

*Different participatory experiences, different participants? A study of direct democracy initiatives in the State of Santa Catarina, Brazil*

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Abstract

Research data about management councils operating inside Brazilian municipalities have been suggesting a phenomenon of “elitization of participation”. Participatory Budgeting (PB) experiences, on the other hand, have shown a much more “popular” participant profile, invalidating reports that indicate a close relationship between poverty and non-participation. This study addresses the following questions: How has the poorest segment of the urban population been incorporated in institutional processes and spaces of political participation? How to explain the differences in participants’ socioeconomic profiles as observed in the management councils and PB? What are the variables or determinant factors of the greater or lesser inclusion of the poorest segment of the population in participatory experiences?

Keywords: political participation, participatory budgeting, management council

How has the poorest segment of the population been incorporated in institutional processes and spaces of political participation in Brazilian cities? How does one explain the differences in participants’ socioeconomic profiles as observed in the management councils (MCs) and in the participatory budgeting (PB) processes? What are the variables or determinant factors of the greater or lesser inclusion of the poorest segment of the population in participatory experiences? Working with data gathered from surveys conducted in several municipalities in the State of Santa Catarina (in Brazil’s South) we seek to understand the differences in the profile of participants in direct or popular

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democracy mechanisms. We assess whether MCs lead to the “elitization of participation” and if PB would attract participants from the most excluded segments of the population.

The literature about political participation generally focuses on explaining the factors that determine participation in conventional contexts (election periods) or unconventional forms (i.e. protest movements). Among the multiple factors raised as determinants, socioeconomic status stands out. The positive relation between greater income and educational level with greater political participation has been affirmed and reaffirmed in studies on the subject (Milbrath, 1965). It is generally understood that individuals with a higher status show a greater interest in politics, have access to more information and are endowed with more resources and abilities. They are also more aware of the importance of politics and have a more acute sense of duty and political effectiveness (Verba e Nie, 1987).

Data about Brazil show that this model explains much about political participation rates by socioeconomic groups. Research studies such as Moisés (1995) have identified that interest in politics and adhesion to democratic values, for instance, are positively associated with educational level and income. IBGE (the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics) data on political party preferences and participation in associations also corroborate this argument (Schwartzman & Reis, 2004).

It is certain that many other variables have a role in a phenomenon as complex as participation. Issues related to identity (Pizzorno, 1985), the role of the political elite (Huntington & Nelson, 1977), the individuals’ rational choice (Olson, 1999), among several others, have expanded and made more complex the explanatory bases of the phenomenon. However, the models available were not constructed, in our opinion, to analyze a type of political participation that does not fit in the conventional/unconventional classification but rather represents an important innovation in relations between the State and society, in countries like Brazil. We are referring here particularly to the experiences of Management Councils and Participatory Budgeting.

Despite an orientation toward direct participation (through forum events, for instance), in the case of the management councils the model is anchored predominantly in the form of representation realized through civil society organizations. The participatory budgeting model, on the other hand, outlines a dynamic that comes close to a pyramidal form of articulation between direct participation and representation. From a

set of data on council and PB participant profiles in Santa Catarina municipalities, it is clear that, while participatory budgeting incorporates in its institutional framework elements that favor the inclusion of the population's poorest sectors, the management councils by their structure promote a more elitist kind of participation.

In a search to understand who takes part in these spaces and what are the factors determining this type of participation, this study aims to point out the main variables which we believe explain the differences in participant profiles within participatory budgeting and council experiences.

To begin, we have thought appropriate that the article briefly contextualize and present the data regarding the socioeconomic profile of council and PB participants (representatives). Then, the article will briefly review the theories attempting to explain the phenomenon of participation, keeping in mind that, as Gusfield (1994, p 93) points out, "no theory is valid for all circumstances". The complexity of the participation phenomenon, as specialists testify, requires the mobilization of variables and analytical categories that suit the different types and contexts of participation. For the present study, as will be shown in the third section, a central analytical key concerns the structure of political opportunities and its several implications.

## **I. Participant profiles in council and participatory budgeting experiences**

Public policy management councils are councils supported by national law. They have a more structured and systemic character and are expected to act in three governmental spheres (municipal, state and national). They have "legally established attributions regarding the formulation and implementation of policies in their respective governmental spheres, comprising the practices of planning and oversight of activities. They are also conceived as public forums to gather demands and make pacts between specific interests of diverse social groups and as a way of broadening the participation of segments with less access to the State apparatus"<sup>2</sup>. Their main goal is the universalization of social rights. Among them, the councils that stand out are Health, Social Work, and Children and Adolescents Rights.

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<sup>2</sup> Comunidade Solidária/IBAM/IPEA.

Two characteristics of participation in these spaces are worth noting: participation through representative civil society organizations and entities, and parity<sup>3</sup> in the representation of civil society and the State. By observing the spaces' respective regulations, it is possible to ascertain the extent of collective representation through non-governmental entities<sup>4</sup> (Children and Adolescents) or representative organizations (Social Work), and to note the existence of parity either between the State and society (Children and Adolescent; Social Work) or between users and other sectors (Health).

Therefore, the type of social representation performed at council meetings is a key element. Representation by entities, or civil society organizations, is anchored diffusely on the legitimacy of these organizations to act, in various ways, on behalf of the diverse social "causes", and to raise attention to the demands and interests of social groups and sectors historically excluded from political decision-making processes.

