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

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ABSTRACT:

This paper examines civic governance in Porto Alegre in terms of deliberative democratic theory, as outlined in Cohen (1997), Fung (1998), and Wright and Fung (1999). Civic governance in Porto Alegre has developed in the ten years of the municipal administration of the Workers’ Party (P.T.) into a complex system of participatory fora where citizens decide and deliberate upon a variety of municipal policies. The cornerstone of the system is the much-publicized Participatory Budget (Orçamento Participativo, O.P.), a neighborhood-based set of deliberative fora on the city’s budget priorities. Based upon interview and historical research as well as a survey I applied (n=1039), in this paper I seek to add to the substantive account of democracy at the center of theories of deliberative democracy. I argue that evidence from these institutions offer a robust defense of the potential of deliberative democracy in face of criticisms deliberation will foster domination of more powerful citizens. Instead, we have evidence of the didactic function of participatory governance in Porto Alegre. I also argue that the institutions of civic governance in Porto Alegre force us to re-examine and theorize the types of civil society-deliberative forum interfaces and the potential impacts of civic governance on civil society. Here, I argue that participatory governance has directly fostered the creation of new autonomous institutions of civil society. Finally, I also argue civic governance in Porto Alegre has flourished under two sets of conditions that may make it not immediately transportable to other contexts: that of an unusually endowed municipal government (for Brazilian standards) and the radical driving vision of Worker’s Party administrators.
INTRODUCTION
The experiment in participatory governance in Porto Alegre Brazil stands apart from many other similar attempts to institute some version of civic governance in Brazil and Latin America. Because of its breadth and scope, it is different than a variety of other experiments (past and present) that simply do not involve as many persons, or more commonly, do not devolve such amount of decision-making power to popular mandate. Its central institutional feature of interfacing civil society through neighborhood-based deliberation regardless of local levels of organization also sets it apart from participatory governance schemes that rely on organized civil society, often through sectoral interfaces (calling upon teachers to consult on education policy, for instance). It is also unusual because it has served the Worker’s Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, P.T.) well, permitting three uninterrupted terms at municipal government, and recently, largely as a result of the successes in Porto Alegre, a term at state level government. It stands against the backdrop of many well-known electoral and institutional failures of leftist municipal administrations, as in São Paulo, Fortaleza, and Florianópolis in Brazil, or Caracas in Venezuela, as well as a number of much more limited participatory experiments as in Montevideo, Uruguay, and Córdoba, Argentina.

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

¹ In English, there are the essays of Abbers (1997, 1998), (Navarro 1996) and Santos, in this volume. See also (Fedozzi 1997), and (Genro and Souza 1997)
some undertheorized areas of deliberative democratic theory. In order to do so, I rely on a number of indicators beyond purely institutional ones, but I do not recount all of the institutional features of participatory governance or their development. Other analyzes, as Santos’, in this volume, accomplish that task. To foreshadow my argument, I suggest that a careful interpretation of the experiment and its outcomes beyond purely institutional indicators provides a defense of deliberative democratic institutions against the charge that they simply reproduce societal inequalities in deliberative settings. Moreover, this analysis suggests that a theory of deliberative democracy needs to take into account more centrally the issue of interfaces with civil society. Finally, I raise some critical comments about the autonomy and capacity of municipal government to carry out this experiment as well as the importance of ‘driving politics’ behind it.

Deliberative Democratic theory refers to a body of political theory that seeks to develop a substantive version of democracy based on public justification through deliberation. More than definition of democracy as a political system, but also more than ‘discussion-based’ democracy, deliberative democracy calls for the deliberation of citizens as reasonable equals for the legitimate exercise of authority and as a way of transforming the preferences and intentions of citizens. (Cohen 1994; Cohen 1996; Cohen and Rogers 1992) In this way, theorists of deliberative democracy address some of the problems that face democratic theory in complex societies such as the plurality of values, which would in principle render the construction of the “common good” of democratic theory as well as the establishment of common democratic practices difficult.

What distinguishes the contributions of these theorists who animate the central concerns of the Real Utopias Project from Habermassian or post-Habermassian
interventions into democratic theory is that a key concern has to do with institutional
preconditions for the realization of deliberative democracy. As such, the foray into real
world Empowered Deliberative Democracies (Wright and Fung, this volume, and Fung,
1998) can be considered a further iteration of these theories of deliberative democracy. A
key feature of deliberative democratic theory and of ‘Real Utopian thinking’ (cf. Wright,
1997) is that it places affirmative responsibility on institutional design to bring real-world
institutions ever closer to normative ‘utopian’ ideals.

In this spirit, then, I offer three critical re-interpretations of some of the features of
the Porto Alegre participatory experiment based on my own research, carried out between
1997 and 1999. Each of the following sections of this paper addresses one of these re-
interpretations. After a very brief discussion of the institutions of the participatory
governance in Porto Alegre, I argue in the next section that the Porto Alegre experiment
offers a particularly successful resolution to the problems of equity in deliberation among
unequals. All available evidence points to the fact that the deliberative experiment
fosters participatory parity by virtue of its didactic functions. In the following section on
civil society, I argue that the experiment also highlights the issue of interfaces between
civil society and deliberative fora. It offers a hopeful example of how this relationship
might work in a way that fosters new organization in unorganized areas of civil society
while not unduly favoring areas with pre-existing associative traditions. Finally, the very
success of the participatory experiment necessarily begs the question of its
transportability to other places. This raises two issues for Deliberative Democratic
theory, which I raise in the last section of the paper: the importance of institutional
capacity and autonomy to carry out deliberative democratic projects, and the importance of the type of ‘driving politics’ behind real-world deliberative democratic experiments.

BACKGROUND: INSTITUTIONS OF PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE

When the Popular Font (an electoral alliance headed by the P.T. but including other leftist parties as well) achieved electoral victory in Porto Alegre in 1989 there was little agreement as to what, exactly, the ‘PT way’ of governing would look like, save for a broad agreement on democratizing and decentralizing the administration, reversing municipal priorities toward those who needed it most, and increasing popular participation in decision making.

