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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:
Rainer Hampp Verlag

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Streck, D. R. (2006). The Scale of Participation: From Municipal Public Budget to Cities' Conference. *International Journal of Action Research*, 2(1), 78-97. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-412782>

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The Scale of Participation: From Municipal Public Budget to Cities' Conference

Danilo R. Streck

In a well ordered city every man flies to the assemblies: under a bad government no one cares to stir a step to get to them, because no one is interested in what happens there, because it is foreseen that the general will will not prevail, and lastly because domestic cares are all-absorbing. Good laws lead to the making of better ones; bad ones bring about worse. As soon as man says of the affairs of the State *What does it matter to me?* the State may be given up for lost. (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 1950: 93).

The essay is intended to contribute for a better understanding of the process of creating a healthy public realm through citizen participation. The empirical reference is the participatory budget as developed in the city of Porto Alegre (Brazil) since 1989 up to this date, and from 1999 to 2002 in the State of Rio Grande do Sul. Based on similar principles, the federal government started a Cities' Conference process which allows reflecting about the possibilities of expanding the scale of participation to a broader geographical area and to more complex and larger social contexts. At the end, the reference to a new social contract points to the search for other social organizations and other ways of living together.

Key words: participation, public realm, participatory budget

Introduction

The development of a healthy public realm is today a major challenge in developed and underdeveloped countries alike and, although the symptoms of the lack of active citizenship may vary, as do the reasons for overcoming it, there is a widespread interest in enhancing citizen engagement.¹ In this paper I argue that there is the possibility of extending the range of participation beyond the limits of the local and municipal community. The city, today, is everywhere. It has become the *sertão*² of Guimarães Rosa (1968), a risky place, where the battles for life are been daily fought against the odds of destiny.

The issue is of utmost importance considering the discontentment of democracy at all spheres of the State revealed basically in the lack of people's confidence in those who are supposed to represent them. Participatory budget, which is the guiding experience in this essay, is considered one of the most promising social and political experiments at the turn of the century because it brings forth a concrete proposal to deal with the limits of the institutional arrangements in Western democracies. The spread of this practice over a hundred of municipalities in Brazil alone³ and countless places around the world (Santos 2002), in a great variety of forms, suggests that there is at least some truth to this appraisal.

Although the origins are usually related to Porto Alegre, there are previous experiences which, in Brazil, were directly related to the resistance to military dictatorship and the re-democratization process. As soon as 1964, i.e., concomitant with the beginning of this dictatorship, there was created in Ijuí⁴ a Communitarian Basis Movement (Movimento Comunitário de Base)

¹ This paper was presented at the panel "A vibrant public realm: engagement, participation and community", which integrated the Conference "Building Public Spaces that work: A Canada-Brazil Dialogue Devoted to Enhancing the Public Realm" (Toronto, October 19-21, 2005). It is related to the project *Participatory processes of emancipative character in Latin America as pedagogical mediations for the construction of the public*, partially financed by CNPq.

² The word connotes the arid Northeastern hinterland.

³ More precisely 103, from 1997 to 2000. (Avritzer/Navarro 2002: 30).

⁴ A city of about 100 thousand inhabitants in the northern part of the State of Rio Grande do Sul.

organizing local and regional community around the principle that “real democracy requires, besides technical knowledge, the active participation of the people, as much in the elaboration as in the accomplishment of plans and tasks.” (Marques/Brum 2002: 53). Two decades later (1983-1987) the municipal administration from Pelotas⁵ instituted a program called *All the power emanates from the people* through which it promoted a pioneering experiment with popular participation in planning, including the public budget. A decade later (1989) started what is so far the best known experience with participatory budget, as much for its radical character as for its institutional design and duration.

The idea of citizens’ participation was taken to the state level, from 1998 to 2002, by the same officials and administrative team who started the participatory budget in Porto Alegre.⁶ There may be no consensus about the outcomes in terms of immediate results, but it would be hard to dispute the fact that participation does not necessarily be restricted to a relatively small geographical area. If the experience in Porto Alegre has shown that even in a city of over one million inhabitants people can be allowed to have their say on what is certainly the core element of urban planning, i.e., the budget, the experience in the State of Rio Grande do Sul has shown that, provided some basic conditions, participation is possible on a state wide basis, in this case, covering a vast geographical area with a population of about ten million inhabitants and around 500 municipalities.

