

The geopolitics of cities

old challenges, new issues



Renato Balbim
Editor



How an urban global agenda should respond to the social, economic and environmental challenges faced by an unequal urban society? How would it address the increase of socio-spatial inequalities and segregation present in cities, mostly in developing countries?

Various chapters in this book have casted light on how and why such an agenda should address the drivers and consequences of social-spatial inequalities, such as the growing number of residents living in informal and unserved settlements; concentration of property in the hands of a few, increasing financialization of land and housing, privatization of public spaces, rising urban insecurity, and shrinking spaces for civil society.

In seeking to account for the unequal distribution of wealth, resources and opportunities, many prepositions advocate for a paradigm shift about how urban development is financed, produced and governed. Government commitment to redistribution, de-concentration and re-democratization efforts in housing, property, basic services, public spaces and governance sectors, is one proposed shift. They emphasize that commitments towards an urban paradigm shift should lead to the realization of the right to the city for all, consisting in the right of all inhabitants, present and future, temporary and permanent, to use, occupy, produce, govern and enjoy peaceful, just, inclusive and sustainable cities, villages and settlements, understood as a common good essential to a full and decent life.

It would require the shift from a techno-economic approach to a people-centered and rights-based one. This would entail giving power and resources in local governments; claiming and preserving territorial spaces for underrepresented groups and excluded communities, recognizing informal settlements and labor, enforcing the social function of land, tackling real estate speculation, securing progressive taxation over property. Questions then arise as to whether it would be possible to engage governments to implement such shifts in contexts of privatization, limited social service provision, neoliberal governance, and market-oriented governance.

This book contributes to ask and address all these questions, taking advantage of the realization of the III United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development in Quito, which will count on the participation of civil society organizations, social movements, academics, private enterprises, foundations, national and local governments and UN representatives.

Leticia Osorio

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HYBRID SCALES OF CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT: HOW TECHNOLOGICAL INTEGRATION CAN SCALE-UP PARTICIPATORY PROCESSES?¹

Giovanni Allegretti²
Michelangelo Secchi³
Audrey Tang⁴

The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights (D. Harvey, 2008, p. 23).

1 INTRODUCTION: WHEN QUESTIONING THE WEIGHT OF SCALE

In the last decade, citizens' participation to decision-making processes has been widely considered as a fundamental component of the construction of the Right-to-the-City. At the same time, the City has also been the main stage where the majority of the experiments of democratic innovations (DIs), which bloomed around the world during the same period, took place. Among these DIs are worth to be quoted participatory budgeting (PB), participatory urban planning and integrated development techniques, Agenda 21, the methodology of Public Debate, the Electronic Town Meetings and several families of Citizens' Juries, Citizens' Panels and Citizens' Assembly which – in the last two decades – have been accompanying public decision making worldwide, hybridizing and adapting to different cultures.

In practice, the local authorities (and namely municipalities) have been the main institutional player involved in a process of extensive intensification of urban democratic regimes, opening their decision-making processes to the active engagement of non-elected citizens and social groups. In several cases, the decision of doing so is fostered by clever representatives of elected officials, aware of the need

1. This article partially owes its reflections to the project "O Orçamento Participativo como Instrumento Inovador Para Reinventar as Autarquias em Portugal e Cabo Verde: uma análise crítica da performance e dos transfers" (funded by FCT with funding PTDC/CS-SOC/099134/2008 - FCOMP-01-0124-FEDER-009255), and to a more recent project funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement "Enabling Multichannel Participation Through ICT Adaptations – Empatia" (687920).

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to renew governing methods in the “era of mistrust” (Rosanvallon, 2006; 2015), while – in other cases – it was the pressure of organized society which managed, from bottom-up, to convince institutions to open new solid spaces of social dialogue.

As a consequence of such a trend of participatory innovations mushrooming at local level, many scholars and activists argue that the small scale of those processes limits intrinsically their potential influence over the power relations that actually shape strategic choices of urbanization and influence structurally local development.⁵ Authors like Mark Purcell developed the concept of *Local Trap* exactly to define the tendency of researchers and activists to generalize a set of value-related assumptions as typically “inherent about the local scale”.⁶ It refers to a number of unwritten and invisible meanings that conflate with the “local” as a reaction and juxtaposition to the cultural framework built around the “global”. As the latter is associated with neoliberal capitalism, social injustice and frequent lack of democratization (or low-intensity of formal democratic regimes) a similar conceptual double bind⁷ is built around the local at different dimension: localization/democratization; community/local community; local people/local sovereignty; local development/community based development. More in general, “the use of the modifier “local” to stand in for more specific ideas such as “indigenous”, “poor”, “rural”, “weak”, or “traditional”, even though there is nothing essentially local about any of these categories.” (Purcell, 2006). Similar biases are visible also in the academic literature on Democratic Innovations and Urban Democracy, and constitute a silent ambiguity all throughout the debate on the Right to the City and its enforcement.

The question we’d like to focus on in this chapter regards exactly the actual capacity of localized experiments of DI to substantiate the right to the city: to enforce a new set of rights related to the condition of inhabitant of the urban space and to influence the power relations that actually underlie urbanization strategies and the related value creation and accumulation mechanisms.

