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da Silva e Silva, Maria Ozanira

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:

Rainer Hampp Verlag

#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

da Silva e Silva, M. O. (2005). Reconstructing a participatory process in the production of knowledge: A concept and a practice. *International Journal of Action Research*, 1(1), 99-120. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-356807>

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# **Reconstructing a participatory process in the production of knowledge: A concept and a practice<sup>1</sup>**

Maria Ozanira da Silva e Silva

This is a reflection on the knowledge production process based on participatory approaches, highlighting experiences in the field of evaluative research. The article emphasizes the contribution that can be offered by this modality of investigation to create tools for the organization and action of “subaltern” classes in the field of Public Policies, and for the advancement of democracy and expansion of citizenship. The social insertion of the researcher is considered essential to allow the participation of knowledge in the field of popular struggles, bearing in mind the construction of a more humane, fair society, oriented to the need of distributing socially produced wealth.

**Key words:** Participatory research, production of knowledge, evaluative research

## **1. Introduction**

My book, “Refletindo a Pesquisa Participante” (Reflecting Participatory Research), published by Cortez Editora in São Paulo, with a first edition in 1986 and a second edition in 1991, presents the results of an exhaustive research study on the state of the art of different modalities of Participatory Research

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<sup>1</sup> The present text was prepared with the support of CAPES-Fundação de Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Nível Superior and CNPq-Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico, Brazilian government agencies involved in training human resources and fostering research and graduate studies.

that became so fashionable from the 1960s onwards in Latin America and in Brazil. This is a study that seeks, analyzes and problematizes the thinking of the most representative authors of the time<sup>2</sup> in constructing those modalities of investigation, at the same time as relevant experiences are referenced in this field of knowledge that I consider in permanent construction, generically called, by me, Participatory Research. The Study begins with a critique of the Positivist Model of Science, and points to theoretical-methodological concepts and contents of Participatory Research, presented in their diversity, but having as central point of reference a profound reaction and critique of science as pure, autonomous and neutral knowledge, and as the expression of a single and universal truth. It presents what I call central aspects of Participatory Research in Brazil and in Latin America, considering the thinking of authors who are relevant in this field of knowledge, as regards the critique of the positivist model of science, the conceptual aspects and characterization, intentionality and objectives, modalities, theoretical and methodological aspects, also highlighting the development of a problematizing analysis on Participation as a central aspect of this modality of investigation.

In constructing the book, I present the participatory dimension as a dimension associated to the process of knowledge, with two outstanding aspects: one that is more intensively discussed and developed in the literature, pointing out the need for the popular sectors to become part of the process of knowledge as subjects, also becoming researchers together with the scientists and people from academe, so that the knowledge produced will be placed at the service of the popular classes and their struggles; another that places the possibility of knowledge, even when produced without the direct participa-

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<sup>2</sup> Among these authors, I wish to point out: Paulo Freire, Carlos Brandão, Orlando Fals Borda, Maruja Acosta, Xavier Albó, Frans Barrios, Virgínia Guímas Barcos, Humberto Barquera, Michal Bodeman, Victor Binila, Guillermo Briones, Felix Cadena, Vicente Carrera, Raúl Leis, Eduardo Correa, Pedro Demo, Sylvia Van Dijk, Ernesto Parra, Justa Ezpeleta, Carlos Food, Luís Regal, Marcela Gajardo, Carlos Garcia Garcia, Ramon Moreira Garcia, Vera Gianotten, Ton de Wit, Francisco Vio Grossi, Carlota Olavarria, Ulf Himmelstrand, Gerrit Huizer, Oscar Jará, Dorit Kramer, Rodas M. Herman, Sérgio Martinic, Héctor Sálz, Alfredo Molano, Heinz Moser, Paul Oquist, Udai Pareek, Luís Rigal, Anders Rudquist, Nicanor Palhares Sá, Anton Schutter, Nelly Stroquist, Michel Thiollent, Julio Valdez, Yolanda Sanguineti, Laura da Veiga, Jean P. Vielle, Luiz Eduardo Wanderley.

tion of the popular classes<sup>3</sup>, in the development of its construction process, being made available to participate and contribute to the advancement of social struggles, which means that the knowledge produced by research may be placed at the service of social transformations, even if the social subjects interested in this transformation have not acted as researchers at all times in the investigation process. In this sense, in the book mentioned, I consider that it is essential to have the participation of research in the forming of a consciousness of the classes that have become subaltern,<sup>4</sup> which allows me to outline a research proposal in support of popular social movements. Naturally, a proposal to construct knowledge committed to social change implies taking reality critically as the object of research, and requires the social insertion of the researcher in social reality, which means his or her identification with the interests and demands of classes of society that have become subaltern, the only subjects whom this change interests. This means performing committed science, consequently with explicit intentionality, going beyond the mask of neutrality that positivist science tries to imprint on knowledge.

