

# LEARNING DEMOCRACY BY DOING

**Alternative Practices in Citizenship  
Learning and Participatory  
Democracy**



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**Learning Democracy by Doing:**  
Alternative Practices in Citizenship Education and  
Participatory Democracy

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## **The Variable Geometry of Participatory Budgeting: Which Lessons from the new Portuguese Explosion?'**

*Nelson Dias<sup>ii</sup> and Giovanni Allegretti<sup>iii</sup>*

### **Introduction**

As seen elsewhere in this book, Participatory Budgeting (PB) experiences have acquired an important significance in less than two decades. Many groups, including political classes in numerous countries, international organizations, such as the World Bank and the United Nations, different academic sectors, as well as countless organizations from society at large, have shown a great interest in this new democratic experiment. PB has thus undergone an astonishing worldwide dissemination.

When travelling across the American Continent, we can find experiences in practically all countries from Canada to Argentina. Africa has kindled a strong interest in this theme. Many of its States are trying to encourage economic development, to create more consolidated democracies, to carry out decentralization policies in home affairs to which they now want to associate participatory processes such as PB. In Europe the theme has come to take on increasing relevance with the emergence of countless initiatives and with the growth of places for training and debate. The first PB experiences have begun to appear in Asia and Australasia as well, including regions with distinct political democratic traditions, such as China, Korea, Indonesia.

In some cases, as has happened in Peru and the Dominican Republic, "PB as an experience" has given way to "PB as a public institutionalised policy", becoming an integral part of the legislative marks of these two countries. Together with the international dynamics that we have seen, these examples lead us to believe that PB is being transformed into "A Theme on a Larger Scale" (Dias, 2008), capable of influencing the agenda of different political classes, offering alternatives to counteract the liberal democratic crisis and favouring a greater proximity between citizens and public matters.

Local government in Portugal has not remained immune to this international dynamic, being one of the countries in Europe that has shown the greatest interest in the theme. In the present article, we aim to reflect on the administrative and socio-political contexts in which these experiences have emerged, their main characteristics and tendencies, as well as the challenges they face. Data shown is the result of research carried out by the authors as part of the project "Participatory Budgeting: the more the participation, the better the democracy", financed by the European Union Community Initiative EQUAL.

### **The Administrative Context**

According to the 1976 Constitution of the Portuguese Republic (whose seventh revision dates from 2005), the democratic organization of the country's political power at a local level is nowadays placed in the existence of the so-called "Local Authorities" (or

“*autarquias*”, Art. 235). These Local Authorities have their own property and finances (Art. 238), their own permanent staff (Art. 243) and they can hold referendums for their respective voters on subjects including the competence of their own bodies (Art. 240).

The administrative structure is made up of 308 municipalities as its base. These are subdivided into 4259 parishes (“*freguesias*”), which are decentralized political administrative bodies that derive from the former territorial divisions of church parishes.

The elected bodies, representatives of the Parishes and the Municipalities, are the Cabinet (the decision making body elected by universal suffrage in a direct ballot by the voters, whose numerical composition depends on the number of voters registered in the respective territory) and the Parish Council or the Municipal Council (the collegiate legislative body). Both also include members elected by the opposition parties, a legacy that makes the political life of the executive difficult. This situation becomes understandable in the light of the post revolutionary situation when the rule was conceived. Its objective was to give value to all the dynamic forces of society.

A Mayor (or “*Presidente*”), that is to say the citizen who heads the list of the most voted for party, coordinates the executive body in Municipalities as well as in Parishes.

The elections of the executive bodies and the decision making bodies are separate but simultaneous, except in the case of by-elections, that is to say when one of the two bodies (as was the case of Lisbon’s Executive Cabinet in 2006) has to terminate its mandate for political or judiciary reasons.

In the Municipal Assembly only part of the members are directly elected. This has to be a higher number than the number of Parish Council Chairmen, who are also an integral part as “members by right”.

The functioning of the Parishes is guaranteed by a percentage of the National Budget that is transferred directly to them. Its capacities are bound to the carrying out of some decentralizing administrative tasks and those of the management of electoral processes. However, other responsibilities for services and public spaces can be added on the basis of specific agreements between each Parish and its respective Municipal Council. As the size and organizational/functional structure of the Parishes is very different (ranging from a few hundred to 65,000 inhabitants) the distribution of its capacities and responsibilities has to be “a variable geometry” as a result.