Indeed, on one hand, it seems evident how the capital investments that transform urban spaces in world cities are always more dependent from decisional mechanism taking place outside the public domain and often at a scale that do not correspond with the physical stage where urbanization projects are implemented. On the other hand, the lower ties of the Public Sector are in general too weak to enforce new rights autonomously, without the support of higher administrative and political levels.

5. Marcelo Lopes de Souza, “Os Orçamentos Participativos E Sua Espacialidade: uma agenda de pesquisa,” *Terra Livre*, no. 15. 2015. p. 39-58.

6. Mark Purcell, “Urban Democracy and the Local Trap,” *Urban Studies* 43, no. 11. 2006. p. 1921-41.

7. Barnor Hesse, “Im/plausible Deniability: Racism’s Conceptual Double Bind,” *Social Identities* 10, no. 1. 2004. p. 9-29, doi:10.1080/1350463042000190976.

This is true also where Nation-States already devolved and decentralized part of their power to other entities (as for example in the context of the European Union, where at least until 2008 decentralization has been a key concept of public sector reforms). We can use the definition of “asymmetric subsidiarity” to describe the framework of decentralization under neoliberalism, where the transference of competences do not correspond to an equal transference of funds to fulfill the new duties, often leaving Local Authorities exposed to indebtedness and progressive financialization.

As an example, is meaningful to underline how much the budgets of municipalities worldwide are suffering from path-dependency illnesses, due to high interest in repaying debts and dependence from transfers by higher ties of the Government. In many cases, the only resource available for structural investments is represented by the urbanization fees: as a consequence, a dramatic spiral takes place, being that the financial autonomy of local authorities becomes dependent from the production of profitable spaces, and a vicious circle of speculation, with selling out and enclosure of commons.

As a consequence of such perverse trends, the scale of participation processes must be questioned in order to research and analyze their actual effectiveness. What should be the adequate socio-institutional scale of participatory innovations so to meet the basic political, social and economic needs and claims of citizens? Is the scale of participatory experiment a so really determinant factor in their success, or could the existence of networks and critical masses of local practices adequately compensate the trap of proximity?

From a theoretical perspective, political ecologists already de-constructed the socio-environmental nature of each geographic scale,⁸ including the scale of social participation and conflict. The wave of alter-mondialist social movements that characterized the dawn of the millennium can be recognized as a myth-poietic example of a “glocalization” of social claims. That strategy used the stage offered by localized mega-summits of globalized institution (as the WTO meeting in Seattle 99 or the G8 in Genoa in 2001) as a base to organize a counter-strategy able to make visible local issues as the widespread diffusion of OGM or the increasing exposition to debt of southern societies. Aside the self-organized social movements, the networking activity engaged a broader range of NGOs and institutional players in the organization of great participatory experiments known as Social Forums: a nebula of flexible and transversal participatory spaces able to connect the local dimension up to the global level, with the annual celebration of the World Social Forums (WSF) since 2001. Exactly in the context of the first WSF in Porto Alegre

8. Erik Swyngedouw and Nikolas C. Heynen, “Urban Political Ecology, Justice and the Politics of Scale,” *Antipode* 35, no. 5. 2003. p. 898-918.

in 2001, the practice of PB experimented in Brazil and Latin America has been for the first time diffused throughout Europe, thanks to the circulation of knowledge and practices allowed by international networks of activists and local authorities as FAL- the Local Authorities Forum for Social Inclusion.⁹

Similarly, in more recent international summit of the UN system (as in the case of Rio+20 in 2012) official consultative process are carried out by the organizing bodies with the double-faceted objective to raise and include in the institutional agenda needs and proposals from civil society, but at the same time to neutralize and weaken the more conflictual positions within social movements.

While these examples created strategic organizational references for social movement and activists on the global stages - based on the organization of counter mega-events – the picture is much more complex and differentiated when we research the development of systematic participatory practices at intermediate scales (between the local and the global). Narrowing down on concrete experiences of DI, it appears evident how until a few years ago it was almost impossible to imagine large scale systematic participation, although punctual cases existed in specific contexts, especially in terms of referendum, legislative bottom-up initiatives or other participatory specific initiatives. Nowadays, some participatory devices strongly affirmed their presence in the international panorama, especially at local level. They often move between institutionalization experiments and a strong use of information and communication technologies, being that – until now - the latter often weakened the social impact and the strength of participatory processes, because they contribute to reducing social dialogue to “light” consultation and mechanical summing of individual preferences. But attempts of scaling-up participatory innovations to larger administrative levels are growing up in quality and numbers. This happens, on one side, in parallel to the strengthening of the regional level as a meaningful space of government (especially within European Union or in Federal States elsewhere). On the other, it takes place in a framework where municipal powers are forced to merge or join forces into supra-municipal or intercommunal entities, as for example the new bodies established to govern metropolitan areas over the administrative boundaries of the municipalities. The latter are often weak in terms of legitimacy and lack of democratic recognition by part of their inhabitants.

Undoubtedly, the widespread diffusion of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and the rapid development of collaborative technologies and related behavioral approaches opened a new range of possibilities, not only allowing a large number of people to participate in large-scale processes (as, for example,

9. Yves Sintomer and Giovanni Allegretti, *I Bilanci Partecipativi in Europa: Nuove Esperienze Democratiche Nel Vecchio Continente*, Nuovo Municipio (Ediesse, 2009).