Participatory Budgeting (PB) is an experience of popular participation in discussions and definitions of the public budget which, unlike the councils established by law, is directly dependent on the government's political project<sup>5</sup>. The PB experience in Porto Alegre stands out not only for its pioneering role in establishing a new paradigm of relations between public power and society, but for its ability to expand, renovate, and maintain continuity across time. In effect, Porto Alegre has been the protagonist of an experience<sup>6</sup> – serving as an example to many other cities in the country<sup>7</sup> – that has as its goal to realize the premise that the population should not only be consulted about the investment demands of the public power, but also be empowered to deliberate on priorities, participating actively in the execution and monitoring of public budget.

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<sup>3</sup> In the Health Council users have the heaviest representation, occupying 50% of the seats.

<sup>4</sup> Although the Health Council legislation does not specifically address collective representation, the list of representatives makes this dimension clear.

<sup>5</sup> Although several political parties have, in different ways, implemented participatory mechanisms, and in some cases even before redemocratization (as in Lages, a mid-size city in the South of Brazil), the centrality of the PT in the process is associated with its political program and the emphasis on "popular democracy" that has characterized its administrations (Meneguello, 1989). It was with the victory on the 1988 municipal elections in the capital and in important cities of the state of São Paulo (São Bernardo do Campo, Santo André, Diadema, Campinas, Piracicaba and Santos), as well as in the capitals of Rio Grande do Sul and Espírito Santo, that a set of participatory mechanisms were effectively instituted, such as participatory budgeting.

<sup>6</sup> In the context of the "popular administration" led by the PT since its victory in the 1989 municipal elections, the PB of Porto Alegre has been pointed by different social and political actors as a "strategy for the institution of citizenship in Brazil" (Fedozzi, 1996), raising civil society to the level of active political subjects.

<sup>7</sup> The proliferation of PB policies in the country and abroad (Uruguay, Argentina, etc) occurs as left-wing parties ascend to power. Some PB experiences have been developed by other political parties or representations and present adaptations and/or specificities according to different projects and political interests.

Despite local particularities, participation in participatory budgeting is realized in different phases and through forums with different degrees of institutionality, either as regards obedience to a set of written rules, level of connection with public power, or character of decision making. In this sense, community forums have the lowest degree of institutionalization and highest level of autonomy. They are a heterogeneous group of spaces and meetings that gather citizens and community organizations (neighborhood associations, mothers' clubs, cultural and religious groups, etc.) organized according to distinct identity bases, though the majority are local or regional territorial associations (neighborhood associations, popular councils).

It is against this backdrop that the institutionality of the PB defines itself - grounded on a group of participatory spaces: assemblies (regional and thematic)<sup>8</sup>, delegate forums<sup>9</sup>, and the Participatory Budget Council<sup>10</sup>.

Let us look at the data on the participants' socioeconomic profile (delegates and council members within participatory experiences).

With respect to the management councils, the data<sup>11</sup> indicate that, in general, participants have much higher income and educational level than the average population. The survey analyzed by Santos Junior, Azevedo and Ribeiro (2004, p.29) shows that only 11% of council members had low education level (up to elementary school) while 62% had higher level (complete or incomplete university studies)<sup>12</sup>. As regards income profile, a figure above the national average was found: 65% earned salaries above five minimum wages and 38% above ten minimum wages, though there were income variations according to council, city and the segment represented (2004, p.30-1).

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<sup>8</sup> These are first level forums that gather citizens, organized groups and public power, aiming to present the PB and the government's resources and spending to the population, as well as to decide who will compose the delegate forum (regional and thematic).

<sup>9</sup> These are 2nd level forums that have an intermediate degree of institutionalization, since the delegates, chosen by the population, are granted greater autonomy to define the organization structure and the priority criteria for the demands.

<sup>10</sup> This co-management forum has an even higher degree of institutionalization since it is bound by a set of norms (Internal Regiment). It is the central forum where the municipal budgeting decisions are made.

<sup>11</sup> There are several data sources. One is a national research carried out by the Urban Policies Observatory and Municipal Management program in the metropolitan regions of Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte, São Paulo, Recife and Belém. According to Santos Junior Azevedo and Ribeiro (2004), a total of 1540 municipal council members and members of different sectorial councils were interviewed. Another source are research studies carried out in the Health, Education, Social Work and Children and Adolescents councils in several cities of Santa Catarina.

<sup>12</sup> Despite this high profile, the authors would like to underline some differences, such as regards the profile of government representatives (81% with high educational level) against non-governmental representatives (51% with high level of education). The regional differences also reflect regional inequalities within the country.

On the other hand, Participatory Budgeting participants appear to have a much more “popular” profile (Avritzer, 2002, Borba and Luchmann, 2007, Fedozzi, 1996, Abers, 1997). This fact contradicts the idea of a direct relation between poverty and non-participation. Despite important variations in the several experiences, the PB of Porto Alegre can be used as a reference. According to Chaves (2000), the majority of participants can be considered to fit in the “popular” category: a significant part have a family income of up to three minimum wages (39,6%) and level of education of up to elementary school (53,9%, including 5,5% with no instruction at all).

