

**But Who Will Speak for the People?  
The Travel and Translations of Participatory Budgeting<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> This paper draws on a larger, on-going research project with Ernesto Ganuza (IESA, Spain). This larger project is discussed in an in-progress book manuscript that revolves around ethnographic accounts of the implementation process in two sites. The account of the cities in Brazil in this article (Camaragibe and Gravataí) also draws on a research project with Patrick Heller and Marcelo K. Silva, which is discussed at length in Baiocchi, Heller and Silva (2011).

## Introduction

The global travel and adoption of Participatory Budgeting is a remarkable story. A relatively simple idea – that “ordinary citizens” should have a direct say in public budgets that impact them, it has traveled the world by the most unexpected routes and landed in unlikely sites. Some twenty-odd years after its shaky start in under the leftist city government of the Workers’ Party (PT) of Porto Alegre<sup>2</sup>, and twenty-five after its first mention by neighborhood activists in that city, the idea and basic blueprint of Participatory Budgeting have now circled the world, having been implemented in literally hundreds of cities in all continents. First it circulated through Workers’ Party networks in the 1990s reaching throughout Brazil, before becoming popular throughout Latin America, via political party networks and then NGOs. Hundreds of municipal participatory budgets were developed in Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Peru, Ecuador, Venezuela, Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, and elsewhere in the region. In the 2000s, participatory budgeting then attracted the attention of international development agencies as well as that of activists in the Global North who learned about it through the World Social Forum. Since 2000, the World Bank and United Nations agencies have in one way or another helped bring participatory budgeting to Asia and Africa, in countries such as Turkey, Fiji, Senegal, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe. And at the same time, European cities begun to implement this idea, once described as the “return of the *Caravels*” by Giovanni Alegretti. At the time of this writing there are dozens of experiences in countries like Spain, Portugal, France, Italy, Germany, England, and Albania.<sup>3</sup> It has, along the way, become official government policy in Venezuela, Peru, and the Dominican Republic, and most recently, actively promoted by subsequent Labor governments in Britain. It has by now even appeared in the United States, where it has been implemented in Chicago’s 49<sup>th</sup> Ward since 2009.

Clearly, there is something attractive to this idea, and something about it resonates with the current moment of retrenched national states and dissatisfaction with mainstream development ideas. The ethos of participation, creativity, and decentralization is also part of what might be called the a “new spirit of government,” characteristic of entrepreneurial states in the current era (Jessop 1998). Its rapid diffusion also no doubt also speaks to the nature of our rapid communications and increasingly intermeshed networks in the globalized era. But looking at this diffusion also earns us purchase on the question of how ideas – and specifically ideas about governing and running social affairs – travel: how they are translated and conveyed by different actors and how they are ultimately received and put into practice. At the very least the story challenges the notion that a characteristic of our era is the exclusive diffusion of institutional blue-prints from North to South and dominance of Northern-based actors and institutions in

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<sup>2</sup> The “Porto Alegre Story” is well-known and well-documented. For one version of events in English, see Baiocchi (2005).

<sup>3</sup> There are a few accounts now of the global phenomenon. See Allegreti and Herzberg (2005) and Cabannes (2007).

generating those blueprints as the story also bears the mark of “counter-hegemonic globalization,” the notion that “transnational connections can potentially be harnessed to the construction of more equitable distributions of wealth and power.” (Evans 2005:1).

This paper thus addresses deliberation not as an institutional arrangement nor as a communicative practice, but as a policy *instrument* (Le Gales 2007) that travels and is adopted and translated as it moves along different conduits but can have unintended effects. A policy instrument, a “device that is both technical and social, that organizes specific social relations between the state and those it is addressed to, according to the representations and meanings it carries”. (Lascoumes and Le Gales 2007: 4).<sup>4</sup> This view rejects what has been described as the “pragmatist” view, and suggests that that instruments do not “land from heaven.” And when they do “land” they represent the play of interests and different arrays of actors interested (or opposed) to the device. Policy instruments in this way “are not neutral devices: they produce specific effects, independently of the objective pursued (the aims ascribed to them), which structure public policy according to their own logic.” The idea of policy instruments borrows from the Science and Technology studies, who have made a strong case for *denaturing* ideas as they travel – that is, (at least temporarily) bracketing the question of whether these are in any way “good” ideas or whether there is truth to their claims.<sup>5</sup> In other words, understanding that the evaluation of the inherent goodness of an idea or technique is often a retrospective evaluation based on its adoption, and not the other way around (Latour 1987). As a method these scholars choose not to “look for the intrinsic qualities of any given statement but to look instead for all the transformations it undergoes later in other hands.” (Latour 1987: 59)

For we who overlap in our many roles as the scholars, advocates, promoters, and implementers of deliberative democracy, this is an important corrective. First, and foremost we have to understand that deliberative democracy is a vague idea and open to interpretation. Even something like Participatory Budgeting can be ambiguously interpreted. What travels in the name of deliberative democracy can be radically different and come to adopt very different meanings in different places. Second, it reminds us that the political play around the adoption and transformation of deliberative institutions is inseparable from the eventual content of those institutions. The emergent discussion about the conditions “favorable to deliberative democracy” too often brackets this element of transmission and translation. A common finding is that “a strong civil society” and a “willing government” are ideal conditions for the institution of robust arrangements of participatory governance where citizens make meaningful decisions that are

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<sup>4</sup> The definition continues, “It is a particular type of institution, a technical device with the generic purpose of carrying a concrete concept of the politics/society relationship and sustained by a concept of regulation.”(Lascoumes and Le Gale 2007:4)

<sup>5</sup> Similarly, scholars of diffusion have argued that a program which seems appealing on a surface level “attracts disproportionate attention” and is embraced because of “its apparent promise, not its demonstrated effects” (Weyland 2006).

respected by government. Attention to instruments and their transformations should at least raise the question about the content of the institution as it was interpreted in a particular setting. In absence of a local coalition to demand that the interpretation of a vague idea of participation should include binding decision-making, why should we expect that deliberative democracy have such a robust interpretation in the first place?

This essay “connects the dots” between those early moments of participatory budgeting and its later incarnations in three different settings. It draws from approaches from Science and Technology Studies and from critical studies of globalization, and is attentive to chains of actors and institutions that pass along the idea, as well as to and the dynamics of translation and adaptation as it is passed along. Scholarly work on international linkages, such as in the promotion of legal expertise (Dezalay and Garth 2002), advocacy networks (Keck and Sikkink 1998), and in Science Studies all “follow the actors.” (Latour 1987) To “follow the actors” in this context means attention to the processes by which actors adopt and adapt ideas, attract others to the idea, make claims about the usefulness of an idea, and mobilize resources in the process. Rather than claiming to account for all possible transmissions, this paper more modestly examines the process of transmission in three particular cases.

