

UCLG World Forum of Intermediary Cities
Kütahya, Turkey



Intermediary Cities: participatory budgeting as schools of democracy and ecological transformation

October 7, 2021 – 12:00-12:45 CEST
Notes of the session taken by Aydog Efe

Introduction by Adria Duarte

- Participatory budgeting (PB) is a tool for innovating ecological transformation and enhancing democratic innovation in cities

Introduction by Yves Cabannes

- Short introduction of panellists: 3 speakers with expertise in different regions and processes.
 - Tigran Bagdasaryan from the Ministry of Finance of Russia, head of PB unit. Russian Federation is one of the largest in terms of PB extension on the ministry level
 - Mohamed Sefiani, mayor of Chefchaouen and representative of UCLG
 - Gisela Barbosa from the Municipality of Valongo, Portugal, head of citizenship and youth division.
 - Diego Cuesy from the Municipality of San Pedro, Mexico, coordinator of PB within the secretariat of innovation and citizen participation
- PB started in different times in different places, each one of the cities and regional governments presented here have a long tradition. In Russia, PB started in 2007, and there are 310 intermediary cities. Chefchaouen in 2015, Valongo is entering its 8th cycle. San Pedro took a radically different direction in PB when Diego joined, starting in 2018.
- 2 major ideas from the Chefchaouen example:
 - One of the major challenges has been engaging with population in intermediary cities is more challenging than in small villages. Population is more diverse, and they are not used to face to face meetings. Similar challenges were encountered in

- Russia and Valongo as well. The reason to call PB as a school for democracy in this year's theme is an issue of engagement.
- Second challenge concerns Insufficient resources: limited for intermediary cities. How can we mobilise more resources to be at the height of the expectation of the citizenship? External support at the beginning was seen in Valongo, Chaouen and Russia. The B of PB was being supplied in the beginning
 - The format will consist of 3 rounds of questions with 3 minutes per speaker on each question.

Question 1. What are the main challenges of your main intermediary cities in the pandemic context? What sort of specific contribution has brought PB through participation and deliberation to face these unprecedented challenges?

Diego Cuesy

- San Pedro is a municipality within a very big metropolitan area. In Mexico, the most basic administration unit is the municipality. Some of the municipalities governing themselves govern the second largest metro area of Mexico (5+ million), making San Pedro somewhat of an intermediary city. It is among the wealthiest places in Latin America, but also among the worst in terms of urban and environmental planning. 50% trips made by cars, 4 cars per person, urban sprawl increased by 26% between 2010-2020. The city is known as one of the industrial hubs of the country, industries operate within the city centre, air quality is worst among nation, water scarcity and heatwaves have hit the city hard. Being one of the wealthiest regions leads to being one of the worst of recycling and waste separation. 3 years ago, a new government came to rule San Pedro and started breaking apart from this path and setting examples for other municipalities, including investment and policies for pedestrianisation, education on environment. Thanks to the pandemic, San Pedro went deeper into these issues, even the state government looked into this as an inspiration.

Gisele Barbosa

- All cities of different scales dealt with increased expenditure and reduced revenue. There is the need to find solutions and mitigate without compromising sustainability in the post-pandemic recovery plans. Problems that existed before the pandemic are higher now. We have a new now, a new world, a new normality. This is an opportunity to invest in resilience for the future. Greater digitalisation with Covid made it easier to reach citizens, implement democratisation, bring culture to citizens. Each of us have a role in common wellbeing, we have a mutual opportunity to create a sense of resilience in our populations, capitalise in participation of civil society in democratic life.

Tigran Bagdasaryan

- Problems caused by Covid for the Ministry of Finance are still existent. However, we can see confident growth in all PB indicators. No of PB practices increased from 145 to 175 this year. The value of all projects increased by 32%, the number of projects by 3%. Federal legislation in Russia allows citizens to support projects, and 7% of the value of all projects came from citizens. In the last year, this figure went down by 9% mostly due to erosion of

purchasing power. Federal law providing power and authority to municipalities strengthens PB. Thanks to the data kept by the Ministry of Finance, the impact of Covid-19 on PB can be assessed by analysing time series data including 2021. The pandemic gave an opportunity to create new mechanisms of public participation in medium sized cities.

Yves Cabannes

- In all three examples, PB has been maintained and transformed despite Covid. In other places, PB was often interrupted or didn't even start, or maybe started with 100% digital simplified methods. Diego is working on digital methods for PB as well. The specimen of these three examples is positive within a sea of not so positive experiences.

Question 2. Do you think intermediary cities are a better place (for instance because of their more human scale, closer proximity between citizens and governments, urban-rural relationship, others you would like to mention) to develop PBs and other practices of democratic innovation? Why?

Firdaous Oussidhoum

- There are 2 important things for PB:
 - proximity is the characteristic of intermediary cities. Better understanding between citizenship and governance, managing is also easier due to size.
 - Intermediary cities are like schools of democracy. Coming from the rural and going to the urban often needs a school of democracy. Having responsibilities and asking for rights is what democracy is about, and PB at intermediary cities allows this.