Let us now look at the results of the research carried out in the state of Santa Catarina. A few comparisons can be established from the data on income and level of education of the delegates and council representatives of three municipalities (Biguaçu, Itajaí and Chapecó).

With respect to educational level, much of the electorate has been educated up to elementary school and/or learned to read and write without attending any formal education. As for income, the majority of the population that receives some kind of income is within the salary range of 1 to 3 minimum wages. It must be taken into account that a significant part of the population in the three municipalities does not have any income at all (39,61% in Biguaçu, 33,56% in Chapecó and 36,60% in Itajaí). These figures are also valid for the state of Santa Catarina as a whole.

**Table 1. Educational Level and Income in Santa Catarina (%)**

| Educational Level*        |            |                                       |                    |                       |                     |          |        |                |        |
|---------------------------|------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|----------|--------|----------------|--------|
| Municipality              | Illiterate | Can read/write + Incompl. Elem. Educ. | Compl. Elem. Educ. | Incompl. Secun. Educ. | Compl. Secun. Educ. | Incompl. | Compl. | Did not answer | Total  |
| Biguaçu                   | 2,25       | 53,68                                 | 10,53              | 17,93                 | 12,29               | 1,52     | 1,80   | 0,00           | 100,00 |
| Chapecó                   | 2,29       | 46,41                                 | 10,77              | 20,16                 | 12,64               | 3,59     | 4,14   | 0,00           | 100,00 |
| Itajaí                    | 1,50       | 41,05                                 | 14,25              | 18,69                 | 15,73               | 4,36     | 4,42   | 0,00           | 100,00 |
| Santa Catarina            | 2,19       | 49,74                                 | 11,89              | 18,01                 | 12,62               | 3,07     | 3,64   | 0,00           | 100,00 |
| Income (in minimum wages) |            |                                       |                    |                       |                     |          |        |                |        |

Source: Regional Electoral Court (Voters' educational level), IBGE *Cities* (income of over 10 yr-olds) - <http://www.ibge.gov.br/cidadesat/default.php>. IBGE *States* (economically active, over 10 yr-olds) -

| <b>Income</b>     | <b>No Income</b> | <b>Less than 1 MW</b> | <b>1 to 3 MWs</b> | <b>3 to 5 MWs</b> | <b>5 to 10 MWs</b> | <b>Over 10 MWs</b> | <b>DK/DA</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|-------------------|------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Biguaçu**         | 39,61            | 10,43                 | 26,55             | 11,48             | 8,72               | 3,21               | 0,0          | 100,0        |
| Chapecó**         | 33,56            | 16,27                 | 27,45             | 9,34              | 8,28               | 5,10               | 0,0          | 100,0        |
| Itajaí**          | 36,60            | 8,95                  | 27,50             | 11,19             | 10,14              | 5,63               | 0,0          | 100,0        |
| Santa Catarina*** | 11,0             | 12,0                  | 44,0              | 15,0              | 9,0                | 3,0                |              | 94,0         |

<http://www.ibge.gov.br/estadosat/temas.php?sigla=sc&tema=pnad&titulo=Popula%C3%A7%C3%A3o%20e%20Domic%C3%ADlios%20-%20PNAD%202004>

\* Educational level of population eligible to vote. Data from 2006.

\*\* Income data from 2001, calculated for workers older than 10 years old.

\*\*\* Income levels for Santa Catarina are from 2004(PNAD), and do not reach 100% because only workers older than 10yrs old were considered.

Let us now analyze the income and educational level of the management council and participatory budgeting representatives of these municipalities, according to the data so far available.

**Table 2 – Educational Level and Income in Santa Catarina’s Management Councils (%)**

| <b>Educational Level</b>         |                             |                             |                             |                            |                            |                       |              |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| <b>Municipality</b>              | <b>Compl. Second. Educ.</b> | <b>Incomp Second. Educ.</b> | <b>Compl. Second. Educ.</b> | <b>Incomp Higher Educ.</b> | <b>Compl. Higher Educ.</b> | <b>Did not answer</b> | <b>Total</b> |
| Biguaçu                          | 5,0                         | 5,0                         | 20,0                        | 5,0                        | 45,0                       | -                     | 100,0        |
| Chapecó                          | 2,85                        | -                           | 12,85                       | 7,14                       | 75,71                      | -                     | 100,0        |
| Itajaí                           | 4,68                        | 7,81                        | 6,25                        | 10,93                      | 67,18                      | -                     | 100,0        |
| Santa Catarina ***               | 0,9                         | 1,7                         | 3,8                         | -                          | 91,9                       | -                     | 100,0        |
| <b>Income (in minimum wages)</b> |                             |                             |                             |                            |                            |                       |              |
|                                  | <b>Less than 1 MW</b>       | <b>1 to 3</b>               | <b>3 to 5</b>               | <b>5 to 10</b>             | <b>Over 10</b>             | <b>DK/DA</b>          | <b>Total</b> |
| Biguaçu*                         | 5,0                         | 25,0                        | 30,0                        | 30,0                       | 10,0                       | 0,0                   | 100,0        |
| Chapecó**                        | -                           | -                           | 34,28                       | 31,42                      | 10,0                       | 24,28                 | 100,0        |
| Itajaí**                         | -                           | -                           | 26,15                       | 32,30                      | 23,07                      | 18,46                 | 100,0        |
| Santa Catarina***                | 0,4                         | 32,1                        | 38,5                        | 22,6                       | 2,1                        | 4,3                   | 100,0        |

Source: For Biguaçu and Education Councils in Santa Catarina, authors survey. Data collected in 2007. For Chapecó and Itajaí, data from the research study “Management Councils and Empowerment”, coordinated by prof. Agueda Wendhausen (Univali). Data collected in 2006 and 2007.