But these are not the limits for participation and organized citizen engagement. The movement begun in the city of Porto Alegre and taken to the state of Rio Grande do Sul had its continuation in the conferences of the cities, on municipal, state and national level. It may be too early to evaluate the

⁵ Pelotas, situated in South of Rio Grande do Sul, is one of the largest cities in the state with a population of about 350 thousand inhabitants.

⁶ At least three names should be mentioned: Olívio Dutra, Mayor of Porto Alegre and later Governor of Rio Grande do Sul); Iria Charão and Ubiratan de Souza, direct assistants on the operational level both in the City and State administration. Iria Charão was later a key figure in the conception and development of the Cities’s Conference, with Olívio Dutra as Minister of the Cities.

process, especially due to the changes in the Ministry of the Cities.⁷ There are nevertheless sufficient indications to suggest, again, that in today's society participatory democracy is not only necessary but feasible. In the next section of this paper there are some notes on this particular process.

In this essay I will attempt to move from one administrative level to the other with the intention to argue that the limits in terms of the scale and scope of participation are not as fixed and restricted as governments from right and left would like citizens to believe. The argument will be divided into two interrelated parts: first, there will be an effort to point out some basic underlying assumptions and, second, the focus will be on some strategies. The lines that divide assumptions from strategies are very thin, but they are nevertheless relevant since noble ideals do not turn automatically into policies and projects, and an administration that operates only on the level of strategies soon finds itself faced with its own limits.

Notes about the cities' conference

The notion of Participatory Budget is quite well known around the world. There are experiences in such different countries – economically, culturally and socially - as Canada, Chile, Bolivia or Spain. They vary in format, scale and depth of participation, but all of them identify themselves as a means for allowing direct involvement of citizens in public administration. Although Porto Alegre remains an important reference given its existence for almost two decades (see Weyh/Streck 2003: 25-42), participatory budget is by far a concept of its own and keeps recreating itself in different settings. The Cities' Conference, on the other hand, is rather new experiment and requires an introduction to the reader.

The Conference is a central political and administrative instrument for the Ministry of the Cities created at the beginning of the presidency of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, in 2002. In the Resolutions of the Second Cities' Con-

⁷ In July 2005 Olívio Dutra, who first occupied the position of Minister of the Cities and under whose direction the Cities' Conference originated, was substituted by Márcio Fortes. This presidential act was harshly attacked by urban social movements who fought for the creation of this new ministry, instituted in 2003 when Luís Inácio Lula da Silva became president.

ference (Brasília, 11.31.05 – 12.03.05) it is defined in the following terms: “The Cities’ Conference is a forum for discussion and propositions for the policies of urban development and related thematic, in the context of each one of the spheres of the Federation with the purpose of promoting citizen participation of diverse social segments as: popular and social movements, workers’ unions, business, NGOs, OSCIPs,⁸ universities and research institutions, professional entities, and the State departments in all of the levels of the Federation⁹, with special attention to the most excluded. (The Conference shall) promote, for the preparatory process, workshops, panels and account of experiences, according to the criteria established by the Preparatory Commissions.”

In the Second Conference participated 1860 delegates from 26 states and from the Federal District, as well as 410 observers. The general purpose was the production of subsidies for the National Policy for Urban Development. This process lasted the whole year, being preceded by municipal and state conferences, where the election of the delegates for the general conference took place. Among some of the basic outcomes stated in the 102 resolutions I would highlight the following:

- a) to guarantee that governments share decisions about the policies of public investments;
- b) to democratize the means for communication with special incentive for community radios and TV stations;
- c) to establish City Councils on municipal, state and national level as instruments for proposing and overseeing the policies regarding issues as housing, urban mobility, territorial planning and sanitation;
- d) to create conditions for effective citizen participation;
- e) to define more precisely the roles of the Union, de states and the municipalities in terms of the development of cities and regions;

⁸ Organizações da Sociedade Civil de Interesse Público (Civil Society Organizations of Public Interest).

⁹ In Brazil the federated levels are municipalities, provinces (states) and central or federal government.

- f) to promote a tributary reform allocating more resources for municipalities and states;
- g) to promote the concept of sustainable city integrating urban and rural areas and situating them in the regional context.¹⁰

There may not be much reason to rejoice about the resolutions, most of them reflecting the precarious living conditions of a great proportion of the Brazilian population and the neglect of governments in searching for solutions, sometimes very simple ones. A central theme, however, pervading all of them is the awakening of citizenship and the recovery of the nation, for decades confiscated by a privatized State. In this sense, the Cities' Conference should be seen as part of a rather large movement of participatory processes aiming as the reconstruction of the public realm.

