

**PARTICIPATION, ACTIVISM, AND POLITICS:
THE PORTO ALEGRE EXPERIMENT AND DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRATIC
THEORY**

**Gianpaolo Baiocchi
Department of Sociology**

University of Wisconsin-Madison

Revised 11/1999

Comments welcome at: *baiocchi@ssc.wisc.edu*

INTRODUCTION

The experiment in participatory governance in Porto Alegre Brazil stands apart from many other similar attempts to institute some version of civic governance in Brazil and Latin America. Because of its breadth and scope, it is different than a variety of other experiments (past and present) that simply do not involve as many persons, or more commonly, do not devolve such amount of decision-making power to popular mandate. Its central institutional feature of interfacing civil society through neighborhood-based deliberation regardless of local levels of organization also sets it apart from participatory governance schemes that rely on organized civil society, often through sectoral interfaces (calling upon teachers to consult on education policy, for instance). It is also unusual because it has served the Worker's Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*, P.T.) well, permitting three uninterrupted terms at municipal government, and recently, largely as a result of the successes in Porto Alegre, a term at state level government. It stands against the backdrop of many well-known electoral and institutional failures of leftist municipal administrations, as in São Paulo, Fortaleza, and Florianópolis in Brazil, or Caracas in Venezuela, as well as a number of much more limited participatory experiments as in Montevideo, Uruguay, and Córdoba, Argentina.

Despite the recent attention to Porto Alegre and some of its innovative institutions, little work exists that explicitly addresses the body of theory of deliberative democracy – a body of theory that straddles normative and practical concerns of democracy-enhancing experiments as this one.¹ This short essay attempts to offer a

¹ In English, there are the essays of Abbers (1997, 1998), Navarro (1998) and Santos, in

corrective, as well as to offer suggestions of how the Porto Alegre sheds light on some undertheorized areas of deliberative democratic theory. As such, in this essay I do not recount all of the institutional features of participatory governance or their development. Other analyzes, as Santos', in this volume, offer essentially correct, if occasionally top-down, accounts. To foreshadow my argument, I suggest that a careful interpretation of the experiment and its outcomes beyond purely institutional indicators offers a defense of deliberative democratic institutions against the charge that they simply reproduce societal inequalities in deliberative settings. In addition, this analysis suggests that a theory of deliberative democracy needs to take into account more centrally the issue of interfaces with civil society. Finally, I also raise some critical comments about the autonomy and capacity of municipal government to carry out this experiment as well as the importance of 'driving politics' behind it.

Deliberative Democratic theory refers to a body of political theory that seeks to develop a substantive version of democracy based on public justification through deliberation. More than a formal definition of democracy as a political system, but also more than 'discussion-based' democracy, deliberative democracy calls for the deliberation of citizens as reasonable equals as a prerequisite for the legitimate exercise of authority and as a way of transforming the preferences and intentions of citizens. (Cohen, 1997. Cohen and Rogers, 1992) In this way, theorists of deliberative democracy address some of the problems that face democratic theory in complex societies as the fact of the plurality of values, which would in principle render the construction of the

this volume.

“common good” of democratic theory as well as the establishment of common democratic practices difficult.

What distinguishes the contributions of theorists who animate the central concerns of the Real Utopias Project (as Josh Cohen) from Habermassian or post-Habermassian interventions into democratic theory is that a key concern has to do with institutional preconditions for the realization of deliberative democracy. As such, the foray into real-world Empowered Deliberative Democracies (as in Wright and Fung, 1999 and Fung, 1999) can be considered a further iteration of these democratic theories. In this spirit, then, I offer three critical re-interpretations of some of the features of the Porto Alegre participatory experiment based on my own research, carried out between 1997 and 1999. I argue that, as an example of an Empowered Deliberative Democracy, the Porto Alegre experiment offers a particularly successful resolution to the problems of equity in deliberation among unequals. All available evidence points to the fact that the deliberative experiment fosters participatory parity by virtue of its didactic functions. The experiment also highlights the issue of civil society- deliberative forum interface, offering a hopeful example of how this relationship might work in a way that fosters new organization in unorganized areas of civil society while not unduly favoring areas with pre-existing associative traditions. Finally, the very success of the participatory experiment necessarily begs the question of its transportability to other places. This raises two issues for Deliberative Democratic theory, which I argue should be more central to its considerations: the importance of institutional capacity and autonomy to carry out deliberative democratic projects, and the importance of the type of ‘driving politics’ behind real-world deliberative democratic experiments.

DELIBERATION AND THE PROBLEM OF INEQUALITY

One of the main concerns of the critics of deliberative democracy is that such spheres are likely to reproduce the kinds of inequalities of society at large. Criticisms from a U.S. context around the lesser participation of the poor and less educated - for whom participation in deliberative settings is more 'costly' - are not particularly relevant here. Since this project is designed around assessing local priorities and needs in service provision and investments in urban infrastructure, it is not a surprise that it does draw in needy persons to decide these priorities. More important is the criticism that deliberative settings in which citizens meet to debate formally as equals could be dominated by the more powerful. We could extend criticisms of the 'public sphere' to deliberative democracy-type proposals to anticipate a particularly poignant criticism that at best, deliberative democracy may create the fiction of rational deliberation that in fact justifies an elitist and male-centered kind of citizenship. A particularly sinister rendering might be that the public justification aspect of deliberative democracy could be used to lend legitimacy to certain inequalities, or to the political party in control of the project.

For someone as Bourdieu deliberation and participatory democracy would only tend to reproduce certain hierarchies. On one hand, it would tend to reproduce class hierarchies; on another, it would tend to reproduce hierarchies of political competence of 'experts' against non-experts within the 'field of politics' (a hierarchy which is likely to align along, roughly, class lines, but need not be coterminous with it). In Language and Symbolic Power (1991) Bourdieu denounces fictions of 'linguistic communism' - that the ability to speak is equally distributed to all. As language is a *medium* (as to opposed to only an instrument) of power, utterances between speakers are always expressions of

relations of power between them. The competence to speak embodies difference and inequality. A privileged class habitus imparts the technical ability to speak *and* the standing to make certain statements. This competence is a *statutory ability*, meaning that “not all linguistic utterances are equally acceptable and not all locutors equal.”