To foreshadow my argument, as I trace the travel of participatory budgeting from its inception to three sites, I argue that the translation process can occur in three ways. First, it can resemble what Evans has described as “Institutional Monocropping” – or a rigid kind of blueprintism, as is the case of the Peruvian national implementations since the early 2000s. Second, it can also resemble ‘democratic experimentalism,’ or ‘bootstrapping’ as Sabel has described the kind of on-the ground learning and trial and error. And third, it can fail to interest local actors or generate so much opposition that the transmission is simply blocked, as was the case in Cordoba in Spain. In each case the conduit by which the idea arrived mattered – but not in straightforward way, and not as much as the process of negotiation as the assembly was extended to include the particular local context. Central to each negotiation, and specific to the travel of deliberation, is the role of the “people” – what part they will play, and who is authorized to speak for it. Before describing each of the cases I briefly address the discussion about participation in the current context.

### **What is at stake?**

In a broad way this essay tackles the problem of understanding deliberative democracy in “a world of objects in motion.” (Appadurai 2000)<sup>6</sup> If one characteristic of the current moment is that globalization raises new democratic dilemmas between forms and scales of governance and representation (Held 1999; Habermas 2001), at the same time one of its potentially hopeful signs is the evocation of

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<sup>6</sup> These objects include ideas and ideologies, people and goods, images and messages, technologies and techniques. This is a world of flows (appadurai 2000:5)

deliberative democracy in so many contexts (Melo and Baiocchi 2006). But deliberative proposals have not appeared in the context of transnational institutions, but usually at local and regional levels precisely as the nation-state has “hollowed out” (Jessop 1998). The global spread of electoral democratic norms, “in the ‘thin’ sense of electorally-sanctioned transfers of formal political power,” has nonetheless paved the way for “experiences with participation at the micro level of projects and communities.” (Evans 2004: 37) With the multiplication of these experiences, the enthusiasm for citizen participation has only grown in practitioner communities and academic circles alike. And the apparent paradox of the concomitant spread of “thin” democracy, hollowed out nation states, and local participatory experiences has also prompted a great deal of critical reflection.

As a result of these changes local processes of regulation and coordination have become increasingly complex and local governments have had to reposition their strategies and practices within entirely new territorial divisions of labor and institutional arrangements, as well as within much more competitive economic environments. Urban governance itself has undergone a number of changes as result of the re-structuring of national economies and the transformation of national states and their relationships to local units. Local administrators have found cities and regions to be of increasing economic importance while city governments have generally been able to rely less on unconditional transfers from central units. Generally speaking, this has also been accompanied by an increase in local autonomy for local governments as well as a shifting downward of the spheres of decision-making.

Critical scholarship has challenged the “heroic claims” made on behalf of participatory approaches, while taking participatory boosterism to task for failing to address questions of power, inequality, and politics (Clever 1999). More broadly, scholars have begun to point to participation, and participatory prescriptions in particular, as part and parcel of neoliberal governmentality. As part of a new rationality of government that calls forward an entrepreneurial citizen, participation emphasizes some of the most important characteristics of that citizen: self-regulation, responsibility for own problems, and a non-conflictive partnerships with the state (Li 2005; Ong 2006). Because participation in government is seen as an alternative to conflictive mobilization and disruption, it is argued, it becomes part of a set of strategies that de-politicize conflicts and thus pave the way for ever-more aggressive neoliberal reforms of the state.

Perhaps the central criticism has been that participation, as a mainstream development prescription, is de-politicizing. Clever, for example argues that the belief in participation is based on three postulates, “that participation is intrinsically a ‘good thing’ (especially for the participants), that a focus on ‘getting the techniques right’ is the principal way of ensuring the success of such approaches and that considerations of power and politics on the whole should be avoided as divisive and obstructive.” (Clever 1999:598) Or to put it more bluntly,

For participation to become part of dominant development practice, it first had to be modified, sanitised, and depoliticised. Once purged of all the threatening elements, participation could be re-engineered as an instrument that could play a role within the status quo, rather than one that defied it. (Leal 543)

When we consider the genealogy of participatory budgeting it is certainly clear that it represents the evolution of ideas about “participation in government” from something that could “defy” the status quo to something that could maintain, and improve, it. But the story is much much more complicated than its “sanitization” by development agencies. First, the story is quite clear – the evolution of participatory budgeting as a privileged tool for the dual goals of good governance and redistribution was a result of the changing fortunes of the Workers’ Party. As the party won its first administrations and its administrators embarked on the path of running administrations that delivered results and gained re-election, the calculus about the usefulness of different participatory strategies changed. In this way, participatory budgeting as something that enhances governance dates to discussions within the PT in the late 1980s and not a cabal of neoliberal development technocrats in the 2000s as is sometimes implied. What is missing is an account of translation and travel of Deliberative Democracy in a world of flows.

### **Understanding the Travel of Instruments**

I orient the discussion by discussing two ways, ideal types, in which new policy instruments can be adopted: institutional monocropping, and democratic experimentalism. Institutional Monocropping is Evan’s term for “the imposition of blueprints based on idealized versions of [Anglo-American] institutions” (2004:32). In monocropping, as the metaphor implies, a single institutional blueprint is applied regardless of context, often against the interests of local populations and in detriment of their developmental possibilities. A number of scholars have by now studied the way that institutional imperatives, the logic of expertise, and (usually) North-South hierarchies interact to reproduce this blueprintism, even in the face of stated interests in not doing so and evidence that the blueprint doesn’t work. Ferguson (1994), for examples, argues that development project is important not necessarily for what it does or does not do, but for its *side effects*, namely the continued application of the same failed schemes. In the context of poverty-reduction schemes in Lesotho, Ferguson describes the way that the “reduction of poverty to a technical problem serves to depoliticize it,” while crystallizing local “power relations, not to rationalize or coordinate them, so much as to cinch them all together into a knot.” (Ferguson, 1994: 274) Similarly, Goldman (2003) argues that the institutional imperatives of the World Bank propel knowledge production – and the enrollment of technocrats and scientists -- to justify the interventions it proposed to carry out. Scott (1998) discusses the straitjacket of “monotonic regimes of centralized rationality” in planning schemes that rely on simplification of complex relationships to simplified, legible accounts. In the end, “high-modernist,

planned social order” that “excludes the necessary role of local knowledge and know-how” (1998:6).