A word about the Ministry of the Cities and its relevance for Brazil: The creation of this ministry can be regarded as a conquest of the social movements for urban reform which started to operate since the 80th due to the population explosion in many Brazilian cities. According to data from statistics, 81% of the total population of about 170 million inhabitants lived in urban areas at the turn of the century while between 1940 and 1950 this number was 45, 83%. The *favelas*, although existing before, grew rapidly in this period: from 2.248.336 to 5.020.517 inhabitants just in the decade between 1980 to 1990. The Ministry of the Cities has, above all, the role of articulating, planning and proposing norms on national level, and of creating a permanent system of data regarding the cities.

Some assumptions: In what to believe

No wonder Rousseau is considered the father of participatory democracy. His ideal – bands of peasants regulating affairs of the State under an oak – inspires the search for participation at a time when peasants are a rather small group and when people would not fit under a tree, a change which is already the subject matter of his social contract. Reviewing experiences of participa-

¹⁰ More information about the Cities' Conference can be found at the site of the Brazilian Ministry of the Cities (<http://www.cidades.gov.br>).

tory budget it is common to encounter this same idealistic drive to have people say their word directly. Radio and TV programs as well as internet chats and sites certainly provide the opportunity for people to express themselves and are available in most places, but they do not substitute the meetings in public spaces, where one says his/her words with others and is listened to by them.

In what follows is a brief analysis of some assumptions which usually inspire these projects. They may sound obvious, but we know that it is the obvious that hides the naturalizations which at the end make things remain as they are. Among the themes chosen for a brief review are the possibility of radicalizing democracy, the meaning and intentionality of participation, the appraisal of people's capacity by the elected officials and the redefinition of the idea of the public.

Radicalization of democracy

Democracy has spread over all the continents and it would be difficult to find open arguments against democracy today. Amartya Sen has considered the rise of democracy as the most significant political development of the 20th Century, referring basically to the respect for the institutions of democracy (see Jones 2004: 161). The geographical dimension, however, can not hide the ugly faces of the same democracy, starting with the ineffectiveness of dealing with inequalities within countries and among them to the adoption of democracy as a mere electoral procedure. We may be advancing in the direction where the numerical and geographical growth of democracy is paradoxically concomitant with the decline of citizenship.

Recent study about democracy in Latin America has shown that over half of the population (51,8%) has been socialized under dictatorial regimes (PNUD, 2004: 139). This same study indicates also that over half the population would be ready to exchange democracy for a more efficient socioeconomic system. In other words, authoritarianism is well disguised under a thin cover of democratic institutional formality, a situation of which leaderships from different ideologies take advantage.

The question posed is about the relationship between democracy and citizenship. John P. Burke (1994: 59) has correctly argued that “although citizenship need not entail democracy, democracy does entail citizenship; to assert this is to claim that the value of democracy is grounded in citizenship.” The shift of attention from democracy to citizenship, respectively to participation and engagement, is appropriate for understanding and evaluating the level of radicalization of a particular democracy.

Participatory budget takes as a basic assumption that the cure for the problems of democracy can not be found outside democracy itself. On the contrary, it is assumed that the solution lies in radicalizing the practice of democracy, since the classical representative system is not sufficiently effective to guarantee that people's needs are respected in governmental policies. The periodical election of representatives does not respond adequately to the social dynamics of our times, when issues and arguments change rapidly. The delegation of one's own power to decide to one person (or even a party) represents almost inevitably handing over a “blank check” to someone who is hardly known.

In classical representative democracy people's participation ends with the election of delegates to whom the citizen delivers his/her own authority. Radicalization of democracy, on its turn, represents an effort to close the gap between the decisions of the delegate in the respective power position in government and the desires, needs and ideas of the citizen by creating mechanisms that allow for a greater involvement on a regular basis. The many experiences of participatory budget propose a combination of representative democracy with direct or participatory democracy.