Attending to a longstanding demand of The Union of Neighborhood Associations of Porto Alegre (UAMPA), which already in its 1985 congress called for a participatory structure involving the municipal budget, P.T. administrators begun to develop a set of institutions of popular control over municipal budgeting priorities. Developing participatory institutions while managing a city of the size of Porto Alegre posed a number of difficulties for administrators. The city of Porto Alegre, the capital of the industrialized, and relatively wealthy, state of Rio Grande do Sul, stands at the center of a metropolitan area of almost three million persons. And although the city of 1,3 million has relatively high social and economic indicators, with its life expectancy (72.6) and literacy rates (90%) well above national average, it is also highly segregated city. Almost a third of its population then lived in irregular housing, as slums or invaded areas; these slum areas fan outward from the city center, with the poorest regions generally the farthest from downtown, making for very geographically distinct economic and social profiles throughout the city. Part of the original difficulties involved fostering
participation among very diverse persons; fostering participation at all in the very poor areas would also prove difficult. Yet another difficulty involved actually attending to the needs of the population in the context of the economic difficulties of the late 1980’s.

The Orçamento Participativo - the ‘Participatory Budget’ (henceforth referred to as O.P.) - has evolved over the years into a two-tiered structure of fora where citizens participate as individuals and as representatives of various groups of civil society (neighborhood associations, cultural groups, special interest groups) throughout the yearly cycle to deliberate and decide on projects for specific regions and on municipal investment priorities as well as monitor the outcome of these projects.

The process begins in March of each year, with regional assemblies in each of the city’s sixteen regions. These meetings accomplish two things: delegates are elected to represent specific neighborhoods, and the previous year’s projects and budget is discussed. These meetings are attended by the Mayor and his staff who listen and reply to the concerns of citizens about projects in the region. More importantly, the number of regional delegates per neighborhood to participate in subsequent deliberations is decided based upon attendance. The number of total delegates is based on a diminishing proportion to the number of attendees, and the proportion of persons from a specific neighborhood to that total. See (Avritzer 2000)

2 The number of delegates for a region is determined as follows: for the first 100 persons, one delegate for every ten persons; for the next 150 persons, one for twenty; for the next 150, one for thirty; for each additional forty persons after that, one delegate. To cite an example, a region that had 520 persons in attendance would have 26 delegates. An association with 47 members in attendance would have two delegates. (9% of the delegates.) See (Avritzer 2000)
In the subsequent months, these delegates meet in each of the regions on a weekly or bi-monthly basis to acquaint themselves with the technical criteria involved in demanding a project as well as to deliberate about the region’s needs. These *Intermediary Meetings* come to a close when, at a second *Regional Plenary* a vote among regional delegates serves to prioritize the region’s demands and priorities and elect councilors to serve on the Municipal Council of the Budget.

The higher tier of participatory governance is the Municipal Council of the Budget. This is a smaller forum of representatives of each of the regions and thematic meetings, which meets with representatives of the administration to make most of the ultimate decisions about the budget. It has as its main function to reconcile the demands from each region with available resources and propose and approve a municipal budget in conjunction with members of the administration. Its 42 members and representatives of planning agencies city hall meet biweekly for several months in this process. Councilors – two per region and per each of the five thematic areas – maintain links with their regions at this time and will, by the end of their one-year term, have proposed and approved changes to the rules of the whole process. For instance, in recent years, some of the changes have included increasing the scope of areas covered by the O.P., broadening the powers of the Municipal Council of the Budget to cover personnel expenditures of the administration, and changing the criteria for assessing how resources are to be allocated to each of the regions. The yearly process is shown in Figure 1 below.

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3 Resources are allocated to each region based on a system of weights that considers population, ‘need’ and regional priorities. I describe this system of weights in the Appendix.
There are a number of features of participatory governance in Porto Alegre of relevance to the concerns of theorists of deliberative democracy. First is that the process creates direct deliberation between citizens at the local level and devolves substantial amount of decision-making power to these local settings. These regional fora are organized along the lines of the city’s sixteen districts, lines that were drawn to respect
the regional traditions of social movement activity. These regional fora fit well the
criteria for Empowered Deliberative Democracy: these are settings of direct deliberation
between citizens directly affected by the problems being debated. These citizens are then
directly involved in monitoring and implementing solutions achieved. These are
continuously deliberative processes over the years, meaning that there are chances for
participants to learn from mistakes. These local units, though vested with substantial
decision-making power do not function completely autonomously from other units or
from central monitoring units. Rather central agencies offer supervision and support of
local units but respect their decision making-power, a feature theorists of deliberative
democracy refer to as recombinance. Unlike many other experiments in Empowered

![Graph showing participants O.P. 1990-1998]

Deliberative Democracy, the O.P. has sustained substantial attendance over the years.
Estimated yearly attendances at the O.P., generated by a measure of participants in first
and second round plenaries is shown in Figure 2.

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4 This distinguishes Empowered Deliberative Democratic proposals from ‘New Left’ models. See (Fung and Wright 2000)
5 This figure, based on published numbers of municipal government, is the best available estimate of the actual number of participants.
In practice, these fora also function as a space for community demands and problems to be aired, for information to be divulged about the functioning of government, and as a regular meeting place for activists of a region. My own research in three regions of the city revealed that much of the year’s proceedings do not actually involve decision-making, but rather, learning about the technical criteria involved in budgeting. As a result, meetings are often ‘taken over’ by activists who make use of this regular forum to discuss issues beyond budgeting matters.

Another relevant feature is that the institutions of the O.P. mix elements of direct and representative democracy. The higher tier of the participatory structures, the Municipal Council of the Budget brings together representatives of each of the regions as well as the thematic meetings. Some analysts, as (Santos 1998) have emphasized the Municipal Council as the most important feature of the O.P. While from the perspective of deliberative democracy, the Council of the Budget lacks the directness of locally based deliberation, it invests a great deal of power in ordinary citizens elected from the regional fora. These councilors act as intermediaries between municipal government and regional activists, bringing the demands of the region to the government, and justifying government actions to regional activists. While councilors fulfill functions that would in other cities be associated with the official municipal legislative, here councilors are subject to immediate recall of their mandate with a simple majority of the regional forum. Their terms are limited to two years. As mentioned earlier, councilors of the O.P. have
the power to change the rules of the process every year and have expanded their roles and responsibilities over the years.