After the book, my practice as a researcher continued on a route on which I have already been for over fifteen years, always marked by disquiet for transforming the knowledge produced into mechanisms that instrumentalize social struggles. More recently my concern has turned towards contributing to change professional practice within the institutions, a transformation that, ultimately, means to also contribute to strengthening social struggles, implicating the involvement of these professionals in practices of critical investigation of their reality. In this trajectory I, together with my fellow researchers, have been accumulating practice in the field of evaluative research, that we consider a space for analysis and modification of Public Policies, so as to

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<sup>3</sup> Popular classes are referred to here, despite the conceptual lack of precision of this term, as a “useful term to show the possible heterogeneity of this immense ensemble of persons who are situated on the lower social and economic levels within the capitalist system currently existing in Brazil.” (Silva 2002, 138). For further reflection on the category of popular classes see the work mentioned.

<sup>4</sup> The subaltern category is taken as a Gramscian legacy, referring to a diversified and contradictory ensemble of denomination situations, which, according to Yazbek (1993, 18) serves to name classes, and subalternity concerns the lack of power to command, to take decisions, to create and direct (Almeida apud Yazbek 1993, 18).

place them as an instrument to care for the basic needs of populations, and as an instrument of law that becomes concrete in a movement of construction and broadening of the citizenship of the subalternized classes of society.

Beginning with this trajectory, in this text I present a reflection that attempts to systematize and share a developing practice, constructed at two articulated and reciprocally determined moments. In the first, I try to reconstruct the theoretical-methodological foundations that feed what I call Participatory Research and participation of research in the construction of knowledge. In the second, I present an effort at systematization of my investigative practice, seeking to provide a foundation and illustrate this practice with experiences in the evaluation of social policies and programs that try to involve subjects of the process of these policies and programs in defining and developing their evaluations, which does not mean the development of what the literature calls participatory evaluations in their broader sense.

## **2. Revisiting participatory research and participation in research to construct knowledge**

I begin with the notion of what literature has been calling Participatory Research, which is presented in two dimensions: an educational dimension of those involved directly in the process of constructing knowledge, called by Freire (1981) a pedagogical dimension, and a collective and formative dimension when it references or provides a foundation for other subjects that use the knowledge constructed.

This modality of research presents two basic attributes: a reciprocal relationship between subject and object and the dialectical relationship between theory and practice. This means that knowledge of reality only occurs in establishing a relationship between researcher, technicians, groups where one can no longer speak about the separation produced by the dichotomy between the subject and object of investigation, and between theory and practice. The distance between researcher and informer, if not eliminated, is shortened, and the product of knowledge is broader, more profound, better able to overcome the immediacy bestowed by the appearance of the phenomenon under consideration. It is reality that it is taken as an object of investigation, but from a

critical perspective, which can develop a movement that seeks to understand this reality as a totality and product of multiple determinations. The figure of the researcher, therefore, neither disappears nor is diluted, it articulates with other subjects that also begin to contribute to the process of building knowledge. The researcher and the others involved in this reality begin to construct a subject, a unit in action that seeks to uncover an aspect or aspects of reality, critically appropriating the latter. Naturally, the intention is not to reduce the individuality and specificity of the subjects that are being articulated, nor to develop uniform attitudes or contributions, since it is the variety of contributions that is capable of constructing richer and more complete knowledge, even knowing that the knowledge of reality is never able to reproduce reality in all of its dimensions.

From this perspective, communication between subjects may only occur in a reciprocity relationship, where there is space for different knowledge, without invading each other's space (Freire 1979), but towards a collective construction. This knowledge is no longer the product of a dominant knowledge, but of knowledge in interactive intercommunication, without leaving a place for passivity, since the collective has already constituted itself as a subject, and a subject is he or she who acts.

Based on these assumptions, the concept of research that is formulated implies an active role attributed to the researchers and the "researched", which necessarily confers unity between theory and practice, besides unveiling the political character of scientific activity, making Brandão (1982, 9) characterize Participatory Research, as "a political practice of popular commitment". Therefore, science in this sense is the product of a collective, and it is placed at the service of a project of society, whose greater reference is liberation and dignity for all, and where "researchers-researched" are the subjects of a same common work, even though with different situations and tasks (Brandão 1981, 11).