Participation as a value in itself

Participation has become a concept widely used and misused. There are many examples of how the line between emancipatory participation and manipulation becomes easily blurred through political and economical interests. This, however, does not seem to be a sufficient argument for keeping people away from the decision making process. As put by Martin Oppenheimer (in: Benello/Roussopoulos 1971: 277): “Participatory democracy involves two com-

plementary notions that people are inherently capable of understanding their problems and expressing themselves about these problems and their solutions, if given a social context in which freedom of expression is possible, that is, a situation in which one is free of personal and political hang-ups. The second is that real solutions to problems require the fullest participation of the people in these solutions, with the development of freedom from dependency on authorities and experts.” The value of participation is related to some believes which are confirmed in participatory social processes, such as the following:

1. *There is a close link between participation and equality.* Data from the Participatory Budget in Porto Alegre and on state level demonstrate that this social experiment can be an important tool for redefining priorities and thus allowing for the application of public resources where they are most needed. In the case of Rio Grande do Sul, this meant the mobilization of financial and personal resources for a large number of rather small projects which have a great impact on the regional development. Iria Charão (in: Marques 1999: 169) has this to say: “One thing that frightens so much the enemies of popular participation – not of the budget, is the organization that this acquires. An organization is being built because persons start to have full conscience of distributing. Even if the resources are still very limited faced with the demands, but if they are well administrated and with social control, the dividends are much higher because they were used in that which is a priority.”

2. *Participation engenders and nurtures the identity of groups and movements.* Through participation, there is the possibility for groups to create and recreate their identities by making explicit in public spaces their common needs. For instance, workers in agriculture find themselves side by side with workers from industry and commerce, or social movements. In discussing the need for support of agribusiness brought up buy farmers in a central region of the state, members of an NGO devoted to ecology soon raised the issue of water. There can be no real development, they argued, without due attention to the problem of water. They presented convincing data about the pollution of the river and other problems related to water supply in this area. What happened very concretely was that the issue of ecology became embedded in the discussion about the possibilities of regional development.

3. *There is a positive relationship between participation and efficiency.* Modern theories of administration applaud participation because it is an efficient tool to achieve positive results. If this is true for private enterprises, there are still more pressing reasons that democratic governments apply participatory principles and strategies in the administration of the *res publica*. A healthy public realm is built on sound policies as well as on positive results. There are countless examples of how scarce resources are able to have an enormous impact on life of people. For instance, in the northern part of Rio Grande do Sul a small community was granted about two thousand dollars for implementing the industrialization of products from sugar cane and manioc. The result was the organization of farmers within the existing cooperative and a visible increase in the population's wellbeing.

4. *Participation has a pedagogical value.* Participation has a close relationship with the education of the citizens. Rousseau's land marking books *Émile* and *The social contract*, respectively on education and on politics, were written and published together. Moreover, for him Plato's *Republic* was the most important book on education. Democracy works on the assumption that at least a great numbers of citizens have a reasonable degree of information and capacity for discernment in order to participate actively in the life of the *polis*. On the other hand, participation also can have a very important educative role for leaders and government. Observation of participatory budget reveals that some leaders change during the process in the perspective of more democratic relations, and other leaders with a new approach have the opportunity to emerge.

Respect for the capacity of the people

This may be one of the simplest and at the same time more difficult and complex issues to be achieved. I do not know empirical studies about the representation politicians have of their constituencies, but it seems reasonable to argue that for most of them citizens are just a mass of individuals who after being seduced to vote become invisible, exception made for a small group who then become part of the circle of power. On the other hand, in Brazil politicians and public officers rank among the lowest in terms of trust.

Participation presupposes a dialogical relationship which, on its turn, needs to be grounded on some human qualities quite strange to the public sphere. Paulo Freire identifies three of them in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: love, humility and faith in men and women. “Founded in love, humility and faith in men and women, dialogue is made in a horizontal relationship, in which the *trust* of one pole in the other is an obvious consequence. It would be a contradiction if, loving, humble and full of faith, dialogue should not provoke this climate of trust between its subjects.” (Freire 1981: 96)

Participatory budget allows for this trust to be built. As an indication of mutual correspondence is the involvement in assemblies of the Participatory budget. In as far as the demands agreed upon are not turned operational in projects and resources, the tendency is for participation to decrease as a sign that the pact of trust has been broken.

Redefinition of the idea of the public

The recent scandals in Brazilian political scene have brought to the open some practices that are grounded in the country’s history. What triggered popular indignation and frustration, therefore, is not so much the fact in itself, but the feeling that “they” are all the same.¹¹ A sense of political orphanage has taken hold of people on the right and on the left alike. At the core of the problem is a historical deficit in terms of the understanding of the public, and its clear differentiation from the private sphere.