The O.P. has attracted a great deal of attention from academics, policy experts, and activists alike. It has succeeded in establishing an efficient and redistributive institution with ample participation and opportunities for individual and collective learning. But while it is indeed the cornerstone of participatory governance, it is not its only feature. Participatory governance has expanded from indeed discussions around the municipal budget to other fora, including direct deliberation on social service and health provisions, local school policy, and human rights. The O.P. itself has transformed to include deliberation on investments in education, culture, health, social services, and sports. My research has revealed that most activists do tend to begin their involvement with participatory governance through the O.P., but tend to ‘graduate’ to fora away from budgeting matters, which makes it the O.P. an ideal site for analysis of participatory governance. Following this section, then, I raise some crucial issues for deliberative democratic theories: the issue of inequality within meetings, the issue of civil society interfaces, and the issues of the replicability of this experiment.

DELIBERATION AND THE PROBLEM OF INEQUALITY

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

For someone as Bourdieu, deliberation and participatory democracy would only reproduce certain hierarchies. On one hand, it would reproduce class hierarchies; on another, it would reproduce hierarchies of political competence of ‘experts’ against non-experts within the ‘field of politics’ (a hierarchy which is likely to align along, roughly, class lines, but need not be coterminous with it). In *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991) Bourdieu denounces fictions of ‘linguistic communism’ - that the ability to speak is equally distributed to all. As language is a *medium* (as to opposed to only an instrument) of power, utterances between speakers are always expressions of *relations of power between them*. The competence to speak embodies difference and inequality. A privileged class habitus imparts the technical ability to speak and the standing to make certain statements. This competence is a *statutory ability*, meaning that “not all linguistic utterances are equally acceptable and not all locutors equal.” (1992:146) Linguistic competence is not a simple technical ability, but certain locutors are not
allowed certain acts of speech. Bourdieu gives the example of the farmer who did not run for mayor of his township, “But I don’t know how to speak!” (146)

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

It is not surprising that poorer persons tend to participate more in these deliberative settings than better-off citizens. Since some notion of ‘need’ is a primary motivator for participation at all in these problem-solving settings, a common sense expectation would be that there would be needier persons in these settings than the city as a whole. There is also the theoretical expectation, however, that the relatively technical

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discussions involved, and the types of time-pressures on a poorer person would act as a disincentive to participation. As Jane Masbridge writes of her townhall participants:

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

As described elsewhere, the bulk of participation in governance in Porto Alegre takes place in meetings of the Participatory Budget (Orçamento Participativo, O.P.), which is divided into regional meetings to assess local priorities, and thematic meetings to assess municipal priorities around specific themes, as education or health. There are a variety of other participatory fora, as regional social services fora. My research for this paper comes from Participatory Budget (O.P.) meetings. The survey revealed that the profile of the average participant in regional meetings was a person of lower economic and educational standing than the average citizen of Porto Alegre. While participants in the regional meetings tended to be of different backgrounds than participants in the thematic meetings, with a strong presence of college-educated liberal professionals, on the whole O.P. participants have tended to be from what could be described as ‘lower middle-class’ sectors and professions or below. Over half of participants earn 4 Minimum Wages or below, and over half have an Eighth-grade education or less.\(^7\) On the upper end of economic standing, we find that the better off are underrepresented.

\(^7\) A ‘Minimum Wage’ is a convenient unit to measure income in Brazil with currency fluctuations. As of 11/1999, it is set at US$62 per month, and ‘poverty’ is often informally set at 2 Minimum Wages in Social Science studies.
Roughly, a third earn more than the equivalent of 5 Minimum Wages, against the 54.8% of the city’s residents who do. (Pozzobon, 1998)

In addition, an analysis of average regional participation over the ten years revealed that the proportion of persons living below the poverty line in a region is a good predictor of participation for that region. While this does not establish that literacy or poverty are not important within the meetings, if poverty or literacy were significant barriers to participation we would expect at least some regional effects – that regions with very high proportions of poor and illiterate persons would show at least lesser participation over the years.

Table 1 below shows a comparison of the proportion of participants by gender, low-income, and low-education against citywide proportions. The table shows a parity of poor persons, of persons with low educational attainment, and a gender parity for participation. Regional and total levels of persons of low educational background were similar to citywide and regional proportions. A comparison of the proportion of women participants against the proportion of adult women showed gender parity in all regions, and the proportion of less educated persons also matched citywide averages and regional averages.
Table 1: Proportion of O.P. Participants by Low-Education, Low income, and Gender.8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>City O.P.</th>
<th>Delegates</th>
<th>Councilors</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Education*</td>
<td>55.5</td>
<td>60.3</td>
<td>34.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>53.34</td>
<td>50.51</td>
<td>45.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Income*</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
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However, even if the poor participate at the meetings, we could still expect the reproduction of inequality to occur inside the meetings: we could still expect that more powerful citizens dominate the meetings and capture key positions – those of elected delegate and councilor. As mentioned above, ethnographic and life-history evidence can shed light on the relationships between structures of inequality and practices inside meetings, or between structures of inequality and individual trajectories through the process. However, a survey question about how often a person speaks in meetings would be able to detect some of these patterns if they were significantly present. A survey question: ‘do you speak in meetings? (Always, almost always, sometimes, never) administered found that there was parity between the poor and the not poor, and between the less educated and the rest. It also found, however, that women speak at meetings less. Table 2 below shows the results of the question.

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8 Note: Low Education is defined, as per Brazilian standards, as less than 8th Grade. Low Income is defined as earning less than 2 Minimum Wages (US$100 - November 1999). Sources: IBGE, 1991. PMPA/FESC, 1998. Survey Data, 1998.
While there is little difference between the poor and not poor, the difference between men and women is significant. A formal statistical statement predicting whether someone will speak at a meeting based solely on gender expresses that the odds of a woman being an active participant at 28.33% lower. The number years of participation in the O.P. also turns out to offset this pattern significantly, and years of participation in the process is a powerful predictor of whether persons will speak. Table 3 shows the proportion of active participants among persons who had participated for six or more years previously.

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9 The logistic coefficient predicting participation based solely on gender gives the odds at 28.33% lower, with a Standard Error of (.09). and Chi-Squared of 13.75, statistically significant at p<.001.
Keeping in mind that this is a much smaller sample of participants, it is apparent that years of experience quite clearly affects the proportion of active participants to non-active participants. A more formal statistical prediction finds that consideration of both years of participation and gender finds that, controlling for years of participation, the odds of a woman speaking are 37% lower. These odds increase 7% for each year of participation. Interaction terms and other variables were not significant predictors of active participation. (See Equation 1 in Statistical Appendix) Once we control for Poverty, and Low Education as well as gender, (see Equation 2) we find that gender is not a significant predictor. We find that poverty is a significant predictor, with a poor person 58.3% lower odds of participating. However, each year of participation increases a person’s odds by 14%, and significantly, low-education, also actually increases a person’s odds by 35.7%. This apparently contradictory result derives from the fact that persons with a lot of education tend not to participate in O.P. proceedings, and well over half of participants were in the low-education category. This is the direct result of the types of persons who attend these meetings and the types of policies enacted by the P.T. to attract new persons from poor neighborhoods. While it certainly does not mean that
‘education’ makes no difference, it establishes that the better educated are not dominating the meetings.

