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Bootstrapping Democracy. Transforming Local Governance and Civil Society in Brazil
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Does participatory budgeting produce qualitative changes in the society? In *Bootstrapping Democracy*, Baiocchi, Heller and Silva tell us, convincingly, how participatory budgeting has transformed the relation between civil society and the state in some Brazilian communities. This transformation tends to empower social actors *vis-à-vis* local state.

Baiocchi *et al.* propose an original framework to analyze one of the classical topics in participatory democracy: the Brazilian Participatory Budget (PB). There are two relevant aspects why this book should be read: firstly, because it focuses in experiences of participatory budgeting that are not “best practices”, providing a balanced view of PB success and failures. But, above all, *Bootstrapping Democracy* should be read because it focuses on *the consequences of participation*. As Fung (2011) has written, we can now speak about a *second generation* of studies on the Brazilian participatory experience. This second generation is addressing the complex causality patterns and the effects of PB. *Bootstrapping Democracy* is a good representative of this new wave.

The much celebrated *orçamento participativo* of Porto Alegre inaugurated a sequence of participatory institutions in Brazilian local budgets. The experience of Porto Alegre was significant for its capacity to include popular sectors which had been traditionally excluded from politics (Baiocchi

2005). In this sense, Porto Alegre was an ideal “blueprint”, “transplanted” in different settings with different outcomes. Currently, the enthusiasm around PB has led way to a more balanced view of its consequences and real impacts.

Bootstrapping Democracy is organized in six chapters. In the Introduction and Chapter 1, Baiocchi *et al.* mark the limits of their subject (the impact of PB in civil society organization). In Chapter 2, we are situated in the scene of participatory budgeting in Brazil, its precedents and trajectory. In Chapter 3, the logics of inquiry are clarified and the methodological strategy is justified. In Chapter 4, we find a description of how political contexts and PB’s institutional design does influence in each of the cases under investigation. In Chapter 5, the authors explicitly address the shifts in civil society. Finally, in the conclusion, the main evidence is situated into the big dilemmas of participatory democracy. Surprisingly, at the end of the conclusion, we find a sub-epigraph where results are compared to those of other developing countries such as South Africa and India. This conclusion “*Beyond Brazil*” opens the door to new inter-societal comparative approaches.

One of the strong points of the book is actually its methodological strategy. *Which are the real consequences of an ambitious policy as the PB in a developing country such as Brazil?* To isolate the contribution of PB, the authors designed a qualitative

investigation based on four *mirror cases*. These cases consisted in four matched pairs of PB and non/PB cities, each pair being homogeneous in terms of population, geographical region, electoral results (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*) and equal socio-economical background. Thus, the four non/PB cities worked as a “control group” to contrast that the effects of PB were a direct consequence of it. This inter-regional controlled strategy is quite rigorous, and it gives strong support and validity to the main findings.

In general terms, PB had a positive impact in the activation of civil society. In three of the four cases: “Cities that introduced PB experienced a shift in the form of engagement from traditional forms of discretionary and personalized engagement [patronage] to more participatory and institutionalized modes, albeit with varying degrees of success” (p. 126). In the non-PB cities any change was observed in the period under scrutiny. However, this positive relation was dependent on the previous organization and autonomy of civil society itself.

In two of the cases, Baiocchi *et al.* found that social organizations went from *prostrate relations* with the state (subordination to the local state through discretionary processes of patronage) to *affirmative relations* (still certain subordination, but through transparent procedures and institutions). In other words: through PB, traditional clienteles and patronage were dismantled and replaced by institutional open channels. Anyway, we feel tempted to question if this was not another way to select the participation of certain social actors in detriment of others. As Clemente

Navarro showed (2000), it is possible that a new *participatory bias* was emerging from PB institutions. Is *affirmative democracy* a new form of patronage? In which situations would it happen?

The other two cases of PB are extreme. In *João Monlevade*, civil society engaged in PB but did not lose its autonomy and equidistance vis-à-vis the state. This would be an ideal case of *mobilized democracy* where civil organisations are able to combine participation in institutions and keep their autonomy, critical eye and mobilization. According to the book, this happened because social actors were strong and independent enough before the PB. At the other extreme, the case of Mauá showed that the introduction of PB can produce *demobilization*. In Mauá, traditionally-clientele organizations had their funds cut and combative-activist sectors were institutionalized (key activists taking government posts). Ultimately, the introduction of PB triggered shifts in social organizations and their relation to local state; but this relation—positive or negative—is dependent on the previous—strong or weak—situation of civil society.

Baiocchi *et al.* also identify the institutional design of PB as a condition for the empowerment of social actors. In some way, institutional devices entail distortions in the formulation and communication of demands. For example, in much decentralized designs (hegemony of neighbourhood assemblies), there was an overemphasis on local narrow interests. In other settings, strategic orientation and district level assemblies counterbalanced excessive localism. The role of mediators and delegates was also relevant and it was frequently

exercised by activists. The outcome of activist mediation seemed to be ambivalent: it can produce a positive accommodation of civic organizations (preserving autonomy) or it can drive to demobilization and submission. The institutional environment of PB, in any case, makes a difference. As the authors note, "The line between embeddedness and synergy, politicization and capture is indeed a fine one".

Bootstrapping Democracy represents an extraordinary effort to reconstruct the process of demand-making and the *chain of sovereignty* in the context of PB. This is a strong contribution to the empirical research on democracy: *how do popular demands travel from citizens to the local state? Which are the real channels, mediations and distortions? How does this occur through participatory budgeting?* In the reconstruction of the chain of sovereignty, from people to the local state and vice versa, this book offers a suggestive proposal. Nevertheless, we missed to see a clearer, more detailed exposition of the demand-making process. *How does a regular demand travel from the quarter assemblies to the official budget? Which are the obstacles, distortions, formal and informal institutions that the demand had to pass through? On the other side, which are the top-down mechanisms, rewards and punishments articulated by local state to exercise control on popular demands?* Though *Bootstrapping Democracy* offers a general insight, we need more in depth, micro qualitative research to identify the matrix of relations placed into circulation around PB.

Participatory policies are now mature enough to study their impacts. Nevertheless, there are other effects of citizen

participation which are as much important as the reorganization of civil society: a) the learning of democratic skills (Talpin 2011); b) the promotion of social justice and redistribution (Fung 2003); c) the modernization of public administration (Ganuza and Sintomer 2011); d) the improvement of public decisions and problem-solving (Fung 2004); e) the decentralization of investments (Funk and Gathmann 2006); f) the increasing of public satisfaction (Olken 2010); g) transparency of government and trust (Wang 2007, Handley 2010), etc. In short, direct participation is supposed to produce many other benefits, so it would be wonderful to see studies which pay attention to a broader spectrum of consequences.

In any case, *Bootstrapping Democracy* represents a leap forward in the analysis of the real consequences of participatory politics. This is not magic: the outcomes and effects of citizen participation depend on the specific institutional design and the previous organization of social actors. In effect, participatory budgeting is not magic, but, under appropriate conditions, it can produce extraordinary democratic changes.

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