\* Biguaçu data refer to the Health and Social Work Councils.

\* The income data for Itajaí and Chapecó were calculated using a different scale, with the first area ranging from 1 to 5 minimum wages. That is why all respondents are in the 3 to 5 MW area. Itajaí e Chapecó data refer to the Health, Social Work, Elderly and Children and Adolescent Municipal Councils.

\*\*\* Data from the Education Municipal Councils of the State of Santa Catarina, collected by Eli Terezinha Januário and her team during the Regional Meetings for the Training of Council Members.

The data reiterate studies suggesting that the profile of council representatives points to a sort of participatory elite, characterized by higher income and educational level when compared with the average of the population (Santos Junior, Azevedo and Ribeiro, 2004; Fuks, Perissinoto and Souza, 2004; Tatagiba, 2002).

The table below shows the profiles of PB council members in some Santa Catarina municipalities (we have highlighted the three municipalities also analyzed in the study of the management councils' composition):

**Table 3 – Educational Level and Income of Participatory Budgeting Council Members in Santa Catarina (%)**

| <b>Educational Level</b>         |                   |                             |                           |                               |                             |                              |                            |                       |              |
|----------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| <b>Municipality</b>              | <b>Illiterate</b> | <b>Incompl. Elem. Educ.</b> | <b>Compl. Elem. Educ.</b> | <b>Incompl. Second. Educ.</b> | <b>Compl. Second. Educ.</b> | <b>Incompl. Higher Educ.</b> | <b>Compl. Higher Educ.</b> | <b>Did not answer</b> | <b>Total</b> |
| Biguaçu                          | 0,0               | 37,0                        | 19,6                      | 8,7                           | 26,1                        | 0,0                          | 8,7                        |                       | 100,0        |
| Chapecó                          | 0,0               | 13,64                       | 9,09                      | 22,73                         | 0,0                         | 4,55                         | 50,0                       | 0,0                   | 100,0        |
| Itajaí                           | 0,0               | 6,2                         | 12,5                      | 12,5                          | 31,3                        | 6,3                          | 28,1                       | 3,1                   | 100,0        |
| Blumenau                         | 0,0               | 25,0                        | 8,33                      | 16,67                         | 0,0                         | 0,0                          | 16,67                      | 33,33                 | 100,0        |
| Concordia                        | 0,0               | 20,0                        | 20,0                      | 20,0                          | 6,67                        | 33,33                        | 0,0                        | 0,0                   | 100,0        |
| Criciúma                         | 4,0               | 16,0                        | 12,0                      | 4,0                           | 28,0                        | 16,0                         | 20,0                       | 0,0                   | 100,0        |
| Guaraciaba                       | 0,0               | 66,66                       | 11,11                     | 3,70                          | 11,11                       | 7,41                         | 0,0                        | 0,0                   | 100,0        |
| <b>Income (in minimum wages)</b> |                   |                             |                           |                               |                             |                              |                            |                       |              |
|                                  |                   | <b>No Income</b>            | <b>Less than 1</b>        | <b>1 to 3</b>                 | <b>3 to 5</b>               | <b>5 to 10</b>               | <b>Over 10</b>             | <b>DK/DA</b>          | <b>Total</b> |
| Biguaçu                          |                   | 0,0                         | 4,5                       | 56,8                          | 27,3                        | 6,8                          | 4,5                        | 0,0                   | 100,0        |
| Chapecó                          |                   | 0,0                         | 0,0                       | 36,36                         | 31,82                       | 18,18                        | 13,64                      | 0,0                   | 100,0        |



|            |  |     |       |       |       |       |       |     |       |
|------------|--|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-------|
| Itajaí     |  | 0,0 | 3,1   | 25,0  | 43,8  | 6,3   | 12,5  | 9,4 | 100,0 |
| Blumenau   |  | 0,0 | 0,0   | 33,33 | 0,0   | 41,67 | 25,00 | 0,0 | 100,0 |
| Concordia  |  | 0,0 | 13,33 | 26,67 | 33,33 | 20,00 | 6,67  | 0,0 | 100,0 |
| Criciúma   |  | 0,0 | 8,0   | 44,0  | 20,0  | 8,0   | 16,0  | 0,0 | 100,0 |
| Guaraciaba |  | 0,0 | 18,52 | 22,22 | 37,04 | 11,11 | 7,41  | 0,0 | 100,0 |

Source: Authors' research. Data collected in 2004 and 2005 for Chapecó, Itajaí, Blumenau, Concórdia and Criciúma. Data collected in 2007 for Biguaçu.