(1992:146) Linguistic competence is not a simple technical ability, but certain locutors are not allowed certain acts of speech. Bourdieu gives the example of the farmer who did not run for mayor of his township, “But I don’t know how to speak!” (146)

While ethnographic and life-history evidence would be crucial to account for the way these inequalities interact with deliberative processes, it is possible to deploy survey and participation evidence to offer a robust defense of deliberative democratic theory against these criticisms. The survey, which I designed and fielded in conjunction with a local NGO and municipal government reached a sample of participants (n=1039) at meetings in all regions of the city.² It included a variety of open and close-ended questions, and allows us to address several of these issues. The *reproduction* of inequality within deliberative settings cannot be directly detected from *static* aggregate evidence, but it is theoretically possible to detect its effects. A survey can provide a very useful ‘snapshot in time’ of some patterns, which, coupled with some evidence about participation and outcomes provides a way of testing these propositions. Here, I concentrate on four types of effects: participation at all, self-reported willingness to speak at meetings, domination of key leadership positions, and manipulation of outcomes.

² Survey results are published in CIDADE, 1998.

It is not surprising that poorer persons tend to participate more in these deliberative settings than better-off citizens. Since some notion of 'need' is a primary motivator for participation at all in these problem-solving settings, a common sense expectation would be that there would be needier persons in these settings than the city as a whole. There is also the theoretical expectation, however, that the relatively technical discussions involved, and the types of time-pressures on a poorer person would act as a disincentive to participation. As Jane Masbridge writes of her townhall participants:

These patterns imply that the psychic costs of participation are greater and the benefits fewer for lower status citizens. In contacting town officials, for instance, they feel more defensive beforehand and less likely to get results afterward. In speaking at meetings they feel more subject to ridicule and are less likely to convince anyone. Each act of participation not only costs them more but also usually produces less. (1983:109)

The survey revealed that the profile of the average participant in regional meetings was a person of lower economic and educational standing than the average citizen of Porto Alegre. While participants in the regional meetings tended to be of different background than participants in the thematic meetings, with a strong presence of college-educated liberal professionals, on the whole O.P. participants have tended to be from what could be described as 'lower middle-class' sectors and professions or below. Over half of participants earn 4 Minimum Wages or below, and over half have an Eighth-

grade education or less.³ Roughly, a third earn more than the equivalent of 5 Minimum Wages, against the 54.8% of the city's residents who do. (Pozzobon, 1998)

In addition, an analysis of average regional participation over the ten years revealed that the proportion of persons living below the poverty line in a region is a good predictor of participation for that region. An ecological regression revealed this a statistically significant correlation, while revealing that, for instance, levels of regional literacy tended to not be at all associated with participation.⁴ Table 1 below shows a comparison of the proportion of participants by gender, low-income, and low-education against city-wide proportions. The table shows a parity of poor persons, of persons with low educational attainment, and a gender parity for participation. Regional and total levels of persons of low educational background were similar to city wide and regional proportions. A comparison of the proportion of women participants against the proportion of adult women showed gender parity in all regions, and a the proportion of less educated persons also matched city wide averages and regional averages.

Table 1: Proportion of OP Participants by Low-Education, Low income, and Gender.

	City	OP	Delegate	Counsel
--	------	----	----------	---------

³ A 'Minimum Wage' is a convenient unit to measure income. As of 11/1999, it is set at US\$62.

⁴ See equation 1 in the Statistical Appendix.

	s	ors		
Low Education*	55.5	60.3	34.7	17.9
Women	53.34	50.51	45.3	34.9
Low Income*	33.3	30.2	26.7	34.2

Note: Low Education is defined, as per Brazilian standards, as less than 8th Grade. Low Income is defined as earning less than 2 Minimum Wages (US\$100 - November 1999).
Sources: IBGE, 1991. PMPA/FESC, 1998. Survey Data, 1998.

However, even if the poor participate at the meetings, we could still expect the reproduction of inequality to occur inside the meetings: we could still expect that more powerful citizens dominate the meetings and capture key positions – those of elected delegate and counselor. While, as mentioned above, ethnographic and life-history evidence can shed light on the relationships between structures of inequality and practices inside meetings, or between structures of inequality and individual trajectories through the process, a survey question about how often a person speaks in meetings would be able to detect some of these patterns if they were significantly present. A survey question: ‘do you speak in meetings? (Always, almost always, sometimes, never) administered found a parity between the poor and the not-poor, and between the less-educated and the rest. It

also found, however, that women speak at meetings less. Table 2 below shows the results of the question.

Active Participation at Meetings by Gender, Income

Income		"Do you Speak at Meetings?"		Total
		No	Yes	
Not Poor	Male	209	153	362
	Female	225	114	339
Total		434	267	701
Poor	Male	82	54	136
	Female	123	55	178
Total		205	109	314

While there is little difference between the poor and not-poor, the difference between men and women is significant. A formal statistical statement predicting whether someone will speak at a meeting based on gender expresses that the odds of a woman being an active participant at 28.33% lower. (See Equation 2 in Statistical Appendix) However, the number years of participation in the OP also turns out to offset this pattern significantly, and years of participation in the process is a better predictor of whether persons will speak. Table 3 shows the proportion of active participants among persons who had participated for six or more years previously.

Active Participation at Meetings (Self Reported) by Gender, Income for persons with 5 or more years' experience in the OP

Income		"Do you speak at Meetings?"		Total
		No	Yes	
Not Poor	Male	14	35	49
	Female	21	23	44
Total		35	58	93
Poor	Male	3	12	15
	Female	7	9	16
Total		10	21	31

While keeping in mind that this is a much smaller sample of participants, it is apparent that years of experience quite clearly affects the proportion of active participants to non-active participants. A more formal statistical prediction finds that considers both years of participation and gender finds that while the odds of a woman speaking are 37% lower, but that they increase 7% for each year of participation. Interaction terms and other variables were not significant predictors of active participation.

While ‘active participation’ in this definition does not unambiguously lead us to parity, the evidence is inconsistent with the expectation of the reproduction of inequality. Certainly, we would expect clearer patterns of the poor reporting speaking less, or of clear effect of education on these patterns, which is not apparent. Also, the importance of years of participation is important. While it does not establish that the process is didactic, since there is the alternate possible explanation that persons who are participants that are more active might be the long term participants, it suggests that learning is important. The best expectation of Deliberative Democratic theory would in fact be that learning is an important factors. It would be an unreasonable expectation that the mere presence of deliberative democratic fora would eliminate inequalities among participants. Rather, the expectation is that deliberation, over time, would foster parity.