Although ‘active participation’ in this definition does not unambiguously lead us to parity, the evidence is inconsistent with the expectation of the reproduction of inequality. Certainly, we would expect clearer patterns of the poor reporting speaking less, or of clear effect of education on these patterns, which is not apparent. Also, the importance of years of participation is important. While this does not establish that the process is didactic, since there is the alternate possible explanation that persons who are more active participants might be the long-term participants, it suggests that learning is important.

This confirms the best expectation of Deliberative Democratic theory: that learning within deliberative settings is an important. It would be an unreasonable expectation that the mere presence of deliberative democratic fora would eliminate inequalities among participants. Rather, the expectation is that deliberation, over time, would foster parity.

A more unambiguous indicator of whether meetings are dominated by men, or by wealthier citizens, is an analysis of who captures representative positions among citizens, and if representatives chosen at the regional level (Delegates) or for the municipal level (Councilors) have significantly different profiles than average participants. If such mechanisms are at work, we can expect that certain citizens, as men, the more educated, or wealthier citizens, would systematically capture those positions. We find that indeed there is a slight, but significant trend toward this kind of stratification. As table 1 above shows, there is an effect at both the first tier of representatives (Delegates) as well as the
second (Councilor). Gender, and education, in particular, tend to affect a person’s chances of being elected. Education appears to be the most pronounced, and particularly so at the highest tier. For the purposes of analysis, I considered the odds of ‘being elected’ to either position as function of a variety of indicators. Years of education in fact once we control for the other variables in the model, do not increase a person’s chances of being elected, and actually appear to lower the odds for each year of education. This is a function of the small number of well-educated persons who participate.

But low education and gender noticeably affect a person’s odds of election. Years of participation is also a significant predictor. A formal statistical analysis of the odds of being elected, a logistical regression model (in equation 3 in the Appendix), establishes that gender, poverty, and low education have negative effects on the likelihood of being elected. It also establishes that years of participation significantly affects the odds positively, and interaction terms between poverty and low-education and years of participation have significant positive effects, suggesting that participation over time tends to increase participatory parity. So while controlling for poverty, low-education, and years of experience, the statistical prediction gives us that the odds of a woman being elected are 78% less than a man’s, and controlling for the other variables yields that each year of participation increases the odds of election by 29%. If the proportion of persons having significant years of experience is going to increase over time this suggests that the process is likely to come closer to parity over time. This is consistent with the finding about speaking at meetings: that women speak less but are more likely to speak with greater years of participation.
The findings do not support, however, the expectation that in time the process would erase gender inequality in terms of election to key positions. The interaction terms between participation and gender were not significant, which suggests that the odds of election between a man and a woman with similar years of participation are still in favor of the man. The interaction between poverty and participation and low education and participation were, however. In contrast, with participation, the odds of election between a poor person and a person with income above poverty would be the same.

It should also be noted that this is a set of very stringent standards; the income level of 2 minimum wages is an income of less than a third of the city’s median income of 6.4 minimum wages, and the education level of 8\textsuperscript{th} grade or less is well below the city’s median educational level of the city. That these figures even approach parity in the context of a highly socially segregated context is reason for optimism. Finally, it should be noted a model that considers education as number of years, or income in terms of tiers, finds that the highest levels of education and income negatively affect the odds of being elected. While this is partially because of the low proportion of highly educated persons in these meetings, this finding is also inconsistent with the expectation that the more educated or wealthier would dominate the meetings. This also gives us some insight into what counts as political competence. Bourdieu’s farmer, who did not ‘know how to speak’ might have found in the institutions of participatory governance in Porto Alegre a place where his type of speech might have been more valued than that of the highly educated and well-off.

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

The overall outcomes of O.P. investments are an impressive testament to how
redistributive this process has been. To take an example among many, in the years
between 1992-1995 the housing department (DEMHAB) offered housing assistance to
28,862 families, against 1,714 for the comparable period of 1986-1988. Another example
is the number of functioning public municipal schools today of 86 against 29 in 1988.
(Pozzobon, 1998)

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

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

A more useful way to assess whether inequality has created inefficiencies in deliberation is to ask whether the process has created gridlocks in decision-making that might result from attempting to deliberate among very disparate communities. Although no standards exist against which to judge these outcomes, through the O.P. citizens have
been able to decide upon more projects and on the allocation of more resources each year, deciding upon more than 200 new projects a year in the last several years. The level of satisfaction of citizens with the O.P., with 58.5% of participants claiming having received benefits in their region (or thematic meeting), and 57.2% asserting that the population always or almost always ‘really decides’ upon public works, is also not consonant with an inefficient deliberative system.

One of the features of participatory governance in Porto Alegre important to its success is its didactic component, both in terms of its effects on individuals as well as on collectives. Individually, the institutional design includes, as part of the yearlong deliberations, many meetings devoted to learning procedures and rules, as well as more specific technical criteria for municipal projects. Persons acquire the specific competences related to budgeting, but also acquire skills in debating and mobilizing resources for collective goals. There is relatively open room for advancement within the process for newcomers. One participant with only a few years of schooling elected as Councilor early on in the process, discussed what it was like in the beginning as a less educated person:

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

In addition, collective learning occurs as result of the meetings. As persons become deeply involved in negotiations and become acquainted with other persons in the region who are involved in similar problems, participants become both more trusting and empathetic of other participants, as well as more accepting of difficulties involved in
implementation of projects. This means that groups become more able to find consensus, and compromise over time. The ability to find compromise in the context of scarce resources is contingent upon solidarity, which results from weekly deliberations, but is also result of direct action of agents of the government. Regional agents of municipal government, \((\text{Coordenadores Regionais do Orçamento Participativo} \ - \ CROPs)\) function as facilitators and didacts, always attempting to foster cooperation without directly interfering with discussions. One of these coordinators discussed their functions:

Another task of CROPs is to preserve and help diffuse certain values. The O.P. demands the construction of cooperation and solidarity, otherwise the logic of competition and ‘taking advantage’ becomes established, creating processes of exclusion. Therefore, negotiations inspired in a solidary practice must be a constant in the pedagogical actions of the CROPs. (Eunínce de Andrade Araújo, cited in Genro and Souza, 1997:30)

**INTERFACES WITH CIVIL SOCIETY**

Another vexing issue for deliberative democracy is the relationship between deliberative democratic forums and civil society. This issue is particularly thorny. Autonomous institutions of civil society are generally positively valued as being the repositories of democratic practices and impulses in society, however, for normative and practical reasons democratic theorists do not rely on civil society in institutional designs. Organizations in civil society might also have the best information and access to certain problems that the participatory scheme is designed to address, but participatory schemes do not explicitly rely on organized civil society. On one hand, to do so might inadvertently favor citizens who are represented by formal and established organizations against citizens who do not have such representation. It might also inadvertently reproduce and harden ‘movement oligarchies’ by giving leaders of such organizations...
additional legitimacy and political capital. On the other hand, this poses the ‘bootstrap’
political question: should we not attempt to conceive of institutional designs that would
function in places without prior organization, or should we abandon those areas
altogether?

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

There are a number of negative expectations about the impact of participatory
forums on civil society. If participatory forums are parallel to – that is, they co-exist with
- civil society, it is not unreasonable to expect they may in certain settings empty out
forums of civil society, as they may provide more efficient (and state-backed) ways of
addressing certain problems. If participatory forums interface directly with civil society,
might they co-opt movements? Or might local decision-making fora ‘balkanize’ political
life? (Fung and Wright, 23) Cohen briefly addresses another possibility altogether, that
deliberative democratic institutions might help foster new solidarities and help construct
civil society:
Notice, however that both the inclusion of nontraditional stakeholders and the development of deliberative arenas suggests a new possibility that of constructing new bases of solidarity through a process of defining and addressing common concerns. (…) In short, these efforts – which could have very wide scope – have the potential to create new deliberative arenas outside formal politics that might work as schools of “deliberative democracy” in a special way. (1997:112-3)

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

One of the most obvious transformations of civil society has been the rapid rise of new associations throughout the city. Although precise figures are difficult to establish for a number of reasons, estimates for the number of associative bodies are shown in Table 4.\textsuperscript{10} The table gives very general estimates of the trends in the transformation of civil society in Porto Alegre.

\textsuperscript{10} One of the main reasons it is difficult to establish how many active associative bodies existed at any one point in time is that there are many more groups ‘in law’ than in practice. Because of Brazilian law, and certain traditions of community politics, there exist many phantom registered organizations for individuals to receive charity. In the 1980’s, for example, there were ‘milk ticket’ programs that gave registered community groups weekly coupons for milk, and this caused for many ‘neighborhood associations’ to be founded by registering with the courts.
Table 4: Basic Indicators of Civil Society, Porto Alegre, 1985-1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Neighborhood Associations</th>
<th>Cooperatives</th>
<th>Regional Popular Councils</th>
<th>Participants O.P.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>300*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>380*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>500*</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11491</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Estimated

Source: Various.

The rise in the number of associations seems to follow the increasing success of the O.P. throughout the years. Appendix 2 gives a more precise comparison per region of best estimate of the number of ‘active neighborhood associations’ for 1988 and 1998. Figures 3 and 4 offer a graphic representation of the Associational density per region of the city for the two years in question.

Figure 3: Associational Density, 1987
The segregated geography of a Brazilian city like Porto Alegre means that these changes have occurred most dramatically in the city’s peripheries, areas with the least prior organization. Numerous new associations and parallel associations have been formed because of participatory governance. A number of formal statements could be offered about these changes, but in equation 6 in the Appendix a simple regression that accounts for changes in Associational density as function of the region’s poverty is effective. An activist who has followed the process closely accounted for these changes:

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

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

group that later becomes a more permanent association:

We began by attending the O.P. meeting. There used to be an association
here, but it was more social and less interested in the problems of our side
of the vila. So we went with a different name, and today we are registered
as an association. We were able to get part of the street paved but we are
still going to go back because there is a lot we still need still.
(Marilia, interview 1997)

In addition, there is reason to believe that civil society is today more
interconnected than before. One of the reasons has to do with the creation of functioning
popular councils, an innovation in civil society during this period. As mentioned in the
table above the number of regional popular councils today is much greater than before,
and almost all function with greater regularity than before. Popular councils are
autonomous institutions that hold regular regional meetings on a weekly or bi-monthly
basis for representatives of neighborhood associations as well as independent citizens
wishing to discuss the region’s problems. The founding statutes of one of these councils,
in the Partenon region, states that its purposes are:

1. To obtain and share information about the municipal administration….
2. To monitor public institutions…
3. To decide upon questions referent to our region, to the city, the state
and the country.
4. To create proposals to the public administration
5. To define proper policies in the areas of transportation, social service
delivery…
6. To participate in the planning of the city, state and country.
7. To foster and support popular organizations. (Conselho Popular do
Partenon, Regimento Interno, p1. 1992)

While popular councils do not have any power over neighborhood associations,
or over the O.P., they often coordinate activities between neighborhood associations (to
make sure a fund-raiser will not overlap with a cultural event in a nearby neighborhood),
settle disputes among them, and more importantly, deploy collective resources for the solving of regional problems. Often popular councils act as intermediaries between a single association and municipal government, approaching the government with the moral mandate of forty or fifty active associations. Very clearly the founding statutes above show that that popular councils as this one have goals of sharing governance, and scrutinizing public administration.

Appendix 4 lists a number of recently developed active citywide fora, as the forum for ‘child and adolescent’ service providers, or the municipal forum of cooperatives. These fora serve as umbrella organizations, coordinating efforts and sharing information and resources across local organizations.

A smaller survey I conducted among ‘key activists’ (n=104) – regular participants in a regional forum – in three regions of the city bears out that most activists participate in a number of different forums. On average, activists participate in 2 to 3 meetings a week, and are regular attendees in 3 to 4 different forums. There were regional differences, but 44% of activists participated regularly in a forum with a regional or municipal focus other than the O.P. or Regional popular council. Almost all activists reported participating regularly in their local neighborhood association – which suggests that there are significant and lasting ties between local, regional, and municipal settings. The larger O.P. survey also found that among O.P. participants who participated in Associational life, most participated in at least two settings, and over half participated in at least one forum of regional or municipal focus.
Observers of the process, as Gildo Lima, one of the architects of the participatory structures in the first administration argues that civil society has indeed become less locally focused as a result of the O.P., and that a new form of mobilization has emerged:

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

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

After starting to participate in the Forum of Cooperatives, I started to become involved with community leaders and wound up being elected as a Delegate of the O.P.. At first, I did not understand much, but with time I started to get it. I got a group together from our cooperative to come on a regular basis. I then was elected to the Council. There it was where I really learned what is a movement, what a community leader does. It was an incredible learning experience in becoming a community leader. (Maria, interview 1999)

A number of municipal mobilizations have resulted. The hunger campaign in 1991, and the Human Rights municipal conference of 1997, have succeeded in drawing activists from all regions as regular participants. This also points to an emerging citywide solidarity as a result of participatory governance. Some of these municipal initiatives are sponsored by city hall, as the human rights conference, but they have been peopled and organized by community leaders emerging from participatory fora.
Participants of the process often recounted that civil society has changed in these directions – toward municipal and regional focus – and they usually recounted that the process had an effect on them, personally, in recasting their horizons as activists:

As delegate and councilor you learn about the region, meet new persons, become a person who has to respond not only to your association, but also to the region as a whole and the city as a whole. I participated in the two congresses to decide the *Plano Diretor* [municipal planning priorities] and since I have worried about the city as a whole. After a year, I learned not to look only at the region, but that you have to look at the city as a whole. (Antonio, interview, 1997)

If the O.P. and the allied deliberative settings have been able to affect civil society in these desirable ways, it is worth considering institutional features (and their alternatives) of participatory governance in Porto Alegre. The first question, as I have suggested, is the issue of interfaces with civil society. An early debate within leftist circles in Brazil in the late 1980’s had to do with how leftist governments would interact with civil society. The idea of popular councils, inspired by both writings on the Paris commune as well as by visions of Soviets, was advocated in many urban settings as semi-permanent forum for discussion among neighborhood associations, social movements, unions, and other spontaneous forms of popular will. The function of these popular councils was clear in an oppositional setting, but it was not apparent what their function would be in case of an electoral victory. In São Paulo, there was disagreement between those who held that popular councils should be consultative and those who held they should be deliberative. If popular councils were consultative, they would be part of the government’s organizational structure, and if they were deliberative they would remain as autonomous associations inserted into municipal government.¹¹

¹¹ In São Paulo, the deliberative vision of mayor Erundina won. Popular power was ‘instituted’ as a fourth
In Porto Alegre, an early vision of interaction with organized civil society – presidents of neighborhood associations, for instance – gave way to a ‘lassez-faire’ relationship to civil society. At meetings of the O.P. where organizations are counted, participants are asked which organization they represent in order to tally votes, but the deliberative processes do not discriminate between ‘actually existing’ neighborhood associations and a momentary association of persons who decide to call themselves a ‘street commission’ from a certain street. This was met with hostility in some areas where leaders of the neighborhood movement felt ‘slighted’, but this has also meant that prior organization does not necessarily favor certain areas, and has created a system that actually fosters the creation of new associations, as well as the creation of parallel organizations to unresponsive ones.

A second question has to do with how autonomous civil society will be from participatory settings. I propose that it should be part of design considerations that successful deliberative institutions will have these kinds of impacts. My findings reveal that how much, and what kind, of impact is the result of three principal considerations: how central the deliberative process will be to concerns already addressed by civil society, what kinds of direct or indirect support the deliberative institution will offer to associations in civil society, and if those subsidies will be subject to any conditions.

Participatory institutions may address issues that are more or less central to existing concerns of civil society. For instance, in Porto Alegre, essential issues addressed by neighborhood associations in 1989 had to do with urban infrastructure and urban services, and participatory budgeting centrally accessed those questions. But

branch of government, after the legislative, executive, and judiciary. See Fernandes (1988)
another issue municipal government could have opened up for deliberation at the time could have been environmental issues or the cultural policy of city government, which have both become part of participatory governance. Both would have no doubt attracted activists, but would not have attracted the attention of civil society as the O.P. did, and would not have caused such impact on civil society. Since a significant proportion of the activities of neighborhood associations went to securing urban services and the O.P. offered a completely novel way of achieving those goals, the relationship between civil society and municipal government was transformed as civil society itself underwent a number of changes. As an interviewee reiterated:

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

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

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

In the case of the O.P., unlike the Associative Democracy proposal of Cohen and Rogers (1992), there are no institutional checks on associations for standards of democracy. The O.P. allows full instrumental autonomy (there are no checks on the activities of an association for it to receive recognition) while establishing a structural relationship. While Fung (1999) argues for ‘supportive but not directive’ central institutions on the basis of positive outcomes on the results of deliberation, this case shows that this relationship has had a positive impact on institutions of civil society.

Subsidies to civil society include:

And while this design has succeeded in fostering new associations, there is no assurance of the ‘internal quality’ of these organizations. While architects and managers of the O.P. in Porto Alegre are well aware that certain neighborhood associations may leave something to be desired in terms of certain procedural standards, nevertheless, city hall has maintained the position not to interfere in popular organization. The experience of political repression, or of state-controlled labor unions and neighborhood associations in Brazil is recent past accounts for this position. But an additional feature functions as a
potential check: just as the O.P. will recognize any association, the door is always open for parallel groups to lay a claim as an association as well. The O.P. allows for persons to informally associate and to represent a region or a neighborhood, whether or not it is officially in existence. If an recognized association is not responsive to enough persons in a community, persons may ‘secede’ through the O.P. and eventually become the dominant association in a community having earned respect through achieving goals through the O.P.

CAPACITIES AND POLITICS: THE TRANSPORTABILITY OF BUDGETING

If participatory governance in Porto Alegre, as I have shown, offers a number of empirical defenses of deliberative democracy as well as suggest an area for rethinking deliberative democratic theory, the next immediate question concerns the replicability of this experiment elsewhere. I want to now backtrack and suggest two ways in which the Porto Alegre experiment is a very special case, in order to raise some questions for theories of empowered deliberative democracy. I want to offer two caveats: that empowered deliberative democratic designs depend on the capacities of municipal government in this case, and that of potential importance of the guiding political project behind participatory governance.

