

Giovanni Allegretti

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“Participatory democracies:
a slow march toward new paradigms
from Brazil to Europe?”



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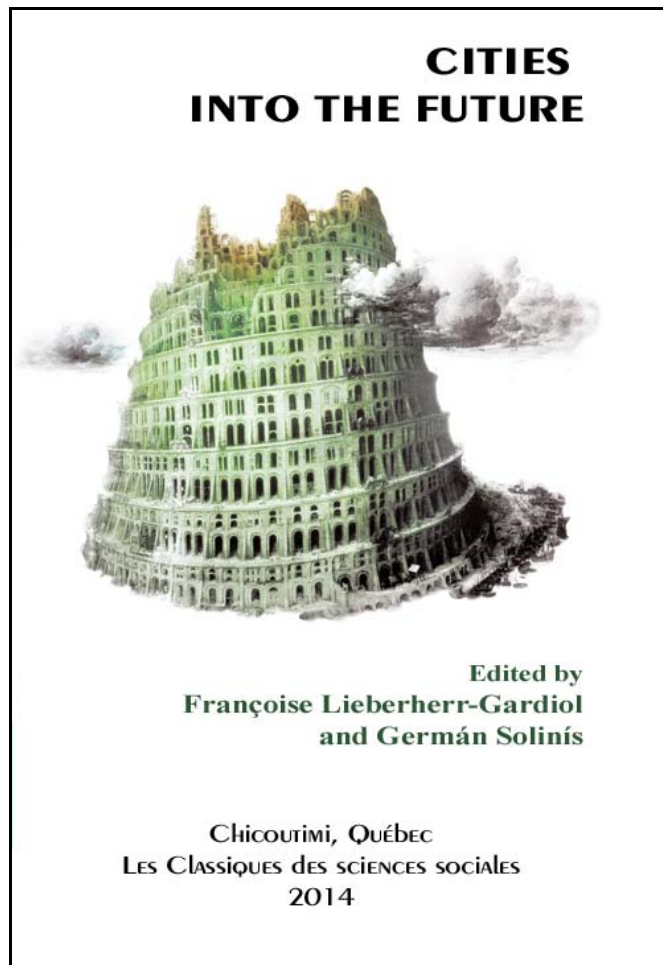
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**Participatory democracies:
a slow march toward new paradigms
from Brazil to Europe? ¹**

by Giovanni Allegretti

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During a conference on Participatory Budgeting (PB) organised in Prague by the “Transform !” network in November 2008, several participants from Eastern Europe declared to admire the rate at which experiences related to that particular type of participatory democracy’s tool are spreading across the world. However, they added that this sounded like an utopia for their countries, which 20 years after the fall of the Berlin wall “still have more urgent problems of establishing representative frameworks”.

Only some months later, at the first International Congress on Participatory Budgeting Models organised in Berlin by Inwent and Marc Bloch Institute ², a group of young Polish activists of SLLGO ³,

¹ This text owes part of its reflections to the project Participatory Budgeting as innovative tool for reinventing local institutions in Portugal and Cape Verde ? A critical analysis of performance and transfers (PTDC/CS-SOC/099134/2008, funded by FEDER – COMPETE and FCT) and to the project Cidade e Alteridade : Convivência Multicultural e Justiça Urbana co-funded through an agreement FCT/CNPQ (4.4.1.00).

² See www.burgerhaushalt.de.

which deals with some growing PBs in rural cities of Poland, observed that this logic of thinking was wrong. In fact, they stated, “participatory practices provide a unique opportunity for enrooting new, improved models of representative democracy”, so that “it is worth starting to structure hypotheses of governance based on dialogue between participation and representation, instead of following a path which states the supremacy of representation and then is forced to reintroduce the direct involvement of citizens to correct the crises of legitimacy of elected institutions, as already happened all over the western world”.

Such an interesting debate explicitly poses the question whether or not a unique sequential logic in conceiving the relationship between representative democratic institutions and spaces of participatory decision-making exists. It also raises doubts on the fact that some countries need participatory practices as a pivotal and indispensable tool for making their representative institutions function, while others can afford to think of participation as a mere “added value”, which could be either ignored or underestimated because the “minimum functionality” of institutions is already granted.

The “Double Disease of Democracy”

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The theoretical debate on such issues is obviously open, but more than one renown thinker (Touraine, 1994 ; Fung and Wright, 2003 ; Santos, 2008) stresses the existence of a “double disease of liberal democracy” (DDD) which is spread all over the planet. This urges us to rethink governance frameworks that create “hybrid models” of institutions and public policies which could involve a tight dialogue between delegated decision-making and direct participation of citizens in the framing of government acts, at least in the management of local and regional levels of policies.

³ SLLGO is the Association of Leaders of local Civic Groups, based in Warsaw (cfr. www.lgo.pl)

As a matter of fact, the so-called "DDD" describes a twin phenomenon. On the one hand, the pathology of representation concerns the way how citizens are increasingly distant from political life and the elected, which they often even do not want to know. On the other hand, obviously related to the former, the pathology of participation is related to the increasingly common idea that "there is no point in participating", as citizens feel far too small to confront large interest groups and the political and economic dynamics that dominate society (Santos, 2008). Such a perspective seems to underline that only the implementation of a tight dialogue between participatory arenas and institutions could activate a "virtuous circle" able to bring an end to the DDD.

While this debate is taking place, in the daily practice of several political/administrative institutions around the world it is becoming increasingly clear that opening "solid" spaces for citizen participation in the shaping of public policies could simultaneously help to increase the legitimacy of institutions, as well as the efficacy of governing and managing resources. It could also allow for a better fulfilment of inhabitants' needs and provide a key stimulus towards enrooting decentralisation processes in common culture (Allegretti, Freitas, Pereira 2013). Such a "convergence of effects", which the opening of spaces of participatory democracy can offer to representative institutions and their political-administrative tasks, explains a "convergence of interests" that is often regarded as "suspicious" (Dagnino, 2004 ; Dagnino e Tatagiba, 2007 ; Ganuza e Baiocchi, 2012). This concerns the way how citizens' participation is central both within the discourse of social grassroots movements (especially those which share a common "alter-globalist" perspective, recognising themselves in the Charter of the World Social Forum) and the champions of the "neoliberal consensus", such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund or even some National Cooperation Agencies.

As a matter of fact, citizen participation can be observed and evaluated through several different perspectives and points of interest, emphasizing different features and results, and using the ambiguity of the concept's intensity to stress its merely "informational" dimensions or to valorise its "co-decisional", "co-managerial" or even "revolutionary" potential. The latter is the case when the emphasis is put mainly on the pedagogical process of "cumulative and progressive

appraisal" which it can open, and whose final results cannot be imagined from the beginning. Even the concept of "citizen" can be read in various ways, either in terms of a customer, a user, an individual who could be empowered by the participatory process (thus enhancing his/her rights of accessing services and power-sharing) or in mere terms of "aggregated groups", which can exert pressures on institutions and express public choices, passing from a condition of "stakeholders" to that of "shareholders" of decisional powers.

