004) considered to be effective participation efforts. The participatory budgeting: allows for a large numbers of participants, in effect, the whole contingent of cities participates through their representatives; input occurs early in the budgeting process; participation includes two-way communication between citizens, public servants and politicians; citizen input is considered by policy-makers; the decisions are legally supported as the process is institutionalized into laws; and yet, input reveals sincere preferences and needs of citizens while respecting a fair prioritization. PBs' meetings promote empowerment and adds legitimation to the process, a novelty against other methods of participation, notably, consultation (e.g., town-hall consultations, on-line surveys, city' ombudsperson, etc.). This empowerment happens because as the information available come from a broad variety of sources (e.g., different barrios, areas, social classes, public roles, etc.), the decision-making process becomes as much informed and inclusive as it may be. Not only new stakeholders are brought to the table but their decisions regarding prioritization of works are a result of several conversations. The broad confrontation of ideas also seems to prevent selfish manipulations and/or biases towards "preferred" groups of interest.

Finally, if the practitioner has in mind the existential-humanistic learning (i.e., Bocatto and Perez-de-Toledo, 2007) defined above and applied to knowledge acquisition and meaning-making, he/she may consider a distinct comprehension of what human beings are and aspire, how they function and what potentialities they have yet to enact. Thus, having the participatory budgeting as a benchmark, the practitioner will be able to rely on solid criteria while implementing change and development in social settings.

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