On the surface, neither violates the characterization of empowered deliberative democracy – after all, all examples examined under the rubric imply a driving ‘politics’ and state capacities to carry it out. But the Porto Alegre context is relatively unique in terms of state capacity (in terms of Brazil) and relatively unique in terms of the radical political vision behind it (if we compare it to North American examples).
The issue of state capacity does not in itself pose a particular problem for deliberative democratic theory. Institutional arrangements proposed imply that the state has the capacity (and relative autonomy) to carry them out. But the types of successes of participatory planning in Porto Alegre have in part to with the ability of the state to deliver goods in a timely enough fashion to overcome cynicism and to convince persons who have a limited amount of time that participation is worthwhile. It is not unreasonable to assume that the experiment would not provide us with such a robust defense of deliberative democracy – bringing in such large numbers of persons from impoverished backgrounds as long term participants were it not for the relatively timely results. If the purpose of deliberative democratic theory is to develop a substantive account of democracy and of the institutions that would permit the conditions for deliberation, part of the account must include, I would argue, caveats for institutional capacities to actually deliver the promised good, and of the potential adversarial relationships that these institutions may encounter.

If the deliberative democratic arrangement involves a public good – as public safety, the institution must be not only empowered so that the decisions actually access the public good, but sufficiently empowered so that there are enough returns to participants above a minimum level so that participation makes sense. Table 5 below shows the crosstabulation of answers to the question: ‘Do you think the population really decides on the results of the O.P.?’ (Always, Almost Always, Sometimes, and Never) with the answers to the question: ‘Has your region or thematic area received benefits?’ shows a significant association between positive answers to the perceived popular control
and positive answers to having received benefits. This is no surprise; we expect that
witnessing direct results from the process increases trust.

Students of urban politics in Latin America have pointed to ‘bounded rationality’ problems of the poor in terms of democratic participation. (Dietz, 1997) Participation may not make much sense for poor persons save for an assurance of fairly timely returns. Przeworski, (1991) for instance, argues that new democracies must convince their poor citizens that there is some minimum probability of timely returns of their investment in time in order to participate. Participatory governance makes participation rational as long as it provides returns.

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

Some cities like Porto Alegre were relative winners in this decentralization scheme, by virtue of being a capital city in a wealthy state, even if the devolution of the responsibility of social services has meant many more additional fiscal burdens. Porto Alegre, with yearly revenues today hovering around US$180 per person has the capacity to offer many more returns than, for example the failed P.T. municipal administration of Fortaleza, a capital city in the North, with a much greater proportion of persons in need and revenues around US$60. A number of municipal governments around Porto Alegre, as of the commuter cities of Viamão and Alvorada, have elected P.T. governments based on the well-publicized success of the Porto Alegre experiment. However, with per-capita revenues at a fraction of Porto Alegre levels, participatory budgeting in those cities has not succeeded in drawing sustained attendances. The table in the Appendix shows the increasing budget of the city over the first years in question. This meant that a greater proportion of the municipal budget was available for investments. The solidarity among unequals may not have been possible with significantly lower levels of investment income available. And since investments have upkeep costs it is imaginable that if municipal revenue did not grow over the period in question it might not have been possible to sustain such high levels of new investments. In addition, if municipal revenues stay constant.
**TABLE 6: Revenue per capita, Municipality of Porto Alegre 1973-1992**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population (thousands)</th>
<th>Revenue/capita (US$)*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>965</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>1,077</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>1,158</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>1,215</td>
<td>99</td>
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<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>1,227</td>
<td>113</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>1,239</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>1,251</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>1,263</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*note: values corrected by the General Price Index (IGP), converted to 1993 Dollars.

Source: Horn 1993:16, PMPA

A second issue related to state capacities is the relative autonomy of the state to carry out significant participatory schemes. Municipal government in Porto Alegre has met significant opposition at different stages of the development of participatory structures, but has been able to overcome them all. There is a way in which deliberative democracy is autonomy enhancing by virtue of the public justification involved in its proceedings.

After the first year’s budget was drawn up in Porto Alegre, the next legal step was to have it approved by the municipal legislative. While a number of vereadores (councilpersons) hostile to the O.P. were in a majority, the budget submitted was approved without alterations.

There is reason to assume that deliberation over a public good is likely to meet opposition, because the closer that participatory decision-making comes to a ‘true’ deliberative democracy, the greater its redistributive consequences. A sociologically realistic expectation about any kind of empowered deliberative setting that redistributes a good toward the less powerful is that it will meet opposition from more powerful organized groups invested in the previous distributive scheme. And in the case of Porto
Alegre, popular pressure was able to protect the autonomy of the process. Participants in the meetings personally went to the office of councilpersons to exert pressure, and despite a negative media campaign, succeeded in guaranteeing the approval. An important feature of deliberative democracy is that is its element of public justification – it becomes difficult for politicians in the context of a democracy to oppose something that is clearly ‘fair’ and result of ‘public will.’

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

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

Progressive intellectuals in the 1980s debated how these four principles would be carried out politically. One of the debates was on the role of progressive municipal
governments in actively changing Brazilian political culture. In other words, should municipal governments function with the goal of most efficient and democratic delivery of services, or should they play a role in a larger culturally transformative project? One prominent PT intellectual, Jorge Bittar, writes in an official publication that:

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

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

Theorists of deliberative institutions are not likely to be convinced that these visions are very important, and will perhaps see these visions as little more than justifications by administrators for cultural leftists or perhaps epiphenomenal with regard to institutional functioning. Fung (1998) for instance, pays little attention to the cultural context of deliberative democracy in Chicago. But recent advances in the analyses of institutions within Sociology have emphasized the importance of these guiding visions as well as the symbolic dimension of institutions. (Friedland and Alford, ) So while a great of civic behavior emerges from participatory institutions, there are elements not reducible to institutions themselves.

I would argue that first, these visions set the ground rules for deliberation in an informal way. It is possible to imagine an identical set of participatory institutions
guided by a different set of visions altogether, and where the informal rules of
deliberation would be very different.