Data on the Participatory Budgeting experience in the three municipalities show that participants come from less privileged classes. They are distributed across all income and educational level ranges, but are concentrated on the 1 to 5 minimum wage and intermediate educational level range. Numbers are reasonably evenly distributed across the educational levels, but Guaraciaba stands out with 66,66% of participants barely knowing to read and write or having incomplete secondary education<sup>13</sup>. It is also worth noting that the income range of 1 to 3 minimum wages is relatively predominant within the PB. In general, PB experiences are able to promote the political inclusion of sectors with intermediate income (though not of the no-income), with a distribution that comes close to the national average. The same is true for the educational level dimension which, despite showing greater variation, comes closer to the profiles of the average population, unlike those observed in the Councils.

The data presented so far show that different institutional forms of participation are able to recruit different types of actors as regards socioeconomic profile. The question is what are the factors conditioning such differences. On the next sections we will outline some possible answers, with no intention of wrapping up the subject. First, we will offer a brief review of the theories of participation, followed by an introduction to the concept of “structure of political opportunity”.

## **II. Theories of political participation: centrality, identity and rational choice**

To speak of political participation, it is necessary first to identify the variables underlying an individual's decision to participate politically (through conventional and

<sup>13</sup> Which can be explained by the lower level of education and income in this municipality compared to the others.

unconventional channels).<sup>14</sup> Avelar (2004), for instance, presents four theoretical models that seek to explain participation<sup>15</sup>, which exemplifies the amount of controversy and analytical variations involved in the matter.

Conversely, Robert Dahl seeks reasons for the low levels of participation within democracies. He suggests three reasons “why an individual does not get involved in politics” (Dahl, 1970, p. 91):

1. An individual is unlikely to get involved in politics if he affords little value to the rewards derived from political involvement in comparison to those he expects to get from other types of human activity (...).
2. An individual is unlikely to get involved in politics if he feels he has little chance of influencing the end result of things and changing the balance of the reward scale through his political involvement (...).
3. An individual is unlikely to get involved in politics if he believes the general outcome will be satisfactory for himself regardless of his particular involvement (...). (bolds in the original).

According to Bobbio (1992), a plausible theory explaining the variety of results regarding political participation has not yet been formulated, but studies point to a relatively constant set of characteristics in participant profiles:

In general, results indicate higher levels of political participation among men, the highest classes, the higher educated, people living in urban centers as opposed to rural areas,

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<sup>14</sup> The distinction between conventional and unconventional participation is found in Baquero (1981) and Baquero and Borba (2005, p. 12): “The specialized literature distinguishes two types of political participation: *traditional* or *conventional* participation includes voting in elections, plebiscites and referenda and participation in political campaigns. Because it refers to activities pertaining to governmental decision-making mechanisms, it is also known as institutional political participation. *Unconventional* political participation on the other hand is defined by actions and activities that take place outside of the formal channels and institutional arena, whose objective is to exert pressure on governmental policies. Demonstrations and protests, petitions addressed to public bodies, donations to NGOs, participation in feminist, environmental and human rights movements and boycotts of supermarket products are some of the actions indicated in literature as new forms of participation and political activism”. Avelar (2004, p. 225) considers that three are the channels for participation: “the electoral channel, which encompasses all kinds of electoral and partisan participation allowed by the constitutional rules and electoral system of each country; the corporate channels, which are intermediary forms of category organization and class associations defending their own interests within the sphere of governments and state systems; and the organizational channel, which consists of non-institutionalized forms of collective organization such as social movements, political subcultures, the activities of civic non-governmental organizations, experiences of public management in partnership with organized groups of the society, like for instance participatory budgeting, management councils, etc”.

<sup>15</sup> Namely: *centrality*; *class consciousness*; *rational choice*; *identity* (2004).

families where politics is a prominent topic, members of organizations connected to politics even if indirectly, people with easier access to politically-charged environments or politically-oriented people, etc. (p.890).

The three authors mentioned above agree that many are the variables affecting an individual decision to participate. These variables as described in the literature might be summarized as follows<sup>16</sup>:

1. The individual's centrality in the social system (Milbrath, 1965; Verba and Nie, 1987). Bueno and Fialho (2007) retrieve the two dimensions of centrality - the *objective* dimension, generally concerning occupational status, urban origin, income and education level; and the *subjective dimension*, related to "attitudes and beliefs regarding the political system, such as interest in politics, perception of marginality, self-exclusion, among others".
2. The associative dimension, or the identitarian context in which the individual is inserted (types of socialization, networks of participation, etc.). Pizzorno (1985) highlights the connection between identity and participation. This literature gained particular strength with studies on the "new social movements" (Touraine, 1994), "civil society" (Cohen & Arato, 1992), and more recently with the propagation of Putnam's theses on the "social capital" (Putnam, 1995). Despite the recognizable epistemological and normative differences between these theories, a common nucleus can be identified in the argument that the particular networks of social interaction developed by an individual throughout his/her life constitute an identity which is accountable for the individual's higher or lower inclination towards political participation;
3. The dimension of rationality. According to the theory of rational choice, *non*-participation is rational, especially when it comes to the distribution of public goods. Participation involves choices and, in some contexts, the individual is influenced by the possibility of obtaining "selective benefits" in his decision to engage in participatory practices (Olson, 1999).