Popular law-making initiatives at national level), but also interconnecting different scales of participation, thus creating linkages between pre-existing processes and fostering the creation of coalitions able to broaden numbers while maintaining complexity and original diversity. As showed in Allegretti, Corsi e Allegretti (2016), in the last decade a wide range of experiences took place, which opened participatory spaces for constitution-making or deep constitution-amending beyond the role of traditional Constituent assemblies, being the cases of South Africa, Kenya, Nepal, Bolivia, Ecuador Iceland and Ireland among the most recent and radical. In such cases, the driver of the processes was mostly the need of sharing the setting of common fundamental values on which to base a national (or even pluri-national or, at least, multi-cultural) new legal framework. Other experiences have been related to the strategic option of sharing with inhabitants reforms which (as that of the electoral system in the case of the Citizens Assemblies experienced in British Columbia Province, Canada)¹⁰ would be very difficult to carry on if left to the self-reform capacity of the elected representatives, and their will to gradually give up to consolidated privileges.

2 A USER-FRIENDLY NOTE TO THIS TEXT

Under the perspective exposed in the previous paragraph, the present text wants to provide a small contribution to understand how the challenge posed by the scale of participatory processes can be gradually overcome through what Leonie Sandercocock once called “a thousand of tiny empowerment” actions (2003).

For this reasons, the research question which inspires this essay is: at what extent and through what mechanisms city-based deliberative democracy processes can influence policy making at another scale than just the local government? Our hypothesis is that ICTs can play a pivotal role by offering the technical opportunity to scale up, but they also accentuate fragmentation and individualization of participation. In order to make their use effective, networks and organized groups are crucial not only when such actors play as “activators” of participatory dynamics at larger scales, but also when they act as “translators” between languages and cultures which are still not able to interact in depth. On this base, in the following paragraphs, we present two different cases in different corners of the planet and in different stages of development:

- The first case is that of Portugal, in its initial stages for constructing a Portuguese National Law on Participation. The latter has been advocated by some professional/research-oriented organizations, and is being pushed forward by a network of local authorities committed to experiment DIs (and especially PB), taking advantage of the availability of Collaborative

10. See Fung et al. (2011).

Platforms, which created the opportunity for a capillary diffusion of such DIs.

- The second example, in a more advanced stage of its political history, is Taiwan. And it tells the story of Taiwan.gov, a movement of civic hackers initially based in Taipei City, which has been able to scale-up its ambitions, and link the physical occupation of urban spaces with a capacity to claim a better and substantial democratization of local and national authorities.

The choice was that of giving value to two “silenced stories” of semiperipheric countries (Santos e Meneses, 2009) which rarely have been properly counted, at least up to now. From a methodological point of view, it is worth to underline that the researchers who authored the two narratives exposed in the next paragraphs have been – in different ways – active part of the movements described. Although not claiming neutrality in relation to the events, and choosing a description of the cases which start from their own experience as active agents, we tried to adopt a “reflexive” approach, taking care of other perspectives and critics that have been emerging along the last two years, especially in the blogosphere, and in other rare spaces of public debate.

3 THE PORTUGUESE SURPRISE: DRIVING ON CRITICAL MASSES OF EXPERIMENTAL ENERGY AT LOCAL LEVEL

Portugal is a small 10 million inhabitants country at the margin of European Union, which – historically – has always been acting as a bridge between the Old Continent and several countries in Africa and Latin America (Santos e Meneses, 2009). In the beginning of the Third Millennium, Portugal hosted some of the first European emulation of PB (PB), the participative device born in Brazil in the late 80s with the aim of giving voice and vote on public budgetary matters to citizens, with special attention to those which had been historically excluded from decision-making during the elitist and military regime which governed the larger Latin American country during the XX century.

Since 1998 the small city of Palmela (in the southern metropolitan area of Lisbon) had been at the forefront of innovation, experimenting a PB process which, despite being merely advisory, was deeply committed in reversing sociopolitical priorities, especially bringing to the center of public policies the voice of rural areas and their inhabitants (UCLG, 2014).

Palmela, soon emulated by other neighboring municipalities led by the same political forces (the CDU, i.e. a coalition of the Green and the Communist Portuguese Party), became not only the pilot of an important wave of municipal experiments of PB, but a recognized reference in the European

domain, thanks to its activism in the global network of *Urbal Programme*, which (between 2003 and 2010) dedicated a specific line of funding to support innovative experiments and mutual learning in the domain of local finances and PB (Cabannes e Baierle, 2005).

In Portugal, Palmela's experience was much more controversial than abroad. In fact, it was considered by other political forces in the country as the most visible example of a "sectarian" ideological approach, incapable of affirming its values and usefulness for a larger conception of reforming governance in Portuguese cities. Around 2005-2006 it had already become an important flagship experiment used by social movements (and especially those linked to the alterglobalist vision of the world Social Forum) to point out the "true path to the future" for the renewal of municipal powers in Portugal (Sintomer e Allegretti, 2016; Tavares et al., 2015).

In this perspective, the claims and requests made by leftist parties in several municipal councils of Portugal for starting PB experiences in cities governed by the Socialist or the Socialdemocrat Parties, were often violently rejected. A mix of political tension against what was still seen as a "neocommunist blueprint" and a skepticism of colonialist origin about the possibilities of Brazilian creative political ideas to pave the path to DIs in Europe tended to suffocate the innovative energy that could have been spread by Palmela's pilot and other municipal experiences.

