



Thinking Brazil



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UPCOMING EVENTS MAY 2006

- Brazil's President as Working Class Raposa (fox): Understanding Lula the Politician
- Participation and Citizenship in Democratic Brazil

Participatory Governance: Strengthening Democracy in Brazil

Since its transition from authoritarianism, Brazil has embraced various innovative forms of participatory governance, giving its citizens direct involvement in municipal finances and allowing for greater oversight of public investments. The city of Porto Alegre's participatory budgeting program is widely seen as the world's model participatory governance experience, where institutional representational channels have enabled citizens to voice their demands in the public sphere and monitor public expenditures. In addition to more than 170 participatory budgeting projects established throughout Brazil, the country now also has 5,000 participatory health councils and several thousand city planning commissions, with varied success. These programs have increased voluntary associational activity in a historically non-participatory country, led to a more equitable distribution of government services, and strengthened democratic citizenship in Brazil.

However, according to Leonardo Avritzer, despite the increasing popularity of participatory governance among academics and international institutions, the current literature on citizen

participation and the actions of international agencies has failed to thoroughly address two key issues. What are the requisite conditions for the emergence and success of participatory institutions? And, what

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BRAZIL

AT THE WILSON CENTER

Leonardo Avritzer is Associate Professor at the Federal University of Minas Gerais. He received his M.A. from the Federal University of Minas Gerais, Brazil, and his Ph.D. in political sociology at the New School for Social Research, where he received the School's Albert Salomon Dissertation Award for Modernity and Democracy in Brazil. From 1998 to 2003, he was a visiting scholar at the Department of Political Science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Among Avritzer's published books is *A Moralidade da Democracia* (1997), which received the José Albertino Rodrigues award for best book in the social sciences in Brazil. He is also the author of *Democracy and the Public Space in Latin America* (2002). Between 1996 and 1998 Leonardo Avritzer was the director of the Brazilian Association of Postgraduate Programs and Research in Social Sciences (ANPOCS), and between 2000 and 2002, he was the director of the Brazilian Association of Political Science (ABCP). He is currently the Chair of the Political Science Committee at CAPES (Coordenação e Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior). As a Public Policy Scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Avritzer has finished his upcoming book, "Participatory Institutions and Multi-Centered Citizenship in Brazil."

are the variables that account for their different results within the same country? Avritzer's new book seeks to answer these questions.

On 11 April 2006, Avritzer presented his research on participatory governance

expansion, and success of Brazil's new participatory institutions. He decenters the discussion from Porto Alegre's participatory budgeting by analyzing cases in other cities, such as São Paulo, Salvador, and Belo Horizonte, and by adding two other participatory institutions to the debate: health councils and city master plans.

Participatory governance, he argues, is not an easily replicable practice that can be applied by progressive governments or international agencies with disregard for a city's historical development trajectory. Furthermore, Avritzer rejects the widespread assumption

that the presence of civil society is the sole requisite for participatory budgeting: a strong civil society, he asserts, is a necessary but *insufficient* condition for

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for his upcoming book, *Participatory Institutions and Multi-Centered Citizenship in Brazil*. In the book Avritzer introduces a comparative framework to evaluate the conditions for the emergence,

participatory governance. Following his analysis of Brazilian cases, Avritzer claims that participatory institutions require three overlapping conditions for this exercise in citizenship and good governance to be successful, implying that variation in design and implementation is needed on a case by case basis.

Participatory governance is not a cure-all that can be imposed upon a city from above. Rather, its success is based on a city's civil society organization, the willingness of its political parties to implement participatory policies, and the nature of the institutional design in each one of these areas. Civil society associations play an active role in proposing the form of participation, whereas political parties bring these new formats of participation to the political arena. The resulting design is successful and sustainable because of constructive negotiation on the parts of civil society and political actors that accommodates their often-conflicting interests and agendas. It is this positive interaction that achieves an *interactive participatory design* and explains the success of participatory policy experiences.

