

2

Participatory democracy in Porto Alegre, Brazil

by RUALDO MENEGAT

Introduction

Porto Alegre is the capital city of Brazil's southernmost state, Rio Grande do Sul. Since 1996, it has consistently had the highest standards of living of all Brazilian metropolitan areas (Exame, 1996). In the context of the present crisis afflicting marginal and dependent economies, and increasing levels of poverty, unemployment and corruption in large South American cities, Porto Alegre's progress is inextricably related to the way in which the city has been managed over the last 12 years. The last four mayoral terms in Porto Alegre's Municipal Government have been coined 'Popular Administration' (*Administração Popular*). The key characteristics of popular administration include the adoption of techniques for participatory democracy, a high level of citizen involvement in allocating the municipal budget, the reorientation of public priorities by citizens, the integration of public environmental management policies, and the regeneration of public spaces.

The most important and widely publicised technique for participatory democracy is participatory budgeting, initiated in 1989 under the mayoral term of Olívio Dutra (1989-1992), and continued under the administrations of Tarso Genro (1993-1996 and 2001-2004) and Raul Pont (1997-2000).

Participatory budgeting is defined as a 'civil, not state, form of governance', and its introduction in 1989 marked the beginning of a significant experience with real participa-

tory democracy. Although there is a municipal government authority responsible for participatory budgeting, the Department of Community Relations, the process is accepted as an autonomous form of public participation. It is based on a number of forums in which citizens are able to control and steer the municipal government and its spending. Communities participate in assemblies organised by geographical district and sectoral theme to determine their needs and priorities. In addition to defining the municipal budget, communities also manage the implementation and timing of the public interventions.

When both the communities' district and sectoral priorities and the government's own requirements have been established, a proposal is drawn up to be discussed with the Participatory Budgeting Council. Once approved, the budget proposal is sent to the City Councillors. In the meantime, the Participatory Budgeting Council and the municipal government begin drawing up the expenditure plan based on the budget proposal. The expenditure plan sets out all the public works to be carried out in each district for that year and the government authorities responsible for their execution, and is printed and distributed to the public. In 1989, the priorities defined by the district public assemblies were sanitation, land tenure regularisation and street paving, with land tenure still at the top of the agenda, but this time along with housing, in 1997.

Participatory budgeting: structure and process

The municipality is sub-divided into 16 districts based on geographical and social criteria and existing community organisation. Each district acts as a unit for the distribution of resources and is allocated a budget quota in proportion to its population size. The sectoral priorities for each district (basic sanitation, housing, street paving, education, social welfare, green areas, health, traffic and transport, sport and recreation, street lighting, economic development and culture) and their respective public interventions are defined at district public assemblies. The municipal government participates in the whole process, providing technical information and presenting its own requirements, which are generally interventions and priorities of a citywide nature. It also uses the assemblies to publicly account for its management of the city and budget expenditure.

Each district also elects representatives (delegates) to form the groups that participate in the various decision-making stages of the participatory budgeting process: (a) the Forum of District Delegates; (b) the Forum of Sectoral Delegates; (c) the District Popular Councils; and (d) the Participatory Budgeting Council. The Participatory Budgeting Council is responsible for establishing the general criteria for allocating the budget among the districts, and for overseeing the implementation of public interventions.

As part of the extensive restructuring of participatory budgeting in 1994, sectoral public assemblies were introduced to give citizens the opportunity to discuss specific issues relevant to the city. Discussion forums were set up around five sectoral themes: (a) urban planning and development, sub-divided into environment and sanitation, and city planning and housing; (b) traffic management and public transport; (c) health and social welfare; (d) education, culture and recreation; and (e) economic development and taxation. For each discussion theme, the plenary assemblies enable citizens to discuss the city's strategic planning and sectoral policies in greater depth. Representatives are also elected at the sectoral plenary assemblies to participate in (a) the Participatory Budgeting Council and (b) the Forum of District and Sectoral Delegates.

The ongoing implementation of participatory budgeting also led to significant changes in the city's culture of urban management. While local issues raised by the public were put on the city's agenda, issues of a citywide nature were neglected. In order to acknowledge and integrate these issues, the 'city conference' was launched in 1993, which proceeded to be held on a periodic basis. The city conferences brought together representatives from civil society, identified by various means including the participatory budgeting initiative. There

"Participatory budgeting has completely reversed the traditional patronage approach that characterises public administration in most Brazilian cities"

have now been three city conferences. They are now held to coincide with the four-yearly planning exercise, which had previously only been done by municipal planners and technical staff. For the first time, the 2000 plan involved the general public in setting targets for the next long term.