The intentionality of science thus conceived is to broaden the potential to think about reality critically, and put knowledge at the service of social struggles, from the perspective of strengthening what has recently been presenting itself as the need to strengthen the popular sectors in the social control in rural areas, for instance of the public policies.

Research is then conceived as an instrument to produce critical knowledge in order to change reality. It is, as in the words of Brandão (1981, 10): a modality of production of collective knowledge “based on work that recreates, from inside out, concrete ways for persons, groups and popular classes to participate in the right and power of thinking, producing and guiding the uses of knowledge about themselves”.

This is a matter of giving direction to the knowledge produced for the instrumentalization of the struggle of the subalternized classes, whether these classes have or not participated in the direct construction of this knowledge. This is what I have been calling research participation, through the knowledge produced, in constructing a class conscience (Silva 1986, 1991). That is what Sá (1984, 26) accepts as being the intentionality of Participatory Research, recognizing that knowledge is power, and thus perceiving this modality of research as an effort to strengthen the power of those that are outside the State’s composition of forces.

Seen in the terms above, research is a continuous process that requires appropriate procedures to allow dialogue, open or semi-structured attitudes, collective interviews, in order to create space to debate ideas and attitudes. It implies the social insertion of the researcher, which means the identification and the commitment to social change.

This is the development of attitudes that provide space for horizontal action between different subjects and oppose vertical, authoritarian and rigid actions. It is, as admitted by Thiollent (1981), an effort to articulate investigation with explanation, within a network of sociopolitical communication open to the criticalness of reality, although, as already admitted previously, there are differentiated contributions and participations.

Within the scope of research as qualified above, a strong concern about restituting ordered and systematized knowledge, written or in debates, should be highlighted. It is then highlighted that the objective of knowledge should be the social change that can universalize the access of a whole population to the goods and services needed to ensure a dignified living standard for all. Consequently, the main addressees of knowledge are the subalternized sectors of society, so that they can instrumentalize their struggles and demands based on information that has historically been denied or withheld from them.

On the other hand, the social control of popular social classes beginning in the 1980s, in Brazil, has been emphasized more explicitly, highlighting the need to decentralize public policies, so that, at the level of local power, they may be more directly followed and placed at the service of the population. It is in this direction that evaluative research may contribute to instrumentalize the social struggles and to broaden citizenship, which allows me to discuss, next, an effort to construct knowledge in this field, that has been an object of central concern, seeking to give my practice as a researcher, together with other colleagues with whom I share this understanding, above all a commitment that should guide our effort to produce knowledge.

### **3. Applying the participatory approach to experiences of evaluation of social policies and programs**

#### *3.1 Particularizing the axes of approach: The participatory process in the production of knowledge and evaluatory research*

In the previous items, I have already pointed out two recurring possibilities somehow present in the development of participatory approaches, within the scope of the construction of knowledge. One which privileges the direct participation of social subjects, stressing subalternized and organized sectors of society in the process of building knowledge. In this sense, these are also researchers, involving themselves and participating actively in the investigation process. Another possibility, that does not withhold consideration from the first, privileges the participation of knowledge in forming a class consciousness so that it can be mobilized in the construction of alternatives of social change in tune with the interests and needs of what I am generically calling subalternized classes. In this sense, knowledge presents an explicit class commitment, having as primary function the instrumentalization of the social struggles committed to social change. Therefore, from this perspective, not all become researchers, but the researcher is necessarily someone committed to and inserted in the social struggles.



It is above all the second approach guiding participatory research that has referenced the practice that I am developing, together with members of the research group<sup>5</sup> that I coordinate, as presented later in this text.

The other axis of the approach which I am formulating concerns evaluative research as applied social research, consequently assumed to be able to formulate knowledge in order to instrumentalize the social struggles in the field of public policies and constructing citizenship.