In contrast, there are scholars who have discussed the possibility of learning, pragmatic experimentation, and creativity of those in charge of public institutions. Democratic experimentalism refers to the way that local actors “utilize their local knowledge to fit solutions to their individual circumstances,” but which rely on the information pooling of “with others facing similar problems.” (Dorf and Sabel 1998:1) In development theory it has been used by Charles Sabel (2004) as a metaphor that suggests a process of building institutions that are capable of constant adjustment, “where each move suggests the next” and that benefit from social learning (2004:7). Sabel’s interest is in institutions that are growth-favoring, and he argues that such bootstrapped institutions “are as much the outcome as the starting points of development” (2004:7). These answers emerged from a great deal of what Sabel has referred to as “institutional bootstrapping”, or the possibility that improved institutional designs emerge from pragmatic experimentation by those in charge of the institution. According to Sabel, bootstrapping is the process by which institutions “can be rebuilt, again and again, by changing combinations of public and private actors, in light of the changing social constraints.” (Sabel 2005:7) While scholars have often pointed to the creativity of social movements and civil society actors, attention to these forms of “democratic experimentalism” (Sabel 2009) points to both the partial viewpoints and creativity of actors within government. Tendler’s account of the administrators in Ceará, for example, emphasizes the creative and pragmatic crafting of “good government in the tropics.” Similarly, Grindle (2009) has emphasized the way that local government in Latin America has been the site of novel approaches to problem-solving by cadres of bureaucrats willing to engage in cross-learning and novel forms of partnerships with the private sector and key stake-holders alike. Generally speaking, scholars of *governance* have discussed the way that new, managerial local authorities have sought partnerships with private actors and concertation of interests with them in the process of innovation (Borraz and John 2004).

These two accounts, insightful as they are, suffer from parallel problems. Both the literature on *monocropping* and *experimentation* are retrospective accounts that suppress “moments of uncertainty” and often tend to describe “a series of inevitable stages moving from the abstract to the concrete.” And while the account of monocropping tends to ignore the collective nature of projects, the experimentation account tends to underplay power and conflict. Monocropping, be it in Lesotho or elsewhere, is today almost never the work of a single omnipotent actor; development *projects* are often framed as partnerships and in practice usually involve more than one international actor, government actors from different levels, ‘stake-holders’ of different sorts, and often all manners of experts. Projects may indeed have logics of their own, but it is unwarranted to assume that this logic is simply a reproduction of the logic of the most powerful actor, no matter how powerful. The construction of facts is always, “a *collective* process” (Latour 1987: 29). Policy instruments become a “a point of inevitable passage and play a part in

what Callon (1986) has called the stage of “problematization,” which allows heterogeneous actors to come together around issues and agree to work on them jointly. Experimentalists, conversely, have been correctly criticized for not paying enough attention to power dynamics. The very definition of what the goals are for government in of themselves represent the power of some agents to define those agendas, as does the answer of the question of who gets to be a “stakeholder” in these discussions. “There is appeal to social factors only when the true path of reason has been ‘distorted’ but not when it goes straight” (Latour 1987:136).

A central argument of this essay is there is a fundamental open-endedness to some of the processes of transmission of ideas. So, to ask about the “conditions of possibility” for monocropping or experimentalism means to be attentive to instability and processes of *translation*, which I use here in the specific sense of creating a new network of allies for a project while changing its meaning to fit the network. “Translating interests means at once offering new interpretations of these interests and channeling people in different directions” (Latour 1987:117). Every translation is thus a transformation and a displacement (Callon 1986: 224), and is “a constant process of relating information and actors, and of regularly reinterpreting the systems thus created.”(Lascombes and Le Gales 2007:7). Scholars of translation are attentive to the politics of instrumentation: the creation of a network of “allies and associations,” the negotiation around interests of the different actors, and the crystallization (or not) of those identities around the project.

In the case of Participatory Budgeting, I am guided by three questions as I examine the travel of the idea. First, what is it that actually travels? As the idea moves, how does the instrument change? As a set of institutional designs, how does it change? Second, How is Participatory Budgeting *justified*? What reasons are given for its implementation? Third, *how* is it implemented? That is, does its implementation resemble experimentalism or monocropping? Finally, how does the politics of instrumentation account for these different processes?

### **Conduits Matter: Global Translations and International Networks**

The spread of Participatory Budgeting has at least two phases. First, the diffusion through Brazil – and to a lesser extent Latin America, up to the mid-1990s. During this period it was through networks associated with the PT and allied NGOs that the idea travelled as a blueprint of a success story of ‘how the left can govern.’ The “Porto Alegre Story” became emblematic of the way that the PT could govern and govern well. By the later 1990s, however, the idea begins to travel further, now through different conduits. International agencies confer on Participatory Budgeting the legitimacy of an international best practice and it garners recognition in many different settings as a strategy for good governance. A number of networks develop to promote its implementation, and many consultancy-oriented NGOs – often funded by international agencies – start work on Participatory Budgeting in the late 1990s. The PT administration in Porto Alegre played no small role in this, actively promoting Participatory Budgeting in a variety of places like the World



Social Forum. By the late 2000s there are consolidated networks promoting Participatory Budgeting in all continents, and the number of cities claiming to do PB is well over 1,500 by 2010.

### *Brazilian Networks and the Travel of Participatory Budgeting*

The story of the translation throughout Brazil begins with the success of the Porto Alegre administration and a national network on participation. By the end of the 1980s, and the “second generation of popular administrations,” there was a certain amount of experience accumulated about participatory reforms, but little systematic theorizing. In 1990 a national forum was created, led by a small number of important NGOs, to meet and exchange experiences and ideas about participation, the National Forum on Popular Participation in Democratic and Popular Administrations, the FNPP. In it, participants from NGOs, from social movement organizations, from PT administrations, and from the academy debated the merits of various forms of participation. Early on in the FNPP, there was a debate between those who advocated “popular councils” and those who defended “institutional channels” of participation, such as the PB. Partially informed by the experiences of the next few years, when several PT administrations failed, some spectacularly, and partially by the shifting of the composition of the Forum, which by 1996 had become almost exclusively occupied by administrators from PT administrations, the Forum settled on PB as a preferred prescription, and it became involved in tracking and disseminating PB practices.

Porto Alegre’s model of Participatory Budgeting, which emerged out of a combination of experimentation, responses to external pressures and a search for legitimacy in absence of a reliable social movement base, became the model administration and the central point of reference for other PB experiments, as it seemed successful in both delivering good governance and in garnering legitimacy. A range of research and indicators confirms that, as innovation to governance and to municipal decision-making, PB has indeed been very successful.<sup>7</sup> One of the central differences of the “Porto Alegre Model” was its concerted move away from *civil society representation* which had been dominant in many other PT administrations and a move towards a formula of direct – individual – participation. Civil Society mediated participation was prone to political difficulties and crises of legitimacy, when PT administrators were caught between charges of “clientelism of the left” (as seen by local media) when they met the demands of civil society, and “class treason” (as seen by their allies) when they did not. Open participation, or citizen

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<sup>7</sup> Although a city with high indicators to begin with, when compared to previous administrations and to changes in Brazil as a whole, the PT administration in Porto Alegre has brought significant improvements in service delivery through participatory budgeting, notably in the areas of basic sewage and water, primary public schooling, and public transportation. There is also evidence of increased civic mobilization around the PB meetings and a decrease in protests and petitions (Baiocchi 2005).

participation (as opposed to civic participation) in the local forums that decided on the budget became a way for the administration to generate legitimacy for its redistributive platforms among the broader voting public as well as with allies. The other two important elements of the “Porto Alegre Model” were “self-regulation” – that is, that participants themselves decide on the rules of the process, and “self determination,” that it is participants themselves who decide on the whole of the capital (new investment) budget and not administrators. The net result in Porto Alegre was a transparent participatory system with broad participation from among the city’s poorer citizens that was widely perceived as legitimate and citizen-run, and that was successful at managing conflicts for demands.