The mandate for the bodies of the Local Authorities is a four-year term of office. Portuguese political culture, up until the present day, is based on the tradition of having a strong continuity of people and “political families”. The Mayors elected as “independents”, away from the spread of traditional parties, are few and far between. Since 2005, the mandate of the chairmen of the executive bodies of the Local Authorities cannot be renewed for more than three consecutive terms.

The administrative divisions, on a higher level than the Municipalities, include the 18 districts of Continental Portugal and the creation of continuous territorial units made up of

Local Authorities: the Urban communities (ComUrb), the Greater Metropolitan Areas (GAM) and the Inter-municipality Communities (Cominter).

As to the creation of Administrative Regions (as foreseen in the Constitution), - after consulting the Municipalities – the brakes were applied by the referendum of November 1998 in which the map of eight regions, made official in the Law by decree 18/98, was not passed. At present, the islands (Madeira and the Azores), made up of various Parishes and Municipalities, are seen as two true Autonomous Administrative Regions. This is in contrast to Continental Portugal, where the “Map of the Region plans” (North, Centre, Lisbon and the Tejo Valley, the Alentejo and the Algarve) only corresponds to five regional commissions for coordination and development (CCDR), with no elected bodies.

Without any doubt, this complex architecture needs a revision on a short or medium term basis. Proposals for reform that are presented never arrive at the point of being truly shared and agreed upon, nor result from careful studies on the real functioning of Local Authority institutions. They normally correspond to “ideological” positions or political party maps. These proposals are, on the one hand, more interested in reducing institutional management costs and on the other hand, securing territorial divisions that correspond to potential political advantages of the different parties in future electoral acts. Proposals that guarantee an unmistakable respect for the principle of subsidiarity have not been dealt with.

At present, a reform of the Local Authorities Electoral Law is in the process of analysis (it has already been passed by the Parliament on January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2008). This reform points to a more “presidential” model for local Government and foresees the election of the Mayor and the Chairman of the Municipal Council as a joint role. In this way the role of the Mayor is reinforced and the latter is free to choose his/her cabinet members. This reduces the “collective” character of the executive that was drawn up after the 1974 revolution in order to guarantee the greater involvement of all the active political forces in the various Local Authority bodies (even including its own opposition in the executive). The new law equally reforms the Parishes, proposing their reduction.

### **Socio-political Context**

New forms of citizen participation in local political life in Portugal have become important for a set of reasons that are worth being analysed, even if succinctly.

In the first place, these developments must be understood with respect to a centralist tradition of power, with consequences in the political and democratic culture of those elected and those electing. The first free elections for the Local Authority bodies date from 1976, thus marking the transition of the Municipalities as auxiliary extensions of the central Government to a model of Local Administration with a greater autonomy and capacity for intervention. This transition clearly made Local Government much more democratic and led to a progressive reinforcement of the State’s capacity to intervene in

areas, such as the creation of infrastructures and public amenities, as well as its ability to provide services to the population.

However, a real process of participation by citizens in public matters did not accompany this change in the Portuguese political and administrative organization. Citizens were to a large extent considered as bystanders in local governments that progressively had assumed key roles in the field of territorial development

The implementation of participatory processes like PB, that imply the adoption of new, more democratic and transparent forms of government, represents a clear paradigmatic change in this respect – the passing of the paradigm of public aid to the paradigm of co-responsibility for the management of “public matters”.

This transformation may be identified as the outcome of the adoption of a new political culture by elected representatives and citizens, on the one hand, and, as already indicated, the rethinking of the political institutional design that has sustained the decentralization process in Portugal, on the other hand.

In democratic culture the political class tends to be considered legitimate because of its electoral status, and therefore often does not recognise the need to initiate participatory processes or render accounts. However, the citizens themselves have stopped being interested in political life, reducing their involvement both in community activities and in elections (the last 2006 by-elections and the national referendum on abortion registered an alarming rise in abstention rates, especially in the Greater Lisbon area).

One of the lessons that we can draw from countries with consolidated democracies is that it is not enough to set up general principles of liberty and civil rights to establish democratic order (Fedozzi, 2001). *“The carrying out of true democratic elections is not sufficient in order to guarantee governing forms appropriate for a modern democracy, forms based on the transparency of administration and the credibility of its public services. It is not enough to assure the existence of democratic institutionalisation in order to develop a political and democratic culture for its citizens”*(Dias, 2006: 84).