The concept of evaluating social policies and programs that guides the thinking present here, goes beyond the evaluation in the perspective of seeking efficiency, predominant in most evaluation experiences developed in the 1980s and 1990s, whose main concern is the containment of demand, as a result of the so-called fiscal crisis of the State. In this sense, the main concern is about the increased profitability of the social programs, i.e., to extend care, maximizing the results, at lower costs. There is no doubt that concern about the efficiency of social programs is currently necessary and should urgently be developed, above all because “the scarcity of public resources requires greater rationalization of expenditures” (Arretche 1999, 35). Therefore, this type of evaluation is justified, due to the scarcity of resources that became more intense in the 1980s, and due to the need to expand social services and programs which faced an increasing demand, in a situation of rising unemployment, unstable, ill-paid jobs, reduction of the salary mass, increased number of poor, situations that were engendered by the economic adjustment movement required because of the determinations resulting from the globalization of the economy. I believe, however, that the evaluation of social programs should have a commitment to contribute mainly to the process of political, social and economic democratization, which implies a greater distribu-

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<sup>5</sup> This is the Group for the Evaluation and Study of Poverty and Poverty-oriented Policies – GAEPP (Grupo de Avaliação e Estudo da Pobreza e de Políticas Direcionadas à Pobreza) an interdisciplinary group that brings together teachers from different Academic Departments and undergraduate and graduate students of the Federal University of Maranhão (UFMA), who develop research activities, privileging studies on the theme of poverty, work and social policies, focusing on the analysis and evaluation of Public Policies, and having as reference the following lines of research: Evaluation of Job and Income Creation Policies; Evaluation of Social Policies and Programs; Evaluation and Follow-up of the Public Policy of Income Transfer.

tion of socially produced wealth, greater distribution of power and social control of public policies by the subalternized sectors of society. Therefore, I am interested in treating this experience within the scope of citizenship and the democratization of Brazilian society.

I consequently take the evaluation of social policies and programs as a mechanism to produce knowledge, not only in order to contribute to the efficiency and effectiveness of social programs,<sup>6</sup> but mainly to produce knowledge that will be used to instrumentalize the social struggles for the universalization of social rights, in a social movement to construct citizenship, which confers on the evaluation, besides a technical content also a political one, since it is guided by intentionality.

I believe that to instrumentalize struggles with results of social policy and program evaluations implies to make the results of these evaluations public to the main interested parties, who are the social program users, targeting popular movements and organizations. "Thus, it is an issue of going beyond the strictly economic and technical character of the evaluation, based on the classical functionalist or rationalist model which hides its political principles, without however, denying the importance of the technical dimensions of the evaluation of social policies (Gomes 2001, 18) The proposal is to go beyond the quantitative bias, with a wide use of econometric methods in the evaluations of social policies and programs, used widely during the 1980s and on into the 1990s, with true lack of knowledge of contextual variables outside the social programs that are being implemented (Vianna/Silva 1989). This is an evaluation that ignores the interests of the subjects involved and the values present in the process of public policies, and contributes nothing to the control over social programs as actions in the public interest.

The proposal is based on the problematization of the development of our citizenship and our social policy, that constituted a historical process marked by the criterion of merit and not need, producing more exclusion than inclusion, engendering what Draibe (1990) called a Particularist Meritocratic Welfare State. The reference in its construction is an economic, concentrating

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<sup>6</sup> Efficiency understood as the relationship between cost and benefit; efficacy as attaining the objectives and goals proposed and effectiveness as direct and indirect impact of the services rendered in the life of the public that uses them and the community.

model, marked by paternalism, social welfare, clientelism, with cooptation, and the exclusion of popular participation in its formation process, leading to a selective, discriminatory inclusion, really transforming right into privilege.

In the 1980s, in Brazil, this picture appeared to be resizing itself, through the great mobilization of new social subjects, stressing the new social movements, the new unionism and the movement in favor of housing and expansion of social rights, which placed the movement to expand citizenship, to use public money appropriately and to demand social control of the social programs offered to the general public demanding it on the Brazilian social agenda.

In the 1990s, specifically in Brazil, the option for a neoliberal project established the need to reform the State and its smaller direct participation in public policies that begin to be implemented largely by organizations of the so-called third sector, so that one tries to disseminate the ideology that everything that is public is vitiated and inefficient, the most frequently heard buzzwords being cutting social expenditures and seeking economic and social profitability. Thus there is a movement to deconstruct the social rights achieved. Even in this situation, I believe that the public policies, notably those with a social aspect, represent a privileged field for social mobilization and struggles, with a view to continuing a movement to expand rights and construct citizenship, and may constitute a fertile terrain for social pressure in favor of the basic fulfillment of social needs, which have become more serious in the last few years. Although initially, this may represent a struggle for the reproduction of the labor force, every social struggle contains political and consciousness-building elements that may lead to strengthening social segments for broader and more profound political-social struggles.