The PB became widely recognized as central to the he ‘PT formula’ of combining redistribution with broad-based participation, and by the mid 1990s the PT had become more adept at solving certain endemic problems. The “PT Way of governing” was one that combined social justice goals with transparency, broad participation, and effective governance, and it was on this basis that the PT expanded its electoral influence in municipal governments throughout the country in the late 1990s. Participation, far from being an instrument of destabilizing the bourgeois political system as had been imagined by some in the mid-1980s, became instead a central piece in a strategy of running government well. Good governance for the thinkers and activists of the PT, of course, meant something other than reducing deficits and improving the delivery of public services, but it certainly included that as well.

Participatory Budgeting reforms were copied, and transformed in the process of being copied, throughout Brazil. Twelve cities introduced PB in 1989-1992, thirty-six did so in 1993-1996, and at least 103 adopted PB in 1997-2000 tenure according to surveys done by the FNPP, and at least 150 did in 2001-2004. According to Teixeira many experiments begin as exact copies of the Porto Alegre experiment, down to the names of the municipal departments responsible for the process, only to be modified after a year or two. Participatory budgeting was widely adopted throughout the country for a variety of reasons. In addition to FNPP, other NGOs like IBASE were instrumental in monitoring and promoting Participatory Budgeting to progressive administrators. Fundação Getúlio Vargas, Brazil’s elite public policy institute, as well as NGOs like Pólis, in São Paulo were instrumental as well in documenting and promoting best municipal practices, and PB programs, alongside a bundle of other municipal best practices were diffused in a period of intensive creativity and experimentation.

The basic structure adopted by municípios generally included a yearly cycle with district-level meetings, concurrent meetings of a main budget council, and somewhat less commonly, municipal thematic meetings. The majority of cases included a system of representation of delegates based on numbers of participants at some meeting or less commonly, on the number of residents per district, as well as a second tier of councilors who were elected among delegates. Less common features involved meetings directly scheduled with groups in civil society, and group visits to chosen priorities. The purpose of meetings varied; among district-

level meetings the election of delegates was commonly held, as was the purpose of deliberating over priorities, raising needs, and accounting about last years' projects.

A "How To" guide from FNPP from 1996 proposes that Participatory Budgeting

[c]an be an efficient instrument for important political, economic, and social achievements: greater transparency in the elaboration and execution of the budget; more social control of the budget and of public finances; the creation of a new standard for distribution of resources that would permit meeting the needs of the poorer population; the increase of municipal resources; fighting clientelism and corruption; the increase of legitimacy of municipal administration; the sharing of power between authorities and society; the strengthening of cooperation and solidarity; the affirmation of the culture of dialogue and of the mutual commitment between government and population; mobilization of organized and unorganized social sectors; education for citizenship; and the broadening of the public sphere. (FNPP 1996:5)

The benefits of Participatory Budgeting in this version are a mix of good governance (transparency, increased resources; the reduction of clientelism), social justice (redistribution of resources) and civic goals (legitimacy, dialogue, cooperation, and solidarity). As Brian Wampler (2007) has noted, there are a range of motivations for administrators to pursue these types of projects, such as building a base of support, legitimating redistribution, increasing the awareness of the population and increasing transparency. The public for such a How-To Guide no doubt includes administrators and it would make sense that it thus emphasizes governance-enhancing benefits.

### *Global Networks*

Participatory Budgeting became a global phenomenon in the late 1990s. In 1997 it was declared a "best practice" by the UNDP, and in 2001 it featured prominently in the *Human Development Report*. The EU-funded "exchange and emulation programs" (Network 9 of the URB-AL cooperation program) were important in the dissemination that followed (Allegretti and Herzberg 2004) Direct exchanges were responsible for some of the first examples outside of Latin America, often linked to the political left. Academics were also prominent - the Institute of Development Studies, in the UK, for example. In addition, there are today a number of international initiatives to track and disseminate participatory budgeting, often partially supported by municipal administrations themselves. These include the International Budget Network, the UNDP-funded International Observatory of Participatory Democracy, the European-based Budget Participatif network, and the International Forum of Local Authorities that convenes with the WSF as well as the countless workshops at the Social Forums dedicated to participatory budgeting. The World Social Forum itself is probably among the most important engines of

diffusion of the idea. Though these impacts have not been documented, the WSF as “a space of mutual encounter and learning, of multiple discourses, modes and activities,” (Conway 2005: 79) is a place where multiple networks meet to share ideas and templates. Progressive activists have gone a long way to learn and diffuse this learning about Participatory Budgeting

In much of the developing world, however, much of the energy in the dissemination of PB has come from development agencies. The World Bank Institute became important in tracking PB best practices in supporting NGOs involved in promotion. In Latin America in particular, USAID has also been very active in directly promoting PB, playing direct consultancy and training roles. As a result of the role of development agencies, Participatory Budgeting diffused much more quickly. Two important elements were important for participatory recipes and blueprints to “jump” to the terrain of multilateral agencies – first, that participation became seen as a *technical fix*, as described above, and second, development discourse was changing as were the roles and functions of national states, with lower levels of government attracting attention as strategic sites.

The success and diffusion of participatory budgeting took place alongside the growing interest in participation by multilateral agencies in the 1990s. Scholars have noted that participation has been advocated by agencies like the UN since the 1970s, and a number of “participatory methodologies” have been developed since the time. But the late 1990s were a different period of intense interest in the role of civil society and community-based development among development agencies. Part of this was no doubt due to the increased influence of reformers and progressives within these institutions who gained influence during this period. (Beggington et al. 2004; Cornwall 2005) Part of this was also due to a shift in thinking that culminates with the recognition that Structural Adjustment had failed to provide either benefits to the majority of populations in question or even actually promote development, and the recognition that “state-dominated development has failed, but so will stateless development.” (World Bank 1997:25.) This is a time of a shift towards *good governance*, or the idea that “[t]he state itself does not inhibit development, but its manner of governance can.” (Grindle 2004: 25) Good governance complements a slightly earlier emphasis on *decentralization*, which had become a catch phrase for policy makers in the 1980s, who argued that a less centralized state would be less bureaucratic, more responsive, and more efficient. (Smoke 2001, Blair 2000)

It is in this context, then, that participation comes to be valued as a complement to good local governance and as an alternative development prescription, as a means to “greater efficiency and effectiveness of investment and of contributing to processes of democratization and empowerment.” (Clever 1999:597) Participatory development practitioners recognize the “necessity of engagement with the state” (Gaventa and Valderrama 1999:3) and the “good governance agenda” more and more emphasized transparent, accountable, and participatory institutions. (Goldsmith 2007) Participatory Budgeting was one of several contending best practices that were adopted and actively promoted in the period.