Portugal faces a barely consolidated culture of participation on the part of its associative movements, more specifically, and of the population in general. Participation is normally the result of rather spontaneous and “reactive” processes, as is the case of individual people who emerge when confronted with unpopular decisions from political bodies, a way of replying to situations on a one-off basis. For their part associative movements are very sector based and little or not at all organized, making proactive actions in defence of global interests difficult. These movements are often coupled to the dynamics of political parties that take from them the capacity to intervene, their credibility and their local embeddedness.

The feeble development of Portuguese citizenship, with direct implications of the populations’ attitude in relation to politics, is visible not only on a national level but also on a local level. The decentralization of the State, via the creation of municipalities, would normally bring with it the expectation of a wider democratisation of political life, but, in fact, some expectations were frustrated, above all for two reasons: 1) on the one hand,

because the institutional design in which the process of decentralization is placed, has not created a sufficiently expressive rupture with the centralist tradition of Government and, on the other hand, 2) because the architecture of local government in Portugal was drawn up having as its base institutional models with strong hierarchies. This signifies that the processes of decentralization and the institutional basis of local authorities were not conceived with a concern for citizen's political involvement.

Cases of corruption in Local Authorities are other elements that mark socio-political contexts where new processes of citizens' participation are emerging. These have been amply reported in the media, often without very solid proof, generating the idea of Local Governments having an immoral nature. Situations of corruption in Local Authorities normally emerge associated with illegalities in the urban sector, such as construction licences and licences for land-use alteration, to which are added cases of illicit financing for the political party machine and also the gaining of wealth and personal favours.

These situations reinforce the present crisis of the representative nature of the political bodies that Alain Touraine (1994) talked about, and that Boaventura de Sousa Santos deepened in his lectures on the contemporary world, when the double pathology of the liberal democracies is referred to. The latter involves a pathology of representation in which citizens are increasingly distant from political life and the elected, whom they often do not even know. Meanwhile, the pathology of participation is associated with the common idea that there is no point in participating, as citizens feel far too small to confront large interest groups and the political and economic agents that dominate society (2008).

Another element to keep in mind in this analysis, is a growing "asymmetry" that is being consolidated in the transfer of the Government's institutional capacities to Municipalities and Parishes. The delegation of these capacities has been made without the corresponding financial means, causing obvious difficulties to Local Government in the creation of adequate responses to the population's demands. Local Authorities, especially the Municipal Councils, have been called to intervene in areas that they were previously not involved in. This was due to the decentralizing of capacities, but also, to demands made by the population itself. The areas of education, social action, culture, sport and economic activities are examples of this. Unable to disregard demands regarding access to basic sanitation and to public amenities, Local Authorities today face these new and renewed challenges. They are obliged to think of more integrated and integrating interventions, sometimes more immaterial than material.

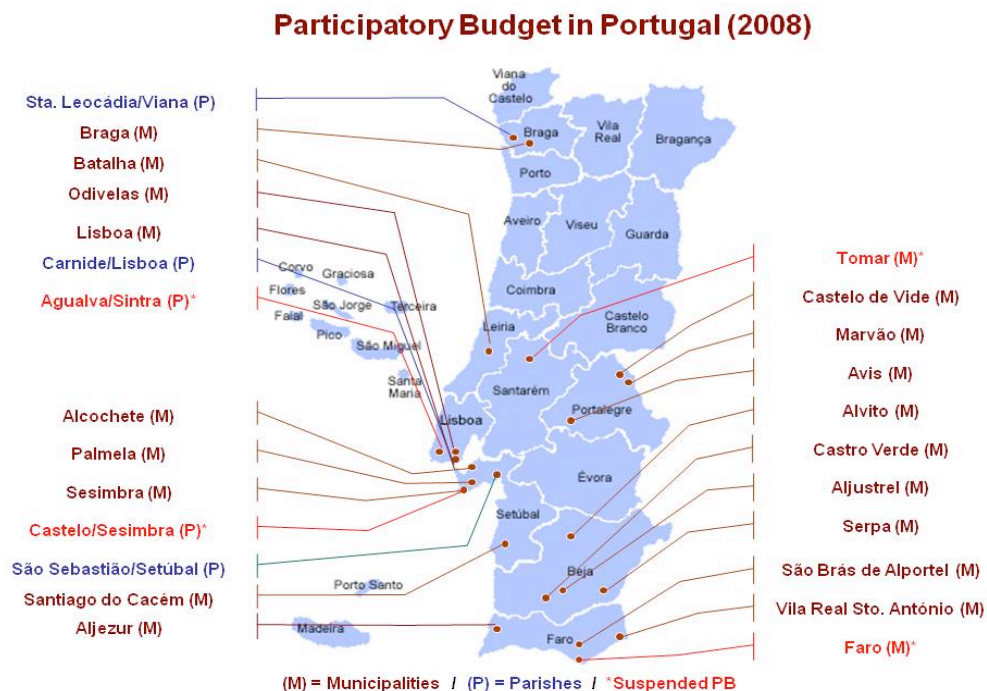
The lack of "certainties" or "guarantees" as to the results of participatory processes carries the risk of frustrating the population, especially in the dynamics that imply medium-long term objectives such as Agenda XXI and discussions on urban development plans. This issue becomes more acute at institutional levels with few capacities and resources, such as Parishes – especially the smaller ones.