3.1 Unblocking a "cul de-sac"

The year of 2006 represented a change of this situation for Portugal. In fact, the Center for Social Studies (CES) of Coimbra University together with *In Loco*, a NGO for action-research in sustainable local development, agreed in trying to intervene in this stuck situation. Following the pioneer studies on participatory democracy of Santos (1999; 2007), the two institutions decided to strengthen training on PB and develop a role of "cultural translation", thus organizing an international event which could bring to Portugal experiences of PB from other European countries, which were trying to emulate and adapt the Brazilian device to different national and local contexts. The main merit of these two institutions was to understand that a sort of "restart from zero" was needed for the national debate on PB, through valuing what European continent had already produced in the field.

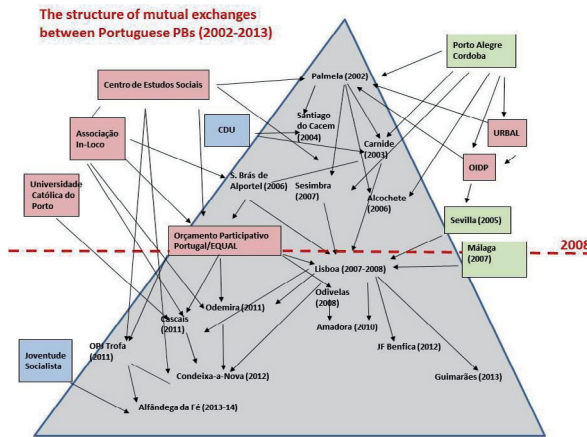
The central idea was that of strengthening networks and opportunities of mutual exchange, possibly stimulating new Portuguese cities to experiment pilot projects. Also, the researcher in the two institutions who engaged in promoting training and debates on PB tried to get funding, aware that when institutions are still skeptical about a novelty, they will barely invest politically and financially on it. Finally, they undertook a task of networking with other organizations of civil society,

seeing in PB an opportunity to strengthen relational capital and social organized fabric in a country where associativism is often weak, and participation is mainly conceived as a “top-down” concession by local institutions.

So, CES and In Loco started to propose free-counseling to the Algarvian Municipality of São Bras de Alportel (for a two-track pilot of PB: one for school-children and the other for adults), taking advantage of an EU funding through the Communitarian Initiative “Equal”.

The image below shows a gradual complexification of the panorama of Portuguese PBs between 2002 and 2008, marked by the appearance of new experience which acted as pilots (and good practices) for new models of participatory budgets.

FIGURE 1
Mutual exchanges between Portuguese PBs



Source: OPtar (2014).

Publisher's note: Figure displayed in low resolution due to the technical characteristics of the original files.

Lately (in 2007), In Loco and CES jointly wrote and coordinated a project called “OP Portugal”, or “*Orçamento Participativo Portugal: Mais Participação, Melhor Democracia*” (PB Portugal: more participation, better democracy”) within the same “Equal” Programme, through which they were able to provide national and regional training courses as well as tailored consultancies to more than fifty municipalities around Portugal. The project, implemented in partnership with three local authorities and the National Center for Training of Municipal Employees (CEFA), lasted until mid of 2009 and won a mention of honor among all the Equal initiatives, interchanging with other national Programmes as “Escolhas”, especially for what concerned PB for children and schools.

The new initiative gave visibility to PB experiments around Portugal and brought many ideas from other European experiments, starting to place Portugal on the world-map for a series of innovations in the domain of PB. The project “*OP Portugal*” had five main outputs: *i*) breaking the silence and skepticism about PB in the two main parties (Socialist and Social Democrat) which run the majority of local authorities in Portugal; *ii*) creating a constructive environment of critics about previous PB examples, which could drive to experiments of larger quality and impact; *iii*) presenting PB as a versatile tool of governance which could dialogue with other participatory devices and the constitutional/legal framework of Portugal; *iv*) making PB a “subject of public discussion” (especially in the media, which elsewhere is very silent or hypercritical on the issue) and a common topic in training for technical staff and civil servant in Portugal; *v*) aiding the city of Lisbon to support the first co-decisional large-scale PB, so opening the way for many imitations around the country.

3.2 A new coagulation of experiments around the capital

As shown by figure 1, 2008 represented a new turning point full of challenges and promises for PB in Portugal. It must be noted, in fact, that the last output of “*OP Portugal*” project was very important in creating a wave of new pilot processes, many of which with the tendency to copy-paste Lisbon PB features without critically adapting them to the new contexts. Lisbon example – started with a shy experiment in 2007 - had a peculiarity, beyond the fact of being the first European capital with a co-decisional PB which reserved to citizens at least 5% of the capital budget for being object of deliberation and hierarchization by citizens. In fact, it was totally on-line initially (for facilitating feasibility and cost reduction), but soon the mayor decided to add face-to-face meetings, when monitoring underlined that a lot of citizens (especially the most vulnerable, the elderly and the not-alphabetized in ICTs) had been excluded from the first edition due to its internet-driven mechanisms. So, in 2008, Lisbon PB acquired not only national projection but also international interest, due to the networking commitment of CES and In Loco, and their desire to make Portugal more visible within a series of international venues dealing with DI.