There is a notable difference in the strategies of justification for promoting PB between PB networks or NGOs and by donor organizations. PB Networks almost always make a normative argument for PB. That is, for NGOs, PB not only helps redistribute resources in ways that help reduce poverty, but also advances a democratic form of governance that is *right* on its own terms, independent of the outcomes it produces. For NGOs, the redistribution of power (supposedly advanced by PB) is a desirable goal in and of itself and thus they frequently make passionate and emotional arguments concerning the value of giving voice to the poor. For donor organizations such as the World Bank, USAID, DFID, and UN HABITAT, however, PB is a “tool” or “best practice” to help advance specific ends such as poverty reduction, improved public accountability, and “good governance.” While these organizations recognize the political nature of PB and its redistributive function, they appear to value PB only insofar as it has been proven “effective.” Thus accordingly, donor organizations, through their funding, have shown significant interest in technical training programs for PB and the dissemination of “best practices” materials. For example, World Bank materials describe PB as:

an innovative mechanism which aims to involve citizens in the decision-making process of public budgeting. By creating a channel for citizens to give voice to their priorities, PB can be instrumental in making the allocation of public resources more inclusive and equitable. By promoting public access to revenue and expenditure information, PB effectively increases transparency in fiscal policy and public expenditure management, reducing scope for clientelistic practices, elite capture, and corruption, thereby enhancing the government's credibility and the citizens' trust.” PB is valuable because it “improves service delivery.

To be fair, the World Bank also recognizes that PB enhances social accountability and promotes active citizenship and social learning. However, PB is foremost a tool to these specific ends and is not discussed as valuable in and of itself, as it is discussed by NGOs or the many PB networks.

In the introduction to its Participatory Budgeting Training Companion for Africa, UN-HABITAT discusses participatory budgeting as an “innovative urban management practice with excellent potential to promote principles of good urban governance.” PB is also discussed as an “important tool in the democratization of cities... and in support of decentralization and social accountability.” Thus this Training Companion serves as a technical guide for implementing PB, highlighting examples of “best practices” from eastern and southern Africa. (UN HABITAT, 2008) A related effort, based on the Bank- Netherlands Partnership Program (BNPP) and the World Bank Institute financed a radio course on “Participatory Budgeting: ‘Preconditions,’ African Experiences in Participatory Budgeting, Impacts and Lessons Learnt, Case Study: Uganda” as part of the Africa Good Governance Program

on the Radio Wave in 2007. The program consisted of ten radio broadcasts on participatory budgeting that can now be accessed online.<sup>8</sup>

In sum, though originally developed and diffused by the Workers' Party of Brazil, and then generally promoted by leftist administrations in Latin America, the current protagonists of the travel of participatory budgeting are ideologically and organizationally varied. They range from administrators from all ends of the political spectrum to NGOs, international dedicated networks, and international agencies. There is a difference in the justification for PB as it travels in different circuits, and a tendency towards "toolkits" and "best practices" among development agencies. But two important qualifications are important: First, the institutional design promoted in different networks is often vague. That is, it is not possible to say that the PB promoted by USAID appears any different than what is described in materials from the World Social Forum. And second, and more important, is that these different actors often come together at particular projects. In many different contexts, it is a combination of all of these networks that are present and not one can be accounted for as the one "diffuser." These overlaps are so common that one recent review of experiences in Latin America noted that Bank-funded PB projects are most empowering when mobilized indigenous or leftist movements to challenge the terms of the debate. (Goldfrank 2007. Van Cott 2007)

### **But so Does Context: Local Mediations**

Even if internationally throughout the 1990s the idea of participatory budgeting was changing towards a design based on consultation and justified on the basis of its good governance effects, the politics of instrumentation were different as the idea actually reached different sites. I describe below three different ways the idea reached different contexts between the late 1990s and early 2000s.

#### *Reformers Against Civil Society: Participatory Budgeting in Córdoba, Spain*

The Participatory Budgeting process in Córdoba (2001-2005) is an emblematic one for Europe. First, because it is sometimes described as "Porto Alegre in Europe" – that is, because it is a city with a strong leftist tradition, and one where the rules and justification were closest to Porto Alegre, and second, because its failure was both spectacular and unexpected. Tapien describes it that, "the experience collapsed due to the opposition of the local civil society – mainly the "*movimiento vecinal*" – that felt excluded from the process and as such to be the main victim of the institutionalization of participatory democracy." The inclusion of "average" citizens, threatened the privileged role of associations of interlocution with local government, "stopping a tradition of associative democracy and of large involvement of associations in the municipal decisions." (Tapien 2007)

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<sup>8</sup>"Urban and Local Government: Africa Good Governance Program on the Radio Waves- Municipal Finance/Participatory Budgeting (Part I)." Internet: <http://go.worldbank.org/K7WVYCM80>.

Local democracy has been an important part of political life in Spain since its transition to democracy. Demands for democratic decision-making around the “the urban question” featured were part of the political landscape of movements in Spain since the mid-1970s in places like Madrid, Barcelona, and Seville, where active neighborhood movements were important players in the process of transition and challenged the highly centralized nature of the Franco Regime. (Castells 1983). Spain held its first free municipal elections in 1979, and in 1985 adopted the Local Government Act (LRBRL) under the first national government of the Socialist Workers' Party of Spain (PSOE - *Partido Socialista Obrero Español*), which had captured several municipalities in the 1983 election. Under pressure from its bases of support, such as the well-organized Citizens' Associations, the *vecinales*, it devolved significant decision-making to municipalities, increasing their level of political and fiscal autonomy (Navarro Yáñez 2004).

Spain is today home to varied forms of citizen participation, particularly in local government (Blanco and Gomà 2001; Botella 1999; Font 2001; Goma and Brugue 1998; Pindado 2000). A recent survey of Catalan municipalities found a number of direct participatory mechanisms being implemented, with varying degrees of inclusivity and decision-making power (Font 2002). These ranged from Citizen Forums, to participation in the development of Strategic Plans, to Environmental Participatory Planning, and to some dozen instances of Participatory Budgeting. The fundamental feature of these experiments is that they “went beyond the usual process of giving voice to an organized groups” to actively and directly engage citizens in policy formulation (Font 2002:26). Much of this effort has been directed as an attempt to recapture the quality of democratic engagement from the early years of the transition and to change focus away from the increasingly fractuous and prominent regional politics. (Navarro Yáñez 2004) What is distinctive about all of these experiments in citizen participation is that they often do *not* emerge from civil society demands, as neighborhood associations seem to be losing in organizational power (Garcia 1995; Goma and Brugue 1998).