Because of the presence of pre-existing local practices, such as regional citizen assemblies, Porto Alegre has had a much stronger and broader history of voluntary associations than the rest of the country. Overall, civil society associations in Porto Alegre are dense (in Robert Putnam's sense of the word) and enjoy favorable relations with the



LEONARDO AVRITZER

local political system. During the re-democratization period of the 1980s and 1990s, civil society developed unevenly, more in some areas of the city than in others (as is true on the national level as well). Avritzer argues that participatory budgeting has helped equalize this local disparity of civil society organization, homogenizing the level of civil society and promoting a more even distribution of government services and resources. Likewise, in Porto Alegre, local politicians and political parties respected neighborhood associations, and opted to work with them in good faith, not against them.

Political parties also readily embraced the implementation of participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre. The Brazilian Workers' Party (PT) in Porto Alegre



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garnered support from an alliance between three social movements: the new left, progressive Catholic groups, and the new unionism. Party unison within the PT was particularly high, with a vast majority of the party willing to implement participatory policies, as the general orientation of the assemblies overlapped with that of the party. Likewise, the PT enjoyed cordial relations with competing political parties, which also supported participatory initiation.

Because the PT so quickly and readily embraced participatory governance, many have argued that it is a distinctly PT invention. Avritzer, however, is quick to note that these participatory policies did not arise from any one single actor. Instead, it was the process of negotiation

and deliberation among the many different interests involved—exactly the type of processes that participatory governance utilize in responding to citizen demands—that made participatory budgeting work so well. The political design of participatory budgeting was thus fashioned in a bottom-up fashion, of cooperative trial and error between political and civil society to create an institutional design specifically suited to take advantage of local conditions and address local demands.

If these three categories do not overlap, Avritzer warns, then participatory governance will not reproduce the same successful effects that it has in Porto Alegre because it will not be the result of an organic process of overlapping interests. São Paulo's participatory budgeting experience demonstrates this. There, grassroots participation did not expand as fast as it did in other cities, and civil society associations were less developed (especially in the city's South region) and more disjointed than those in Porto Alegre. New unionism was relatively weak in the city's inner regions, so participatory policies made little headway, given the competition from continued support for corporatist

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forms of participation. Also, participatory policies were seen as more contentious in São Paulo, with the city's PT members divided over their willingness to embrace participation since party orientation was not directly analogous to the assemblies' ideological orientation. By relying on cross-spectrum party alliances to construct a majority in city council, the PT created political enemies, engendering a collision with the political system where cooperation was needed.

Because the three key elements were not fully integrated in São Paulo, policy design and implementation was flawed, leading to a relative failure in replicating Porto Alegre's success. While Porto Alegre boasts that its four poorest regions have enjoyed annual resource transfers of 1,000 reais per person, São Paulo's equivalent figure is only 90 reais (roughly 40 dollars). Also, the better distribution of civil society organization that resulted from Porto Alegre's participatory policies was not reproduced in São Paulo, where the continued existence of citywide disparities in the breadth and depth of voluntary associations continues to complicate exercises in democratic citizenship.

Avritzer's view of multicentered citizenship is one in which citizens and

political actors collaborate through state-civil partnerships. In this construction of citizenship, citizens hold both rights and responsibilities; they not only make demands upon the state, but also help build the state's capacity to accommodate these demands. Avritzer's research shows a direct, observable link between participation and the more efficient and effective provision of state goods and services to those in need. Participatory governance, if implemented correctly, can transform corporatism and clientelism into democratic representation and participation, and increase the

ability of people to see themselves as citizens. His research concludes that there are no universally applicable conditions that can be imposed from above to create participatory policies in cities lacking a history of voluntary associationalism. Likewise, participatory experiences designed

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for one societal reality cannot be expected to succeed elsewhere. Rather, cooperation and negotiation on the local level is needed to author policies specifically tailored to a city's individual characteristics. Only through this interactive participatory design can these democratic forms of political institutions successfully raise government legitimacy, construct citizenship, and strengthen democracy. ■



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Brazil at the Wilson Center

Thinking Brazil Update is an electronic publication of Brazil at the Wilson Center. This project is founded on the conviction that Brazil and the U.S.-Brazilian relationship deserve greater attention within the Washington policy-making community. Brazil's population, size, and economy, as well as its unique position as a regional leader and global player, justify this interest. In keeping with the Center's mission to bridge the worlds of scholarship and policymaking, Brazil at the Wilson Center sponsors activities on a broad range of key policy issues designed to create a Brazil "presence" in Washington.

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