Among the latter, there were the International Observatory of Participatory Democracy, the UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights, the International Platform of PB and so on. In parallel, international institution as UNDP contracted Portuguese specialists to try to “export” and readapt the Portuguese experience in other lusophone countries as Cape Verde (lately the World Bank did the same with Mozambique).

Since 2007, an annual National Meeting of Portuguese PB was also organized, being hosted by different cities each year. And in 2010 it became a biennial

pan-iberic event, so to facilitate the cross-cutting dialogue between Spanish and Portuguese experiences of participatory democracy. Although PBs remained the strongest “core group” in the events, the network was opened to other typologies of DIs.

The two institutions who had been promoting the “new deal for Portuguese PBs” in 2006, which are well complementary in working between the world of academia and that of professional bodies and NGOs which help local authorities to manage innovations, always tried to maintain a “critical capacity” in relation to the experiments to which they had collaborated.

This was definitely visible in the case of Lisbon (Allegretti e Antunes, 2014), whose conduction of PB did not often give attention to quickly correct critical element which were emerging during the years. In this case, the excessive attention given to numbers (proposals, voters, volumes of resources) in relation to that recognized to the quality of proposals and deliberation became a negative factor for the expansion and the evolution of PB. Under this perspective, the absence of real spaces for careful sharing of visions and identification of commons to be defended and valued showed the risk to transform the process into a mere sum of individual preferences, i.e. in a sort of “concourse of ideas” (as Dias, 2014, defined it) with few spaces for more strategic thinking about “the city its inhabitants want”.

It must be also underlined that in the Lisbon PB – in line with the majority of European experiments (except some Spanish and Italian cases) – no special interest was devoted to issues related to social justice and redistribution of resources.

3.3 The phase of emulations, with the consolidation of a Portuguese PB model

During their solid collaboration through several different projects, In Loco e CES maintained a careful balance between national and international networking with the goal to keep attention alive on structural and conjunctural limits showed by concrete experiences, with the aim of guaranteeing a capacity of permanent self-appraisal of each city or local borough interested by participatory experiments.

FIGURE 2

Logotypes of joint project carried on by In Loco and CES between 2008 and 2016



Publisher's note: Figure displayed in low resolution due to the technical characteristics of the original files.

So, some of the above mentioned critics were definitely incorporated and taken into account by new experiments of participatory budget undertaken 2-3 years

after that of Lisbon, as in the case of Cascais, one of the larger and richest cities of Portugal, located near the sea in the metropolitan area of the capital. In 2011 Cascais (unlike Lisbon, governed by a center-right political coalition) decided to engage in PB, inserting it in the framework of its Agenda XXI Programme, as a part of a larger vision shared with inhabitants. The model of PB which was elaborated here valued mainly deliberative spaces, allowing citizens to present proposals only via participation in face-to-face meetings, although the phase of voting priorities is organized mainly through ICT tools (Internet, SMS, van equipped with computers which circulate around the whole municipal territory).

Cascais' PB, especially after winning several international recognition as a "best practice", opened the way to a new generation of Portuguese PBs, which include those of large cities as the capitals of Azores and Madeira (Ponta Delgada and Funchal), as well as minor municipalities like Agueda, Albufeira, Loulè, Alenquer or Caminha (the first which started to discuss also on revenues and not only on expenditures). This can be considered a "third generation" of Portuguese PBs (Dias, 2014), whose uniformity is much more critical and reflexive than the previous ones (the one of copy-cats of Palmela, between 2002 and 2007, and the one of copy-cats of Lisbon, between 2008 and 2011).

This aspect of reflexivity owe a lot to the two social institutions previously quoted, which continued their "evangelization work" about PBs offering a new umbrella-project called "*OPtar: PB as innovative tool for reinventing local institutions in Portugal and Cape Verde? A critical analysis of performance and transfer*" (between 2010 and 2013). The project, this time, was funded by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) as a space for reflecting on the direction taken by Portuguese PBs and elaborating new horizons around open challenges and correction of mistakes emerged in the first decade of their life.

Such a project, which aimed at the collective construction of a new direction for Portuguese PB on the base of an action-research approach in ten pilot-municipalities, has possibly been a useful driver for the change of pace of several participatory processes in Portugal. In fact, through local laboratories and several co-learning events, "*OPtar*" offered the opportunity of realizing a live overview of PBs in Portugal, helping auto-assessment and evolution of several experiences. The project made possible a diagnostic of Portuguese PBs (Alves e Allegretti, 2012), which gave proof of the short average life of experiences of first generation (revealing a 77% rate of death of the 77 experiments done between 2002 and 2013) and tried to explain its reasons, especially taking into account the ineffectiveness of consultative models, and their incapacity to produce a convincing image of change of traditional political culture (*OPtar*, 2014). At the same time, the project – while strongly dialoguing with national media (convincing them that PB is a topic which

deserves growing spaces of attention in order to strengthen its efficacy) – was the proper space to spread the interest for PB in the academic environment as well as in organized civil society (from the Portuguese branch of transparency International to small local community-based organizations). In such a new framework, the fast evolution of several PB experiences in Portugal is certainly due to a growing tissue of social activism which PB was able to agglutinate, functioning as a reference and a catalyzer for new struggles, oriented to claim new rights and more solid legal frameworks for enforcing them.