Consequently, the guiding understanding here is that the evaluation of social policies and programs may be perceived and developed as demand in the sphere of democracy to produce a better distribution of the socially produced wealth. In this sense, the decision-making process for public policies and publicization of the results of their evaluations represent important political moments in the evaluation process, which should be broadened with the inclusion of all subjects of the process, ranging from formulation to their implementation. From this perspective, the decision process is articulated with

the implementation of the public policies, constituting a single process, which makes it possible to appropriate the results of the evaluations of social programs in a reflexive and socialized form, by all the subjects involved in this action in movement (Gomes 2001, 29). In this movement in action, the evaluation becomes a democratic practice capable of making the social movements contribute to extending the public sphere (Oliveira 1993), conferring a public character on the results of evaluation, with a possibility of making them known to society.

In this sphere, I am situating the evaluation of social policies and programs as a fruitful possibility of constructing critical knowledge on public policies, the latter being able to offer elements and information that could subsidize the development of social struggles in this field.

It is in this direction that I will now present an effort, if only preliminary as yet, and therefore unfinished and limited in the direction here indicated.

### *3.2 Evaluative research as an instrumentalizing mechanism for professional practice and popular practice*

In experience in the field of evaluative research, I have always had two very marked concerns. The first refers to the identification and involvement of the different groups of subjects present in the process of public policies, and here I believe that these subjects are diversified and differentiated at every moment in this process, and are guided by intentionalities, interests and rationalities that are also different. The second concern is about applying the results of evaluation, which represents a fragile aspect of the evaluation of public policies, as has been demonstrated in the experiences.<sup>7</sup>

These two areas of interest in the field of evaluative research (involvement of subjects and publicity given to the results of evaluations) are related to the participatory dimension in the process of knowledge production, since

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<sup>7</sup> The limited application of the results of evaluations of social programs is due to many reasons, outstanding among which are the problems of how the evaluation process is conducted technically, producing inadequate results; lack of interest on the part of the stakeholders; conflict between the results achieved during evaluation and institutional interests; lack of participation and of popular pressure.

I consider evaluative research as a type of applied social research and, as such, generating knowledge on public policies.

As regards the identification and involvement of subjects in the public policy evaluation process, two groups of subjects were outstanding: the professionals, managers and executors of the social programs, and the users of the same programs.

Since my experience in this field of investigation has always been as an external evaluator<sup>8</sup>, I have always considered the participatory involvement of professionals from the programs evaluated to be relevant. First of all, because I consider that the knowledge possessed by these professionals, both of the program and of the population of users, is always superior to mine, as an external evaluator. In other words, our knowledge is essential and complementary. By involving the professionals in the evaluation process, I am always guaranteed at least two things: greater control over the object of evaluation, indispensable in the evaluative processes, as well as greater possibility of a certain involvement of the public that uses the social programs who, from the perspective adopted, are more than program users or mere informers for the evaluation, but are considered subjects with interests and able to contribute and influence the evaluative process. Furthermore, my practice in the field of evaluation of social policies and programs always has as its ultimate and most important intentionality, besides contributing to raise the quantitative and qualitative standard of the programs evaluated, the instrumentalization of popular social struggles in achieving rights and expanding the access of the subalternized classes of society to good quality services, able to satisfy the basic needs of these populations.

The second area of interest indicated above refers to applying the results of evaluation. This aspect is situated in a broader perspective, which means applying these results in the sphere of the program, for its improvement, and applying the results of evaluation within the sphere of society or organized groups affected by the program evaluated, which I have been considering as

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<sup>8</sup> External evaluator is the member of an evaluation team that does not belong to the professional staff of the institution responsible for the program that is being evaluated. Generally this person is a specialist in evaluation, and is contracted by the institution to evaluate a social policy or program.

generation of knowledge which presents a potential to instrumentalize the actions and struggles of these groups and movements.

The experience reported here shows that the application of results of evaluations, and here I consider myself an external evaluator, is always very limited. This if we consider the two groups of subjects highlighted previously: the professionals, managers and executors, and the users of social programs. The former, above all, have institutional limits that range from the political will of the leaders to the limitation of resources and lack of training of the professionals themselves. The users count on an essential structural limit: the low level of organization of the subalternized sectors and the low access of the latter to the information generated within the scope of the evaluation of the social programs. The Management Councils (*Conselhos de Gestão*),<sup>9</sup> which would be fundamental subjects in this process, have great weaknesses ranging from interferences in their constitution to lack of training of their members and limited access to information.