Converging crises

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Undoubtedly, the present world financial crisis raises issues related to the provision and distribution of resources, and the need to find innovative strategies is especially felt regarding local administrative institutions, affected by diminishing State transfers and self-funding opportunities. If this crisis constitutes a major issue, it is not acting alone ; but – instead – it sums its risks to those generated by the legitimacy crises of representative institutions, and to a widespread loss of communitarian values which the analyses of authors like Bauman (1998) or Beck (2003) clearly identify, relating it to "liquid modernity" and the individualist trends of present society.

The question is whether and how the convergent effects of these parallel - and interrelated – crises could be addressed by increasing the level of citizens' participation in public policies.

For many cities of different sizes, in different geographical contexts, both in the South as well as in the North of the world, this represents a crucial "bet" on which to invest human energies and creativity as well as intellectual and financial resources. So this challenge has been addressed worldwide by innovations in public policies, seeking to develop participatory mechanisms allowing citizens to share public actors' responsibilities in decision making. One of them is Participatory Budgeting (PB), which involves citizens in discussing and deciding on the priorities of budgeting documents to be implemented using public resources.

In the following paragraphs of the present essay, we will be referring to PB not only as a central *tool* of new experiments seeking to successfully renovate public policies at a local or supra-local level, but also as a *perspective* from which it is possible to understand some features and challenges of a needed major "shift" in facing the mentioned convergent crises.

We choose Participatory Budgeting for three main reasons. The first one is that PB tends to address concrete issues, proposing a way to share decision-making on resource allocation between elected representatives and inhabitants, which appears to be relevant in the context of economic crisis, but also for making the perception of this "sharing" more effective among the social actors. Resource allocation is definitely a matter of highly concrete and symbolic value. The second reason relates to the fact that the majority of around 2,700 PBs today experienced in the world (Sintomer, Herzberg, Allegretti, 2013) go beyond a mere "stakeholder" approach", opening decision-making to all citizens, independent of their belonging to aggregated groups. They therefore take advantage of "individual motivations", using them as an engine to promote participation, while creating deliberative common spaces where all proposals can be negotiated and reviewed through collective action. The third reason for focussing our essay on PB is because during the last 24 years several different models of it have been implemented, showing an intense variety of motivations and objectives, which were set in coherence with specific tools and local government cultures in each specific local context (Sintomer, Herzberg, Allegretti, 2013 ; Sintomer, Allegretti, 2009). Such features allow considering Participatory Budgeting today as representative of the plural paradigms which are contributing to shape a new "culture of participation" around the planet, which shows the added value of following a South-North direction in global learning. Under this perspective, PB could be regarded as both a space for renovating public policies and political systems, and an instrument to dynamise societal relations and try to create a new civic culture of common goods.

Participatory Budgeting : an incremental tool for facing a wide range of issues

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Today, using the definition of Appadurai (1991), we could consider PB as an “ideoscape”, signifying a political model which travels globally but exists through local appropriation. Participatory Budgeting, after first being shaped during the ‘90s in semi-peripheric Latin American countries, where it contributed to consolidating new democratic institutions (Sintomer and Allegretti 2013, Calvo 2011, Molina Molina 2010, Avritzer, 2009, Santos 2007 ; Marquetti, Campos, Pires. 2007), spread to Europe and Africa at the end of the millennium.

Today PB could be considered a mainly urban “device”. In fact, although its methodologies are spreading also in rural environments (especially in Poland, in the Andes and in some African countries), its first experiments have all been implemented in big cities, and the main and more interesting examples are still held in large towns, as it is well proved by cases such as those of Dakar, Yaoundé, Lisbon, Cologne, New York or Chicago ⁴. A reason to explain such prevalence could be that the original conception of PB was aimed at bridging social gaps and reducing the distance between citizens and elected institutions. This usually constitutes a deeper problem in large and dense urban areas whose size and scale of problems reinforce social polarization and the separation between inhabitants and their political representatives.

According to Cabannes (2004, 2005), four “pure models” of PB can be recognised analysing a wide range of existing experiences. The first and most widespread one is the “territorial model”, in which discussions on resources are organised through community- or neighbourhood-based public debates. The second is a “thematic

⁴ The last two ones developed since 2011 in some electoral districts of the two cities and are growing very fast in terms of increasing deliberative quality and spreading to other wards (Lerner and Secondo, 2012).

model", which concentrates energies on specific policy sectors (example of this could be the "Public Housing PB" of the Toronto Housing Community and the Logiparc Housing Agency of Poitiers). The third one is the so-called "actorial model" which aims to involve specific social or age groups (the most common example being the PBs dedicated to younger people and schools, as in the French Regions of Poitou Charentes and Nord-Pas de Calais, in the Swedish towns of Uddevalla and Örebro, in the Brazilian metropolises of Recife and Fortaleza, or in the towns of São Bras de Alportel, Trofa, Lisbon, Oliveira do Hospital, Vilanova de Famalicão and Condeixa in Portugal). The fourth model – partially overlapped to the previous - could be defined as a "virtual PB", because proposals, deliberation and priority voting take place mainly through the internet, as happens in Lisbon (Portugal) or Cologne (Germany). In both cases this involves a significant amount of investments included in the municipal budget. Examples of this last typology demonstrate how the risk of exclusion which it can imply needs to be addressed by mixing such a model with others, simultaneously offering different channels of possible participation. In the hypothesis tested in Belo Horizonte, Lisbon or Cascais (Allegretti 2012a, Sampaio 2010), important investments have been made in "itinerant caravans" equipped with computers and internet connections, through which trained facilitators help people living in the most deprived areas (and especially youngsters) to learn to use computers and to participate in "virtual PB" voting.

Today, all the above mentioned "PB models" are rarely found alone. Instead, the majority of experiences mix them, trying to create complementary environments for a "healthy development" of participatory practices allowing for an equal access to different groups or types of citizens.

In a context of financial and economic crisis, it seems natural that existing PBs, which historically have mainly been instruments towards orienting resource allocation, thus focussing on expenses, and particularly capital investments, are changing or at least enriching their "core business". This has implied starting to debate issues related to "income", with the clear aim of strengthening the financial autonomy of local institutions, by consolidating their revenue- and fund-raising capacity, as well as their ability to build partnerships with the social fabric and economic stakeholders. This is becoming a strongly-

felt "need" especially in some developing countries in Africa, but also in small and medium sized European cities, such as Grottammare in Italy or Santa Cristina de Aro in Spain, which have been experiencing such a shift in the last five years.