A more unambiguous indicator of whether meetings are dominated by men, or by wealthier citizens, is an analysis of who captures representative positions among citizens, and if representatives chosen at the regional level (Delegates) or for the municipal level (Counselors) have significantly different profiles than average participants. If such mechanisms are at work, we can expect that certain citizens, as men, the more educated, or wealthier citizens, would systematically capture those positions. We find that indeed

there is a slight, but significant trend toward this kind of stratification. As table 1 above shows, there is an effect at both the first tier of representatives (Delegates) as well as the second (Counselor). Both gender, education, and income above the poverty line, tend to affect a person's chances of being elected. Education appears to be the most pronounced, and particularly at the highest tier. So, while years of education or tier of income are not good predictors of a person's chance of being elected, both low education and gender noticeably affect a person's odds. Years of participation in the process is the most significant predictor, and among participants who have participated in the process for 5 or more years, the proportion of women and poor persons is much closer to parity.

A formal statistical analysis of the odds of being elected, a logistical regression model (in equation 4 in the Appendix), establishes that while gender, poverty, and low education have negative effects on the likelihood of being elected, years of participation significantly affects the odds positively, and interaction terms between poverty and low-education and years of participation have significant positive effects, suggesting that participation over time tends to increase participatory parity. So while the proportion of elected representatives does show a slightly lesser proportion of women, the poor, and the less educated at elected positions, a more complete study of the available evidence suggests that this effect is significantly tempered by years of participation. So while controlling for poverty, low-education, and years of experience, gives us that the odds of a woman being elected are 78% less than a man's, controlling for the other variables yields that each year of participation increases the odds of election by 29%. If the proportion of persons having significant years of experience is going to increase over time suggests that the process is likely to approximate parity over time.

It should also be noted that this is a set of very stringent standards; the income level of 2 minimum wages is an income of less than a third of the city's median income of 6.4 minimum wages, and the education level of 8th grade or less is well below the city's median educational level of the city. That these figures even approach parity in the context of a highly socially segregated context is reason for optimism. Finally, it should be noted a model that considers education and income in terms of years finds that the highest levels of education and income negatively affect the odds of being elected. While this is partially because of the low proportion of highly educated persons in these meetings, this finding is also inconsistent with the expectation that the more educated or wealthier would dominate the meetings. One participant with only a few years of schooling who was elected as Counselor early on in the process, discussed what it was like in the beginning as a less educated person:

I had to learn about the process as the meetings took place. The first time I participated I was unsure, because there were persons there with college degrees, and we don't have it, so we had to wait for the others to suggest an idea first, and then enter the discussion. And there were things from city hall in the technical areas, we used to 'float.' But with time we started to learn. (Gilberto, Interview 1997)

A final indicator of whether meetings are dominated by the more powerful to the point of distorting deliberation is whether these citizens manipulate outcomes. That is, this domination would be evident if outcomes were systematically distorted in the direction of the distribution of investments toward more powerful citizens. In this case,

this becomes a partially rhetorical question in terms of economic standing because ‘need’ is built into the formula for distribution of resources. Counselors themselves have over the years fashioned the rules of distribution in terms of what would be a fair allocation – and the rules themselves guarantee that the outcomes be weighed toward the less well-off. For this reason, a systematic comparison of investments per region calculating the proportion of investments per region would not yield necessarily useful evidence to compare with poverty or literacy per region since these are themselves part of what constitutes need. It is not surprising that the vast majority of investments has gone to poorer areas of the city and has affected poorer citizens. If the more powerful were indeed able to manipulate outcomes this would not clearly be the case, and the rules the counselors have fashioned would not include standards of need, for example.

Nonetheless, critics of this process have suggested that investments per region are responsive to levels of organization, or perhaps, local sympathy to the P.T. A series of ecological regressions attempting to find patterns to account for the regions of most, or least, investments for first three years finds no association to by either P.T. strength or associational density per region. (See equation 5 in the Statistical Appendix) The overall outcomes of O.P. investments are an impressive testament to how redistributive this process has been. To take an example among many, in the years between 1992-1995 the housing department (DEMHAB) offered housing assistance to 28,862 families, against 1,714 for the comparable period of 1986-1988. Another example is the number of functioning public municipal schools today of 86 against 29 in 1988. (Pozzobon, 1998)

A further problem could result from the inequality of citizens attempting to deliberate as formal equals within these settings. The heterogeneity of persons could

presumably be a source of inefficiency if deliberative processes are to actually involve public justification based on information from vastly different persons. A variety of different backgrounds and interests could make constructing a common platform very difficult as well as even gathering information from persons with potentially different levels of competence. If participatory governance in Porto Alegre is not simply dominated by more educated citizens, for instance, we could ask about the efficiency of deliberation. The problem with assessing the 'efficiency' of this scheme of participatory governance is that there are no standards against which to measure it. Because of the radical reversal of municipal priorities that has followed participatory budgeting the allocations of municipal government in Porto Alegre, it is not particularly useful to compare with years prior. Efficiency threatens to become mixed with measures of how redistributive the institutional arrangement is.

While municipal government as a whole has become more fiscally efficient in comparison to years before the Worker's Party assumed city hall, this does not in itself show that deliberative processes are efficient. Impressive figures exist about the percentage of the public budget available for investment – close to 20% in 1994 up from 2% in 1989. While no doubt some of this increased efficiency has to do with public scrutiny over public works as a feature of the OP, much of it has also to do with features of municipal government that can exist in absence of deliberative processes, as the ethics of party members in government agencies and a disciplined relationship with municipal employees.

A more useful way to assess whether inequality has created inefficiencies in deliberation is to ask whether the process has created gridlocks in decision-making that

might result from attempting to deliberate among very disparate persons. While there are no standards against which to judge these outcomes, through the OP citizens have been able to decide upon more projects and on the allocation of more resources each year, deciding upon more than 200 new projects a year in recent years. The level of satisfaction of citizens with the OP, with 58.5% of participants claiming having received benefits in their region (or thematic meeting), and 57.2% asserting that the population always or almost always ‘really decides’ upon public works, is also not consonant with an inefficient deliberative system.