The retrieval of rationality brings to the fore a consideration regarding the costs and opportunities of political participation. According to Held (1987), the definition of

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<sup>16</sup> We believe that any discussion of participation has a point of departure in Dahl's warning, in the beginning of the 6th chapter of his *Polyarchy's*: "Evidently, a country with extreme inequalities in political resources is highly likely to show extreme inequalities in the exercise of power and therefore, a hegemonic regime" (1997).

passive as opposed to active citizens may be grounded much more solidly on a lack of opportunities for participation than on the individuals' alleged natural passivity<sup>17</sup>. There are evidences, he says, that many people do not engage in participation because of a distrust or skepticism toward politics. Furthermore, participation involves costs (Pateman, 1992) which make it impossible for large population contingents - in Brazil the category of the excluded. These groups, if not excluded by material difficulties, are silenced by cognitive and symbolic mechanisms.

So far we have established a few propositions regarding the factors conditioning participation:

4. Participation is conditioned by the dimension of the individual's centrality in the social system. In addition to the objective dimension, this centrality also manifests itself on the subjective plane;
5. The associative dimension, or the identitarian context in which the individual is inserted (types of socialization, networks of participation, etc.) intervenes to an extent in his/her political participation;
6. Participation involves choices and, in some contexts, the individual is influenced by the possibility of obtaining "selective benefits" in his decision to engage in participatory practices.

Generally speaking, despite their interconnections, these theories draw on different resources to explain the act of participation, both in conventional and unconventional forms. We believe, however, that participation in "emerging institutionalities" such as the ones we refer to in this article, demands that we use other reference factors. Our theoretical choice here will be the concept of "political opportunities", derived from the "theory of political mobilization", and its interfaces with institutional theory.

### **III. Structures of political opportunity and participation**

We will start off from the premise that management councils and participatory budgets are as much the result of, as they are conditioning of a new political-institutional

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<sup>17</sup> Sustained by the realist or elitist theories of democracy.

context in the country. Under this perspective some of the pivotal notions of the analytical approach centered on “structures of political opportunity” will be reviewed.

Despite the fact that this approach is generally concerned with the forms of “autonomous participation” that get materialized above all as “protest movements”, its overall premises bring to light indispensable elements to the debate about political participation within the new institutional context.

The most systematic discussion on the concept of “structure of opportunity” is to be found in Sidney Tarrow’s work. He considers (1999, p.20) political opportunities to be “dimensions of the political struggle that encourage people to engage in contentious politics (...) There is no simple formula for predicting when contentious politics will emerge, both because the specification of these variables in different historical and political circumstances, and because different factors may vary in opposing directions”.

Tarrow underlines that political opportunities are external variables affecting collective action but which cannot be viewed as an “invariant model inevitable” (idem). In other words, if they facilitate, they nonetheless do not determine collective action.

Among the structures of opportunity enabling collective action, Tarrow identifies not only state institutions but also “contentious structures” and “alliances” which provide incentives or constraints to its realization. He points to the following four elements (signs) as the most significant: the opening of access, changes in alignments, divisions within the elites and influential allies. The presence (individual or collective) of these elements provides the conditions facilitating the emergence of collective action.

Schneiberg and Lounsbury (2007) cite several studies identifying different political and institutional factors that condition the dynamics or the success of the social movements. These include the legacy of previous policies, the receptivity of political-institutional authorities toward demands and requisitions, the concentration of resources in the institutional field of collective action, and the predominance of certain cultural models. In this approach the institutional context holds a great capacity to shape political participation and mobilization. According to Rennó, “institutions may foster collective action by creating structures of political opportunity for social groups” (2003, p. 74-75). The structures of political opportunity affect participation and the capacity of mobilization of the social sectors.

As we know, the institution in Brazil of new channels of popular participation in public policy management has been conditioned by two great historical-institutional factors. The 1988 Constitution had several articles prescribing mechanisms and spaces of participation and promoted the decentralization of the State, with a consequent increase in the importance of local power. From the Constitution also derived statutes and organic laws guaranteeing participation, like the Organic Social Assistance Law, the Statute of the Child and Adolescent and the Statute of the City. Another factor was the political rise, in the executive sphere in several Brazilian municipalities, of left-wing parties (mainly the PT) which implemented and invigorated new participatory institutions, the best-known of these being Participatory Budgeting (PB).

This was a new, very promising political context for the development of new institutions (or new participatory systems) which, like the management councils and participatory budgets, expanded the opportunities for political participation in the country.

However, unlike the “collective and autonomous” forms of participation that generally characterize the action of the social movements, this new kind of political participation is directly related to either a new State institutional-legal framework (in the case of the management councils), or the project and political will of the governing authorities (in the case of the PB). In other words, these are new forms of participation which, as well as deriving from new structures of political opportunity, give rise to new institutionalities. This, as we see it, requires a closer dialogue with the institutional or, more specifically, neo-institutional theories to the extent that three of the elements forming these spaces are largely accountable for the differing participant socioeconomic profiles. These elements are: *the role of the political elites*, *the character of the institutional field (legal nature and type of policies)* and *the different institutional designs*. In other words, these institutions constitute new structures of opportunity for political participation, their varied configurations producing different kinds of opportunity, which finally reflects on the social composition of participants.

