

Popular Participation in the Management of Transportation: the Experience of Porto Alegre, Brazil

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RESUME: La décentralisation de la discussion et de la décision, mise en oeuvre à Porto Alegre, Brésil, en ce qui concerne les budgets municipaux, sous le nom de Budget Participatif (PB en anglais) a été largement divulguée, au Brésil et ailleurs. La participation des citoyens à cette gestion a évolué avec la division de la ville en 16 zones administratives et avec l'institution de rencontres thématiques. L'un des thèmes retenus est "circulation et transport". Cette communication se termine par des propositions visant à développer la participation et à améliorer la compétence des participants; certaines de ces propositions ont été récemment appliquées

ABSTRACT: The decentralization of discussion and decision carried out in Porto Alegre, Brazil, as regards the application of municipal funds, named Participatory Budget - PB, has been widely divulged, in Brazil and out of there. The participation of citizens in the management evolved with the subdivision of town in 16 administrative regions and the institution of "thematic meetings". One of that refers to "circulation and transportation". This communication concludes with proposes to qualify and increase the participation, some of those were recently applied.

1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to relate the form of popular participation in the management of transportation applied in Porto Alegre, capital of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. This paper also presents suggestions to extend and qualify such participation and its results.

In the first part a brief history of the system of Participatory Budget is given. Then, the paper describes in more details the operation of the structure that allows the participation of the community in the decisions concerning the municipal services, which are not object of the budget. The focus of this work are the Commissions of Traffic and Transportation formed in regional scope for discussing and sending the demands to the municipal managing institution.

In the development of this paper bibliographic sources were consulted concerning the participatory management in Porto Alegre and popular consultation in other localities. Interviews were also held with several agents involved in the process. The following of a cycle of the Participatory Budget, seminars and courses on the theme "Popular Participation" highly contributed for the understanding of the system and for the resulting propositions.

2 PARTICIPATORY MANAGEMENT IN PORTO ALEGRE

According to the Federal Constitution of 1988, which institutes the participation of citizens through the cooperation of representative associations in the municipal planning, popular initiative of bills of specific interest to the municipality, to the city or to the neighborhoods, through the manifestation of, at least, 5% of the electorate, the organic law of the city of Porto Alegre (1990) guarantees the "participation of the community, starting from the regions of the municipality, in the planning, definition and supervision stages of the accomplishment of the pluriannual plan, the budgetary guiding lines and the annual budget". The system of Participatory Budget (henceforth PB) has been implemented since 1989 with the receiving of regional demands among the existing organized communities. The structure that allows this participation has evolved since then, also serving to assist the community regarding public services in general. The Regionalization and Decentralization Administrative Program, whose criteria are defined in the Lei Complementar (a complementary law to the constitution) number 273 (Porto Ale-

gre, 1992), promoted the division of the municipal territory and created the Regional Administrative Centers (henceforth CAR).

In order to have an overview of the way in which the population of Porto Alegre participates in the municipal management it is necessary to get to know the system of PB. Its annual cycle starts in March and goes until January of the following year. In the initial stage, with unlimited participation, the accounts of the previous year are rendered and themes are brought into discussion. In an intermediate stage, in which the participation is representative, the priorities of each region and of the whole city are defined. From this definition the Planning Office prepares the budgetary proposal. The proposal goes back for discussion in the Participatory Budgeting Council (Conselho do Orçamento Participativo, henceforth COP), which then sends it to the Mayor and to the Chamber of Deputies (Camara de Vereadores) to be voted until the end of November. The council and the municipal secretaries prepare the Investment Plan until December.

Organized as regional and thematic assemblies the debates concern thematic priorities and demands, which should be categorized as policies/guiding lines, actions/events, works/investments or studies/projects. About 11% of the municipal budget is for investments. The allocation of these resources is defined with the participation of the population.

Further descriptions of the system of PB adopted in Porto Alegre can be found in Pozzobon (2001), PMPA (2001), Perondi & Domínguez (2000) and Green (1999).