However, I wish to emphasize that these difficulties and limits did not render impossible the different attempts to adopt a participatory approach in the effort that the team of researchers-evaluators of social programs coordinated by me have been developing on different occasions. In this sense a few illustrative cases are briefly reported below.

### *3.3 Effort at applying the participatory approach to the evaluation of social policies and programs*

As mentioned previously, the participatory approach to experiences reported below, occurred mainly in the development of mechanisms for the articulation and participation of professionals from the institutions whose programs were evaluated, above all located in the sphere of planning and implementation of the aforementioned programs. As also mentioned, we formed an external evaluation team which took an attitude of involving actively, directly,

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<sup>9</sup> I refer to the Councils instituted mainly after the 1988 Brazilian Constitution, to develop the social control of social programs in the field of the different social policies, consisting of representatives of the government, the State and, some, of businesses, with a view to fulfilling the constitutional principle of social participation.

professionals and, indirectly, program users, in the process of evaluative studies performed, as presented below.

a) Evaluation of the Day Care Center Maintenance Program of the Federal Government<sup>10</sup>

The evaluation of the Day Care Center Maintenance Program (*Programa Creche Manutenção – PCM*) was performed in the state of Maranhão, during 1999. The evaluation was implemented in a partnership between the Federal University of Maranhão/Group for the Evaluation and Study of Poverty and Policies Oriented to Poverty – UFMA/GAEPP and the Management of Social Development (*Gerência de Desenvolvimento Social – GDS*), an agency of the state of Maranhão which is the state-level manager of the Social Welfare Policy.

The Day Care Center Maintenance Program, as determined by the Organic Law of Social Welfare, aims to care of children 0 to 6 years old, for the purpose of improving and extending this care. In the state of Maranhão, this Program was developed by the GDS. Interest in this evaluation arose as an indication of the 1993 State Plan of Social Welfare, considering the identification of problems, difficulties and distortions that had been found in the implementation of this Program by the team of technicians responsible for its follow up and supervision.

The effort to involve the GDS professionals in the evaluation began from the moment the study project was prepared, and, at various work meetings, the following were the main aspects debated: definition of the configurative dimensions that constituted the subject of evaluation, i.e., the interest was to define what should be evaluated; define the sample of municipalities where the study would be performed, since the Program was implemented in 131 (one hundred and thirty-one) municipalities in the State; definition of the subjects to be considered in the evaluation and strategies for the involvement of professionals and executing agencies of the Program in each municipality where the study was performed.

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<sup>10</sup> About this experience see Silva (2001).

After several preparatory meetings, the UFMA/GAEPP and GDS team identified the following aspects to be considered in the evaluation:

- A look at the Program history, highlighting objectives and content.
- Evaluation of the current objectives (execution, distortions).
- Criteria adopted to establish an agreement between GDS and the executing institutions.
- Activities performed: socio-educational, pedagogical, recreational, health care, food, etc.
- Management: heading the day care center, administrative activities, participation of parents and the community in administration.
- Technical staff, volunteers, trainees (form of recruitment and employment, level of education, specific training, attributions, performance).
- Socioeconomic characterization of the families of the children cared for at the day care centers.
- Identification of problems and blockages in day care center functioning.
- Identification of facilitating elements in Program implementation.
- Participation of the families and the community in the life of the day care centers.
- Possible impacts of the Program on the children and the families.
- What happens to the children who have been in the day care centers.
- Follow-up, control and evaluation system adopted by the Program.

In order to develop the study, the following methodological procedures were used:

- Survey and analysis of literature and documents on the Program.
- Participation of the subjects that are part of the Program in the evaluation process.
- Semi-structured interviews with technical staff of GDS and of the then Regional Office of the Secretariat of Social Welfare belonging to the Ministry of Social Security and Social Welfare – ER-SAS/MA (*Escritório Regional da Secretaria de Assistência Social do Ministério da Previdência e Assistência Social – ER-SAS/MA*).
- Interview with the directors and technical staff that worked at the day-care centers.



- Interviews with parents/people responsible for day care center pupils.
- Publicizing the evaluation results to the subjects interested, especially professionals and entities that implement the Program.