In addition, activists within participatory democracy are guided by visions of
radical democracy borne of the Ecclesiastical Base Communities, of labor and urban
movements, and of activism within socialist parties. These ‘true believers’ were very
important for the establishment of the process in the various regions. And these orient
their practices within the structures today. One of the more experienced activists in one
of the regions I studied described his concern for new persons in terms that tell of an
activist calling:

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

As Cohen (1997) writes, deliberative democracy is at its best a process whereby
participants reconsider and reconstruct their preferences. The question we can ask is if it
makes a difference if deliberation takes place not just under the aegis of rationality and
problem-solving, but also of empowerment of the poor and social justice, visions borne
of social movement activism and oppositional politics.
Appendix 1: Statistics

DATA
I analyze a representative sample of O.P. participants drawn from first plenary meetings in March and April of 1991. Respondents were randomly selected from participants at each regional and thematic meeting and were asked to answer to a questionnaire. If the person had difficulty in answering the questionnaire in written format, an interviewer would apply the questionnaire. The sample of participants was roughly 10% of the total number of participants. The survey was applied by myself, members of an N.G.O. in Porto Alegre, and municipal government employees. Other participation and regional-level data comes from officially published materials from the municipal government of Porto Alegre.

RESEARCH DESIGN – VARIABLES
For this analysis, the models were restricted to only some of the key variables of interest. Independent variables of interest included Female, a dummy variable that assumed 1 for female; POOR, a dummy variable for income up to 2 Minimum Wages; LOED (=1), a dummy variable for education up to the 8th grade; SCHOOLING refers to the numbers of years of education; YEARSOP, the total number of previous years of participation in O.P. proceedings; BENEFITS (=1), whether the person’s region had received a project. Dependent variables included PARTICIPATES (=1), a dichotomous variable of whether the person reported actively participating in meetings; ELECTED (=1), a dichotomous outcome of whether the person had ever been elected to delegate or councilor; DECIDES (=1) refers to whether the person answered ‘Always’ or ‘Almost Always’ to the question: ‘Does the Population really decide on projects through the O.P.? ’ The means and standard deviations are listed below.

Means and Standard Deviations of Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POOR</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOED</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YEARSOP</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>2.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCHOOLING</td>
<td>7.62</td>
<td>4.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BENEFITS</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PARTICIPATES</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARTICIPATES</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELECTED</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELECTED</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DECIDES</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Equation 1: Logistic Coefficients Predicting the Likelihood of Active Participation in Meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-.46*** (.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YEARS</td>
<td>.072** (.0234)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-Squared = 23.22***
Degrees of Freedom = 2

Note: Numbers in Parentheses indicate Standard Error.
** p < .01 *** p < .001

Equation 2: Logistic Coefficients Predicting the Likelihood of Active Participation in Meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>-.876 (.128)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-.067 (.119)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YEARS</td>
<td>.132 (.027)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOED</td>
<td>.306 (.145)*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-Squared = 74.9 ***
Degrees of Freedom = 4

Note: Numbers in Parentheses indicate Standard Error.
* p < .05 ** p < .01 *** p < .001

Equation 3: Logistic Coefficients Predicting the Likelihood of Election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-1.50 (.19)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YEARS</td>
<td>.225 (.051)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POOR</td>
<td>-.837 (.281)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POOR* Yrs</td>
<td>.19 (.076)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOED</td>
<td>-1.64 (.227)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOED* Yrs</td>
<td>.2585 (.063)***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-Squared = 431.553***
Degrees of Freedom = 6

Note: Numbers in Parentheses indicate Standard Error.
* p < .05 ** p < .01 *** p < .001
Appendix 2: Weights and Criteria for Allocating Resources

Once municipal priorities for the year’s budget are established by the Municipal Council of the Budget, specific investments are divided among the city’s regions according to three criteria:

A. Lack of the specific public service
   Up to 25% of region’s population: 1
   26 to 50% :2
   51 to 75% :3
   76 to 100%:4

B. Proportion of the Region in areas of extreme need’
   Up to 25% of region’s population: 1
   26 to 50% :2
   51 to 75% :3
   76 to 100%:4

C. Total Population of the region, in thousands:
   Up to 49,999:  1
   50 to 99,999:  2
   100 to 199,999: 3
   above 200,000: 4

D. how the region prioritized the specific service
   Fourth or below: 1
   Third: 2
   Second: 3
   First: 4

For 1995, the Municipal Council allocated enough resources to pavement for 23Km of roads. It was divided among the city’s regions in the following way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria and ()Weights</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Region</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* (Navarro 1996)
Appendix 3: Associational Density Measures per Region, 1988, 1988

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>d1</th>
<th>d2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>48,199</td>
<td>0.124484</td>
<td>0.31121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>127,574</td>
<td>0.039193</td>
<td>0.156772</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>110,451</td>
<td>0.172022</td>
<td>0.416474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>48,368</td>
<td>0.124049</td>
<td>0.785643</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>88,614</td>
<td>0.304692</td>
<td>0.50782</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>24,261</td>
<td>0.123655</td>
<td>0.989242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>114,127</td>
<td>0.140195</td>
<td>0.394298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>45,999</td>
<td>0.086958</td>
<td>0.717407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>37,439</td>
<td>0.320521</td>
<td>1.041694</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>34,900</td>
<td>0.286533</td>
<td>1.002865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>30,045</td>
<td>0.366117</td>
<td>1.164919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>101,397</td>
<td>0.108484</td>
<td>0.552285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>23,905</td>
<td>0.125497</td>
<td>1.003974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>86,057</td>
<td>0.058101</td>
<td>0.708833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>62,837</td>
<td>0.047743</td>
<td>0.811624</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>27,129.4</td>
<td>0.051605</td>
<td>0.117953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,255,467</td>
<td>0.12346</td>
<td>0.477113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The earlier figure was generated by a ‘triangulation’ of associations that were identified by a municipal report of the Collares Administration, and dues-paying associations linked to the city-wide union of neighborhood associations (UAMPA). For an association to be considered active, it had to appear in one of the two lists. The 1998 figures are based, again, on associations paying dues to the union of associations, and associations that participated in O.P. proceedings of the Worker’s Party administration for 1997 and 1998. For the second number I used a more stringent standard, which was that it had to be listed in both years. If an association did not appear in the UAMPA list, and only appeared in one of the years it was not counted. This more conservative estimation procedure was necessary to avoid over-counting momentary associations of persons who decided to attend an O.P. meeting.
Appendix 4: Development of Participatory Structures, Porto Alegre

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

Source: Various, PMPA.
REFERENCES:

Avritzer, Leornardo. 2000. “Public Deliberation at the Local Level: Participatory Budgeting in Brazil.” in Real Utopias Conference. Madison, WI.