INTERFACES WITH CIVIL SOCIETY

Another vexing issue for deliberative democracy is the relationship between deliberative democratic forums and civil society. This issue is particularly thorny. While autonomous institutions of civil society are generally positively valued as being the repositories of democratic practices and impulses in society, for normative and practical reasons democratic theorists do not rely on civil society in institutional designs. Organizations in civil society might also have the best information and access to certain problems that the participatory scheme is designed to address, but participatory schemes do not explicitly rely on organized civil society. On one hand, to do so might inadvertently favor citizens who are represented by highly organized organizations against citizens who do not have such representation. It might also inadvertently reproduce and harden ‘movement oligarchies’ by giving leaders of such organizations additional legitimacy and political capital. On the other hand, this poses the ‘bootstrap’ political question: should we not attempt to conceive of institutional designs that would

function in places without prior organization, or should we abandon those areas altogether?

But if civil society as a discrete category does not figure prominently in these accounts this does not mean that this is not a crucial issue. For deliberative democracy, this poses the first question of what should be the institutional interface between participatory forums and organized bodies of civil society. The question is both normative and practical: as mentioned above, organized bodies of civil society may not come close to our normative standards of democracy, but they may also facilitate in many ways the deliberative processes, with already established networks of activists, with repertoires of solutions etc. The second question this suggests is about the impacts on civil society of the establishment of participatory forums. Should institutional designs attempt to anticipate this outcome?

There are a number of negative expectations about the impact of participatory forums on civil society. If participatory forums are parallel to – that is, they co-exist with - civil society, it is not unreasonable to expect they may in certain settings empty out forums of civil society, as they may provide more efficient (and state-backed) ways of addressing certain problems. If participatory forums interface directly with civil society, might they co-opt movements? Or might local decision-making forums ‘balkanize’ political life? (Fung and Wright, 23) Cohen briefly addresses another possibility altogether, that deliberative democratic institutions might help foster new solidarities and help *construct* civil society:

Notice, however that both the inclusion of nontraditional stakeholders and the development of deliberative arenas suggests a new possibility that of

constructing new bases of solidarity through a process of defining and addressing common concerns. (...) In short, these efforts – which could have very wide scope – have the potential to create new deliberative arenas outside formal politics that might work as schools of “deliberative democracy” in a special way. (1997:112-3)

The Porto Alegre experiment has functioned, in my view, much more like a ‘school of deliberative democracy’ than as a vehicle of the co-optation or hollowing out of civil society. One of the real effects of the establishment of participatory governance in Porto Alegre has been the fostering of new and more intermeshed institutions in civil society a renewal of leadership positions in civil society, and a greater adherence to procedural deliberative rules than before. Civil society has also ‘scaled up’ - with the bulk of activism in civil society having shifted to regional and municipal levels, away from the neighborhood – which is the opposite of balkanization.

One of the most obvious transformations of civil society has been the rapid rise of new associations throughout the city. Although precise figures are difficult to establish for a number of reasons, estimates for the number of associative bodies are shown in Table 4.⁵ The table gives very general estimates of the trends in the transformation of civil society in Porto Alegre.

⁵ One of the main reasons it is difficult to establish how many active associative bodies existed at any one point in time is that there are many more groups ‘in law’ than in practice. Because of Brazilian law, and certain traditions of community politics, there

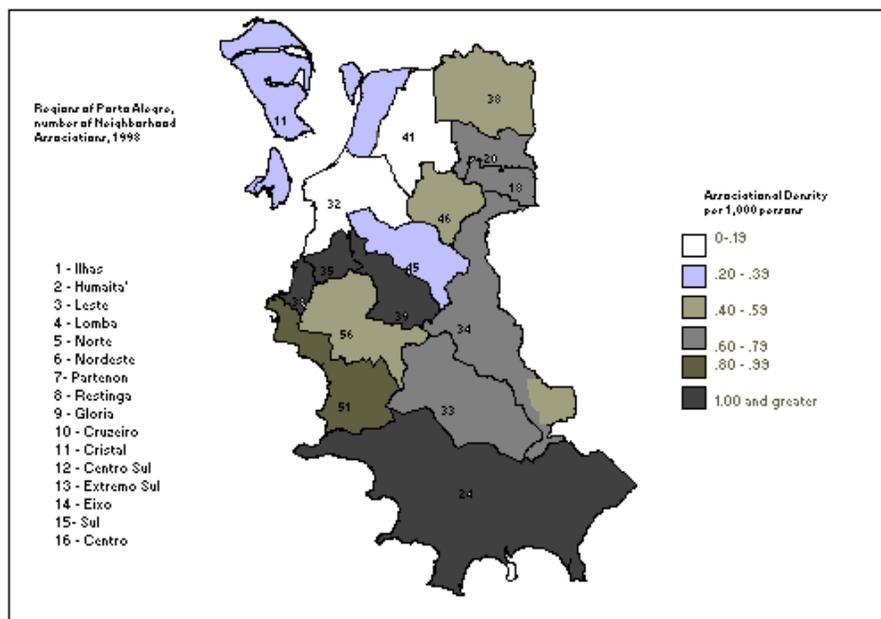
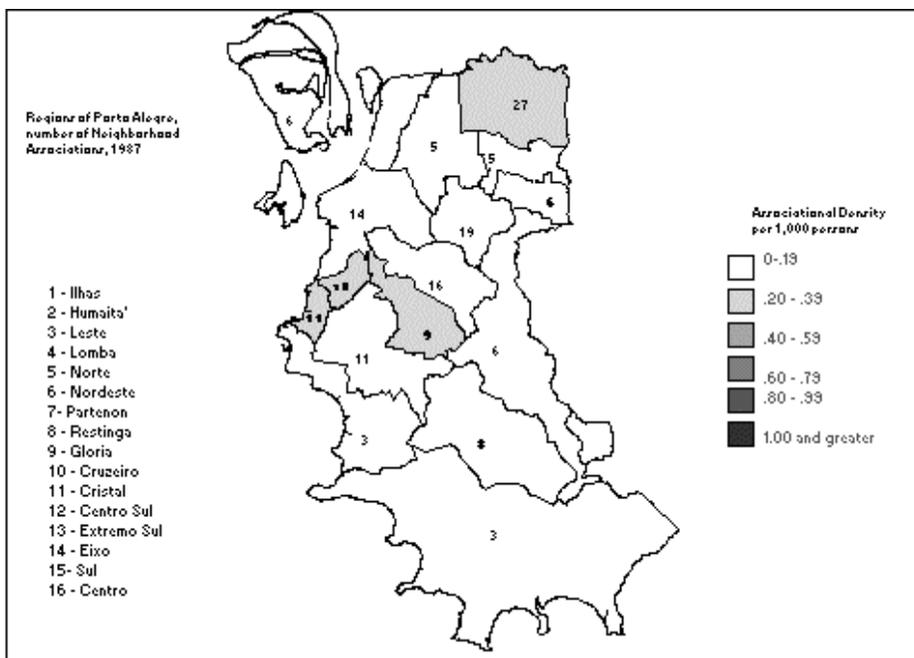
Table 4: Basic Indicators of Civil Society, Porto Alegre, 1985-1998