It should be stressed that the direct participation of the professionals responsible for the Program was essential to obtain a reality-appropriate design of the evaluation, and for us to develop preliminary work with the participation of representatives of the Program-executing institutions in the evaluation process, in order to make it easier to survey the information foreseen, later making the evaluation results public by means of debates, reports and seminars on the evaluation results.

#### b) Evaluation of the Money Transfer Programs initiated by the Brazilian States and Municipalities

As the methodological procedure of a nationwide study on the Income Transfer Programs<sup>11</sup> (*Programas de Transferência de Renda*), generically called Minimum Income Programs or School Grants, on the initiative of Brazilian States and Municipalities, a National Workshop was performed during the period of December 5 and 6, 2002, in Campinas (*Centro de Treinamento e Reciclagem – FECAMP*).

This is a broad, nationwide study, whose purpose is to systematize the content of the Programs in order to prepare an analytic-critical profile of the Public Program for Income Transfer which is being implemented in Brazil. In its information survey methodology this study included, besides applying a

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<sup>11</sup> This study is part of the research activities of an Academic Cooperation Project – PROCAD, maintained with funding from CAPES – Fundação Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior, a Brazilian Government agency, with the participation of the Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo-PUC-SP/Programa de Pós-Graduação em Serviço Social; Universidade Federal do Maranhão-UFMA/Programa de Pós-Graduação em Políticas Públicas and Núcleo de Estudos de Políticas Públicas/NEPP/UNICAMP. Income Transfer Programs are those that assign a monetary transfer to individuals or families, but that also associate to this monetary transfer, a compensatory component, other measures mainly in the field of policies of education, health and labor, thus representing structuring elements which are essential to break the vicious circle that imprisons a large part of the Brazilian population in the bonds of reproduction of poverty.

semi-structured instrument, establishing contacts and holding interviews, and surveying complementary documentation of the programs, as well as holding a National Workshop, with a view to complementing the information obtained until that point, and presenting for collective discussion, with representatives of programs involved in the study, a preliminary document with an initial level of systematization of the information raised, prepared by the researchers. Therefore, this National Workshop represented the participatory dimension that guided the development of the evaluative research considered, insofar as it allowed the socialization and complementation of the preliminary results of the study, counting on the direct participation of the professionals responsible for the implementation of the programs that are the subject of the study.

From this perspective, 37 (thirty-seven) municipal and state Minimum Income/School Grant Programs participated in the National Workshop of several Brazilian states, represented by 62 participants, the following having been the categories expected to be part of the event:

- Representatives of the PROCAD Project researchers: 03 (three) per participating University (PUC/SP; UFMA; NEPP/UNICAMP), totalizing 09 (nine) participants, including the coordinators;
- Representatives of the state and municipal Minimum Income/School Grant Programs that are being implemented in the Brazilian states, with a total of 60 participants;
- Support staff, a total of 03 (three).

The objectives of the National Workshop were:

- To enable the exchange of experiences and information between representatives of the Minimum Income/Schools Grant Programs initiated by Brazilian states and municipalities, under implementation, which were included in the study;
- To socialize and complement the information raised on the set of programs to further the results of the study;
- To identify external impacts in the development of programs, particularly the impacts of the federal programs on the programs initiated by the States

and municipalities, taking as reference the socioeconomic situation of the States and municipalities;

- To survey elements that would allow going further and analyzing the set of Programs being studied;
- To identify and evaluate recent changes in the programs as a whole;
- To expand the process of academic cooperation between graduate programs of the three Brazilian Universities (PUC/SP; UFMA and UNICAMP);
- To contribute to the progress and systematization of the Public Policy of Minimum Income/School Grant in Brazil.

The Workshop proceedings took place with 03(three) groups, each group consisting of about 20(twenty) members, taking participants by order of registration as a criterion to constitute them, and two sessions were held. Each group had the participation of previously designated advisors to ensure the best functioning of the two sessions. During this experience, it was observed that a rich environment was created, favorable to exchanging experiences and to socializing the preliminary results of the study, which were enriched with significant contributions from those present, who also had the opportunity of socializing information referring to the Income Transfer Programs that are being implemented in Brazil, allowing the enrichment of the programs individually, based on a collectively developed participatory construction.