Let us look at each of the elements cited above:

As regards the **political elites**<sup>18</sup>, or the role of governments and political parties as a key conditioning factor of the differing forms of participation, we stress the importance of the idea, now readapted and relativized, of mobilized participation. Huntington and Nelson's analysis (1977) suggests that, in addition to determining these different forms, it is necessary to assess the difference between *autonomous participation*, characterized by a personal interest or motivation toward political change or influence, and *mobilized participation*, induced by others and undertaken for such reasons as loyalty, affection, deference, fear, dependence or the wish to partake of the benefits that might be achieved through participation (p. 125). In the latter case, participation is conditioned by mechanisms of coercion, persuasion, dependence or material interests<sup>19</sup>. Although markedly related to traditional political practices based on loyalty, deference and/or the exchange of personal favors (clientelism), mobilized participation may originate from other interests and motivations, as with the political ideologies that seek to promote socioeconomic changes leading to greater social justice. Unlike the management councils, participatory budgeting as we see it is a form of mobilized participation, in that a) it depends on the government's project, will and political commitment, and b) it makes benefit gain (public works and services) conditional on participation. Since the poorest sectors depend more heavily on governmental services, they will therefore occupy a major space in these spaces. On the other hand, because the management councils are established by law, they are less dependent on the projects and wills of the political elites, and benefit gain is detached from participation. It must be pointed out however, that despite the councils' greater independence, there are differing dynamics at work among them<sup>20</sup> which, as shown by authors such as Côtés (2002, p. 195), may be connected either to institutional and associative particularities, or the "municipal managers' stance towards

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<sup>18</sup> It must be pointed out that the role of the political elites is a fundamental variable in Tarrow's analysis (1999) of the "structure of political opportunities".

<sup>19</sup> It is of interest to note that according to the authors, this difference is more of principle than practice. These are therefore not dichotomic categories, but form a spectrum whose point of distinction is arbitrary. In addition, participation in competitive, democratic political systems contains much of pressure and manipulation. Virtually all political systems include both autonomous and mobilized forms of participation (varying in accordance with the specific system and period in time). Finally, behaviors deriving from mobilized participation may become acts of autonomous participation and vice-versa (Huntington and Nelson, 1977).

<sup>20</sup> The author compares the functioning dynamics of Porto Alegre's Municipal Health and Social Assistance Councils.

participation”. In other words, the elites can be said to play a rather relevant role in these councils, even if not as relevant as in the PBs.

As regards the character of the **institutional field** (legal nature and type of policies), it must be noted that the management councils fall into the paradigm of institutional participation due to a legal regulation, the participation of civil society therefore acquiring a character of obligation. This new legal statute expresses important differences in the contexts of local implementation (more or less “mobilizatory” and participatory). As Dagnino (2002) highlights, it is necessary to heed the fact that, if the fight for the implementation of councils as a way of changing traditional patterns of public policy became possible “thanks to the correlation of forces at work at national level during the formulation of the 1988 Constitution (...), this correlation of forces is far from being replicated in the local contexts, at the time when councils are established in the several municipalities and states, as indeed at federal level” (Dagnino,2002, p.294).

On the other hand, this obligatory character allows social conflicts to become more explicit. The clashes between civil society, or some of its sectors, and the State within several council experiences is an important indicator that, by being anchored in a legal statute, the councils can not only cause a lot of noise in the sense of questioning the traditional mechanisms of power, but effectively promote changes in social conditions and realities.

In the case of the PBs, on the one hand the lack of legal ties grants them greater institutional flexibility as well as the possibility of becoming co-management spaces where rules are defined in the interaction between the participating actors, but on the other makes them contingent on the current government’s political will and susceptible to manipulation mechanisms.

As for the type of policies (its selective and/or universal benefits), it can be said that by putting a city’s distinct regions in a competition for investment resources, the PB is offering a kind of “selective benefit” for those communities that are granted works and services (González, 1998, p.202-203). That is to say, participation is justified from the viewpoint of strategic rationality insofar as selective benefits are fought over against other city districts. In addition, recent studies have pointed out that despite it being a space of “strategic” competition for resources (selective benefits), the PB promotes changes in the social consciousness of its participants (Fedozzi, 2002). In other words, even if arguably a “zero sum game” (one region has to lose for the other to win), attitudinal and behavioral



changes can be identified in its participants that are engendered by a “gradual opening toward negotiation and the acceptance of other criteria for benefit-seeking, employed by communities other than their own” (González, 1998, p. 203)<sup>21</sup>. This would confirm Hirschman’s thesis (1983) that, in some cases, participation goes from being a “cost” to becoming a “benefit” in itself.

The management councils are spaces where, because very wide issues (affecting the entire collectivity such as “municipal plans”) or basically “public goods” are dealt with, the free-rider logic tends to prevail.

A third factor conditioning the participants’ profiles has to do with the **institutional designs**, to the extent that differences in format (rules, spaces, participative and representative subjects) determine to an extent the body’s potential for politically including the poorest sectors of the population.

Local differences aside, participation in participatory budgeting takes place by means of an institutional format that follows the city’s spatial organization and is based upon its neighborhood or region structure. This lowers the “costs” of participation, since the regional organization (community associations) is the main form of collective action of the popular sectors (Doimo, 1995). This format enables PB to penetrate city spaces where the citizens gather “among equals”, breaking the occasional discomfort certain participants might have in more heterogeneous spaces (where the inequalities of participation resources are more apparent). Furthermore, when a demand formulated by popular participation is granted, the citizens tend to feel that they are part of the political process (feeling of political effectiveness), provoking an effect that has been called by the literature as empowerment or “political learning”. Hence, as well as having an impact on the limiting effects of objective centrality (participation of those with more political, economic and cultural resources), the PB also deals with the subjective dimension of centrality, apparent in the citizens’ attitudes and beliefs regarding their capacity to influence decisions and their importance in politics.