Year	Neighborhood Associations	Cooperatives	Regional Popular Councils	Participants OP
1986	-			
1988	300*		2	
1990	380*		4	976
1994	450	11	8	11247
1996	500*	32	11	11491
1998	540	51	11	16456

*Source: Various. * Estimated*

The rise in the number of associations seems to follow the increasing success of the OP throughout the years. Appendix 2 gives a more precise comparison per region of best estimate of the number of ‘active neighborhood associations’ for 1988 and 1998. Figures 1 and 2 offer a graphic representation of the associational density per region of the city for the two years in question.

exist many phantom registered organizations for individuals to receive charity. In the 1980’s, for example, there were ‘milk ticket’ programs that gave registered community groups weekly coupons for milk, and this caused for many ‘neighborhood associations’ to be founded by registering with the courts.



T

he segregated geography of a Brazilian city like Porto Alegre means that these changes have occurred most dramatically in the city's peripheries, areas with the least prior organization. Very many new associations and parallel associations have been formed

because of participatory governance. A number of formal statements could be offered about these changes, but in equation 6 in the Appendix a simple regression that accounts for changes in associational density as function of the region's poverty is effective. An activist who has followed the process closely accounted for these changes:

New leaders appear with new ideas every year and they are hard workers and full of good intentions. Our region has benefited a lot. Many of the new *vilas* now have developed associations to fight through the OP, and old ones are re-opening to go demand in the OP. Every year two or three new associations appear. (Fernando, interview 1998)

A common pattern that persons often describe for how new neighborhood associations develop is around a demand to be solved that requires some kind of collective mobilization. Sometimes there already is a registered, but inactive, association for the area. Nonetheless, one or more concerned persons will begin to attend O.P. meetings and eventually mobilize a number of concerned neighbors who then attend as an ad-hoc group that later becomes a more permanent association:

We began by attending the O.P. meeting. There used to be an association here, but it was more social and less interested in the problems of our side of the vila. So we went with a different name, and today we are registered as an association. We were able to get part of the street paved but we are still going to go back because there is a lot we still need still.

(Nelsa, interview 1997)

In addition, there is reason to believe that civil society is today more interconnected than before. As mentioned in the table above the number of regional popular councils today is much greater than before. Popular councils are autonomous institutions that hold regular regional meetings on a weekly or bi-monthly basis for representatives of neighborhood associations as well as independent citizens wishing to discuss the region's problems. While popular councils do not have any power over neighborhood associations, or over the O.P., they often coordinate activities between associations (to make sure a fund-raiser will not overlap with a cultural event in a nearby neighborhood), settle disputes among them, and more importantly, deploy collective resources for the solving of regional problems. Often popular councils act as intermediaries between a single association and municipal government, approaching the government with the moral mandate of forty or fifty active associations. Appendix 3 lists a number of recently developed active city-wide forums, as the forum for 'child and adolescent' service providers, or the municipal forum of cooperatives. These forums act as umbrella organizations, coordinating efforts and sharing information and resources across local organizations.

A smaller survey I conducted among 'key activists' (n=104)– regular participants in a regional forum - in three regions of the city bears out that most activists participate in a number of different forums. On average, activists participate in 2 to 3 meetings a week, and are regular attendees in 3 to 4 different forums. There were regional differences, but 44% of activists participated regularly in a forum with a regional or municipal focus other than the OP or Regional popular council. Almost all activists reported participating regularly in their local neighborhood association – which suggests

that there are significant and lasting ties between local, regional, and municipal settings. The larger OP survey also found that among OP participants who participated in associational life, most participated in at least two settings, and over half participated in at least one forum of regional or municipal focus.

Observers of the process, as Gildo Lima, one of the architects of the participatory structures in the first administration argues that civil society has indeed become less locally focused as a result of the OP, and that a new form of mobilization has emerged:

This type of mass mobilization campaign has become rapid, dynamic, and has established a frequent 'network of conversations'. While I don't speak to my neighbor who lives in front of my apartment, (...) in this network the guy who lives here speaks with the guy who lives on the other side, and the one who lives really far away, every week because of this process. Many people do not realize that that we have created the capacity for dialogue every week as a result of the OP. (Gildo Lima, interview, 1999)

A number of activists echoed that this indeed was an important process for development of more permanent networks of activists. For example, Maria described her trajectory from becoming involved in the Forum of Cooperatives to then becoming an elected delegate and Counselor, and the way the OP has helped foster more or less permanent bonds:

After starting to participate in the Forum of Cooperatives, I started to become involved with community leaders and wound up being elected as a Delegate of the OP. At first, I did not understand much, but with time I started to get it. I got a group together from our cooperative to come on a regular basis. I then was elected to the Council. There it was where I really learned what is a movement, what a community leader does. It was

an incredible learning experience in becoming a community leader.

(Maria, interview 1999)

A number of municipal mobilizations over the years of the OP, as the hunger campaign in 1991, and the success of municipal initiatives, as the Human Rights municipal conference of 1997, which has succeeded in drawing activists from all regions as regular participants, also points to an emerging city-wide solidarity as a result of the process. Some of these municipal initiatives are sponsored by city hall, as the human rights conference, but they have been peopled and organized by persons emerging from participatory fora.