It is worth to point out that several radical movements also emerge in this panorama, often strongly criticizing Portuguese experiments of PB, as in the case of the collective *Habita – Associação pelo direito à habitação e à cidade*, and its newly-created network of movements for the right to housing and the right to the city. They started publicly criticizing PB for its lack of interest in being a tool for conquering social justice; for not being specifically oriented to measure of social inclusion and positive discrimination to the sake of vulnerable actors; and even more for being incapable of creating vision and scenarios of the desired city before engaging in prioritizing the funding to be given to single interventions often inspired to immediacy needs and competitions for resources among local lobbies.

The new tensions emerged during this slow evolution of umbrella-projects coming from bottom-up, to accompany a gradual political evolution towards new DIs, have been taken in the due account by the two “main drivers” (In Loco and CES) of the evolution of Portuguese PB, when (in 2014) they proposed to the Gulbenkian Foundation to support a project called “*Portugal Participa*”. The latter was approved with top-scored and even prolonged with new fresh funding until 2016. In fact, the new project had three important aims: *i*) taking advantage of the astonishing spreading of PB to make them dialogue with more invisible and less diffuse DI, which could be complementary and integrative of emerged limits and challenges of PBs; *ii*) creating a proper series of spaces for reflection and mutual learning between local authorities interested in experimenting participatory processes; *iii*) strengthening the legal framework through which citizens participation is intervening in political matters in Portugal, scaling up from the local to larger levels of administrative ties.

3.4 Betting on autonomous capacity of creating “virtuous circles” in sociopolitical cultures

In the above mentioned perspective, “*Portugal Participa*” was not only the opportunity for shaping a solid network of “Participatory Local Authorities” (RAP or “*Rede de Autarquias Participativas*”, with a specific *best-practice award* partially decided by citizens). In fact, it was also a space for collectively elaborating a Workbook of Recommendations to the National Parliament, which has been presented in

April 2016 in a public session to the major parties, the Minister of Administrative Modernization and the Presidency of the Portuguese Republic.

The Workbook is a guide of ideas given by the project partnership and the mayors' network to members of Parliament and the National Government for them to think about legislative measures to reinforce citizens participation in all the range of local, regional and national policies in Portugal. But it has also been conceived as a funding charter of values for starting a large consultation to Portuguese citizens which could end in a process of co-writing of a bottom-up Proposal of Law to be presented to the Parliament as an autonomous Citizens' Initiative of Law.

Several external factors made possible to scale-up the idea of involving Portuguese citizens not only in local policies and planning, but also in topics of larger width. One factor is related to a law which entered in force in 2013 local elections to introduce a limit of mandates for mayors, which generated a large shift in the age, political perspective and participatory sensitivity of many newly-elected local authorities, and eventually led to make the number of PB experiences to jump to 83 in the beginning of 2016. A second reason was the timeliness of the discussion promoted by "*Portugal Participa*" in relation to the need of hybridizing and complementing PB with other DI, both in terms of quality and institutional levels. In fact, such timely debate intercepted the 2015 national election campaign, and the critical mass of many innovative local experiences emerged in the previous 2 years convinced the Socialist Party to insert in its political proposal the idea of a first world experiment of PB at national level.

Once the Socialist Prime Minister Antonio Costa (ex-mayor of Lisbon, and initiator of its co-decisional PB) enter in office in the end of 2015, supported by the entire spectrum of leftist-progressive parties elected in the Parliament, he translated his party campaign promise of a national PB into the Government Commitments Plan, and started molding the structure for conceiving and shaping the first pilot process for the end of 2016. The "task force" dedicated to such experiment, seeded in the Ministry of Administrative Modernization and made-up of professionals who have been working for years in local experiments of PB in Portugal and elsewhere (including members of CES and In Loco), has a unique task, which will undoubtedly attract attention from all over the world, as proved by a background document presented by In Loco and CES members through "*Portugal Participa*".

This task consists in avoiding to shape the national PB as a "fractal replica" of local participatory budgets at a larger scale, but needs to integrate and complement them (and foster their multiplication) focusing on three main goals which have been pointed out in the past as missing elements of local Portuguese PBs: *i*) the promotion of social justice; *ii*) the promotion of transparency in all State-related budgets (at all administrative levels), relating it not only to the amounts

directly discussed by people, but to the entire budgets, to be released in open data; *iii*) the construction of a space of deliberation which could interrelate the discussion on public expenditures with the debate on revenues (taxation, mortgage rates on debt, etc.).

The National level PB will possibly take advantage of the last project presented to the EU Commission by CES and In Loco (this time, together with other international partners), which is called “Empatia”, acronym for “Enabling Multi-channel Participation Through ICT Adaptations”. Such a project, funded by the Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation line called CAPS, aims to transform the use of technologies until now experienced in Portuguese PBs with several visible limits. A concrete goal is that of structuring a platform which could make dialogue the top-down use of technologies proposed in many participatory government-led processes and several civic collaborative technological spaces which have been created, reshaped or conducted by social movements and group of civic hackers worldwide. At the moment, Empatia platform is imagined both as an important tool for allowing the scaling-up of PB at National level, but also to start the consultation for co-writing with inhabitants the Proposal of a Legislative Act which could frame the Right to Participation of Portuguese citizens, to which “*Portugal Participa*” offered a sort of basic Charter of Values and Recommendations elaborated with the aid of many of the municipalities that in the last decade have been in the forefront of experimenting participative processes in the country.