All of this is happening within the context of a foreseeable and progressive loss of Local Authorities' financial capacity. Coping with this situation will require new permanent alliances with private profit or non-profit making entities, which allow for an enlargement of the capacity of action and the harnessing of resources.

A predictable renovation of the Local Authorities' political framework, due to the new electoral law that imposes a limit on the mandates of those in government, is still not a very visible phenomenon when looking at "those at the top of the lists" of the different parties. But in any case, it will become more or less obvious that in the autumn elections of 2009 parties will be obliged to advance processes of internal renovation of their permanent staff, possibly supported by the respective youth branches of political parties. Will this bring the emergence of new political generations, possibly more inclined towards democratic innovation and the consequent implementation of participatory processes, such as participatory budgeting? It is an open ended issue, although there are increasing signs of this possibility, as demonstrated by the fact that the average age of local Mayors or District Presidents who have experimented with PB is lower than the national average age. Another interesting indicator is the fact that the impulses behind the majority of PB experiences have been Mayors who are in their first term in office, demonstrating a desire to construct a "personal style" appropriate in the management of public matters.

### Participatory Budgeting in Portugal

Twenty-five PB experiences are known in Portugal dating from 2002 to the present day. Twenty-one of these are promoted by Municipalities and 4 by Parishes, as illustrated in the following map.



Source: adapted from DIAS (2006)

A quick glance over this map allows one to easily understand the southern tendency of the majority of experiences in Portugal. This reality reflects the traditional political



division of the country, according to which, the Centre–Right is the most dominant presence in the North, whilst the South is largely positioned Centre-Left. However, a more detailed, chronological analysis of PB development in Portugal allows one to affirm that parties across the political spectrum, including the independent movements that govern some Local Authorities, are opening to these new forms of democratic experimentalism.

If, in the initial phase, PB emerged as a “left wing idea”, with especial prominence for Local Governments led by the Democratic Unitarian Coalition (Coligação Democrática Unitária) (CDU)<sup>iv</sup>, today the tendency is increasingly related to the emergence of PB in areas led by the Socialist Party (PS)<sup>v</sup> or by the Social Democratic Party (PSD)<sup>vi</sup>. The first signs of a will to implement PB in municipalities governed by PSD and the Popular Party (CDS-PP)<sup>vii</sup> are also perceptible. According to the knowledge that the authors hold at the moment, an enlargement of PB experiences in territories governed locally by the PS and the PSD is to be expected soon. As a matter of fact it is these two parties that contest the majority of local governments in the country.

At present, of the 25 Local Authorities indicated on the previous map, 44% are governed by CDU, 24% by PS, the same percentage for PSD, whilst 8% are governed by Independent Movements.

Another element that allows us to think that PB will not be restricted to a specific political tendency, has to do with the fact that no evidence exists at the moment, that allows us to distinguish forms of organization and the implementation of PB that depend specifically on the political party that promotes it. Furthermore, the characteristics of PB in Portugal seem to rely much more on the changeable structures related to the institutional and socio-political legacy, dealt with in the previous two points of this text. The following paragraphs try to synthetically sum up these characteristics.

### **Models of participation**

The majority of PB experiences in Portugal are of a consultative character. This means that they are normally centred on the discussion of problems, needs and proposals presented by the citizens, without this implying a real debate on budgeting. In some cases, as has happened in Palmela and São Brás de Alportel, the process begins with an initial proposal of projects elaborated by the respective Executive Bodies. Alterations may then be introduced due to contributions given by the citizens in the “deliberation arenas” or in the different areas for discussion and the handing in of suggestions that are open to the inhabitants (this may be in face to face meetings, enquiries on the Internet or on paper).