Participants of the process often recounted that civil society has changed in these directions – toward municipal and regional focus – and they usually recounted that the process had an effect on them, personally, in recasting their horizons as activists:

As delegate and counselor you learn about the region, meet new persons, become a person who has to respond not only to your association, but also to the region as a whole and the city as a whole. I participated in the two congresses to decide the *Plano Diretor* [municipal planning priorities] and since I have worried about the city as a whole. After a year, I learned not to look only at the region, but that you have to look at the city as a whole.

(Antonio, interview, 1997)

If the OP and the allied deliberative settings have been able to affect civil society in these desirable ways, it is worth considering institutional features (and their alternatives) of participatory governance in Porto Alegre. The first question, as I have

suggested, is the issue of interfaces with civil society. An early debate within leftist circles in Brazil in the late 1980's had to do with how leftist governments would interact with civil society. The idea of popular councils, inspired by both writings on the Paris commune as well as by visions of Soviets, was advocated in many urban settings as semi-permanent forum for discussion among neighborhood associations, social movements, unions, and other spontaneous forms of popular will. The function of these popular councils was clear in an opposition setting, but it was not apparent what their function would be in case of an electoral victory. In São Paulo, there was disagreement between those who held that popular councils should be consultative and those who held they should be deliberative. If popular councils were consultative, they would be part of the government's organizational structure, and if they were deliberative they would remain as autonomous associations inserted into municipal government.⁶

In Porto Alegre, an early vision of interaction with organized civil society – presidents of neighborhood associations, for instance – gave way to a 'lasses-faire' relationship to civil society. At meetings of the OP where organizations are counted, persons are asked which organization they represent in order to tally votes, but the deliberative processes do not discriminate between 'actually existing' neighborhood associations and a momentary association of persons who decide to call themselves a 'street commission' from a certain street. While this was met with hostility in some areas

⁶ In São Paulo, the deliberative vision of mayor Erundina won. Popular power was 'instituted' as a fourth branch of government, after the legislative, executive, and judiciary. See Fernandes (1988)

where leaders of the neighborhood movement felt ‘slighted’ – this has also meant that prior organization does not necessarily favor certain areas, and has created a system that actually fosters the creation of new associations, as well as the creation of parallel organizations to unresponsive ones.

A second question has to do with how autonomous civil society will be from participatory settings. As I suggested above, participatory governance in Porto Alegre has had an immense impact on the institutions and networks of civil society. It should be part of design considerations that successful deliberative institutions will have these kinds of impacts. How much, and what kind, of impact is the result of three principal considerations: how central the deliberative process will be to concerns already addressed by civil society, what kinds of direct or indirect support the deliberative institution will offer to associations in civil society, and if those subsidies will be subject to any conditions.

Participatory institutions may address issues that are more or less central to existing concerns of civil society. For instance, in Porto Alegre, essential issues addressed by neighborhood associations in 1989 had to do with urban infrastructure and urban services, and participatory budgeting centrally addressed those questions. But another issue municipal government could have opened up for deliberation at the time could have been environmental issues or the cultural policy of city government, which have both become part of participatory governance. Both would have no doubt attracted activists, but would not have attracted the attention of civil society as the OP did, and would not have caused such impact on civil society. Since a significant proportion of the activities of neighborhood associations went to securing urban services and the OP

offered a completely novel way of achieving those goals, the relationship between civil society and municipal government was transformed as civil society itself underwent a number of changes. As an interviewee reiterated:

Before you had to go to the *vereador's* (councilperson) office when you had to get something done, you had to go and sit in his waiting area, sometimes for more than a whole day. When you saw him you told him why you needed this street or materials for the (neighborhood) association building. It was always an exchange. Or you would bring a petition with lots of signatures to DEMHAB to show you had respect in the community. Today it is different. This brought big changes to the associations, because it was what we mostly used to do. (Nelsa, interview 1988)

Additionally, we can speculate about the possible kinds of relationships between civil society and deliberative settings in terms of relative autonomies. While not part of the stated goals of the OP, its institutions provide a number of indirect subsidies for civil society. The OP, for instance, accounts for the political learning of most new activists today. In my smaller survey, of the 104 activists, approximately half had their start in associative life through the OP. Of activists with less than five years' experience, the vast majority had their start in the OP. The OP also provides a regional forum for activists to meet other activists, to share information and learning, and that facilitates mobilization. Importantly, the OP has also made some of the principal tasks of neighborhood associations much easier. As another interviewee put it,

Before the OP, the associations used to work by themselves. Each one would write up its demands and go to the government. Today, 90% of the business of associations is through the OP. All our main demands are through the OP. And even complaints are through the OP, because of the Counselors. Counselors can speak directly with the government. Sometimes a president will take a month to get an audition from the government and a Counselor will get it in a week. (Antonio, Interview 1997)

In the case of the OP, unlike the Associative Democracy proposal of Cohen and Rogers (1992), there are no institutional checks on associations for standards of democracy. The OP allows full instrumental autonomy (there are no checks on the activities of an association for it to receive recognition) while establishing a structural dependence.

And while this design has succeeded in fostering new associations, there is no assurance of the ‘internal quality’ of these organizations. While architects and managers of the OP in Porto Alegre are well aware that certain neighborhood associations may leave something to be desired in terms of certain procedural standards, city hall has maintained the position not to interfere in popular organization. The experience of political repression, or of state-controlled labor unions and neighborhood associations in Brazil is recent past accounts for this position. But an additional feature functions as a potential check: just as the OP will recognize any association, the door is always open for parallel groups to lay a claim as an association as well. If a recognized association is not responsive to enough persons in a community, participation in the OP is open to new groups who wish to secede.

CAPACITIES AND POLITICS: THE TRANSPORTABILITY OF BUDGETING

If participatory governance in Porto Alegre, as I have shown, offers a number of empirical defenses of deliberative democracy as well as suggest an area for rethinking deliberative democratic theory, the next immediate question concerns the replicability of this experiment elsewhere. I want to now apparently backtrack and suggest two ways in which the Porto Alegre experiment is a very special case, in a way that may perhaps raise

some questions for theories of empowered deliberative democracy. I want to offer two caveats, then: that of the capacities of municipal government in this case, and that of potential importance of the guiding political project behind participatory governance.