Hannah Arendt puts forward two characteristics of the public, which seem to be quite appropriate to be brought to attention in the context of the discussion of participatory budget or other mechanisms of participation. The first one is that what makes up the public is the possibility of speaking and acting together with others, of being part of the spaces where everyone appears to the other. Participatory budget provides the possibility for the construction of an autonomous and active public sphere. In the city of Porto Alegre, in the State of Rio Grande do Sul and then in thousands of cities around the country

¹¹ The scandals refer to the use of not declared funds for financing electoral campaigns or, as denounced, to buy votes at the Congress. The Workers’s Party, a protagonist in this scandal, was so far regarded as an ethical reserve in a generalized distrusted body.

people stood up to say their word, and did so in front of others and with others. The fact of expressing their needs in the open and being listened to by neighbors and government officials has the effect of going beyond the pragmatic defense of one's own interests and establishing relationships of solidarity. In most cases it is indeed a negotiation around very scarce resources since only a very small proportion of the budget is available for investments.

The other characteristic that Arendt regards as constitutive for the idea of the public is the world itself, a complex of mediations created by humans and which provides a sense of permanence or duration. There can be no public, Hannah Arendt (2004: 59) argues, if there is not a world which assures the existence of a tomorrow. The real involvement with issues of the *polis* provides the conditions to feel part of the creation of this world. Countless testimonies from our research confirm this fact, as expressed by one teacher when asked about what leads her to participate: "I want to leave a message for our children. The lesson that to believe and to participate makes a difference. Today it is starting very small, but it will be all over this State."

This testimony is a strong reaction to the real conditions of great part of youth in Latin America. A study among young Argentinians (Boletín IE-SALC) reveals that 37,8% of them consider leaving the country and making their future in another place. Interviews with youth from the periphery of São Leopoldo, a city of about 200,000 inhabitants in the greater Porto Alegre, shows that their dream goes no further than to take care of cars in the streets, if not an explicit involvement with drugs (Schmiedt Streck 2004: 254)

Some strategies: What to do

In a critical balance of experiences of participatory budget Leonardo Avritzer (Avritzer/Navarro 2003: 73) concludes that there are three indicators that offer the best conditions to evaluate their functioning: democracy, rationalization of the administration and redistributive justice. In other words, political intentionality must go hand in hand with mechanisms that effectively bring about the expected results. After all, there are not few resources involved in the process, considering especially travel expenses and time for meetings and

assemblies. In this section there will be discussed only three of these strategies which are quite comprehensive of the whole process.

A new contract for governance

The implementation of the participatory budget involves a complex process of negotiation. At the core of the dispute is the tension between legality and legitimacy. Although the Executive power has the constitutional right to consult the citizens and people have the right to meet and discuss their problems, there is at the start the necessity to build a compromise between the interested sides in order to make it legitimate (Sobottka 2005).

In the city of Porto Alegre the main contenders were urban social movements, local community organizations, political parties and the Municipal House of Representatives. In the state of Rio Grande do Sul there was a long legal dispute between the Governor's Office and the House of Representatives who felt that they were left out of the process. Besides, the Regional Councils for Development, led mostly by traditional authorities from industry, commerce, church and universities understood the appointment of regional coordinators of the budgeting process by the state as an intrusion. As the end result, the elected state representatives instituted a parallel consultation which consisted basically in double checking the results of the former process.

At the end there were only minor changes to the original project. It has to be said that both processes do not have an official legislation. The participatory budget or another relevant form of consultation in the preparation of the budget is a prerogative of the governor's office written in the Brazilian constitution, while the House of Representatives can create its own mechanisms for checking the projects they will have to vote. It could be concluded that when people are asked to participate and give their opinion the differences due to party lines or interest groups tend to be minimized while they are brought to the ground of the daily life.

Considering the national level, the problem gets more complex because of the involvement of different government levels sometimes with conflicting interests and the difficulty of organizing a direct participation of the citizens.

A main concern of the Cities' Conference, for instance, is the existence of an enormous variety of councils each one directed towards specific topics, from health to environment. Also the party lines become more complex since from the lowest level (municipalities) to the federal ministry there may be implicated three different political parties. Once more, the results of the Conference point to the possibility of bringing divergent, and sometimes very particular, interests to a common table and elect priorities which, from the perspective of real life, are obvious. It is not surprising that in a local conference the regularization of urban land in *favelas* may be considered a priority over against a new highway, even in the presence of the construction industry.