Córdoba is a medium-sized municipality (pop 300,000) in the South of Spain, with tradition of oppositional politics and ruled by a coalition of the United Left (IU), and the Socialist Workers' Party of Spain (PSOE). In the early years of the democratic transition, local political party activists had set up localist coalitions in places like Córdoba with community activists to demand participation. (Balfour 1989) In 1999 some activists within the Federation of Neighborhood Associations proposed the idea of participatory budgeting after a visit from the then Mayor of Porto Alegre. The process was implemented as a pilot project in 2001 and then as a regular process in 2002. The Participatory Budget was introduced as an “attractive new way of government for the left,” (Ganuza 2005:515) and in particular the concern that the PSOE was disconnected with the population. It was also introduced as a mechanism for modernizing the municipal administration. Modernizers within government, supported by researchers linked to the Graduate Program in Planning at the University of Madrid, and with affinities to newer, anti-globalization movements, developed a process that adapted several of the Porto Alegre

principles: A yearly cycle with open, district assemblies that would elect representatives, *agentes*, who would be responsible for the next stages of the process and ultimately make binding decisions on projects to be carried out by the municipal administration. The *agentes*, elected at the end of the first information assemblies, received training in municipal government issues and debated the rules of the process, which changed yearly. They decided on the dates of meetings for the next stage of neighborhood meetings, where citizens were to bring forward project ideas and prioritize them. *Agentes* worked on these proposals and returned them to a subsequent district assembly to ratify what would become the proposal for each district. A second round of *agentes* were then elected to decide on the overall city priorities and approve the budget (Ganuza 2005; Droualt 2006)

What the process did not include was a privileged role for the *vecinales*, or neighborhood associations. Early on, representatives of the Association of Neighborhood Associations of Córdoba approached the administration demanding that participation be organized along associational lines. A city with a history of active associations, Córdoba has more than 2,000 registered civil society organizations, of which over 100 are *vecinales*. Each existing association in Córdoba should have one or more of the seats for the representatives who choose projects. The *vecinales* should, in addition, be allowed to organize the process in each of the city's neighborhoods under their "jurisdiction." This demand was not met at the time, and neighborhood associations began to more actively criticize the process. Participation in the neighborhood assembly stage, which had been about 1,500 in the first year, nonetheless remained at the same level for the next year, but with the noticeable absence of people linked to the leadership of the *vecinales*. This leadership began in 2004 a more active campaign against Participatory Budgeting, claiming the process was "anti-democratic," "against grassroots democracy," and represented a state strategy to "coopt and undermine neighborhood associations." (Vecinales, 2004)

The PB process came to a halt in 2004, amid growing controversies in the local newspapers. A committee of *agentes* quickly started a counter-mobilization demanding the continuance of the process. *Agentes* were from a cross section of Córdoba society, but included a number of activists in NGOs, alter-globalization movements, and notably, members of *vecinales*, and some members of the Communist party, who understood participatory budgeting to be part of a "move to transcend bourgeois democracy." As a compromise position, the process was then changed from an "individual citizen model" to a "mixed model," meaning mixed between individual citizens and associations. In the subsequent model, the *vecinales* got to organize and facilitate meetings throughout the city, and the role of *agentes* was abolished in favor of a representative. Representatives to a "city council" that ultimately decides on spending priorities are to be elected from among participants, but a number of representative seats are reserved for *vecinales*.

The process continued for two more years before being discontinued altogether under pressure from the *vecinales*, who still mistrusted it. Still in contention were



several of the rules of the process, such as the “social’ criteria for the distribution of resources, giving greater scores to proposals which ‘positively discrimination’ in favour of the weakest groups.” (Alegretti 2005). As the Córdoba case floundered under controversy, other Participatory Budgeting processes were undertaken in cities around Spain – neighboring Sevilla, and in Puente Genil, as well as in the outskirts of Madrid. All of the subsequent cases have abandoned “individual participation” in favor of mixed participation. Now, “various cities, the associations, especially neighbourhood associations, are indeed the only legal participants in the processes.” (Tapien 2007:48)

The fundamental issue for Córdoba is why associations felt so threatened as to undermine, and eventually render the project unviable. And in a related way, why associations have come to play such an important role in these processes in Spain. It is not that these associations are clientelistic, necessarily, but that they have a privileged relationship with city government. Associational democracy has been at the heart of the transition in Spain, and it is a successful arrangement in its own terms. Associations are able have their demands met and have a institutionalized channel of communication with subsequent administrations. To leaders of associations, participatory budgeting represented a threat in that it dislodged their position as an obligatory passage point and potentially rendered them obsolete.

#### *The Iron Cage of Participation: Blueprintism in Peru<sup>9</sup>*

At roughly the same time that Participatory Budgeting was being introduced in the three Brazilian cities above and in Córdoba, two Peruvian municipalities (Villa El Salvador and Ilo) under the rule of the IU, or *Izquierda Unida*, had begun to experiment with Participatory Budgeting. Both places had a tradition of local democracy and social movement militancy (Zapata Velasco 1996; Balvin Diaz, Folegatti, and Hardjik 1996; Folegatti 1999) In 1999, a “representative” of the city of Porto Alegre had toured Peru introducing PB, sponsored by the NGO *Foro Ciudades por la Vida*, a consultancy supported the EU (Hordjik 1999; Steinberg and Miranda 2005). The Forum stepped in to fill a perceived “weakness” of the association of Peruvian municipalities, “embracing the concept of best practices to support the evolution and dissemination of successful experiences.” (Steinberg and Miranda 2005:419) Both Villa El Salvador and Ilo were achieving some notoriety as successful cases outside of Brazil, when the UNDP exchange program (PGU-ALC) sponsored an international seminar on Participatory Budgeting in Vila EL Salvador in 2001 attended by civil society activists, politicians, and university researchers. (Hardjik 2009; Remy 2005)

With the election of Alejandro Toledo in 2001, and the end of the Fujimori *demodictatura*, a number of national spaces of dialogue and consultation were inaugurated – the *mesas de concertación*, the most notable being the one on poverty

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<sup>9</sup> This section draws from the work of several scholars, but most prominently the account of Michaela Hordjik. (2007)

alleviation.<sup>10</sup> The *Acuerdo Nacional* of 2002 followed – a document of *concertación* composed by civil society, political actors, and private sector representatives that listed 30 policy objectives for the country, including decentralization and the strengthening of democratic institutions to be achieved by 2020. Also in 2002, two laws were passed: a law on regional government that forced the publication of budgetary data, and a law on decentralization that increased the transfers to local government as well as *mandating participatory budgeting* in the creation of local “development plans.”

Actors on the national stage were divided on the value of Participatory Budgeting, but a law-project was introduced in 2002. The ruling coalition included several progressive parties and groups, and Left-wing politicians, like the former mayor of Ilo, of the IU, were prominent in the introduction of the law. The Budget Office of the Economic and Finance Ministry was an “unexpected and unusual promoter of PB,” (Hardjik 1999:48) actually drafting the PB law. The ministry also launched pilot PB processes in several states in 2002 ahead of the passing of the law.