Despite this being the tendency in the majority of cases, we are beginning to see the emergence of a second generation of PB in Portugal at the moment. This is laying its bets on the implementation of a decision-making process with a previously defined component in the budget. This second generation is at present played out by experiences such as the Municipalities of Lisbon (the capital of the country) and Sesimbra, as well as by the Parish of Santa Leocádia do Geraz do Lima (Viana do Castelo Local Authority) in the north of the country.

Apart from the learning dimension that this type of process could have for the citizens, as well as gains in terms of democratic transparency, PB promoted by the Parish Councils is, above all, put into perspective as a tool of participation that helps reinforce the role of this administrative level in the political mediation process with their respective Municipal Councils. The Parish Councils in Portugal have very limited investment capacities, unless specific annual agreements are made with the Municipalities to whom they belong, attributing new roles in the management of local services and infra-structures. This may lead Parishes to see PB as a tool towards reinforcing its negotiation arguments with the respective Municipal Councils, urging the latter to contemplate transferring investments within their budgets to the Parish in question.

All the Portuguese experiences favour the participation of people acting individually, although some (such as Braga, one of the largest cities with a Socialist Local Government in the North of the country) also allow systems of representation via local collectives and associations. This is an important aspect, given that local associations are excessively dependant on financial help and logistics provided by the Local Authorities, and are often subject to interference and influence from political party structures. From this point of view, PB partially symbolizes the return of the individual actor, very much abandoned by the logic of representative democratic systems, who normally accord social and political relevance to pre-organised stakeholders. The perspective of this small “revolution” starts mainly with the individual using specific needs or desires as its “driving force” in order to guarantee presence in the public space where more collective visions may be negotiated and “common goods” identified.

The focus taken by PB in Portugal has a territorial tendency. This means that the dynamics of decentralised participation (on the base of neighbourhoods and villages within every parish), that allow different dimensions of local life to be incorporated in debates are favoured. We refer specifically to the possibility of discussing different areas of interest in people’s lives within these processes. Areas, amongst many others, such as for example education, health, transport, the environment, culture, sport, urban problems and the economy. This focus has the tendency to reveal differences among territories and asymmetries between municipalities, as for example, the need to understand the specific problems of urban or rural areas, of the more run down housing estates or the central areas with their more valued heritage etc. The adoption of this focus relates to the fact that Municipalities in Portugal have progressively come to take on capacities in nearly all thematic areas, from the creation of basic infrastructure to the development of the local economy. The fact that this focus sometimes has a limited perspective that does not allow a discussion on “strategic choices” for the interested territory, partially justifies the insertion of Portuguese PB in the category of “proximity democracy” (Allegretti/Sintomer, 2009) with respect to comparisons among different families of European OP.

Parallel to this tendency, we also begin to see the emergence of first initiatives whose focus is, above all directed towards certain actors or social groups, as has happened with children and young people. This is the case of São Brás de Alportel that implemented the first experience of Children’s and Young People’s Participatory Budgeting (OPCJ) in 2007. This involved the students of the two main schools of the Municipality in a territorial