From needs to programs: the institutional design

Citizens as well as government officials are aware of the needs facing great part of the population. There is no way of denying such social problems as unemployment, low quality in education and poor health services. It is publicly recognized that there is something wrong when children perform any kind of show at crossings and stop lights to get some money to take home. The issue, then, is not only government priorities and political will, but also the strategies for moving from the recognition of social needs to effective programs.

Participatory budget should not be seen as a technique or a panacea, but there have been developed strategies involved which are important for the process to produce the expected results. One of these strategies is to move between larger themes and specific demands. For instance, if one region decides in its thematic assembly that education is priority number one, the demands within this area will be ranked higher as the demands for transportation. In another region, the thematic priority may be the opposite. In the I Cities' Conference (2003) the following four great themes for debate on the municipal, state and national level were elected: participation and social control; the federative question; regional urban policies and metropolitan regions; the financing of urban development in the federal, state and municipal spheres.

Another important strategy is to allow for as much self-regulation as possible. It is important that Participatory Budget does not become officially regulated as many would like it to be. The price for guaranteeing the proce-

ture may not be worth losing the soul. The elected councilors are free, from one year to the other, to propose and vote significant changes. The state, as one of the partners in the process, will be an active participant in the discussion and decision. For example, on the state level, after seeing that small schools did not get a fair treatment, there was set aside previously a proportion of resources for them.

A comparative analysis between participatory budget in Porto Alegre and in the State of Rio Grande do Sul shows that the role of the institutional design becomes more crucial on a larger scale. (Avritzer/Navarro 2003: 38). Looking at the Cities' Conference this hypothesis should be easily confirmed. Without a clear definition of the expected results and a detailed map of the steps to be taken, it will be even difficult to mobilize people to participate. On the other hand, the complexity of the institutional design on larger scales may also be an obstacle to participation and favour "specialized" groups and social movements.

Building on local organizations and cultures of participation

The success of the experience in Porto Alegre has been attributed largely to the existence of a strong network of community organizations. However, research of other experiences shows that this is not a determinant factor. Participatory budget can also work at places with no or very little social and popular organizations. What these analyses also point out, however, is that in these places participatory budget is not an effective instrument to foster new organizations that in the long run might be able to sustain the process (Avritzer/Navarro 2003: 33).

Although Brazil is today a country known for its associative capacity and democratic participation, these new tendencies were not yet sufficient to overcome the historical pattern of injustice and domination (Guimarães 2004). The coordinator of the Participatory budget in Rio Grande do Sul, Iria Charão, in an interview, opened the map of the state on a table and started pointing to the different regions, telling about their cultural characteristics. At one place there is a strong tradition of community involvement from church choirs to soccer clubs. At another region there is a secular tradition of large

land owners with an economy based on cattle farms; industries and workers' unions are predominant in other regions, and so on.

An effective participatory process tries to build on the cultural inheritance of the region. The local ways of participation may indeed be very far from democratic, but the coming together with others has a pedagogical effect and can transform the individual cultures. The learning of participation cannot be accomplished without participation regardless of the specific cultures' inheritance or know how in this matter. There are simply no shortcuts.

Creating mechanisms of social control

In a classical study about social control, Morris Janowitz (1976) concludes that although sociologists have associated social control with social conformity and even with repression, it would be important to return to the original meaning which linked the concept with political legitimacy. Social control was not a conservative concept neither was it restricted to fiscalization. It corresponded to society's capacity of auto-regulation in view of previously established objectives. Still according to Janowitz there would be value commitments implicit in the idea of control, such as: a) the reduction of coercion through a system of legitimate authority; b) the elimination of human misery as the end purpose; c) a commitment to procedures in order to define the social objectives in a rational way.