Obviously, this process of creation just started and is still ongoing, but what seems to us very important is the fact that it enrooted a large, dare and bold political commitment into a thicker evolution which not only started at the local level, but partially was originated bottom-up within a milieu of civil society organizations which devoted to participation their interest for action-research. The most important challenge of such a path is that of gradually rebalancing the asymmetry still existing between a political society which growingly showed interested to imagine elements of self-reform, and a civil society which until now proved less active than in its discourse in accepting the challenges offered by this transformation of political culture, in order to increase the social control on public policies and projects, and its pivotal contribution in moving to politics more oriented to social equity, to redistributive justice and to the protection and the co-govern of commons.

4 FORK THE GOVERNMENT: CIVIC HACKING FOR A PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY IN TAIWAN

Another different but somehow convergent story of collective action is that of Taiwan, another semiperipheral country, which is still not recognized as a legitimate State power the majority of world nations, due to its tense relation with the People Republic of China.

One of the most densely populated countries in the world, the island of Taiwan (formerly known as “Formosa”) has a population of around 23 million inhabitants, and a stable industrial economy marked by a rapid economic growth and industrialization where the high-tech industry plays a key role. A member of the World Trade Organization and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, Taiwan is ranked highly in terms of human development, freedom of the press, health care, public education and economic freedom.

By 2012, Social Media had firmly entrenched itself in Taiwanese everyday life, when Facebook alone claimed 75% of online users. However, netizens remained pessimistic about the potential of existing social media outlets and portals to spark civic empowerment – or even engagement – online.

As the popular term “filter bubble” implies, Social Media tends to encourage impulsive, instant-gratified expression of emotional sympathy among like-minded individuals. However, real-world activism requires deepening this into bonds of empathy in order to enable shared reflections among individuals with diverse backgrounds. The challenges of online mobilization in Taiwan were five-fold (TH Schee, 2012):¹¹

- 1) Nonprofit organizations’ social media exposure was ineffective and not proactive.
- 2) Individuals felt powerless to influence policies and politics.
- 3) Online participation could not translate into offline action or collaboration.
- 4) Open-source communities seemed to care little for social issues.
- 5) Digital divide prevented offline and online activists from collaborating.

The culmination of these problems is known in Taiwan’s social activism circles as 弱弱相殘 (“weak-weak cannibalism”). Among socially underrepresented groups and regions, mutual stereotyping and a lack of intersectional empathy often reinforced each other’s feeling of helplessness.

In this section, we would like to describe g0v (“gov-zero”), a civic movement by informed netizens toward participatory self-government. Borne out of frustration at the government’s blithe lack of transparency at the end of 2012, we have made these ongoing contributions:

- 1) By establishing participatory media channels such as News Helper, Congress Matters, and g0v.today during the Sunflower movement, we established ourselves as a popular and well-trusted civic media.

11. 2012-04-02 Hurdles of online mobilisation. Available at: <<https://blog.schee.info/2012/04/02/mobilization/>>.

- 2) By crowd-producing definitive works such as dictionaries, welfare directories and contemporary history, we transform ourselves from passive consumers into effective agents for social justice.
- 3) By organizing regular hackathons and offering logistic support to social movements – virtual-reality recording, crowd-sourced reading list, real-time transcripts – we create shared cultural spaces that blends online and offline activism, enabling cross-regional mobilization through ICT interventions.
- 4) By constructing sites of social production modeled after open-source principles, we shape civic projects into communal grounds for learning and hacking alike, engaging contribution from schoolchildren and teachers outside the usual social activism circles.
- 5) By designing outreach programs on social issues such as labor rights, environmental rights and cyberspace rights, we form ongoing dialogues with established activists, promoting social awareness and online consensus-building through nation-level regulation deliberation platforms.

4.1 Background of the movement

Amidst popular unrest regarding speculative housing inflation, President Ma Ying-jeou made housing justice a key component of his 2012 re-election platform, and ordered Ministry of the Interior to commission a website on which people could find transaction records by street address. The site went live to a flood of requests and remained only intermittently accessible for the first few weeks. Three days after the launch, a team of four Google.tw engineers incorporated the Ministry's data into their *Real-Price Maps* website, overlaying aggregated pricing information on Google Maps with a plethora of filtering features.

A week later, Minister Simon Chang (a Google alum himself) invited the remixers to a round table. However, after sensational media coverage pitted the team's shoestring budget of NTD\$ 500 against the official site's "million-dollar disaster", the relationship between the two soon turned sour. The incident came to a head on November 14, when the official site replaced all street addresses with image files, dramatically increasing the burden of crawling. The Real-Price Maps site closed shortly thereafter.¹²

While the *Real Price* incident was still unfolding, a new government production took the spotlight: a 40-seconds propaganda video titled "What's the economy power-up plan?". Devoid of information, the clip simply repeated the following refrain:

12. Starting July 2013, the Ministry began offering biweekly limited-timeframe download of land price data set. As of July 2015, quarterly data is finally released as Open Data without restrictions.

“We have a very complex plan. It is too complicated to explain. Never mind the details – just follow instructions and go along with it!”. Met with incredulity and mockery, the video went viral as viewers on YouTube rushed to click “report abuse” in protest.