Regarding the format of the management councils, a basic participation rule concerns parity participation and/or representation<sup>22</sup> between civil society sectors and the State. In the case of civil society, this representation occurs through constituted entities,

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<sup>21</sup> From a text in which he comments on the PB analysis made by Fedozzi (1996) and Abers (1997).

<sup>22</sup> An exception to this rule are the health councils that have multiple representatives: users, service providers, health professionals and government.

with little space for individual participation, although the outcome of entity representation can, in many cases, result in individual participation.

The combination of parity and entity representation presents limitations regarding the opportunities and broadening of participation to more plural individuals. Aside from limitations in number and seats<sup>23</sup>, a reduction in the number of participants can be noted as a result of the natural tendency for the incorporation of sectors with more representation “legitimacy”. Hence, in Social Work councils, the categories and professionals of Social Work end up prevailing over other social sectors, in the same way as in other areas of social policy.

Despite also important local and sector variations, the set of institutional rules related to actors, objectives, and spaces of discussion and deliberation tends to weaken, in comparison with PB, the expansion of participation and social representation, as it shifts leaderships to the institutional space without a counteraction directed at invigorating the local associative fabric. This setup only increases participation costs. Instead of promoting greater inclusion, it tends more strongly to create a vicious cycle between knowledge, qualification, participation and representation.

It is therefore not by chance that PB experiences have shown a greater capacity to mobilize and broaden participation. This is due not only to the linking of participation with real benefits, but also to the PB’s institutional framework which allows the participation of individuals and associations in neighborhoods and local regions, lowering the costs of participation. Furthermore, the PB impacts the feeling of low political effectiveness by producing a “demonstration effect” (Abers, 1997), therefore affecting a central variable of political participation.

The table below seeks to summarize the discussion, as well as this article’s proposed methodology regarding the factors that determine participation in emerging institutions.

**Table I – Variables intervening in the composition of new institutions**

| <b>Opportunity Structure</b> | <b>Councils</b> | <b>PB</b> |
|------------------------------|-----------------|-----------|
|                              |                 |           |

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<sup>23</sup> The number of seats for different sectors in each council is related to the field of action and follows a quantity/quality pattern that corresponds to the group of governmental and social sectors that are involved in the policy in question.

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| Elites' Role                                       | The elites play a moderate role, since the councils have legal attributions. | The elites play a determinant role, as PB is directly linked to the administration's commitment and political will |
| Institutional Field<br>Legal Nature<br>Policy Type | Regulated by Law<br>Public goods   | Government Programs<br>Selective benefits <sup>24</sup>  |
| Institutional Framework                            | Parity; collective representation, weak social articulation; municipal level | Territorial representation; individual participation; Regional and municipal level                                 |

#### IV. Final remarks

This study gave us the opportunity to approach the subject of new participatory institutions in Brazil and deal with the issue of participants' socioeconomic profiles. Our data are similar to those of other studies on the subject of the different participant profiles within council and participatory budgeting experiences. In the search for explanations for these differences, we reviewed some of the theories of political participation and found potential answers in the theories of political mobilization and neo-institutionalism. We have pointed particularly to the role of the political elites and the institutional configuration as crucial in political inclusion (or recruiting). Once more it is relevant to mention that such answers do not intend to be conclusive. The data are from an ongoing study.

A second point to be observed is that while the data point to the quantitative difference among the participants (their socioeconomic profiles), nothing has been said about qualitative aspects (quality of public debate, dynamics of political representation, accountability mechanisms, etc), which have been widely discussed in recent debate forums about participation in Brazil<sup>25</sup>. This reference to the quantitative and qualitative

<sup>24</sup> Benefits that apply only to the agents that contributed to the provision of the public good (Olson, 1999).

<sup>25</sup> See, in particular, the works gathered in Schattan & Nobre (2004) and Avritzer (2004), as well as publications by Lavallo (2006).

dimensions of the analysis of participation is related to the theoretical debate between participatory and deliberative democracy (Fung & Cohen, 2007), and to the search for the necessary articulation between an increased number of actors in public forums and a higher quality of debate. Proposals of articulation between these dimensions have been the object of recent reflections in the Social Sciences and are essential for the continuity of research in the field<sup>26</sup>.

To conclude, it appears that the challenge of participatory processes is to be able to provide two types of conditions for participation. On one side, to promote the participation of sectors that have little or no income, education, time and opportunities, diminishing participation costs (Abers, 1997). The emphasis here is on the provision of accessibility, or on the inclusive character of the process. On the other side, the challenge is to provide or promote conditions of equality in participation, reducing or eliminating asymmetric power relations within participatory spaces. The emphasis is on the quality of participation. The development of conditions for equality has to do both with the set of rules defining institutional procedures and the need to impact or alter the underlying social conditions responsible for the reproduction of inequality on an institutional level. The participatory budgeting when compared with other participatory experiences has achieved greater success in fulfilling these conditions, in spite of its difficulties and limitations.

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<sup>26</sup> See, specially, the study developed by Fishkin (2002).

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