A last development is also clearly visible regarding the recent spread of PB experiences around the world. It is related to the "cross-pollination" of Participatory Budgeting with other practices of social dialogue, such as spatial participatory planning, sectorial consultative councils or Agendas XXI. In the case of some German PBs, the tradition of "Planungzelle" (Dienel, 1977) led to experiments involving the use of a "random selection" of citizens, involving different types of social groups and individuals, which were not easily attracted to participate in public debates, in the budgetary discussion. This "hybrid merge" between PB and the "citizens' juries" method has likewise been experienced in other countries such as Spain, France or the Tuscany Region in Italy, and in rare cases even combined with principles of "deliberative polling" (Fishkin, 2009). An example of the latter is that of the Zeguo district in the Wenling municipality in China (He, 2011, 2010), which used random sampling of inhabitants, through scientifically set methods aimed at increasing the "representative capacity" of PB, thus reflecting gender, age and socio-economic stratifications and the educational-professional differentiation of the overall population. Although interesting for their ability to raise issues of "social representativity" and "deep deliberation", models like that of Zeguo seem to compromise on objectives of "social inclusion" and civic pedagogy through wide participation, given that they concentrate on "reduced samples" of inhabitants (Sintomer, Traub-Merz, Zhang, Herzberg, 2012).

Therefore, today it is becoming clear that choosing a specific set of PB is a strong political option, which has to seriously interrogate itself on the coherence between its main aims, on the one hand, and the mechanisms of promoting and implementing participation locally, on the other hand. Just to provide an example of this, if the Swedish PBs, whose main need for experimenting is that of recreating and enhancing social ties within the context of a strongly individualist and fragmented society (Allegretti 2011c, Langlet, 2008), would use the Internet as the main feature for debating and voting priorities, they would

probably not reach their goals, therefore partially wasting time, resources and energies.

Such a reflection is important in supporting the idea that PB is not a "model", but rather a contextualizable "set of principles" which characterises a new approach to participation. Some of these principles have been well classified for the European context by comparative research (Sintomer and Allegretti, 2009 ; Sintomer, Herzberg and Röcke, 2008). They are : (1) The budgetary and/or financial dimension needs to be explicitly discussed. (2) A participatory budget needs to be implemented at a town level (or a decentralised district that has an elected assembly and a certain measure of control over public services) while a neighbourhood level *per se* is not enough. (3) It should be a repetitive procedure over a period of time : a single meeting or referendum on budgetary issues does not constitute a participatory budget in the sense implied in our work. (4) The process should include certain forms of public deliberation in assemblies or specific fora. (5) The moderators of the participatory approach should report back on the results achieved, at least in the form of a report or follow-up to discussions (notion of accountability).

Obviously, these criteria have been established in order to clarify the features of PBs and distinguish them from a larger range of other participatory or consultative tools in use in several cities within the European context. On other continents, it would be possible to stress the centrality of other principles : for example the need of implementing specific measures for increasing "social justice" and "solidarity" in the distribution of public resources or for guaranteeing the total transparency of expenses-tracking as a means to fight corruption (Matovu, 2006), as we will see further. As a matter of fact, the contexts and the goals which justify the experimentation of PB may modify its main settings, possibly adding new criteria to those above stated, rather than replacing them (Allegretti, 2012, Allegretti, Garcia, Paño 2011, Allegretti, Alves 2011).

Tailoring practices to the changing contexts

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If settings and goals of PBs are usually site-specific, results also are. As Marquetti et alii (2007) and the project INCLUIR (2007) showed well, for example, the capacity of PB to be a space of social inclusion and redistributive justice is directly proportional to the tools forged to implement these aims. Since the start-up of the first Participatory Budgeting examples in the early ‘90s, Brazilian cities have been those which set a wider range of measures to fulfil these types of goals.

Among the means to guarantee equal access to all citizens some were very simple but sagacious. For example, specific rules regulating the speaking-time of each intervening person during PB meetings were set in order to “equalize” the cultural differences between participants and their different habits to speak (or not) in public ; baby-sitting sessions during assemblies were organised to allow participation of young and/or monoparental families, which usually have less spare-time than the elderly (especially retired citizens) ; the live-streaming of assemblies was used to integrate commuters and other citizens with difficulties to attend meetings ; the geography of meeting places was set according to the need of guaranteeing accessibility to all neighbourhoods, particularly those less served by public transportation, and in some cases the number of public meetings was multiplied in order to allow people to participate in assemblies taking place in spaces located at walking-distance. Taking into account the risk that the choice of meeting places could communicate wrong information to the inhabitants, public spaces such as schools, libraries or sport centres were privileged rather than using private schools, seats of associations, parties or institutions which could give the impression of being “excluding” spaces for some types of potential participants.

As far as the size of public meetings for discussing budget priorities is concerned, this probably represents the weakest point in Brazilian experiences. Here where big assemblies have always been privi-

leged, in comparison with the use of small seminars and workshops where everybody could feel more at ease, due to the reduced number of participants and the slower agendas, marked by a more serene use of time and space resources. Over time, several cities corrected mistakes related to this particular aspect, creating a variable geometry of spaces (pre-meetings, convocations for the preparation of public debates, thematic seminars) compatible with a wide range of needs and the desires of every citizen. Experiences are known, where special tools were used to take into account the particular needs of disabled people, i.e. translation in language-of-signs for integrating deaf participants, and the publication of reports and proceedings of meetings in Braille. In several of these situations, initially the service did not exist, but was provided by the municipalities after specific requests and pressures by citizens with special needs. The fact of PB usually being an "incremental" and "progressively-built" process helped to complexify its features and devices over time according to the requests of participants.

As far as measures towards stimulating a more equitable distribution of resources are concerned, Brazil also possesses several important experiments, usually centred on three types of devices. The first is constituted by the so-called "matrixes of social criteria", whose goal is to reduce the "dictatorship of simple majority", merging the vote of citizens who support specific investments with "technical criteria" helping to address common choices which benefit weaker social groups and/or specific areas of the city. The second device consists of providing "positive discrimination" criteria which make weaker social groups more represented inside "delegate groups" which, especially in big cities, are usually established to simplify the dialogue between citizens and public officials in some decisional phases of each participatory process. A third tool is represented by the so-called "caravanas", i.e. collective visits organised by public institutions to involve citizens in an active diagnosis of their territory before the phase of investment priority voting. This last measure is very important because it is not only useful to enrich the debate on the investments which are most urgent to support, but also because they can help to alleviate a lack of knowledge on the relevant territory which affects a majority of citizens.