Stages and process

The process of discussion and decision-making follows an annual cycle of two main stages: (i) defining priorities and proposals for public spending in plenary assemblies, in which all citizens can participate; (ii) drawing up the budget proposal and expenditure plan, in which the priorities and proposals approved by the citizens should: (a) be developed enough for submission to the state legislature as the Municipal Budget; and (b) be technically sound enough to be converted into an expenditure plan detailing the works and services to be undertaken by the municipal secretariats and departments. The whole process is observed and monitored by the municipal government and the representatives elected through the participatory budgeting process, namely the Participatory Budgeting Council and the Forums of District and Sectoral Delegates.

The first stage comprises two large rounds of general and sectoral plenary assemblies. Citizens can participate in all events, at which they have the opportunity to present their requests and proposals for the annual municipal budget destined for their district or a certain sector. Between the two rounds is an interim phase, which consists of numerous more specific meetings based on each of the 16 districts and five themes, and their respective sub-divisions. These meetings are coordinated and facilitated by the delegates elected in the district and sectoral assemblies, and allow the communities to discuss in greater depth their needs and priorities, which will be decided during the second round of assemblies.

The second round is coordinated by the Participatory Budgeting Council, made up of councillors as follows: (a) two members and two deputies from each of the 16 districts; (b) two members and two deputies from each of the five sectoral forums; (c) one member and one deputy from the Porto Alegre Municipal Workers Union; (d) one member and one deputy from the Union of Porto Alegre Residents' Asso-

Table 1: Sectoral distribution of budget over the last 12 years

Sector	Budget in the first year of each mayoral term (millions of Reais [†])			
	1989	1993	1997	2000 (budgeted)
Urban development, basic services and environment	134.7	189.3	307.0	385.8
Economic development	2.7	3.1	6.6	8.6
Social services (health, education, housing, welfare)	91.2	152.6	314.8	361.6
Culture, recreation and tourism	2.6	5.5	17.9	15.1

[†] Brazilian Real (pl. Reais); US\$1.00 = R\$2.50 approx. (February 2002)

ciations; and (e) two representatives of the municipal government, but without the right to vote. The councillors' term of office is one year and re-election is permitted for one further consecutive term. A councillor's term can be revoked at any time by the Forum of District and Sectoral Delegates, which is also able to approve the substitution of a councillor when this decision is backed by at least two thirds of its members.

The district and sectoral delegates, who make up a larger number of members than the Participatory Budgeting Council, play an important role in the second round of assemblies. They meet monthly and serve the following functions: supporting the participatory budgeting councillors; recording and circulating the issues discussed and outcomes reached; coordinating the interim meetings; overseeing the execution of public interventions through the Commission for Public Works; and assisting in the consolidation of the District Popular Councils.

All these representatives are responsible for synthesising and reconciling the requests and priorities decided upon, and helping to formulate a budget proposal to be submitted to the City councillors, who are responsible for the final approval of the municipal budget and the expenditure plan.

Results of participatory budgeting

The participatory budgeting process is undergoing constant development and improvement since its introduction in 1989, under the administration of the Workers' Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*) in coalition with other parties of the Popular Front (*Frente Popular*) that continues to govern Porto Alegre. During this time, the municipal government has allocated between 15-25% of the total budget to public spending. The rest is designated to municipal staff salaries and municipal government administration.

Table 2: Development of indicators in different sectors between 1989 and 2000 (only the first year of each of the Popular Administration's four mayoral terms are cited, except where indicated)

SECTOR / INDICATOR	UNIT	1989	1993	1997	2000
Drop-out rate for basic education in municipal schools ¹	%	9.02	5.41	2.43	1.46 (1999)
Number of municipal educational establishments	Schools	37	69	87	90
Investment in housing ²	R\$ millions	3.436	4.439	18.696	14.959
Leakage in the municipal water network ³	%	50 (1991)	47	39	34
Sewerage network coverage	Km of sewers	768 (1988)	n/a	n/a	1,399
Proportion of treated sewage	%	2	5	15	27
Green areas ⁴	m2 per resident	12.5	n/a	13.35	14.11
Public involved in activities of the Municipal Culture Secretariat ⁵	People	398,950	n/a	n/a	1,732,900 (1999)

(n/a = not available)

¹Azevedo, J.C. (2000) "Escola cidadã: políticas e práticas" in Pont, R. (Coordinator) & Barcelos, A. (Organiser) Porto Alegre, uma cidade que conquista, Artes e Ofícios, Porto Alegre, pp. 111-122.