Besides the contributions and enrichment, allowing the study to be further developed, it should be pointed out that the great demand of the Workshop participants was for a mechanism to be created, to articulate the Income Transfer Program for a systematic exchange of experiences, a type of National Forum. In this sense, the team that coordinates the study is surveying contributions to create this National Forum, expected to start work in 2005, which shows the progress that the participatory dimension adopted in the research represented, both for the process of constructing knowledge on the Brazilian social policy, and to publicize study results among those who have the responsibility of implementing the social programs, i.e., are responsible

for improving these programs and maintaining direct contact with the user public.<sup>12</sup>

### Conclusions

In this text my purpose was to take up a debate again, illustrating a few experiences that I have developed as a researcher committed to social aspects. I have participated in this debate since the mid-1980s. I begin with and maintain strong criticism of the positivist model of science which qualifies scientific knowledge as pure, autonomous and neutral, taken as an expression of a non-existent universal truth. I reaffirm the class character of science and its historicity, as well as its dialectical perspective which, through critically assumed movements of contact with reality, tries to go from appearance to essence, from the concrete to the abstract. This movement considers the groups and populations as subjects of the process of knowledge, and seeks to establish a dialectical relationship between theory and practice. Furthermore, knowledge is here considered in its applicability to the solution of serious social problems that afflict humankind.

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<sup>12</sup> Still within the sphere of this research, the specific study developed on the so-called Income Transfer Programs should be pointed out. These programs were pioneering in Brazil, since they began to be implemented in 1995. They are: The Program of Assured Minimum Family Income (PGRM-Programa de Garantia de Renda Familiar Mínima) of the Municipal Administration of Campinas/SP; the Family Grant Program for Education (Programa Bolsa Familiar para Educação) and the School-Savings Program (Programa Poupança-Escola) of the Brasília Municipal Government; the Program of Assured Minimum Family Income – PGRM of the Municipal Administration of Ribeirão Preto/SP and the “Our Family” Program (Programa “Nossa Família”) of the Municipal Administration of Santos/SP. These programs were studied by analyzing the documents, results of evaluations performed, contacts and visits, besides sending them an instrument to gather complementary information, based on which a preliminary text was prepared which was sent to the people in charge of the respective programs. Later each program was visited and at that time the preliminary text sent to them was discussed. In this debate, besides allowing the preliminary results of the overall study to be socialized, the specific text on each program was enriched and complemented. This participatory aspect of the study also provided an opportunity for self-assessment and reflection by those responsible for the program about the practice they were developing, with relevant attention given to issues of interest to the users of these programs

From this perspective there is no place for a dichotomy between subject and object in the investigative process, nor separation between theory and practice. Consequently, there is no space for individualization, psychologization and generation of passivity, nor hiding the problematization of reality, by taking a critical attitude with commitment to social change. Therefore, science is taken as a historical truth, and thus situated and limited in its outreach, because it is marked by the values of society, constituting a process of approaching and thus always unfinished, in the explanation that it constructs on the reality that is constantly moving and changing.

I highlight the commitment of science to critique reality for its transformation, i.e., the social commitment of the researcher, a commitment to the subalternized classes of society, seeking to articulate and overcome the subject-object, theory-practice dichotomy.

Based on this context, I do not advocate a specific type of participatory or participant research, and the diversity of proposals, concepts and methodological attitudes must be considered. What I advocate is to place knowledge at the service of the destitute of society, with or without the direct participation of these segments in the process of building knowledge. What I am advocating is the insertion and the commitment of a researcher to solving social problems which prevent the participation of large parts of the world population and, specifically, the Brazilian population in the enjoyment of humanity's achievements. I also advocate that the researchers break down the wall of academe, where they generally isolate themselves, and seek to articulate their academic practice with fellow professionals who execute public policies that are closer to social reality and the population, involving the latter in the process of knowledge, trying to shorten the distance between knowledge and social reality. This is what we try to do in practicing evaluative research as reported above, although it is a difficult and limited task, as demonstrated by practice.

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*Author's address*

Maria Ozanira da Silva e Silva  
Avenida dos Holandeses, Quadra 31, Lote 07  
Ed. Vila Lobos, aptp. 1401  
Cahau  
65071-380 Sao Luís, Maranhão  
Brasil  
E-mail: ozanira@elo.com.br

*About the author*

**Maria Ozanira da Silva e Silva**, PhD in Social Work; level 01 CNPq researcher, coordinator of the Graduate Program in Public Policies at the Federal University of Maranhão; author of several books, including: *Refletindo a pesquisa participante*, *Avaliação de políticas e programas sociais*, and *Comunidade Solidária: o não enfrentamento da pobreza no Brasil*, published by Cortez and Veras, both publishers in São Paulo.

*Translated by Hedy L. Hofmann*