On the surface, neither violates the characterization of empowered deliberative democracy – after all, all examples examined under the rubric imply a driving ‘politics’ and state capacities to carry it out. But it is important that the experiment’s success in the context of these two unusual circumstances.

The issue of state capacity does not in itself pose a particular problem for deliberative democratic theory. Institutional arrangements proposed imply that the state has the capacity (and relative autonomy) to carry them out. But the types of successes of participatory planning in Porto Alegre have in part to do with the ability of the state to deliver goods in a timely enough fashion to overcome cynicism and to convince persons who have a limited amount of time that participation is worthwhile. It is not unreasonable to assume that the experiment would not provide us with such a robust defense of deliberative democracy – bringing in such large numbers of persons from impoverished backgrounds as long term participants were it not for the relatively timely results. If the purpose of deliberative democratic theory is to develop a substantive account of democracy and of the institutions that would permit the conditions for deliberation, part of the account must include, I would argue, caveats for the conditions of the institutions to actually deliver the promised good, and of the potential adversarial relationships that these institutions may encounter.

If the deliberative democratic arrangement involves a public good - as public safety, the institution must be not only empowered so that the decisions actually access

the public good, but sufficiently empowered so that there are enough returns to participants above a minimum level so that participation makes sense. Students of urban politics in Latin America have pointed to ‘bounded rationality’ problems of the poor in terms of democratic participation. (Dietz, 1997) Participation may not make much sense for poor persons save for an assurance of fairly timely returns.

In Brazil, a series of structural transformations of the state throughout the 1980’s culminated with the 1988 constitution that codified into law the devolution and decentralization of the state as well as a greater autonomy for municipal governments. Evans (1999) has pointed out that while these transformations have inadvertently opened spaces for highly beneficial local institutional innovation, these changes have produced many undesirable scenarios as well as increased regional inequalities. Municipal governments were given the power to develop ‘organic laws’ – in essence, municipal constitutions that were more responsive to local needs, *institutionalize channels of direct popular participation into public affairs*, and were given greater fiscal autonomy from their regional and national counterparts, and the autonomy to decide on much greater shares of that revenue. Cities gained new ways of raising revenue, as well as increased proportions of certain taxes, as vehicle, sales, and services taxes.

Some cities like Porto Alegre were relative winners in this decentralization scheme, by virtue of being a capital city in a wealthy state, even if the devolution of the responsibility of social services has meant many more additional fiscal burdens. Porto Alegre, with yearly revenues today hovering around US\$180 per person has the capacity to offer many more returns than, for example the failed P.T. municipal administration of Fortaleza, a capital city in the North, with a much greater proportion of persons in need

and revenues around US\$60. A number of municipal governments around Porto Alegre, as of the commuter cities of Viamão and Alvorada, have elected P.T. governments based on the well-publicized success of the Porto Alegre experiment. However, with per-capita revenues at a fraction of Porto Alegre levels, participatory budgeting in those cities has not succeeded in drawing sustained attendances.

A second issue related to state capacities is the relative autonomy of the state to carry out significant participatory schemes. Municipal government in Porto Alegre has met significant opposition at different stages of the development of participatory structures, but has been able to overcome them all. There is a way in which deliberative democracy is autonomy enhancing by virtue of the public justification involved in its proceedings. After the first year's budget was drawn up in Porto Alegre, the next legal step was to have it approved by the municipal legislative. While a number of *vereadores* (councilpersons) to this day remain hostile to the P.T., and at that time P.T. council persons constituted a small minority, to this day, the budget was approved then, and has been approved every year without significant alterations.

There is reason to assume that deliberation over a public good is likely to meet opposition, because the closer that participatory decision-making comes to a 'true' deliberative democracy, the more redistributive it is going to be in relation to existing distribution of that public good. A sociologically realistic expectation about any kind of empowered deliberative setting that redistributes a good toward the less powerful is that it will meet opposition from more powerful organized groups invested in the previous distributive scheme. And in the case of Porto Alegre, popular pressure was able to protect the autonomy of the process. Participants in the meetings personally went to the

office of councilpersons to exert pressure, and despite a negative media campaign, succeeded in guaranteeing the approval. An important feature of deliberative democracy is that is its element of public justification – it becomes difficult for politicians in the context of a democracy to oppose something that is clearly ‘fair’ and result of ‘public will.’

However, while it may be autonomy-enhancing, this may not in itself guarantee that the project be carried through, as a number of ‘failed’ deliberative experiments that were met with considerable opposition (to mention participatory governance in São Paulo, or Fortaleza, for instance) attest.

The issue of the driving political vision behind this project also comes to bear on a number of issues for deliberative democracy. While theorists of deliberative democracy generally stay away from such ‘content’ issues, and the issue of a ‘driving vision’ needs to be addressed carefully, I think this case highlights suggests some of the ways in which it is important. The question, of course, is whether it would be possible to abstract and transport the institutional features of the experiment without taking its founding visions along. In this case, the *reason of state* behind the participatory experiment is a radical democratic vision of popular control of city government and of inversion of government priorities away from downtown and toward its peripheries. Four orienting principles made up the PT vision for municipal government: *popular participation, transparent governance, democratizing the state, and creating a new political culture.*

Progressive intellectuals in the 1980s debated how these four principles would be carried out politically. One of the debates was on the role of progressive municipal

governments in actively changing Brazilian political culture. In other words, should municipal governments function with the goal of most efficient and democratic delivery of services, or should they play a role in a larger culturally transformative project? One prominent PT intellectual, Jorge Bittar, writes in an official publication that:

‘The inversion of priorities and popular participation are necessary components, but although not sufficient for a transformative project. An alternative project of local power must consider actions in two levels: at the municipal political power, and in local society (...) the clash with the values that sustain local hegemony at the local level becomes a conflict must cross all of our actions.’ (1992:8)

Writings from the early days of the process document lofty objectives for a popular administration, as when the PT candidate for Mayor Olivio Dutra wrote that popular councils would “restore the historical legacy of the working classes in giving form and content to democracy,” (PT, 1988. cited in Augustin Filho, 1994).