The last example clearly illustrates that such tools become very useful not only for their direct effects on investments, but mainly for their pedagogic added value on citizens’ civic engagement and maturation. In fact, “social justice” could be guaranteed by elected institutions through services and decisions which choose not to pass “through” PB voting. As it happens in Europe, for example, the quantity of investments co-decided with citizens could be limited to a restricted part of the budget, in order to leave to elected officials a “discretionary space of manoeuvre” to guarantee an equal distribution of resources. But such behaviour seems rooted in a widespread relationship between inhabitants and representative institutions mainly based on mutual “mistrust”, which could negatively affect the participatory spirit. Meanwhile, if measures to guarantee equity and solidarity are undertaken together inside a collective space of decision-making, as is the case in several PBs in Southern World, the trust-centred environment could enhance and stimulate important results in terms of pedagogic appraisal (Mbera, 2012).

As Rebecca Abers’ findings underline (2000), only by accepting to be a really open space to share decision-making with citizens, Participatory Budgeting can foster important appraisal, which is not only useful to increase the levels of civic engagement of citizens, but can also teach and shape new skills to be reused in private life, making citizens grow up as more complex and richer human beings (see also Talpin, 2011).

***The rescue of territories :
reaching environmental sustainability
through enhancing citizenship***

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One of the main aims of the first experiences of Participatory Budgeting – especially the Brazilian ones in the early ‘90s – was to consolidate citizenship and expand the “right to the city”, by making traditionally silent voices count in policy setting and decision making. In the transformation of local territory many of these cases, concentrated on issues of social integration, which sometimes could only be

solved through physical arrangements, such as the requalification of slums, the provision of infrastructures and services, the opening of equipped common areas, and so on, but the "territory" and its environmental quality in themselves were not so central as such (Allegretti, 2003). It was a strong political choice by institutions whose political representatives were convinced that the quality of "citizenship" and the level of accessibility of services are a crucial precondition for the sustainability of territorial transformations and the improvement of their quality level.

That explains why several cities invested in training programmes whose main aim was to provide new skills and tools to citizens and public officials with respect to promoting better decision making on public policies. This is the case of several Brazilian cities (such as Porto Alegre or Guarulhos, in the São Paulo metropolitan area), and some Bolivian (El Alto) and Spanish (Seville) ones. They invested in "capacity building" initiatives by often using the pedagogic methods of Paulo Freire centred in self-appraisal. Their aim was to avoid the training moment being perceived by citizens as space of "indoctrination" through which representative institutions would try to influence people decisions, instead of simply contributing to the creation and spreading of new knowledge and capacities of critical analysis of urban complexity. One of the first Asian PB experiences, that of Kerala State in India (Shubham et al. 2001), which took shape in 1996⁵ and still represents one of the worldwide largest experiments at a regional level, also took this line of action. In the "*Kerala People's Campaign for the Ninth Plan*" promoting citizen participation in decentralized planning was held to call for a preliminary capacity building phase. In this respect, together with a pilot-project called "Kalliasseri People's Planning Experiment", the "Total Literacy Campaign", the "People's Science Movement" and the "People's Resource Mapping Program" became indispensable instruments to spread a culture of participation in complex decisions,. Furthermore, in order to increase the mobilisation of citizens through a cyclical process, 373 state-level trainers were involved, together with almost 10,500 trained provincial-level resource-persons and 50,000 trained local activists. Among the latter 4,000 retired technicians were mobilised as "Volunteer Technical

⁵ See: <http://www.kerala.gov.in/government/localself.htm>

Corps" to spread knowledge and give quality to discussions, which constituted the "engine" of the process since its beginning (Sunny, 2009 ; Chaudhuri and Heller, 2002).

All of these examples underline that improving the quality of public discussion and that of all policies aimed to fulfil the common interests of a local community is possible, but that it requires specific measures and investments. The case of Porto Alegre still remains an important reference from this point of view. In 1994 the new mayor Tarso Genro, who was very much concerned with the quality of democratic decision-making processes (Genro and De Souza, 1997) promoted an important evolution in PB mechanisms, making citizens collectively approve two major transformations : first the introduction of thematic PB assemblies, and second the establishment of "social and technical criteria" which have to be fulfilled by citizens' requests within the hierarchisation of budget priorities. In fact, Genro's team had noticed that a limited number of issues were always at the top of the "priorities list" issued by the PB People Council every year (usually housing, street-paving and basic infrastructures). That repetition, although necessary to reduce the infrastructural gaps and to reverse the social polarisation of city investments, could impoverish the complexity of urban management that local institutions have to guarantee ; for example, eliminating issues such as culture or the environment from the governing perspective. Furthermore, some municipal services (as those in charge of mobility and infrastructures) had noticed that the quality of certain public works had gradually lowered, due to the fact that the "pressure" posed by citizens on some priorities such as street-asphalting was pushing the administration to implement decisions rapidly, without matching the quality levels usually guaranteed by the respect of technical requirements and building procedures (Allegretti, 2005a).

There were two ways of dealing with such risks : one was a top-down and authoritarian one (i.e. : reducing the amount of money on which citizens could exert co-decision, in order to provide a margin for manoeuvre to the institutions which would guarantee the survival of many other important policies.), and the other was proposing a modification of the PB structure introducing a mechanism which could stimulate citizens (from "inside" the process") to widen their reading of city complexity. This second path was the one chosen by

the Porto Alegre municipal government, in order to express its commitment to increase (and not reduce) the margins of participation. Although, it was not an easy policy to be followed, due to the resistance that citizens put up for some years against the respect of "technical/legal requirements and criteria" applied to the hierarchisation phase of PB decisions. From their point of view the latter appeared to be an easy, artificial and clever way to "re-bureaucratise" the participatory process and partially expropriate the "peoples' will". The argument convincing the popular committees which annually contribute to the revision and amendment of the PB "internal ruling document" was that, given that many technical criteria were set by national laws, they had to be respected anyway. Superposing them after citizens' decisions, instead of incorporating them during decision making would have enormously slowed the implementation of certain investments.

The present complexity of the participatory architecture of cities like Porto Alegre, Recife, Seville, Belo Horizonte or Fortaleza, which can scare a beginner when looking at the fluxograms and organigrams of the structure set to improve decision-making, should be interpreted from this perspective. It is just a slow ongoing process of studying "additions" seeking to improve the quality of commonly-done decisions, which gradually complexify the PB "device". The scope of these "additions" will hopefully be taken into account by new starting processes, but copying the complex structure might also be dangerous, risking the creation of a participatory device which repulses citizens because of its unreadable complexity, instead of attracting them through its transparent and understandable way of functioning.

As a matter of fact, every local experience should gradually reach its complexity, respecting the level of "tolerance" that social actors can afford at every stage of the participatory device's transformations, which could be strictly linked to the characteristics of each local context, its social/political conditions and its maturity in dealing with several interconnected issues at the same time.

Enhancing a pedagogy of solidarity

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The expansion of PB to several different places today illustrates this aspect and poses new challenges to the device itself. This is clear, when comparing some Southern world PBs with those of Sweden or Norway, for example. In the first, in fact, issues related to culture and the environment are often left at the margins of decision-making by the social actors (or appear as “late conquests”), while in some Nordic countries they are central from the beginning of the process.

Notwithstanding, reaching aims of complexity in participatory decision-making, and facing issues related to sustainability in the public discussion is possible. This possibility is often in a relation of direct proportionality with the capacity of local governments (or of the most sensitive and innovative social actors) to clarify the existing links between the apparent “abstraction” of issues related to sustainability and the concrete daily-life-experience of citizens, and the aim of guaranteeing a better quality of life for every citizen. An interesting case again is offered by the Porto Alegre experience, in as far as it concerns the issue of convincing citizens to support the approval of investments to reduce water-pollution in the city’s lake Guaiba.

At the end of the ‘90s the inhabitants several times opposed the suggestions of the City Hall to approve “anti-pollution measures to clean the lake”, where bathing had been forbidden for many years. But in 2000, the Municipality proposed to introduce a “technical criterium” which (without superposing the people’s decision on priorities to be funded) could promote a gradual depollution programme for Lake Guaiba (Prefeitura de Porto Alegre, 2002). The criteria consisted of giving a higher score (while deciding the list of priorities to fund) to the “demolition” of slums located beside the lake and its affluent rivers and streams, and the “relocation” of their inhabitants in social housing. This could allow reducing pollution without investing money in specific environmental projects for the lake. When some years later the idea started to produce its first concrete effects, and the Praia do Lami (Lami’s beach) was re-opened to bathing soon to be followed by

several other beaches, many vulnerable social groups which had until then considered "environmental policies" just as a superfluous issue benefiting people with an already wealthy social status, they started to revise their positions. In fact, they understood that depollution was allowing economically vulnerable citizens to take a swim close to home, without having to reach the sea-beach, located at a distance of more than 100 km. requiring an expensive trip. From this perspective, the first practical output of the environmental-friendly criterion used to promote the cleaning of the lake without further investments created the possibility of giving to the policy a new proactive reading. Other cases which have been able to make the discussion of environmental policies more "acceptable" to all the citizenry were related to waste-recycling, whose potential of producing local development and micro-economies to benefit vulnerable social groups was underlined with positive effects.

In the light of such examples, PB could be read as an interesting mechanism which can address issues of environmental sustainability (reduction of the ecological footprint, land saving, precautionary principle, energy saving, closure of natural cycles, protection of biodiversity and socio-diversity, etc.), through the emphasis made on sustainability addressed first of all in its social-economic dimensions (Busatto, 2005). Thus, it is a device which can slowly foster cultural changes, making citizens and institutions "converge" towards the valorisation of policies aimed at increasing sustainable development by widening the adhesion of all social/political and administrative actors to the main "principles" of sustainability.

Similar challenges are not automatic in any PB and they only can be addressed in a mid-term perspective, especially through merging Participatory Budgeting with other processes of citizen participation in planning and development. This is because PB is a device tending to face "immediate" investments, which often can be decided within a narrow-minded, fragmented and short-termed perspective, if specific measures are not undertaken towards complexifying the visions of all the intervening actors, thus trying to overcome the risks of immediatism and self-referentiality.

Learning from the South and differentiating motivations and goals of experimentation

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Over the last 10 years, the diffusion of networks of decentralised co-operation practices among local administrations and research centres, the interest of some international institutions (primarily UNDP, UN-Habitat and the World Bank Institute), and the efforts of the "alterglobalist" movement acting under the motto 'Another World is Possible' to spread awareness of some important experiences in the democratisation of urban management in Latin American cities, stimulated the birth of experiences of participatory budgets in Europe and other continents.

The European Union itself has even funded exchange and emulation projects, launching a Network (No. 9 of the URB-AL co-operation programme) entirely dedicated to the issue of Participatory Budgets. The mutual learning during the programmes of dialogue and cooperation between cities was the main factor that allowed 'the return of the caravels'. That is, the 'disembarkation' and the taking root in European soil of creative innovations born from urban management in cities in the Global South, which themselves had been stimulated by a 'virtuous rethinking' of land management models often borrowed from Old World Countries during and after the periods of colonisation (Allegretti, Herzberg, 2004).

The Latin American practices of PB had mainly centred on 'urban conflict' rather than on the search for 'social peace', interpreting urban conflict as a source of creative solutions, capable of drawing on the wealth of different stratifications in cities without mortifying them through homogenising approaches. In this way, they had tried to put different sectors of society into dialogue with each other, and to involve 'antagonistic' movements in the experimentation with innovative management policies for the transformation of land use. In some cases, several Latin American PBs had succeeded to fight global trends convinced that privatisation of public services and outsourcing and externalisation of social responsibilities must be the rule in order

to grant efficiency to local policies through market-oriented strategies, that rarely proved interest in the needs of the most vulnerable citizens. For example, in Porto Alegre the re-publicisation of the transportation agency in 1990 showed great results in terms of efficiency and effectiveness when combined with a participatory approach which was able to involve users as well as employees in the reshaping of mobility services. The same happened in Belo Horizonte and Fortaleza for the water and housing services, while in Recife a new umbrella-project of "risk-prevention" interlinked with participatory budgeting recently won the "Best Practices" award of the International Observatory of Participatory Democracy (2008) ⁶, for having managed to almost reduce to zero the number of casualties of citizens living in poor and unsafe areas yearly struck by natural disasters.

In the European contexts, the interpretation of PB has undoubtedly been more "light". For example, until now rarely PBs have acted as spaces to challenge mechanisms of privatisation, which tend to leave larger and larger margins of power to those that end up managing 'common assets', once 'public assets' in both ownership and management terms.

If in cases like Italy this lack of a cultural shift toward common goods was mainly the consequence of regulations approved by national or regional governments to stimulate the private management of formerly public services, in other countries the free choice left to municipalities on how to manage their facilities and service-delivery structures made the ambiguity of some PB conceptions become clear.

Spain is an example where the study of "ambiguity" in PB application becomes interesting. In fact, there are towns such as Puente Genil (Andalusia) or Santa Cristina de Aro (Catalonia), where PB decisions are applied to all public sectors, including the management of service-delivery agencies. In Cordoba, instead, the sub-budget of municipal sectorial agencies has often been excluded from the financial pot subjected to citizens' decisions, so reducing the total amount of services and resources left in their hands. And this despite the city being a promoter of the international network of Local Authorities against the Privatisation of Public Services...

⁶ www.oidp.net

Families of innovative practice : heading beyond models

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If examples of Participatory Budgets in Europe do not point at an inversion of the privatising or outsourcing mechanism, as experimented in some of Latin America cases (especially in the Andean area, and mainly in villages and cities with a high indigenous population rate), this is mainly because PB in Europe was less intended as a tool for democratising access to resources and democratic management of common goods and assets than as an instrument for granting ‘good governance’.

Sintomer and Allegretti (2013, 2009) and Sintomer, Herzberg and Allegretti (2012) showed in their comparative studies on PBs in Europe that in the Old Continent several different families of Participatory Budgeting are today at work, often being strictly linked to models of management which reduce citizens’ participation to the valorisation of “proximity”, social linkages and “community development”, as well as the modernisation of the public administration machine or the creation of new public-private partnerships. Much more rare, instead, are the examples centred on the horizon of reaching a radical model of participatory management of public resources, where the goal of “social justice” could be a pivotal feature. The most interesting examples of PB where a fairer redistribution of common resources becomes a central goal are mainly concentrated in Spain, as the cases of Cordoba and Seville illustrate (Allegretti, 2012 ; Allegretti and Ganuza, 2013). They usually set mechanisms for enhancing public discussions and decisions which are based on the creation of the already mentioned “grids of social criteria” which could help to valorise projects aimed to mainly benefit weak social groups and less wealthy neighbourhoods of each city. Such mechanisms were inspired by those in use in many Latin American experiences, where PBs are generally also conceived as means for contributing to fill the gaps between social groups and the different areas of a often highly polarised territory.

As far as it concerns other cities in different countries from Spain, is it possible to underline that the aim of reaching "territorial (rather than social) justice" seem to be a frequent goal for several PBs, which subdivide their territory in several sub-districts, in each one of which citizens have the right to approve some priorities (in terms of public works and policies) to be inserted in the budget proposal for the next year.

It has to be admitted that in some cases Latin American cities have been able to turn sophisticated and modern tools into administrative routine much more than European cities themselves. A clear example relates to the merging and articulation between PB and the processes of participatory planning. Since the early '90s, for example, the city of Porto Alegre was subdivided into 16 districts, whose number and borders were forged according to a discussion with community groups, in order to reflect feelings of "ownership and belonging". In 1999, the new Master Plan led the City Council to create 8 Planning Regions, each one merging together two PB districts in order to create a better relationship between the choices of participatory budgeting and those of the "Municipal Management System of Urban Planning". When the Observatory of Porto Alegre (OBSERVAPOA) was created in 2005, one of its main tasks was to develop social, economical and environmental indicators on easily understandable maps, reorganising all the statistical data through a Geographic Information System which was based on the PB districts. The Observatory was a very important innovation in itself, because it was set up as a "mixed structure" (whose members are the municipality, some universities and social organisations, but also inhabitants indicated by the Popular Council of Participatory Budgeting), which has the task to verify and diffuse knowledge on the city, raising the level of inhabitants' awareness and confidence in the information spread, due to the fact that its main source is not anymore located in the political powers, but in a larger range of different actors (Fedozzi, 2007). Only few cities in Europe (as those of Bobigny or Morsang sur Orge in the Metropolitan area of Paris ⁷) have so far adopted a similar idea of letting Observatories monitor participatory processes. But recently the OIDP international network,

⁷ See Camilla Lattanzi (2008), "Virtù periferica", in *Altreconomia*, October 2008, pp. 34-35.

based in Barcelona, studied special guidelines for stimulating cities and social movements to create independent observatories to follow and communicate the output of participatory experiences in local areas, and some structures started to be activated in other parts of Latin America (as in Chile and Mexico, for example) as well as in Africa, where an African-Wide Observatory on Participation was launched in December 2012 together with the Senegalese Ngo ENDA.

In the same period, in the town of Santo André (located in the San Paulo metropolitan area), PB and strategic planning have been systematically articulated, and the strategic planning meetings had to elect delegates to the PB council. The Office for participatory budgeting and planning (SOPP) also elaborated a Geographic Information System to represent on maps the social indicators in each district, together with the distribution of resources made possible by PB. The city participated in the URBAL Project "INCLUIR" (called "Participatory Budgeting as a means to overcome the social and territorial exclusion"), using the opportunity to improve its representational geographic-based system, and make some European cities interested on how to replicate or emulate it.

In Belo Horizonte, in 2008, the Municipal Government published a complete study on the distribution of the 1000 public works funded through PB since 1993. Thanks to the Geographic Information System, it was calculated that 80% of the city population was living closer than 500 metres from a Participatory Budget-funded public infrastructure, and it was represented on very communicative maps. But Belo Horizonte went further in using new technologies, for example setting an "electronic PB" which allowed more than 500.000 citizens to vote some city-wide public works through the internet (Sampaio 2010, Allegretti, Matias, Schettini 2007). Furthermore, in 1996, the spatialisation of social/economical data was used by the Town Hall and the Catholic University of Minas Gerais to create the "Quality Index of Urban Life" (IQVU), whose more than 50 parameters were used to better distribute the municipal resources on the 80 infra-urban statistical areas of the territory. Since 2000, PB in Belo Horizonte allocates resources to every district proportionally to the level of its IQVU : the lower the index, the higher the resources aimed at improving the quality of life in that city area.

Similar “more scientific features” are still today to be implemented in European cities, although in the last 2 or 3 years the use of Internet tools to better enroot PB in the decision-making structures of some cities have made enormous progress. The software created in Hamburg to “simulate” budget construction, or those used in Modena and Rome XI ⁸ to map and follow the implementation of co-decided investments clearly illustrate this trend.

Despite this generally slow modernisation of tools used within the PB frameworks, in 2008 a very interesting mathematical instrument was adopted in the Participatory Budget of the IX District of Rome, thanks to the support of the Tipus Laboratory of Participatory Techniques of the Third Roman University. The device consists of using ANP software (Analytic Network Process), a *multicriteria* method of calculation whose aim is to evaluate the cost/benefit relationship of each investment proposal made by citizens, through considering some “intangibles”, i.e. perspectives, variables and factors not linked to their economic/financial value. The method (Sintomer, Allegretti, 2009) is based on the translation into numbers of judgements made by citizens in a narrative form, and the final index result is higher proportionally to how much the number of benefits reduce environmental and social costs. It is interesting that in the Rome IX District, the proposed method was not implemented before being discussed with citizens’ representatives, and that they contribute to improving its performance by inserting two new principles for evaluation, which are the “solidarity potential” of each proposal, and its “capacity of creating synergies” with other works and projects already under way in the area (Allegretti, Alves 2011).

⁸ In 2006 the Rome XI District (together with other partners) elaborated a free-software for connecting PB and the Google Earth satellite images, called “Edem 1.0” (www.municipiopartecipato.it). Unfortunately the process of PB stopped in 2008, and the software has not been used again, although other cities (as the Spanish Santa Cristina de Aro) are today using it.

Expanding knowledge through planetary networks

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How many of all the different experiments of PB and other participatory processes will be able to “merge” and “positively contaminate” each other, partially will depend on the degree of “inclusiveness” that international networks of participatory practices will be able to reach. Today, in fact, one of the most outstanding processes has been the birth of several networks which are stimulating the interchanges among experiences in different countries, both in a North-to-North, in a South-to-North and in a South-to-South perspective. But the degree of “inclusiveness” of these different structures is also highly differentiated.

In fact, networking is happening at different levels, it is promoted by a wide range of different actors and often reveals objectives and strategies which are diverse and complementary. One of the main types of networks today dealing with PB as a key issue is that of so-called “national networks”, which valorise the common language and a similar socio-political background of PB experiences taking place in the same country. Among these networks there are some (as the Brazilian, the Chilean or the Colombian one, but also the Italian Working Group of the multiactorial association called Network of the New Municipium or ARNM) which have a high level of politisation. For this reason, they can sometimes be perceived as “exclusive clubs” whose permeability is reduced because members are informally requested to share a common political vision on PB as a central tool for “democratising democracy”.

In other countries, “governance” constitutes the main focus of national networks – which are often more informal and built around a “catalyst” institution (as Engagement Global/Service in One World in Germany, the tandem CES–IN LOCO in Portugal, the Association of Regions and Municipalities – SALAR/SKL - in Sweden). In these latter cases (as well as in Japan or South Korea), PB is usually read as a useful tool to foster a modernisation of government’s action, by in-

creasing transparency and the efficacy of policies, and promoting improvements in social capital creation. In such cases, the networks seem more open to incorporate political and ideological differences, and their permeability provides a more "inclusive" approach to different kind of experiments, while also presenting the risk of fostering the "dilution" of the main PB principles. The German case is particularly interesting because the "virtual space of networking" created by the "Bürgershaushalt" project ⁹ proposes a "filtering" of accepted members, through setting some minimum criteria of access to welcome new local institutions in the web.

The opportunities of "scaling-up"

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Rare cases of "regional networks" can be found in Lazio or Tuscany (both in Italy) and in Andalusia (Spain). Here networking is not an explicit objective, but a natural effect of a regional strategy which combines training of local authorities together with special funding dedicated to promote participation at municipal and submunicipal levels, thus strengthening a natural dialogue between experimenting institutions.

A lack is generally felt in the performance of all these national or regional level networks : it relates to the still unexplored possibility of realising a comprehensive "mapping" of each country's or region's experiences which could go beyond the panorama of active members of the network itself, and stimulate comparative studies among all the existing experiences in that territory.

The Lazio Region constitutes an exception, having started in 2008 to publish an annual "Atlas" of all the PBs experimented in the regional territory. Anyway, being that the work is internally produced by the Regional Office of Participation, for reasons of diplomacy (and also lack of human and intellectual resources) it does not contain any "evaluation", but is limited to "descriptions" sent by the cities themselves and lightly re-elaborated by the Regional Office personnel.

⁹ See : www.burgerhaushalt.de.

An effective networking strategy is today being promoted by the United Cities and Local Government Office for Africa, which in 2012 started a promotion and training strategy for PB. It also instituted a special award for African best practices in the participatory budgeting domain, which has been launched in the "Africities" Pan-African Forum 2012 (in Dakar) and will be delivered in all the next editions of the event. Such a strategy is taking advantage of already well established national networks, which mainly work in Senegal, Cameroon and Madagascar. Especially in the latter two countries, they have been able to promote cross-pollination among municipal experiences of PB, creating a critical mass that is quickly multiplying the number of local experiments, which overcome the number of 75 in each of those countries. An interesting case is that of the South Kivu Region (Mbera, 2012) in the Democratic Republic of Congo, whose Provincial Government in 2010 started to promote PBs, actively contributing – with the support of the World Bank Institute – to the increase of local resources to guarantee more effectiveness to the experiments. The South Kivu Province formalized its commitment with the promotion of participatory Budgeting with a legal framework which enforces local authorities to undertake PB experiments.

Nowadays, one of the most interesting and effective world experiences in scaling-up PBs is that of Poland, where in 2009 the National Government approved the so-called "Solecki Fund" law, which promote participatory budgeting in rural villages, through a reimbursement mechanism which give back from 10% up to 30% of the value of PB investments granted by the city, according to a mathematic formula which rewards the poorest municipalities and those that invest more in PB. Thanks to such a mechanism, in 2012 the number of PBs in Poland raised to more than 1,100 in 2012, also convincing urban municipalities (which are not touched by the benefits of the law) to undertake PB experiments. Somehow, this experiment (which is part of the expansion of PB to ex Soviet-countries, taking into account the PB experience which started recently in Albania, Croatia and Slovakia) proved even more effective than those of countries (as Peru and Dominican Republic) in which PB was made compulsory by national laws for all local authorities (McNulty, 2012 ; Allegretti et alii, 2012 ; World Bank, 2010).

***Towards an open conclusion :
enhancing the quality of policy
through the quality of democracy***

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In the last five years several cities around the world increasingly benefited from such mechanisms, promoting “cross-pollination” between their participatory experimentations, and if Participatory Budgeting spread quickly in such different places it was partially due to the growth of cooperation interchanges, which was strengthened as well by the diffusion of policy-oriented handbooks and international libraries of participatory techniques and best practices (see UN-Habitat/ENDA TM, 2008 ; UN-Habitat/MDP-ESA, 2008 ; UN-Habitat, 2009 ; URBACT, 2006).

If we read the spreading of Participatory Budgeting as a metaphor of the possibilities opened by the radicalisation of participatory experiences – at least those heading to a horizon of participatory democracy implementation – we could be optimistic. In fact, many experiences reveal to have been reaching important “material” results in several domains, such as the reintegration of the informal settlements, the diffusion of infrastructures in areas ignored for a long time, the reduction of vandalism in public spaces or the faster implementation of more effective environmental projects. They have also produced more “immaterial” outputs, like the growth of the average level of civic sense, the valorisation of citizens’ skills through new partnerships, the recreation of mutual trust between citizens and political representatives, the better integration of vulnerable social groups, the capacity of local institutions to increase their strength via the creation of critical masses of pressure (involving their citizens) to obtain more attention and transfers from the supra-local institutions, or the raise in quality of public debates on territorial problems.

The major limit of all formalised participatory processes (and particularly of the most complex ones, like PB) is that they are “fragile” and “volatile” (Cabannes, 2005), due to the fact that in the majority of countries they are superposed to the autonomous capacities of organi-

sations of civil society. Their rules risk to reveal themselves as “inertial” and “trapping” regarding the setting of a progressive/evolutionary process, thus “freezing” the participatory devices into repetitive rituals emptied of innovative energies.

Moreover, even if articulated mechanisms of participation often prove useful to enlarge technical skills, awareness and knowledge levels of participants, they do not automatically grant a fostering of complex cultural changes.

Beyond the sprawl ? The difficulty of changing cultural references

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The analysis of urban modifications in Porto Alegre in its first 15 years of Participatory Budgeting clearly shows that the pressure of inhabitants on the institution can lower the quality level of public investments, making some benefits usually provided by careful technical planning disappear. For example, as stated in Allegretti (2005), the “urban extensive” model which usually determines the city sprawling in many towns of developing countries is often so enrooted in the inhabitants’ imaginary, that it becomes difficult to local authorities to oppose such a development model of planning, thereby contributing to the growth of “irrationality” in urban management and land-use typologies of transformation.

Undoubtedly a lot of time is needed to explain to all citizens how negative it could be to follow the “sprawl-model” of urban development that was so common in the past, in particular the one based on individual detached or semi-detached houses, which often represent the “individual dream”, i.e. an urban “myth” spread all over the world by homogenised audiovisual products known via TV and cinema. And a lot of courage and energy by political institutions and technical mediators/facilitators is also demanded, when it comes to confront enrooted “urban legends” and “prejudicial myths” on city development and economic evolution.

So, if participatory processes seek to promote cultural transformations which can really raise the level of sustainability of urban transformations, working with important mid-long term goals becomes indispensable, possibly favouring the merge between more "immediatist" mechanisms of participatory decision-making (which are useful to create the confidence of inhabitants in the good-faith of public institutions) and other methods of participatory planning which refer to larger mid-long term perspectives. So, good "participatory engineering", meaning the creation of fluid and well-conceived organisational structures to promote cycles of participatory debates with citizens on territorial transformations, is never enough. A strong political will towards promoting real sustainable changes, at the same time without disrespecting the point of view of citizens, proves fundamental.

Furthermore, it has to be noted that mechanisms of networking are not necessarily "oriented-to-evolution", being that they can contribute to spread the idea that "minimum standards of consultative participation" could be enough to satisfy the expectations of many inhabitants. Some training sessions on PB provided in the last three years by the World Bank or other international institutions, especially in Africa, often evidenced the risks of "diluting" the idea of committed and radical hypotheses of participation, spreading "light" models of Participatory Budgeting (Sintomer, Herzberg and Allegretti, 2013, Allegretti 2011b) and making them be accepted as "noble" forms of participation.

One recent event points out all these risks. In fact, during winter 2009 the new mayor of Porto Alegre (Josè Fortunati) raised a strong debate in the Brazilian metropolis, proposing to "biennialize" the discussion of PB, whose cycle had been repeated yearly till that moment. To defend his idea he quoted the exchanges which had occurred with the cities of Santo André and Belo Horizonte within the Brazilian Network of Participatory Budgets created in 2007. The main reason for accepting the "biennialisation" of decision-making spaces for prioritising public investments would be that implementing common decisions takes a long time, because of the respect of rules on tendering and technical deadlines for detailing executive planning schemes. A similar position reveals an intense "stepping-back" in PB ambitions. In fact, in the past the debate in many cities experimenting participa-

tion was mainly focussed on how to reform and modernise the administrative/technical machine in order to improve its effectiveness and fulfil the expectations created by the participatory processes. Today, the new Brazilian debate seems almost to accept the idea that modernising administrative machines is a too hard and slow task, and it is better to be realistic and adapt the participatory machine to the limits and constraints of public bureaucracy.

That is why it becomes very important to continue to fight, maintaining alive the "tensions" and "conflicts" between the different perspectives of the highly diverse range of urban actors. As a matter of fact, their conflicting interests can guarantee that the setting of any participatory process would not be conceived as a mere "gift" given by public institutions, but a hard "conquest" of dynamic social fabrics which try to find "half-path compromises" with their elected representative.

Only if so, to enhance the active contribution of citizenry will be not only possible in the discussion of policy contents, but also in the setting and monitoring of the tools and methods used to forge them through time.

As many Brazilian and Spanish Participatory Budgets demonstrate, a similar perspective could lead to a higher level of "radicality" of participatory processes, but also to a stronger confidence of inhabitants into their functioning, being that many concrete experiences show that citizens usually feel more sense of "ownership" for something they have contributed to create and whose rules are not a "black box" but something they can control, monitor and periodically revise.

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SUMMARY

[TOC](#)

Since the echo of Porto Alegre experience started to gain space and emulations around the world, during the 90s, Participatory Budgeting (PB) became one of the most respected and analysed typologies of participatory democracy processes, due to the radical horizons it often poses, and the clear principles that forge its peculiarities. At present, with more than 1500 experiences of Participatory Budgeting existing in different countries of the world, it raises an interesting debate which explicitly poses the question whether or not a unique sequential logic in conceiving the relationship between representative democratic institutions and spaces of participatory decision-making exists. The essay starts looking at Participatory Budgeting practices as a barrier to what can be described as the “double disease of liberal democracies” (DDD) through the creation of “hybrid models” of participatory institutions which could involve a tight dialogue between delegated decision-making and direct participation of citizens in the framing of government acts. PB is analysed not only as a central *tool* of new experiments seeking to successfully renovate public policies at a local level, but also as a *perspective* from which it is possible to understand some features and challenges of a needed major “shift” in facing the convergent crises that affect several countries.

Seen not as a “model”, but rather as an “ideoscape” (using an Appadurai definition), Participatory Budgeting is read as a political and contextualisable “set of principles” which travels globally through cross-pollination networks, but only exists through local appropriation, especially in urban areas. The essay describes “pure models” and some “hybrids” that merged the most common principles of Latin American PBs together with features which are typical of “deliberative democracy” experiments, as the Chinese example of Zeguo. Beyond the multiple and differentiated direct effects on investments, Participatory Budgeting is valorised for its pedagogic added value on citizens’ civic engagement and maturation, its capacity to strengthen and spread a “pedagogy of solidarity”, and for the complementary in-

tegration with the benefits of other participatory programmes, often interrelated with it. Specific references are done to concrete examples where PB contributed to guarantee a better level of sustainability to local public policies.

In the end of the article, the author underlines some examples (in Spain, Italy, France, Congo, India or Brazil) which are showing the challenges of "scaling up" of Participatory Budgeting to higher institutional levels than the municipal ones, also fighting against the fragility and volatility that have – up to now – affected several experimentations around the world.

End