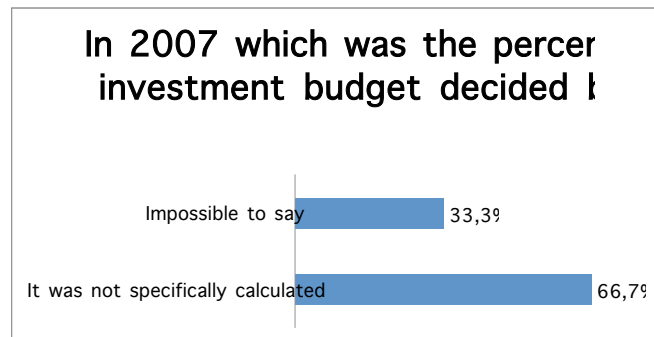
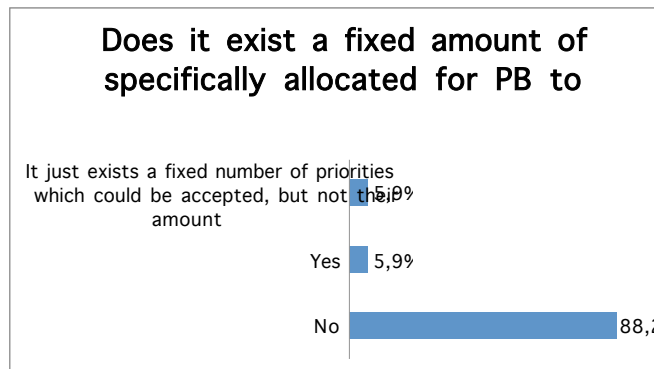
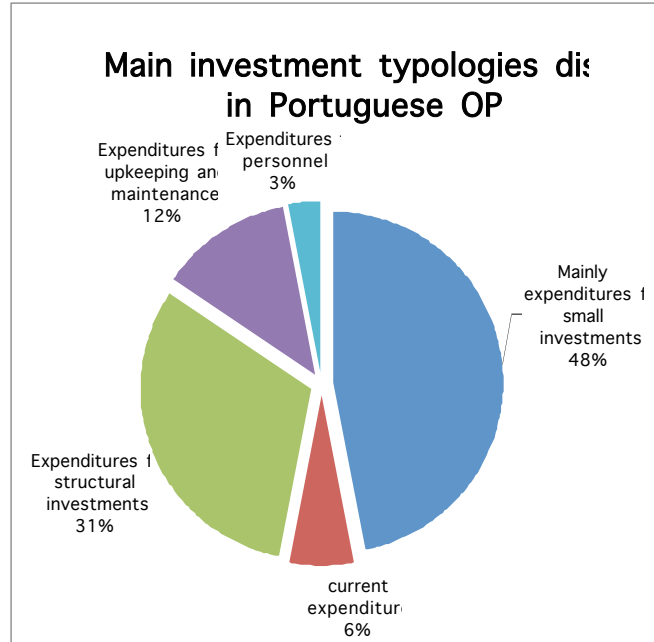
partnership that involved the Municipality, the In Loco Association and the schools themselves (Dias, 2008). The experiences of the Parish of Carnide in Lisbon also began soon afterwards, involving primary school children aged between 6 and 10 years old, as well as that of Braga in the Northern region of the country. These experiences take on an important role, being a moment of socialization and training on the theme of democracy and citizenship, above all in a setting of almost total absence of institutions that clearly take on this function. They also help to give substance to a panorama of fragmented, pseudo participatory initiatives. In Portugal, these initiatives have had the ambition to work on some topics of interest within the school community in a consensual way. They are to be found in “Charters” and “Education Councils”: a development tool – often a weak one – of social dialogue with students (rarely), teachers and other actors involved in the education field.

### **The Institutional Drawing**

The striking majority of PB processes corresponds to a set of meetings held between Executive Bodies and citizens that normally takes place in the last quarter of each year. This time scale is mainly due to four reasons:

- The consultative character of the processes that does not imply very complex institutional design and architecture, nor the anticipation of public debates with the aim of agreement and voting on the part of the citizens;
- This is the time of the year in which Executive Bodies feel more confident facing the local taxpayers. This is due to the fact that they are able to have a more realistic budget forecast for the following year. Moreover, with respect to the year in progress more public works have been completed from the current budget;
- The marginal role that PB takes within the Local Authorities priorities and within the functioning of the administration itself;
- OP’s low impact within the decision of the Local Authorities’ Executive Bodies in relation to the large scale investments that absorb the bulk of the Local Authorities’ financial resources.

This last characteristic clearly emerges in the inquiry carried out as part of the project “PB Portugal” (2008), as represented in images number 2, 3 and 4 that show the main investment typologies discussed in Portuguese OP and how “careful” the incidence of PB results are calculated and presented to citizens.



Apart from public meetings, many experiences have also come to adopt the use of questionnaires on participation, either using paper or the Internet. On this level we highlight the experiences from Odivelas that in its first year combined the digital method

with real life debates, as well as that of Lisbon that, in 2008, developed a type of OP exclusively developed via the Internet. Nevertheless, in the majority of cases the use of information technology is still limited (Allegretti/Matias/Cunha, 2007).

Some interesting innovations have been developed by the experience of Santa Leocádia do Geraz do Lima, namely the creation of a Participatory Budgeting Council (Conselho do Orçamento Participativo - COP) and a priorities caravan. The COP is made up of delegates elected in all the Parish's communities with the right to vote and to make decisions on investments to be included in the Local Authority's budget. The caravan corresponds to the phase of the participation cycle that precedes the voting of priorities. In accordance with this, the citizens' delegates (who are the spokesmen elected by the participants) visit all the spots where local proposals have been presented by inhabitants as part of the PB sessions. They do this in order to be able to compare the needs of each community and reduce the level of ignorance that many inhabitants have regarding the territory as a whole in which they live.