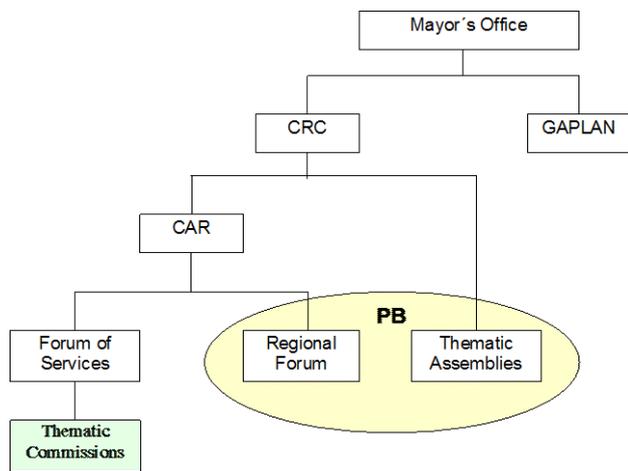


Figure 1 – Participatory Management in Porto Alegre

The structure working on the preparation of the PB is the same one that assists the community concerning public services and is represented as a scheme in Figure 1. Directly related to the Mayor's Office are the Planning Office (henceforth GAPLAN), which prepares the government proposal for the annual budget, conciliating the community and the institutional demands, and the Coordination

of Relations with the Community (henceforth CRC), which assists the public and coordinates the CARs.

The political and administrative representation of the Mayoralty (Prefeitura) in the regions is done through the CARs, with emphasis in the articulation of the PB. It also functions as an advanced post, where it is possible to ask for services and information as well as make complaints. To perform these functions the Centers count upon a variable number of administrative assistants who belong to the staff of the Prefeitura, a Regional Coordinator of the Participatory Budget (henceforth CROP) for each region and a coordinator from the CAR, these last ones, positions in commission, nominated by the Executive. There are eight CARs, each one of them serving an average of two of the sixteen existing regions (see Figure 2).

The regional assemblies of the PB are organized and supervised by the CAR. A counterpoint to the regionalization, with the aim of incorporating a global view of the city to the popular participation, was the institution, since 1994, of the thematic assemblies (Pozzobon, 2001), in which themes that affect more than one region are discussed.



Figure 2 – CAR and the Regions of Participatory Budget

Low cost services are demanded directly in the CAR and services requiring a significant investment must be approved in the PB. Therefore there are two fora in this structure: one for discussing the demands of investments, the Forum of Delegates of the PB (henceforth FDPB); and one for the demands of services, the Forum of Services (henceforth FS), which is organized by the CAR with the participation of the PB delegates and community members. With the objective of joining the demands of the region concerning the same theme commissions are composed, whose members are, in general but not necessarily, members elected to the PB. The initiative may come

from the community, from the CAR, or from a municipal secretary. However, the creation of the commission depends on the interest and availability of residents.

3 THE COMMISSIONS OF TRANSPORTATION

We have, this way, reached the focus of this paper: the commissions of transportation formed by the regional communities to defend their interest at EPTC (Public Enterprise of Transportation and Circulation), the managing agency of traffic and transportation of the city of Porto Alegre, whose Director-President is the Municipal Secretary of Transportation. The participation of the community in the management of public transportation and circulation takes place in two stages besides the PB: in the Fora of Services, where the company is represented; and in meetings convened by the commissions of transportation.

The composition of commissions of transportation is not obligatory. Its constitution is flexible regarding the number of members, periodicity and local of meetings, and to the own existence of commissions. In some cases the commission is related to the region, in others to the CAR, representing two regions. There are no restrictions concerning the participants who are, in general, delegates or members of the community indicated by the CAR or associations. The regions where there are commissions of traffic and transportation and their respective composition are listed in Table 1.

The commission of transportation constitutes a channel of communication through which the community can inform, from its point of view, its needs and details of the situation, which are not perceived in technical visits or in statistic data. It differs from research by the personal contact between the municipal employees and the population, allowing the interaction, discussion, and argumentation, having influence in the elaboration of the proposal. The final result is qualified, due to the commitment of both parts, a consequence of the joint proposal, therefore reducing the possibility of frustration and error.

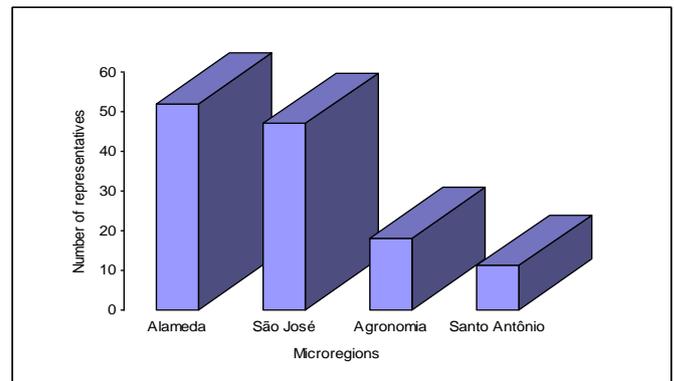
CAR	Region	Commission of Transportation (members)
1	Centro	-
2	Noroeste/ Humaita/ Navegantes/ Ilhas	27
3	Norte-Eixo Baltazar	39
4	Leste/ Nordeste	13
5	Glória/ Cruzeiro/ Cristal	-
6	Centro-Sul/Sul	10

		Sul	
7	Partenon/ Lomba do Pinheiro	Partenon	6
		Lomba do Pinheiro	3
8	Restinga/ Extremo Sul	Restinga	7
		Extremo Sul	-

Table 1 – Commissions of Traffic and transportation in existence in May/2001

One of the motivations found for the participation in commissions is the demand of assistance to individual needs. In such case, the participation may end when the demand is dealt with, or, on the other hand, it may create a wider view of the problems of the population as a whole. The remaining of the members of a commission in the same activity promotes the familiarization with the company's operation.

Figure 3 - Partenon: microregions and representation



tion, with the customer's service and even with the technical criteria.

Considering the fact that the task is entirely voluntary, the participants in the commissions are not asked for any kind of formal representation. Even though the commissions are recognized as legitimate in their relation with the public administration. The expectation is that, by being a resident at the region, the person knows the place well and maintains contact with the local community.

The importance of the commissions has origins in their contribution for a better assistance of the community demands and for the reduction of waste of time and work due to the reaction to inadequate projects. However, more important than the institutionalization of the commissions, it is to feel the need in the region, and also the interest and availability of residents. The contact of EPTC with the commissions is made through the Communitarian Advisory Board that mediates the dealing with the priorities of the community demands. The demands brought up by the advisory board are then distributed towards the proper sector and, from there they follow the usual procedure as a process, with informal priority.

Although the nature of the public service and public employee is the dealing with the needs of the community, the contact of EPTC technicians with the communities is not always part of the process. In the PB, their presence is restricted to the presentation of the technical criteria in the beginning of the

annual cycle, and in the evaluation of technical viability of the demands classified as priorities on the 2nd round. In the Fora of Services and in meetings with the commissions, the task of establishing contact with the community can or cannot be given to the Communitarian Advisory Board, depending on personal availability.

A region that has a commission of traffic and transportation is Partenon, where an analysis of demands was made in the year 2000. The region is subdivided into four microregions: Santo Antônio, Alameda, São José and Agronomia. As most members of the commission are delegates of the PB, it is interesting to notice that the representation of the microregions is not uniform (see Figure 3).

This distribution is reflected in the composition of the commission, having also influence upon the amount of local demands. Therefore, the feedback expected from part of the commission is limited in terms of cooperation in projects in the area least represented.

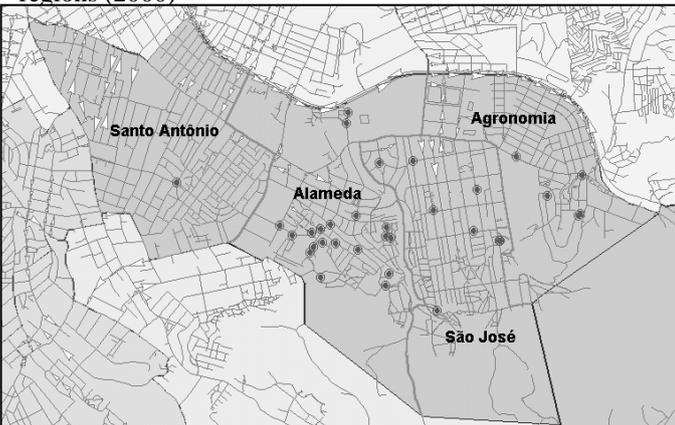
It is possible to notice a tendency in the distribution of demands straight related to the representation of the area (see Figure 4). Besides, in each region a concentration is verified, possibly because the representatives know the area. This may be a symptom that the representativity is localized, what, by itself, is not considered to be negative; it is a stage in the process of evolution of the participation. In search of a way of supplying the local needs, the contact with other interests arouses the collective conscience (Pozzobon, 2001). The proposal is to accelerate the process of consciousness raising.

4 PROPOSALS

Based on the analysis of the context in which the participation of the population in the municipal management takes place nowadays, some proposals were put forward in order to contribute to the evolution and qualification of the process.

Regarding the relation of EPTC with the community, there are two alternatives: the first, in which the communitarian advisory board is the only link or

Figure 4 - Partenon – Concentration of demands in the microregions (2000)



contact – this alternative considers the dealing with the demands irrespective of technical evaluation, in a fast way, since it eliminates the slowest steps of the process. The second alternative counts upon the participation of technicians, in which it is intended to combine knowledge and the interests of the community to the planning, being it more qualified once it considers wider factors than the object of demand.

As the participation in the thematic commissions is entirely voluntary, it is possible to believe that their components are interested in the theme. Thus, an invitation from EPTC for meetings, reunions or courses on transportation would probably be accepted. The intention is to give basic notions on transportation safety, equipments, circulation, means of transportation, legislation, and operation and guiding lines of EPTC.

The aim is not exactly to qualify the commission to make technical evaluations, but mainly to inform in order to expand people's view to make easier the identification and selection of priorities of their problems. Another important matter to be approached by the commissions would be the awareness of the meaning of their work, their function, the representativity and legitimacy of the members.

Even the non-existence of a commission in a certain region might be a symptom of lack of preparation of the population in the identification or evaluation of the importance of its problems. The representation of all regions is regarded as being important because the fact that there are demands to be supplied is unquestionable. For this, it is justified the encouragement from the part of the managing agency for the creation of commissions of traffic and transportation.

It is worthless, however, the expansion and qualification of participation if the governmental agencies are not structured to receive and process the increasing of demands. At present their internal organization presents an independent format, with limited capacity of reply.

In order to give transparency to the work performed by EPTC concerning the dealing with the population demands, it is proposed that the information collected and systematized be made available to the commissions through the CARs - this information concern statistics of accidents, evolution of indexes of the region and maps. Moreover, the projects for the region should be presented in all their phases of development to aggregate the contribution of residents, who certainly have more knowledge of the area than the technicians.

The interaction between the community and the public sector already established and with intention of being improved, could produce significant progress in the final service and function as a motivation for more participation. This way, a "virtuous cycle" is formed, if the effects are really positive; otherwise it will be a vicious cycle. To guarantee

positive effects, the proposal is a systematic evaluation of the results obtained, by consulting the community.

5 CONCLUSIONS

From the viewpoint of the managing agency, the existence of resident commissions to deal with specific matters represents an important contribution to the task of evaluating and planning of solutions. However, proposals to modify the system of participatory management are only acceptable if they serve the interests of the community. It is advisable to be careful so that the proposals do not become a barrier or a filter between the demands and the sectors responsible for the services; the aim is for them to function as a facilitator for both sides.

The proposals presented in this paper have origin in the interest of qualifying the form of participatory management carried out in Porto Alegre. Although the focus is the management of transportation, the proposal equally applies to other areas of the public service.

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