Diego Cuesy

- Intermediary cities are better for proximity. Very often family members, friends and acquaintances turn out to be implementers of public policy. San Pedro sets a precedent for other municipalities. Transparency on how many projects there are, how much money is distributed, the contracts allow this to happen. For the first time, any public office holder would be re-elected in Mexico with the latest elections. This has been a huge incentive for mayors to do the right thing, therefore San Pedro's projects were implemented by other mayors. Many of the projects from PB are very different from what other mayors thought was good for the city. Investing in urban gardens, transforming parking lots, pedestrianizing, etc. This can change the feeling of a whole city and doing it in a municipality is good before implementing it in a city. Monterrey metro area takes inspiration now from San Pedro.

Yves Cabannes

- Valongo within the metropolitan area of Porto and San Pedro within the metropolitan area of Monterrey show a similar typology of intermediary cities.

Gisela Barbosa

- Intermediary cities achieve more effective results because they are closer to the people, approaching problems and managing public services is much easier. Not only spatial

proximity but also in terms of social dynamics. Characteristic and size are both important. Everyone knows their responsibilities, rights, and roles in their community. The commitment of local decision makers, constant dialogue and proximity to citizens is crucial to encourage future participation. Capitalising on all the advantages of being closer to citizens could generate a multiplier effect on even national and transnational participation.

Tigran Bagdasaryan

- Intermediary cities have a pool of tools that result in successful practices and unique deliberation mechanisms. There are sufficiently large local groups with their own specific problems. They can be in touch with authorities discussing their problems thanks to the size of the cityscape. %80 of PB projects are about infrastructure in small municipalities, much different than big cities. Balanced practices to solve wide range of problems: %40 of projects are on territorial improvement, %30 on basic infrastructure, %30 on other projects. Intermediary city PBs consider citizens and authorities at the same time. Usually in Russia, small cities have low fiscal capacity and receive subsidies from higher budgets. Due to small budgets, people resort to PB initially to resolve things. Intermediate cities, with a wide typology of projects, are better places to develop PB and democratic innovation.

Yves Cabannes

- A clear advantage of PB is the nature of the project, they are fit (the plasticity of PB to answer to the necessities of intermediary cities w different than the needs for villages and big cities).

Question 3. To what extent PBs allowed to face climate challenges in your intermediary cities? Which ones? Can you give one of two practical and illustrative examples?

Diego Cuesy

- The municipality does not have authority among complex systems where federal or state governments have more power. Air, water issues are more dependent on these higher authorities. San Pedro can set example to fight climate change with smaller projects such as parking lots being converted into gardens. With 15 thousand USD, – municipal air monitoring system with open data was implemented. Other municipalities followed suit. It was not easy to change these public spaces. Urban gardens are another example. In 2021, despite being very wealthy, San Pablo was ranked 32nd in terms of recycling. A pilot programme in 20 neighbourhoods was launched. PB can move governments towards what we're supposed to do. Policies inspired from the neighbourhood to the city!

Gisele Barbosa

- With the Youth PB programme, the youth can be changed. 9th edition of the youth PB is starting. Proposals on recycling, gardens, mountain protection, reforestation, creating activities at open air spaces have been implemented. The Green Leaf Award (2022) has been awarded to Valongo. Natural conservation is becoming a priority in PB now. EU guidelines, national commitments are being followed. Over 200+ people including

landowners have been involved in 2 examples of participatory processes: initiative of parks and an annual event with schools, associations, and other actors.

Tigran Bagdasaryan

- Russia is implementing a thematic PB programme on the green and climate change agenda. Many Russian colleagues don't know it but it's starting soon. This a project that fully belongs to the arctic zone, protecting the nomadic way of life. Colleagues from Yamal are working on PB practices such as waste management, fish farming, cultural and environmental projects. Yamal has numerous intermediary cities that will participate in the implementation of practices. On a final note, PB should not substitute regular government programmes on climate change. Developing PB should consider implementing green mechanisms into already existing PB practices.

Concluding remarks

Yves Cabannes

- 3 conclusions:
 - PB is a barometer and a social thermometer. Who should take care of these problems? It cannot be PB by itself, as its main role is detecting the issues. Central and regional governments also have a role to play.
 - With these three examples, we are looking at very different ecosystems that require different solutions. PB is a global observatory of what's happening, a gold mine of ideas from each contributor affected from climate change differently. We should never lose our global vision because climate change is global.
 - Both adaptation and mitigation solutions are brought up with PB, and it brings more of adaptation, as a thermometer and with immediate projects on adaptation. Yet, in the 400+ examples used in comparative analyses, many go beyond, see the future, there is demand for the mitigation of effects, especially from young people. PB's strength is not only in adaptation, it is also in the solution of the weather forecast which is becoming very bad.

Gisele Barbosa

- Despite the challenge of climate change, central governments might not be hard to directly reach out to, but we can educate people and give them the idea of having a choice to do differently.

Diego Cuesy

- We can change how colleagues within the public sector think about their job, the role of the municipality, and set it as a school of democracy. This would mean rewiring public servants in the way they regard their job. People become proud of their job with PB practices, it is important to have happy and motivated public servants.

Yves Cabannes

- There is the need for a comparative analysis for the contribution of PB in intermediary cities to combat climate change. There is nothing currently written on this. In relation to Covid and climate change, summing up the experiences of different countries would be important for the next forum on intermediary cities. Something more consolidated for the next meeting would be great.