### **Organizational outlines: PB as a marginal sectorial policy?**

In Portugal, the great majority of the PB is based in the Mayors' Support Offices showing the political wager that this process represents. This signifies that these initiatives are conducted technically and politically by people whom the Mayors trust. This option also gives evidence that the processes have still not reached high levels of demand within the administration, a reason for which it becomes possible to implement using the frugal human resources of the Mayors' Support Offices. In accordance with data collected from the already mentioned enquiry questionnaires, more than 70% of the experiences function without PB being taken on by a branch of the Municipal or other service. Simultaneously, more than 50% of the PB also do not possess any political coordination that guarantees the management and assessment of these processes.

On the contrary, PBs with a greater level of structure and complexity that represent a firmer political will tend to generate the internal necessity for the creation of work teams by the administration. The city of Palmela has gone along this path after various years of experience. It has opted to create a structure legally recognised in the general set up of the Local Authority, responsible for the coordination and the dynamics of the different participatory processes. At the moment, Lisbon is going in the direction of the creation of a project team that will bring together technicians from different Municipality services. Odivelas is also inserted in this dynamic, although a peculiarity is to be highlighted: PB has emerged within the Local Authority's financial department. From this point of view comes the perception that PB will also be a tool to improve the Municipality's finances and budget's effectiveness and efficiency. Other Local Authorities have come to create work teams, essentially formed by technicians from the finance department, organizing a first internal proposal of the PB model to submit to the political decision of the elected. It is possible to understand from the consulting and training work that the authors have developed with these teams, that they have easily concluded that PB will not be able to work if the department, to which they belong, does not know how to mobilize and implicate other important departments within the Local Authority, such as, public works, or social, youth and associational affairs amongst others.

Another of the aspects that calls for attention is related to training teams on PB's conceptual and methodological issues. Local Authorities in which PB is a marginal activity of little significance tend not to invest in the training of its permanent technicians and politicians. On the contrary, Local Authorities that are more concerned with drawing up processes with a greater organisational rigour, usually seek out training offers on the subject and organize visits to other PB experiences. Data from questionnaires suggests that about 60% of Local Authorities have never promoted or looked for training for technicians directly involved in the process and that about 90% have never sought to guarantee this same training for staff that do not directly work with OP.

The Project "PB Portugal"<sup>viii</sup> has been a decisive factor on this level in promoting training courses, workshops and free consulting work for Local Authorities for the first time in the whole country. It represents an interesting perspective from which OPs are interpreted not only as "objects" (organisational mechanisms) but rather as constituent parts of a transformation in progress in territorial governance concerning the internal functioning of the administrative machine and its desire to relate creatively to new forms of "collective action".

Little has changed over the last few years in Portugal with respect to the legal or normative framework of OP: These continue to depend exclusively on the political will of the elected. The creation of regulations or rules for processes has accompanied the dynamic that is emerging from this type of experience. This means that, effective forms of PB have necessarily involved the creation of regulations or norms for their functional framework. It is something that results naturally from the demands of the processes themselves, the management of the unexpected and from team learning. However, in Portugal (differently from what has happened in the majority of Spanish OP) none of the PB experiences has had self-regulation or rather regulation created or defined with the participation of the citizens. In more than 50% of experiences, however, PB is still a non-formalized process.

Intimately related to these issues is the absence of previously defined objectives, as well as the processes of registering, monitoring and rigorous assessment, capable of providing elements that allow for learning with participatory dynamics, understanding what runs well and what needs to be improved. In some experiences (as is the case of Odivelas, Lisbon, Sesimbra and São Brás de Alportel), the results of the process, namely the public wide spread diffusion of information about public works and projects agreed upon as part of OP, is guaranteed via the Internet or in Public sessions. In the case of Sesimbra, we point out an interesting peculiarity related to the fact the work agreed upon by the citizens is reported on the Local Authority's Internet page, illustrated with photos and with the identification of its state of development (launching, carrying out or completion).

In our opinion this type of detail on the rendering of accounts allows one to think of PB processes as dynamics with two cycles of participation: the first dedicated to debating the budget plan and the second to the carrying out of priorities. In both moments, citizens have an important role in terms of participation and democratic vigilance. This type of dynamics promotes learning on Municipal management and the territorial reality, supplying important elements for the carrying out of an informed citizenship and democracy.

### **Some final remarks**

While Portuguese PBs had an essentially “stable” character in the first experiments (2002-2005), reproducing organisational characteristics that barely evolved from one year to another, the processes have become more “evolved” in the last three years via an increasing transformation. This is partially due to the numerical diffusion, the diversification and the increasing contacts maintained with experiences in other countries via conventions and international networks such as FAL, UCLG<sup>ix</sup> and the International Observatory for Participatory Democracy, based in Barcelona.