²Silva, F.J.H. da (2000) "A política habitacional no terceiro mandato da administração popular" in Pont, R. (Coordinator) & Barcelos, A. (Organiser) Porto Alegre, uma cidade que conquista, Artes e Ofícios, Porto Alegre, pp. 153-164.

³Dutra, A.L. (2000) "O DMAE e a qualificação do saneamento ambiental" in Pont, R. (Coordinator) & Barcelos, A. (Organiser) Porto Alegre, uma cidade que conquista, Artes e Ofícios, Porto Alegre, pp. 199-206.

⁴Lüdke, M.C. (1998) "Evolução das áreas verdes: dos largos às praças e parques arborizados" in Menegat, R., Porto, M.L., Carraro, C.C. & Fernandes, L.A.D. (Coordinators) (1998) Atlas Ambiental de Porto Alegre, Edufrgs, Porto Alegre, pp. 119-130 and Lüdke, M.C., Mohr, F.V., Menegat, R. (1998) "Mapa de áreas verdes", idem, pp. 131-132.

⁵Kiefer, C. (2000) "Cultura: onde o povo está" in Pont, R. (Coordinator) & Barcelos, A. (Organiser) Porto Alegre, uma cidade que conquista, Artes e Ofícios, Porto Alegre, pp. 11-27.

Over the last ten years, public works totalling more than US\$700 million have been implemented through participatory budgeting. The highest priority during this period has been basic sanitation (see Table 1). Between 1990 and 1995, the number of households served by the drinking water network in Porto Alegre was expanded from 400,000 to 465,000, and at present 98% of households are connected.

Table 3: Participants in the District and Sectoral Assemblies of the participatory budgeting process and the City Conferences

Year	District assembly	Sectoral assembly	City Conference	Total
1990	976	-	-	976
1991	3,694	-	-	3,694
1992	7,610	-	-	7,610
1993	10,735	-	2,048	12,783
1994	9,638	1,609	-	11,247
1995	11,821	2,446	3,031	17,298
1996	10,148	1,793	-	11,941
1997	11,908	4,105	-	16,013
1998	13,687	2,769	-	16,456
1999	16,813	3,911	-	20,724
2000	15,331	3,694	8,780	27,805

Moreover, the sewerage network expansion has been greater still. In 1989, only 46% of the population had sewer connections, but this has now almost doubled to 85%.

Street paving has also been a high priority for citizens, especially in the less developed districts. Around 30 kilometres of streets are paved annually, and this is always accompanied by drainage and street lighting. In low-income districts, this intervention has not only improved access by

public transport, but the increased traffic has helped to deter organised crime. Furthermore, it has raised the inhabitants' sense of dignity, and they now feel a real part of the city that had previously neglected them.

Increased spending on education doubled the total number of pupils enrolled between 1988 and 1996. A significant improvement in the quality of teaching was achieved through radically democratising the school system and revaluing the teaching and administrative staff as professionals. In the health sector, the municipalisation of health clinics produced a significant improvement in the level of service by ensuring unrestricted access for all residents.

In addition to the impressive figures for the different sectors (see Table 2) and districts, participatory budgeting also brought about a fundamental change in the political culture of Porto Alegre. This change signified an end to the traditional top down approach, the redefinition of public priorities in line with citizens' views, a return to citizenship, and the transition to an inclusive city. The level of citizen participation has increased with each year, with around 150,000 people now involved in the process, whether in District or Sectoral Assemblies or in the City Conferences (see Table 3).

Participatory budgeting has completely reversed the traditional patronage approach that characterises public administration in most Brazilian cities. As an indicator of this, in 2000, the participatory budgeting process involved approximately 30,000 citizens, thus ensuring that public interventions corresponded to the priorities of the population.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rualdo Menegat
 Coordenador do Curso de Geologia
 Instituto de Geociencias da UFRGS.
 PO Box/Caixa Postal 15065
 91501-970, Porto Alegre, RS, BRAZIL
 Tel: +55 51 3316-6376
 Fax: +55 51 3319-1811
 Email: rualdo.menegat@ufrgs.br
 www.ufrgs.br/gaia

NOTES

Rualdo Menegat is Professor at the Institute of Geosciences of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, and former Deputy Environment Secretary of Porto Alegre (1994 to 1998).

REFERENCES

Exame, 1996 "Trilegal, é muito bom viver aqui", *Exame*, Vol. 26, No. 625, December, pp. 104-128.