The PB law faced difficulties in congress, and its final versions included compromises to assure that any PB would not threaten representative democracy, especially from the conservative APRA party (Chirinos 2004). The compromise included several elements that weakened elements of direct democracy; for example, it established that government officials would make up the majority of participants (60%) in the local councils that would make the final decisions over PB processes. It also introduced language about official “participating agents.” “participating agents” introduced by the Economic Committee in Congress. A participating agent had to be representative of a legally registered CSO with at least three years of existence. This contradicted the “guidelines” originally proposed by the Ministry of Economy, which de-emphasized councils and emphasized more direct participation. (Goldfrank 2007) Finally, the language of the law itself changed away from social justice or social transformation. Participatory Budgeting became “a mechanism to assign public resources in a just, rational, efficient, effective, and transparent manner, which strengthens the relationship between state and civil society.” (Article 1, in Hardjik 1999:49) The modified law passed in 2003.

The law was considered vague, so the Ministry created more specific guidelines for implementation of the process. The “Participatory Guidelines” were also crafted by the Economic Ministry, but now it drew together a working group with members of the poverty-alleviation roundtable, several NGOs, the umbrella groups ANC and Red Peru, the Association of Peruvian Municipalities. Related to this working group there were two projects sponsored by US-AID, UNICEF, and UNIFEM: *Participa Peru* and PRODES, which also participate in the working group. In addition, members of the Decentralization Commission, the Ministry of Women and Social Development, and the Social Development Fund also came to join the working group. This

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<sup>10</sup> This was the MCLCP, the *Mesa de Concertación de Lucha Contra La Pobreza*.

working group became the principal place to debate PB-rules and challenges and it has produced reports every year as well as changes to the process. There are yearly rule changes determined nationally by the working group.

Eight municipalities started to develop PB processes in 2003, and they presented their experiences with PB in a conference in national congress that year. With assistance from USAID there were training exercises all over the country about how to implement PB and implementation was quick. By 2007 there were 661 PB processes in the country, including a third of regional governments and all major cities.

The process is identical throughout the country. It is based on a yearly cycle. First, there are workshops of information delivery; this is followed by working groups that make proposals; this is followed by technical assessments of proposals by a technical committee; and this is followed by agreements with the local coordinating councils and monitoring of implementation (Grompone 2005). It is not a process of direct participation, since it in fact is not open to anyone. It is consultative, in that government has two veto points – the technical committee can change or reject projects, and the coordinating council ultimately makes the final decisions. The coordinating council is composed of 60% government and 40% CSO representatives. 30% of civil society representatives are from the business sector. There are no clear guidelines on the election of participants to the council, but a 2004 study found that most did not hold election (Chirinos 2004)

According to Goldfrank, the general evaluation by observers and academics alike has been that, especially in the first years, it “was not successful in promoting participation, transparency, effective planning, or improvements in public infrastructure or service provision.” According to internal evaluations by the Economics and Finance Ministry, that even in the open information workshops, has been low participation of civil society in terms of numbers or in proportion to government, as well as a virtual absence of participants from outside of organized sectors (MCLCP 2007). Arroyo (2006) concludes that less than 10% of PB processes in Peru are actually participatory. Grompone criticizes the fact that a city of 750,000 like Trujillo and a small town in the jungle should have the same institutions (2005). An evaluation of the PB process as a whole by ‘Red Participa Peru’ – a “network of promoters of citizen participation” related the results of a discussion of the “balance of citizen participation” in Peru, a debate that took place in late 2007/8. The evaluation was quite negative – in sharp contrast to the evaluation by the Working Group within the Ministry, that argues that state-civil society relations have improved, and PB has been “a positive influence on the quality of democracy and governability.” The list of complaints about the PB processes in Peru was long, including the “notorious low quality of proposals, and the lack of capacity by participants,” “the lack of representativity of participants, and the low quality of their participation,” the “little political will of authorities,” the “lack of connection between PB and the local development councils,” and the disconnect between the

great “social mobilization that a PB process implies and its low capacity to solve problems.” (Grupo Propuesta Ciudadana 2008: 17-18)

In later years the process underwent some loosening. First, there were increased possibilities for “unorganized sectors of society’ and ‘natural persons’ to participate in the local assemblies (but not the in the coordinating council), and the formal requirements for the length of existence of an organization to join the council were also loosened. Ambiguity about the relationship between Councils and PB. (MEF – DNNP 2005) There is now greater attention to local complaints civil society dialogue in the formation of the rules, such as the composition of technical committees, and increased funding for PB projects. (CIPP 2006)

The case of Peru demonstrates clearly, translation at work. Two factors are worth mentioning. First is that what arrived in Peru as “Participatory Budgeting” from USAID was already quite hollowed out – USAID blueprints de-emphasized binding decision-making and local adaptation. This version eventually overcame more empowered and more experimentalist versions that had come through political party networks. Second is the process of slow erosion of the meaning of the process. The language of citizen participation remained, but its substantive meaning change through each iteration, emptying its empowering potential on one hand, while more and more approximating a rigid, blueprinting, process of transmission.

#### *Bootstrapping Democracy: Camaragibe and Gravataí in Brazil*

As described above the 1997-2000 period was one of expansion of Participatory Budgeting in Brazil, and under its rubric administrators carried out many different variations on the theme. Elected PT administrators were expected to introduce mechanisms of participation, and by 1996 PB had become *the* principal PT formula for accomplishing this. As a blueprint, it had been applied successfully in dozens of cities by the time of the conferences and discussions of late 1996. Its central innovation – open meetings leading to binding decisions on urban infrastructure - seemed to have travelled well, often extending support for PT administrations’ redistributive platforms among the broader voting public while at the same time shielding administrators from charges of “clientelism of the left.” The idea that local PT governments should be instruments of popular mobilization had given way to more pragmatic understandings that the PT should focus on governing well.

Here I briefly describe the process of adaptation of the PB blueprint in three different, less known cases in Brazil: Camaragibe, in Pernambuco in the Northeast; and Gravataí, in Rio Grande do Sul, in the South. These are described in greater detail elsewhere (Baiocchi, Heller, and Silva 2011) and are discussed as to their success and impacts on the quality of democracy. Of importance here is the nature of the experimentalism and adaptation of the institutional blueprint as it reached these different contexts.

Both towns are medium-sized, poorer municipalities with what might be described as “weak” histories of social movements and civil society – in other words, inauspicious settings for the transplant of a model fine-tuned in a city like Porto Alegre, with its oppositional history and relatively wealthy coffers (Baiocchi 2005). It is worth noting that the fiscal years of 1996 and 1997 had been especially difficult ones for Brazilian municipalities, and the elected Mayors in both cases faced difficult tasks in delivering on campaign promises. Gravataí and Camaragibe both represent creative adaptations of the PB blueprint, while staying close to the principle of direct, binding participation, mixed with delegated participation via elected representatives.