With respect to the analysis developed by the International team coordinated by Yves Sintomer<sup>x</sup>, already mentioned, PBs in Portugal have been largely worked within the perspective of creating “proximity democracy” (geographically and communicatively), without great concern for the promotion of justice or socio-territorial cohesion, but as important elements in the re-establishing of a dialogue between the elected and those electing and in the creation of a new source of political legitimacy. However, a gradual shift of paradigms may be observed which in the future could lead Portugal PBs to emulate some features of non-Mediterranean PB models, such as the German ones which were firstly inspired by the new Zealand’s experience of Christchurch rather than by Porto Alegre.

The participation of technicians from the financial departments of various municipalities in specific training courses on PB has been an interesting indicator of this transformation. While in Spain and Italy the majority of technicians trained in PB belong to municipal branches and departments connected to social affairs, the promotion of active citizenship or public works, the recent Portuguese way of looking at PB points to a new hypothesis for interpretation: participatory budgeting has begun to take on the perspective of experiments that can favour a new way of dealing with expenditure and public revenue, starting from reforms concerning ways of working with the Local Authorities’ internal communication and coordination within budget and finance departments.

The Portuguese “hyper-realist” framework has traditionally worked with budget forecasts that were very much out of touch with the reality of real public finances. The resulting excess of unfulfilled promises may have contributed to the distancing of taxpayers and their loss of trust in the Local Authorities’ administrations and in politics in general. Within a country that has come to see the growth of electoral absenteeism the need to regain credibility and authority in the eyes of the citizens is becoming urgent and visible. Improving relationships of trust and “performance” in administrative activities stands to guarantee greater efficiency in the battle against citizens’ alienation with “public matters”.

Further confirmation for the hypothesis of a transformation of PB could be found in interesting new developments, which are strengthened by the first experiments in the Scandinavian world. Portugal has been chosen as a privileged interlocutor for the first pilot scheme in Sweden in an unprecedented relationship between the North and the South of Europe. Although more common, it is to be equally noted that Cape Verde has also turned to Portugal for support within the process of implementation of the first PB experiences in the country. This has been via training and consultancy for Municipal teams and the central government. This allows the idea to be advanced that Portugal nowadays holds a privileged

position as contributor to an extremely enriching dialogue in North-South and South-North relationships.

The case of Carnide, a Parish in Lisbon, may be a symbol for the future, due to its extensive range of tools for social dialogue (nowadays entitled “Participatory Management”). Here in this Lisbon Parish, data for electoral absenteeism is significantly lower than the average for the city and the country. This shows how a coherent dialogical approach may reconstruct ties of mutual trust between citizens and the world of politics. It may be that today participation in public policies has a new option for holistic development when in different cities OP is beginning to be related to other management dialogue tools (urban development plans, Agenda XXI, thematic advisory councils). Interest shown by different parties in inserting PB as “engine of innovation” in the electoral programmes for the 2009 local and national elections, may be another indicator of a transformation to consider.

Some challenges, that have still not been faced, remain for the near future. The main one being the possibility to look at PB as a “energiser” for a civil society which is still weak and low in action, and the opportunity to conceive methods of discussion and co-decision for participatory budgeting to be the “engine for the construction of negotiated solidarity” between citizens and different parts of the territory. With this challenge, it would be excellent to establish a dialogue with the many Brazilian experiences, although we can put forward the idea that some aspects of post-colonial culture (that still have not managed to leave behind the air of superiority regarding the ex colonies) make such an evolution difficult in the imminent future. In fact, in these last three years many Portuguese politicians prefer to look at European examples of OP, culturally closer, and have had the need to be supported by “cultural translations” of the Latin-American models. Mistakenly, they have not managed to consider the latter as credible sources of institutional transformation.

It is to be hoped that it will be equally possible in Portugal, while waiting for this type of openness to the teachings of the South (Allegretti/Herzberg 2004), to strengthen ties with the Spanish and Italian PB experiences. They are beginning to work not only with the “proximity” perspective but are betting on more structural administrative and cultural transformations that PB may bring, marking out an important space of innovation in politics as a whole and not only politics in the local sphere.

The attention accorded in the last three years to “learning by doing” on the part of PBs in Portugal, the European country with the highest percentage of PBs with respect to the total number of municipal institutions, gives hope that it is on the right track towards leaving initial reservations behind and contributing to a creative quantity-quality transformation of PB both in Europe and beyond. With which range of goals, it is still to be discovered...

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