



## Assessing the Effects of Participatory Budgeting in Brazil

By Adrian Gurza Lavalle



The Participatory Budgeting assemblies involving the largest number of participants are the regional plenary sessions, which, in Guarulhos, take place every two years. On these occasions the city mayor visits the regions, along with a team from the city council that includes secretaries, councillors, PB officers and sometimes deputies from the city. The plenary sessions are preceded by a preparatory phase, generally beginning a few days prior to the date planned for the event. This is when the 'representatives' perform a crucial role. Neighbourhood associations' leaders and other grassroots leaders, as well as municipal legislative representatives and council members mobilize the local residents and a city hall car with a loudspeaker circulates in the region announcing the date and time of the plenary session. Space is given for inhabitants to speak and each person has the right to make a demand for public policy that will be voted on within the region and later compete with other winning demands from other regions.

PT's administration not only introduced a new form of implementing PB in the city with a biannual cycle, it also invested in new technology to make PB more dynamic, including electronic voting and a plasma screen allowing all participants to follow the assembly's proceedings closely. Citizens are given a wristband with the name of their neighbourhood district, a folder containing information about PB, the works carried out over the last few years, and a leaflet with the PB rules of procedure. All citizens must register. During the plenary sessions, citizens share their concerns and issues with other citizens. However the choice of policies demanded can be a surprise since they depend on number of votes to be selected. Prior mobilization is very important in order to ensure participation, as well as to coordinate interests, organize voting and keeping voters in the plenary till the end, when demand are elected .

Coordination of votes is usually articulated by local leaderships. Sometimes political representatives, such as councillors and party activists, enter the grassroots communities to promote and mobilize participation in PB assemblies or ask for political support.

Participatory Budgeting brought positive effects for the city in two senses: external and internal. PT's administration in Guarulhos with its innovations and investment in PB turned this participatory governance policy into a kind of showcase for the city. On one hand Guarulhos became the second coordinator of the Brazilian Participatory Budgeting Network. On the other hand, the Guarulhos International Relations Department parades PB as PT's flagship in the city, systematically highlighting its benefits. PB does indeed present interesting qualities, such as increasing transparency in the budgetary process, accountability and effective investments, based on the principle of society's involvement and participation. Moreover PB is an important instrument in terms of highlighting recurrent problems in the more outlying districts (such as floods and landslides) and presenting them more quickly to the government with better information from the ground. From a political viewpoint, PB allows local leaders greater access to political posts in the municipality since its events and processes can serve as a space for learning about political representation in particular and political activity in general.

However, some neighbourhood and grassroots associations and the people they intermediate with the City Hall fail to benefit from the advantages of PB since they have difficulties in being included and/or little interest in participating. We found this cases belong to PMDB's socio-partisan network, as opposed to PT networks. An example is the Mara Association, a network traditionally associated with the Pascoal Thomeu political group, whose members find it

very difficult to distribute milk and vegetables, and emphasizes the government's lack of any real interest in helping them. On the contrary, the benefits accrue in those networks closest to the PT government. The Sítio São Francisco provides a clear example on this point, since the close work with PB in the region enables its residents to

transmit demands directly to the City Hall. The Sítio's neighbourhood association was founded by suggestion and with support of PT's administration. No wonder, the leader of this association was very active in mobilizing people for PB plenary.

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