The above considerations help us to have a clearer focus on the control of citizens in participatory social processes:

- a) It is quite inadequate to level social control with fiscalization. The concept suggests a co-responsibility in terms of the *res publica* based on a relationship of mutual trust. It is not always fair when governmental officials ask citizens to operate as fiscals of projects about which they had very little to say. In other words, it is again a way of blaming the victim for their own problems. Participatory budget tries to overcome this restricted view of social control since citizens are involved in the process of formulating goals and exploring alternatives.
- b) Social control is related to social justice and in this sense it turns itself critically on the factors that cause social injustice. The concept leads to

the question about the legitimacy of the institutional and legal apparatus and is not restricted to pointing out specific irregularities. Social control, as closely related to participation, points to the whole, to the functioning of the system. It is thus a task of the collective subject which takes up the challenge of working together. At the same time, it recognizes conflict as part of the social process. Persons and groups have different interests, sometimes contradictory, and social control is a means for making them explicit against the horizon of the common good.

Concluding remarks: Towards a new social contract

This paper is grounded on the conviction that it is possible to move towards another way of living together, supported by a new institutional order which guarantees a decent living for every person, and the maintenance of conditions for life itself on this planet. The concept of a new social contract in a sense summarizes this search, understanding that *new* usually refers much more to the search in itself as to a specific social or institutional configuration.

In the background of the discussion is the idea that the modern social contract has shown its shortcomings. Carol Pateman has argued that this social contract was indeed a contract made by men; Charles Mills has denounced it as a racial contract, which allowed silently the black population being turned into slaves or the Indians being driven away from their lands if not physically eliminated; Michel Serres reveals how this contract separated the humans from the world, history and culture from nature (Streck 2003).

A new social contract would have some characteristics which the participatory processes are enhancing. First, it would provide conditions for a more inclusive and egalitarian world. Social exclusion as the sense of not having a place in this world is today a pervasive reality especially in the Third World. Participatory processes have the potential to empower men and women to reclaim their place in their city.

The new social contract would be, at the same time, more respectful of the differences. Boaventura de Sousa Santos refers to an ecological thinking, comprehending a) an ecology of knowledge, overcoming the monoculture of the scientific way of knowing; b) an ecology of temporalities, overcoming the

monoculture of linear time; c) an ecology of recognition, breaking the naturalized classifications; d) an ecology trans-scale which allows dealing simultaneously with various scales; e) an ecology of productivity which allows for the recovery of alternative ways of producing. "Common to all these ecologies, comments Santos, is the idea that reality can not be reduced to what exists" (Santos 2004: 793).

It will also be a planetary contract. There are problems which require that we apply to policies the images that satellites transmit daily in weather forecasts and other news about the space: the world as a beautiful sphere traveling through the universe in the company other worlds about which we know very little. Maybe our salvation lies paradoxically in assuming what Edgar Morin calls the "gospel of damnation", i.e., the idea of assumed irrelevance as voyagers mounted on a small planet whose destiny nobody knows.¹²

Another social contract would also mean the redefinition of the boundaries between the local, the regional, the national and the global. Today it is difficult to differentiate the local from the global. For instance, the production of cheap shoes in China affects directly the life of communities in South Brazil who live from leather manufacture. The emission of toxic gas in one country may affect the ozone layer above a country quite distant from where the gas has been produced. Therefore, the new social contract will have to deal with the complexity of creating institutions that cross the levels of the local, regional, national and global.

Finally, the new social contract would be an expression of a new living together that extrapolates the boundaries of a contract. In the participatory budget it has been shown how solidarity can be fostered when people come together to discuss conditions for their common destiny. When life itself, in its many dimensions, is put as starting point, as well expressed in the words of Olívio Dutra (in Streck 2003: 113): "The budget is not a piece of fiction or simply technical, neither the mere fulfillment of legal formalities. The

¹² "Here is the bad news: we are lost, irremediably lost. If there is a gospel, that is, a good news, this news has to begin with the bad one: we are lost, but we have a roof, a house, a father/motherland: the little planet where life created its garden, where humans formed their home, where from now on humanity have to recognize their common house" (Morin 1995: 174).

budget, thus constructed, is related to life. The life of people and their communities, of their state (...) The participatory budget is not a ready recipe; it is an open, rich, instigating, provocative process; in the good sense it provokes us to be participants, it provokes us to be protagonists of politics and not anymore the object of the politics of others.”

This essay tries to highlight some of the possibilities for developing a participative public sphere. Its optimism springs not so much from real achievements and results, but from the proximity from people who are finding ways of making their voices to be heard by their neighbors and co-citizens, and by those invested with the power to decide. One of the challenges, it was shown, consists in bringing together consistent beliefs and effective strategies, of tying up utopian horizons and daily social practices.

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