Gravataí originally modelled its PB on Porto Alegre, but significantly modified it after a few months. In Gravataí, because organized civil society was essentially absent from the process, if not openly antagonistic, it played little or no role in drawing participants or processing demands, and the participatory process relied instead on the active and intensive intervention of city government to make it work. City hall employees divided the town of 230,000 into 85 micro-districts and coordinated meetings in each at the beginning of the cycle. It was a massive and complex experiment in inclusive participation that depended on a concerted effort by administrators who had to facilitate hundreds of meetings a year.

Citizens were directly engaged in making choices in micro-regional and regional plenaries that were more decentralized than in the Porto Alegre blueprint. Micro-regional demands and preference hierarchies are aggregated to the regional level, delegates from the micro-regions participate, and then once more to the level of the council of the budget, where councillors from the region participate. Because the plenaries are at the neighbourhood level, they make participation fairly easy. Participation in the first year was high (6,900 participants) due to popular expectation, dropping in the second year (3,500) to climb again to 13,000. In a proportional comparison, this is four times as high as the participation in Porto Alegre, and Gravataí administrators started to claim the label of the “Champion of Popular Participation” in promotional materials in the third year of the process.

Camaragibe represents an important departure from the basic blueprint. In a town far less plugged into national circuits than Gravataí, the participatory blueprint for the Participatory Administration was a highly local invention based on the previous experiences of Health Councils, and a pragmatic response to a lack of available funds for investments. The Mayor-elect was a doctor, and a highly respected activist from the health movement, had served as the head of the municipal health department some years earlier and had launched a Municipal Health Conference. Once elected, the mayor’s team sought partnerships with several advisory institutions, including the Recife-based Josué de Castro Center, a progressive social-science research

institute, among many others.<sup>11</sup> These advisors helped further the earlier “diagnostic” work of the campaign process by continuing to carry out research in the town’s five districts. Rather than controlling the budget, the process that emerged out of the diagnostic process intervened in the governance of all the municipal departments that served citizens directly. The particularity of this design reflects the pragmatic choices of administrators to channel participation *away* from new investments and *toward* areas of governance such as health which rely on external funding, and where management of services is more important. The emphasis was on governance, broadly conceived. *Participatory Administration* was understood as a practical alternative to Participatory Budgeting.

Participation was high, but in a unique twist, delegates were elected for a four-year term at the start of the process and played the role that the government officials played in Gravataí – drawing participants, helping filter demands, negotiating scaled-up demands. A general election was held and 120 delegates were elected (one for every thousand residents). In Camaragibe, associations – neighborhood associations, and movements linked to health and housing, among others – played important roles in the mediation of interests, but largely through this cadre of elected delegates that included many community leaders. This is evident, for example, in the privileged role that delegates (who, according to our interviews tended to come from movements) played. Camaragibe built a system that went beyond the budget to encompass administration. Its Participatory Administration resulted in a highly complex institutional design that combined forums with a range of coordinating institutions.

In both cities, there was pragmatic adaptation to local conditions and heavy reliance on pre-existing experiences with promoting participation. Both these points highlight and help explain the extraordinary heterogeneity of actual institutional design behind the idea of PB. These differences reflected pragmatic adaptations by PB architects to local realities, and in particular to the condition of local civil society which was perceived as unable to play a proactive role.

## **Conclusions**

Deliberative Democracy appears to be everywhere, and “participation in government” more so. In this paper I have argued that in a world of flows, the story of the trajectory and implementation of an instrument is as important as the other more commonly evoked background conditions. Participatory Budgeting is but one of a fascinating array of democratic blueprints that travel the world and other similar investigations could be undertaken on the trajectories of the solidarity economy, citizen juries, users’ councils, micro-credit schemes, gender budgeting, urban cooperatives, and fair trade, among many other traveling best practices.

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<sup>11</sup> In addition to the Josué de Castro Center, administrators developed partnerships with several other institutions, including the Brazilian Development Bank, the State Planning Department, and even once with UNDP.

I argued that the as the idea traveled its “governance-enhancing” aspects were emphasized, and its social justice components de-emphasized, and that its appearance on the world stage as a “best practice” occurred at a time of great interest in participatory approaches as a development alternatives. But that the idea traveled through different routes at the same time, and more importantly, that its local implementation – what I have called the politics of instrumentation – decisively shaped its translation in different contexts. The array of actors and interests mobilized in a particular project helped account for the actual design of the institution, its justification, as well as whether the idea landed as a monocropped blueprint or as material for democratic experimentation.

So what do the three cases of translation tell us? First, and most obviously, is that very different things went by the name of participatory budgeting. The institutions implemented in Peru, for example, evoke the name and the yearly cycle from Porto Alegre, but are different in nearly every other way. Similarly, the second version of the PB from Córdoba is also very different. And this is the case in the Brazilian city as well. Second, and somewhat counter-intuitively, is that variation from the formula is not accounted for by distance from the original case in Brazil. The cases in Brazil were the ones that varied significantly and self-consciously from the original PB story, while the Spanish case started as a close copy, while the Peruvian case deviated but then repeated down the chain. Third, they tell us about how translation of Participatory Budgeting, and deliberative democratic institutions more generally happen. The array of actors enrolled in the project helps account for the process, but more than that, the particular role of “civil society” – who will speak for it, who will be authorized to represent “the people” in the institution – turns out to be the most fragile part of the coalition around a project. In Brazil, it formed the central worry for administrators, while in Spain it was the issue that ended the project, while in Peru it was the basis of opposition to it from conservative parties and the reason for the shape of the current process.

In sum, what the stories do *not* show is the overwhelming importance of the conduits that bring the instrument. That is, the stories show a transformation of what Participatory Budgeting is, but this more due to the processes of local negotiation than the available blueprints or the nature of the international actors involved per se. Translation takes many forms, and we have more highly politicized networks in Brazil and Spain maintained the element of social justice more visible than in the case of Peru. But in Peru, those more politicized networks were present at first as well; it is the story of the local negotiations, and increasing importance of USAID versions over time that accounts for the shape it took more than USAID itself.

And finally, to return to the question about what this says about the possibilities of deliberative democracy as a form of transformative social change in the current global moment. The stories are both hopeful and cause for caution. The hopeful part of the story concerns the democratic experimentalism in the Brazilian cases – not cases with the presumed “right” set of conditions for Participatory Budgeting. The

argument here has also been hopeful in its insistence on the importance of local agency – here moving far from accounts of the “sanitization of participation” as a post-political ideological endgame. As for caution, the Peruvian story is clearly a case of monocropping. The adoption of PB by Peruvian municipalities was faster than in Brazil, but the negotiation of the process in Peru produced an institution with little space for deliberation, no room for popular input, and no opportunities for local communities to determine how this institution would look in their particular context. It was a transformation of deliberative development and self determination into a new, hybrid form of High Modernism (Scott 1998). The Spanish case is also cause for caution – here that it cannot be assumed that what looks like the “right” alignment of factors – leftist administration, high resources, and an active civil society – will produce a translation that will work.



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