While theorists of deliberative institutions are not likely to be convinced that these visions are very important and to see them as perhaps justifications by administrators for cultural leftists, it is indisputable that these visions set the ground rules for deliberation within the new participatory structures as well as orienting visions for the activists who run them. One of the more experienced activists in one of the regions I studied described his concern for new persons in terms that tell of an activist calling:

The most important thing is that more and more persons come. Those who come for the first time are welcome, we have a lot of patience for them, there is no problem, we let them make demands during technical meetings, they can speak their mind and their anxieties. We have patience for it because we were like that once. And if he has an issue, we set up a meeting for him, and create a comission to accompany him. You have the responsibility of not abandoning him, of staying with him. That’s the most important thing. (Nino, interview 1999)

As Cohen (1997) writes, deliberative democracy is at its best a process whereby participants reconsider and reconstruct their preferences. The question we can ask is if it makes a difference if deliberation takes place not just under the aegis of rationality and problem-solving, but also of empowerment of the poor and social justice, visions borne of social movement activism and oppositional politics.

Appendix: Statistics

Equation 1

Yearly Regional Participation as Function of Regional Poverty

Ecological Regression Model : $Y = b * m^x$

Variable	B	S.E.
POVERTY	0.000503206	0.445846797
CONSTANT	176.0668491	1.033562516

R²: 0.64129724

F= 25.02952959 Df= 14

Note: Poverty is defined as the proportion of persons per region with incomes below 2 Minimum Wages. Participation is defined as the average proportion of persons per region participating in the First and Second Round Meetings of the OP, 1990-1998.

Sources: PMPA/ FESC. PMPA/ CRC

Equation 2

Self Reported Active Participation in meetings as Function of Gender

Binary Logistic Regression Model : $Y \text{ Active} = B \text{ Sex Female}$

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig	R	Exp(B)
Gender (F)	-.3331	.0904	13.5699	1	.0002	-.0897	.7166

Chi- Squared =13.759

Df= 1

Note: Active Participation is defined as self-reported answer to speaking in meetings sometimes or more often.

Source: 1998 Survey

Equation 3

Active Participation as Function of Years of Experience and Gender

Binary Logistic Regression

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig	R	Exp(B)
SEXO(1)	-.4613	.1000	21.2839	1	.0000	-.1158	.6304
YEARSOP	.0720	.0234	9.4918	1	.0021		1.070

Chi- Square: 23.22

Df=2

Equation 4

Election as Function of Gender (Female), Years Participation, Poverty, with interaction terms

Binary Logistic Regression

Regression Model : $Y \text{ Election} = B_1\text{Sex} + B_2\text{Years} + B_3\text{Poverty} + B_4 \text{Low-ed} + B_5$

$\text{Poverty} * \text{Years} + B_6 \text{Low-ed} * \text{Years}$

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig	R	Exp(B)
SEX(F)	-1.5040	.1901	62.5700	1	.0000	-.2156	.2222
YEARS	.2252	.0514	19.1745	1	.0000	.1148	.2526
POOR	-.8374	.2814	8.8548	1	.0029	-.0725	.4328

POOR* Yrs	.1900	.0763	6.2001	1	.0128	.0568	.2092
LOED	-1.6492	.2278	52.4224	1	.0000	-.1967	.1922
LOED* Yrs	.2585	.0637	16.4578	1	.0000	.1053	.2950

Chi- Squared: 431.553

Df= 6

Equation 5

Investment (1990-1994) as Function of P.T. Strength (1988) or Associational Density (1988)

Correlation Investment and Associational Density = .00119

Correlation Investment and PT Strength = .0117

Equation 6

Changes in Density as Function of Poverty

$d2-d1 = \text{Poverty}$

Variable	B	S.E.
POVERTY	0.002854745	0.211727655
CONSTANT	1.23579576	0.490827273
R ² :	0.311674787	
F=	6.339222993	Df= 14

Appendix 2: Associational Density Measures per Region, 1988, 1988⁷

Region	Population	d1	d2
1	48,199	0.124484	0.31121
2	127574	0.039193	0.156772
3	110451	0.172022	0.416474
4	48368	0.124049	0.785643
5	88614	0.304692	0.50782
6	24261	0.123655	0.989242
7	114127	0.140195	0.394298
8	45999	0.086958	0.717407
9	37439	0.320521	1.041694
10	34900	0.286533	1.002865
11	30045	0.366117	1.164919
12	101397	0.108484	0.552285
13	23905	0.125497	1.003974

14	86057	0.058101	0.708833
15	62837	0.047743	0.811624
16	271294	0.051605	0.117953
Total:	1,255,46	0.12346	0.477113

7

Note: The earlier figure was generated by a ‘triangulation’ of associations that were identified by a municipal report of the Collares Administration, and dues-paying associations linked to the city-wide union of neighborhood associations. (UAMPA). For an association to be considered active, it had to appear in one of the two lists. The 1998 figures are based, again, on associations paying dues to the union of associations, and associations that participated in OP proceedings of the Worker’s Party administration for 1997 and 1998. For the second number I used a more stringent standard, which was that it had to be listed in both years. If an association did not appear in the UAMPA list, and only appeared in one of the years it was not counted. This more conservative estimation procedure was necessary to avoid over-counting momentary associations of persons who decided to attend an OP meeting.

Appendix 3: Development of Participatory Structures, Porto Alegre

- 1983 City Wide Organization of Neighborhood Associations founded
- 1986-1989 Failed attempts at City hall Participatory structures
- 1987 First Popular Councils developed throughout the city
- 1988 First Health Councils developed
- 1989 PT Victory, Participatory Budget announced
- 1990 First Rounds of OP meetings, in five regions
- 1991 Direct Voting for Tutelar Council introduced
- 1991 Number of Regional Meetings increased to sixteen
- 1992 Number of Participants in OP takes off
- 1992-1995 Participatory structures widened to include municipal councils on housing, social assistance, child and family services, technology,
- 1993 City Wide Congress to debate directives
- 1993 Municipal Health Council
- 1994 Direct Voting for Municipal School directors introduced
- 1994 Theme Oriented Meetings introduced
- 1995 City Wide Forum of Child and Adolescent Services.
- 1996 Municipal Councils on Human Rights, Environment
- 1997 City Wide Forum of Cooperatives
- 1998 Second City Wide Congress, Health Congress.
- 1996 Human Rights Council Instituted
- 1997 Participatory Planning of schools.

1998 Human Rights Conference

TABLES FOLLOW: