

## **Participatory Budget: citizenship and participatory democracy In the city of Santo André, Brazil**

*Presenter: Ariane Dalla Déa, B.A. UCLA, 2000, M.A. UCI, 2004*

I went to Brazil in 2005 to conduct my fieldwork investigating the role of Theatre of the Oppressed in creating awareness and increasing public participation in city politics, and ended up attending all of the participatory budget meetings in the city of Santo André. The city is ruled by the Workers' Party, one of the most influential political parties in Brazil today, which I refer as PT, short for its original Portuguese title Partido dos Trabalhadores. PT has rapidly emerged and influenced Brazilian politics mainly from the bottom up, mobilizing and influencing the masses at the local level. In this paper, which is a preliminary to a chapter on my dissertation of the same title, I examine political participation through the process of participatory budget in the city of Santo André. It is part of larger analysis of the impact of culture, represented in symbolisms and meanings of theater in the participatory democracy process, on the outcome of political participation. It is an anthropological perspective to studies of new experiments in democracy and citizenship, on government's attempt to produce new cultural patterns, and on modernity in Brazil.

The city of Santo André comprises of an area of 179 Km<sup>2</sup>, or roughly 69 m<sup>2</sup>, located in what is called the Greater São Paulo, akin to the Greater Los Angeles, making up the over-populated megalopolis of 39 cities. According to the 2000 Census, Santo André had a population of 639,331, projected population of 664,263 by 2004, divided in 51.7% females, and 49.3% males. Racially the city population was divided as 77.8% white, 16.9% mixed, 3.4% black, 1.2% Asian, 0.1% Natives, and 0.6% declined responding.

Santo André is at the heart of Brazilian industrial district known as ABCD, which is short hand for the cities Santo André, São Bernardo, São Caetano, and Diadema. These four cities bear the most important economic and political nucleus in recent Brazilian history. This is an industrial area; its chief products are metal, car, car parts, and clothing manufactures. Concurrently this is also the area where the labor union movement begin in the early 1970s, having Luis Ignacio da Silva, or Lula, as its main spokesperson and organizer, later becoming the President of the Metal Workers Union, one of the organizers of the Workers' Party, or PT (short for Partido dos Trabalhadores), in 2002 the president of Brazil, and now he is serving his second term.

The importance of PT for this area is enormous due to its influence in the labor unions and now through the use of participatory democracy model in order to involve the historically excluded population in the budgetary decision-making. This model of participation is most evident in the practice of participatory budget, and in this paper I explore the repercussions in low-income areas through citizens' involvement in city budgetary procedures. I focus on gender, race, and class as a means to understand the role of citizens within the democratic process and how participatory budget expand citizen access and influence in transforming their environment. I discuss the meanings and interpretations of participatory democracy and citizenship through the political production to promote civic engagement from the academic perspective.

Through participant observation in the participatory budget meetings, mostly recorded in videos, interviews with city officials and workers, and archival research, I noted that the variables that produce positive outcomes (e.g. participation in the city's budgetary procedures) were shared identity and experiences. Gender, economic status, and race affect the outcome of political participation in that group identification and shared ideology, experiences, and living

arrangements seemed to be the strongest factors to aggregate participation. In addition, women' and blacks' participation departed from an increased activist involvement through non-governmental organizations, political party affiliation (mostly in the PT), and grassroots movements (Carvalho 2001b; 42).

Traditionally, city policies' decisions in Brazil are top-down, based on an unbalanced redistribution of revenues, widen the economic gap between the low and high income population, and decreasing the size of the middle class while the participatory democracy method gives voice to the population on the city's budget and procedures (Baiocchi 2003). This alternative democratic approach is an attempt to break with old cultural patterns that promoted nepotism and clientelism (Abers 1998; Baiocchi 2003; Nylén 2002). It suggests that changes proposed at the locations where shared aesthetics and experiences are the leading force to produce an impact superior to any governmental installed program. Through the process of civic engagement, participatory democracy intends to dismantle a generalized mistrust of government, shaped historically by paternalistic practices (Abers 1996; Abers 1998; Baiocchi 2003; Daniel 1999; Dirceu 1999; Nylén 2000).

Twenty years ago Brazil began rebuilding its civil, economic, and political base, recovering from twenty years of military dictatorship rule, which I view as the darkest political and social period in Brazilian history. The political 'reconstruction' started by re-activating the Brazilian left, which was made silent or dead during the military period by procedures that ranged from mere censorship – you could not speak, publish, or public debate against the military dictatorship – to torture and death of malcontents, dissidents, revolutionaries, and leftists – which was also the way to keep the left quiet.

## ***PT: an overview of the Workers Party in Brazil***

The actual Brazilian political structure materialized in the early 1980s, signaled by the end of the military dictatorship through the “Abertura” (literally ‘opening’) process, which gave amnesty to political prisoners and exiles, and nearly ended censorship of leftist expressions in media, literature, and art (Pereira 2000). The process promoted a significant shift in Brazilian leadership from military to civilian, which was symbolized through the first presidential election in 1984, after twenty years of military power. Subsequently the Brazilian politics opened to the neoliberal and globalization policies, but also allowed for the Brazilian left to participate in the political process. The PT was officialized in early 1980, and this event represented the beginning of the most energetic and effective phase of the Brazilian left “led by Brazilian workers” (Alves 2003). During the 1990s, PT began a strong representation in the national and state congresses, taking in many mayor and governor seats around the country, and culminating with the leader and founder of the Workers Party, Lula winning the presidential elections of 2002. But the importance and impact of PT in Brazilian politics is not as well publicized as Lula’s victory in the presidential election. The most significant role PT plays in politics is at the municipal level, through the participatory democracy model, which was implemented in several cities in Brazil, being Porto Alegre (Abers 1998; Abers 2000; Wainwright 2003), Betim, and Belo Horizonte (Nylen 2002) the most successful and documented cases.

### ***Innovations in political practice implemented at the local level: The city of Santo***

#### ***André case***

This new democratic model is centered on local government and on the empowerment of the citizenry. During the 1980s the Brazilian government underwent change that began in the mid 1970s due to pressures from the labor unions, mainly from the Metal Workers Union, which

led at the end that decade a series of strikes demanding better working conditions and pay from the multinationals, which occurred in the ABC area, and led by Lula (who was the president of the Metal Workers Union at that time). Due to this pressure, a massive pressure demanding a “political opening” and the right to vote for the officials such as governors and mayors (which during the military administration this voting was performed only by officials). These movements were called “Abertura” and “Diretas Já” both led directly or indirectly by PT. The goal was to reform the political system, which the public showed a high discontent. Following these movements was the local movements to reform municipal codes and ruling, and it was paired, from PT’s perspective, with a struggle to stop neoliberal policies, focused on agreements among rulers and the globalization of goods and profits, free trade zones, and privatization of governmental agencies, looking at economic trends at the macro level, while ignoring the impact on the local population (Abers 2000; Baiocchi 2003; Caldeira 2005; Daniel 1999; Dirceu 1999). Strengthening citizenship and participation and in the democratic process is a growing trend in response to elite-profit driven administration, which is an attempt to return the decision power to the people.

PT’s main commitment is to the improvement of the socioeconomic condition of the low income population (Nylen 2000) (ALSO BAIIOCHI). Through the application of participatory democracy, PT granted an effective alternative to violent outbreak of resistance, and reduced corruption and clientelism (Nylen 2000). Participatory democracy is a political process, envisaged by the Greek democracy, and which goes beyond the voting ballots (Pateman 1970). It is characterized by “citizens... involve[ment] in policymaking processes, especially at the grass-roots level where such processes seem more relevant to people’s day-to-day lives” (Nylen 2002). As an experimental project, a few municipalities in Brazil begin to adopt the participatory

democracy model in early 1990s (Abers 2000; Nylén 2002; Wainwright 2003), in order to stimulate citizens to exercise their power to actively contribute in a politically open process; an essential function to strengthen democracy (Abers 2000; Wainwright 2003). The city of Santo André, in the state of São Paulo, Brazil is one of such sites.

In 1998, Santo André has adopted the participatory budget, which is explained by William R.

Nylén below:

“Citizens are encouraged to attend neighborhood meetings to propose, discuss, and vote on budgetary priorities in the areas of public works and social services, and to elect delegates to subsequent neighborhood forums where the sum of neighborhood priorities is debated and put to a final vote” (2002).

The late mayor Celso Daniel implemented the participatory budget, as well as the participatory model initiating and solidifying a series of award winning programs. These programs, funded by the United Nations Human Settlement Programme, the ABC Institute for Governance and Citizenship, and Ford Foundation, among others (2003a; 2003b), were directed to the low income population (Abers 2000). The pilot experiment entitled Integrated Program for Social Inclusion (IPSI) became a department of the same name, generating the program Egalitarian Santo André, described by the city as “centered in the multidimensionality of social exclusion, the Egalitarian Santo André is an expansion of the pilot program. It consolidated the interaction and integration of several municipal programs aiming at promoting social inclusion in its varied dimensions” (2003c).

The pilot projects served as laboratory for testing projects in development, targeting community participation in the city political processes, and economic growth in the city of Santo André. The main objectives of these programs are:

1. The creation economic conditions to help establishing small business, and to encourage financial investment;
2. To generate vocational training, and to develop literacy programs;
3. The implementation of after-school programs and early childhood education;
4. The installation of a health assistance program geared towards prevention and early diagnoses;
5. The realization of housing assistance programs to increment infrastructures, that eliminate risk and degradation;
6. The establishing of legal services to report human rights abuses;
7. And the implementation of a program addressing the issues related to the feminization of poverty (2003c).

These programs are directed at the lower economic stratum, with a special attention to children and adolescent populations, and economic growth. Therefore, Santo André is the locus for governmental alternative projects.

Bruno José Daniel Filho clearly defines the typologies of participatory budget as a process of local representation, which is a way to balance the participatory and representative democracy models. These characteristics are not always adopted as a total, but in most cases only partially used. Participation in the city budgetary procedures can depart from a series of thematic meetings where every citizen turns into a member of the municipal assembly, introducing regional assemblies and council from the traditional participatory democracy method, where the participants define the rules of participation, or through prioritizing the to privilege the most impoverished population in the city (2003, 35-6). In any case, the participatory budget was instated in order to “extend the social, political, and civil rights to the

citizens” (Daniel Filho 2003). It is a way to re-evaluate institutional power and transform the life of the citizens through a process of accountability and government administration transparency. According to Daniel Filho, the practice of participatory budget was installed to move some of the governmental decision-making to the local, to democratize public actions integrating the citizens in a new public space, to create a center for decision and policy making that did not depart from elitist classical democratic practices, as an answer to the state crisis and a reform of the state to break with the bureaucratic system, and as an “instrument to fight the totalitarian homogeneous instilled public opinion by media executives who defend a life style contrary to the mass interests,” (Daniel Filho 2003, 42). The participatory budget is a process of government decentralization moving contrary to neo-liberalism.

The city of Santo André participatory budget has the following specific characteristics: Departing from the Annual Budgetary Law, where cities must send their proposals to the executive, and receive the approval at the legislative, which is implemented by the Directive Budgetary Law, and from the Multi-Annual Planning for Investments, the city has what Daniel Filho termed as the “best combination of representative and direct democracy practices. In this case, the executive does not give up its power: it shares it. In this was the public sphere is a key actor... There is no break with the representative democracy because it does not eliminate any of the powers, but instead a new power is created. What occurs then is a process of co-optation” (2003, 34).

The citizenship process faces the obstacle of how to overcome cultural patterns and the ingrained concept of “backwardness” – counter-attacking corruption, paternalism, and clientelism. Clientelism is definitely a major obstacle to the possibility of expansion in participatory democracy. Problems in making the Participatory Democracy work is twofold: On



one hand, you have paternalistic practices, and chauvinistic attitudes towards females and homosexuals; the continuous belief that a woman is inferior to a man, and on the other hand the “need” for clientelism – the belief that you cannot achieve any position of power, or any status above where one is located without the help of a powerful individual. One cannot achieve status based solely on his or her professional capabilities.

Class and Democracy in Brazil has the legacy of colonial cultural, political, and economic practices. “Nepotism and clientelism are not that the main obstacle for participatory democracy; the participatory democracy parted from a response to, and to counter the widespread clientelism and nepotism in our society” (Ribeiro 2005). Unfortunately nepotism and clientelism continues in widespread operation in Brazil, and attesting to such practice, and while I was there conducting my fieldwork, the media reported a big corruption scandal involving the practice of clientelism and nepotism, where officials used public monies to fund private projects. I also witnessed it in the field where one of my informants, who, through personal connections with the city mayor’s son, worked directly with disenfranchised children, and had neither academic training nor was qualified to deal with youth and poverty problems, nor demonstrated an activist commitment to those kids, often referring to them as “losers” and mentioning on several occasions that “they have no future.” A commitment to the kids would show hope and faith that these kids can make it out of the favelas where they live. I compare this lack of commitment that that informant had to the commitment that Anderson Sá, the creator of the black movement Cultural Group AfroReggae, from the Vigario Geral favela in Rio de Janeiro. The basic difference, and source of commitment, between my informant and Anderson is experience. My informant comes from upper-middle class, white, despising the poor, leads a group of youth in Theatre of the Oppressed – no clear results were achieved from this practice.

Anderson: a favela dweller who lost his brother to a massacre led by the police in retaliation for the assassination of 4 police officers at Vigario Geral favela, in early 1990s. I believe commitment to a cause, any cause, departs from experience – the more traumatic and striking the more the experience is bound to create change, either for better or worse. I also believe that my informant represents the norm in the political administration.

In the city of Santo André, women's participation in the budgetary procedures during the time I conducted my fieldwork high. The city is divided into nineteen districts and from 2001 to 2004 the councils who to represent these districts were dominated by women, although their participation declined, from 73% of delegates in 2001-02, to 58% in 2003-04, they still dominated the budgetary procedures. In addition, women comprised 50% of the head of departments in the city administration, being the Secretaria do Orçamento Participativo (Participatory Budget Department), the council-members leader, and vice-mayor seats (some of the city's key positions) led by women. The city of Santo André is unique in that it created through its Department of Citizenship and Participation a special section Women's Rights Committee to work specifically with the female population, dealing with problems of violence, discrimination, sexual harassment, to bank loans to start their own business, incentives and training to enter the work force. This action was not by accident, since the leader and president of the local feminist group, FEMININA, was a city employee, along with many members of this group (Carvalho 2001b).

In contrast, Race, more specifically referring to the black population, has a more difficult trajectory in the history of Brazil. Departing from the erroneous notion of "racial democracy," that Gilberto Freyre introduced to the academic world, and which spread across the social imaginary, still exists. Many scholars have debunked this false notion, but Brazilians still cannot

see that their practices towards blacks are racist (Carvalho 2001b; Degler 1971; Fernandes 1971; Hanchard 1999; Santos 2005; Telles 2004; Twine 1997). During my fieldwork I was able to observe several instances where the conception that “Brazil does not have racism. That is an American thing,” was displayed. I have to interject that I also had the same conception when I came to the US, often telling my friends that “Brazil is a racial paradise; we are not racist.” In Santo André, the coordinating team for the participatory budget, the Popular Participation Nucleus (composed by the councilors and delegates from the nineteen districts), acknowledge that there is a widespread discrimination towards women and blacks, but that “gender discrimination is much more understood and incorporated in the policies than racial discrimination, which is much more ‘invisible.’ These people experience also a more difficulties in seeing themselves in the public and work spaces from the racial perspective. Those interviewed seem to ‘escape’ the recognition of racial discrimination, and consider it to be based on patterns of aesthetics, similar to those who dress down, the poor, those from the Northeastern states, the overweight, the ‘dumb blonds,’ etc” (Carvalho 2001a). The concept of race is diluted in class, ethnicity, and aesthetics.

Race is a touchy issue in Brazil, and especially in Santo André where I conducted my research, in contrast to gender where the idea of women’s participation and autonomy is widespread, as well as GLBT rights issues. These two groups are visible and outspoken, and the evidence for this factor, in addition to the scholarship produced on the subject, are the parades – women’s day parade in March 8, and gay parade in late May or early June (this one went from a participation of 300+ in 2000, to over a million in 2005), but it does not mean tolerance towards these groups, which means is that they have a space and time to “come out and play,” but outside these arenas discrimination still strong.

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