On Yahoo Open Hack Day 2012, an annual 24-hour event in which sixty-four teams show off their innovative creations. Infuriated by the controversial ad, four hackers made a pivot. They resolved to create a bird’s eye view of how taxes are spent. The resulting Budget Maps presented each agency’s annual spending in the form of geometric shapes of proportional sizes, inviting participants to review and rate each item’s usefulness. Calling upon citizens to “strike out rip-off spending”, the two-minute demo won NTD\$ 50K in Hack Day prizes.

While demo-day crowds are known to quickly forget such projects, Chia-Liang Kao came up with an elegant hack to keep this one alive. He registered the catchy domain name g0v.tw, dedicated to citizens’ remixes of government websites. The Real-Price Maps thus became accessible at lvr.land.moi.g0v.tw before its shut-down – literally just one fingertip away from its official counterpart at lvr.land.moi.gov.tw; meanwhile, the Budget Maps lived on at budget.g0v.tw as the inaugural g0v project.

4.2 A chain of struggles opened by the Open-Space Hackathons (2012)

Modeled after participant-driven BarCamp events, the four hackers which has conceived the above mentioned counter-governmental website, named the new event “0th Hackathon of Martial Mobilization”, invoking a rebellious image from the 1949-era civil war. On December 1, 2012, civic hackers filled an auditorium and presented their projects, covering a wide range of government functions, including Congress, tenders, geography, weather, electricity, healthcare and many other areas. Lively discussion continued online at Hackpad and IRC well after the daylong event.

In support of the coding efforts, writers and bloggers formed a Facebook group copywriting on demand, offering their skills to any project that asked for assistance. Dissatisfied with the makeshift logo banner, designers would continue to work on several iterations of the logotypes, eventually completing a set of Visual Identity guidelines, which elevated g0v into an easily recognizable brand as visible in figure 3.

As the new projects continue online, writers and designers participating in g0v found that Facebook groups lacked essential features such as shared bookmarks and task tracking. On the other hand, popular tools for open-source software development such as Git, IRC and Wikis posed a high entry barrier for non-coder participants.

FIGURE 3
G0V Logos Contest



Publisher's note: Figure displayed in low resolution due to the technical characteristics of the original files.

To address this issue, in January 2013, hack.g0v.tw launched the meeting point of online projects as well as face-to-face events. It combines several tools that form a cohesive space for coordination:

- *Hackfoldr* organizes all related links around a project into multi-level shared bookmarks.
- *EtherCalc* provides a scalable, multi-user spreadsheet with a real-time API.
- *People Registry* lets participants discover each other with profile tags for projects, issues, skills and interests, bringing bite-sized tasks with new contributors.
- *Web Chats* keeps daily logs with a distinct URL for each line, and introduces new users to IRC via web-based chatrooms. Every utterance is given its own permanent URL for future citations.

Owing to the diverse nature of the projects and participants, there's a strong preference for lightweight, descriptive structures ("tags") over rigid, prescriptive structures ("taxonomies"). Because much of our activities are face-to-face, we also favor real-time shared documents (e.g., Hackpad and EtherCalc) over revision-controlled, long distance collaboration tools (e.g., Wikis and mailing lists).

4.3 Engaging Online Activists (2013)

In addition to interests in Taiwan's current affairs, g0v people have also been inspired by the massive upsurge of democratic activities in Europe, including, for example, Iceland's constitutional referendum, Finland's crowd-sourced legislation, Italy's Five Star Movement, Germany's Pirate Party, and other similar precedents. As g0v continues to work with the government for greater information transparency, these activities have presented clear evidence for the accumulated wisdom of online communities and their potential to shape public policy.

Accordingly, g0v participants have localized the online policy-formation system Liquid Feedback and have named it 動民主 (Dynamic Democracy).

The first trial took place on June 8, 2013. By the end of June, Dynamic Democracy team members held online meetings with representatives from the German and Italian Pirate Parties, and decided to systematically experiment with all existing voting platforms and incorporate pre-proposal discussions and post-performance tracking into the system, turning it into a “Foundation for Decision-making” (Basisentscheid) for online collaboration among policy groups.

In August 2013, Coscup – the most popular annual conference for Taiwan’s open source users, promoters, and developers – took place in Taipei’s International Conference Center, attracting a total of 1,800 registrants. Among its eight tracks, the Community Track featured seven presentations by g0v.

Traditionally, various major communities hold Birds of a Feather (BoF) meetups nearby on the evening of the opening day of Coscup. The g0v BoF adopted the slogan “Fork the Government and Build It Anew” and was held on the Ketagalan Boulevard. Participants dressed in white and joined 250,000 other demonstrators in the peaceful protest organized by the group Citizen 1985 over Corporal Hung Chung-chiu’s death, and the subsequent lack of transparency from the Ministry of Defense investigation.

Both Citizen 1985 and g0v had been emerging from grassroots movements that combine online collaboration with face-to-face meetings. Following the protest, we took the initiative to offer ICT support to Citizen 1985, providing anti-eavesdropping and distributed network encryption technologies. The two groups would eventually enter formal collaboration in October with the launch of the Big Citizen Is Watching alliance, working together on a series of congressional oversight projects.

With mutual recognition and trust with web-enabled activists, we were ready to scale out and engage established, long-time social activists. That opportunity would appear on March 2014.

4.4 Sunflower through Telepresence (2014)

In 2014, Taiwan was about to sign a cross-strait trade agreement deal with Beijing. The city of Beijing proposed a favorable term of trade – much more favorable than the world trade organization’s general terms – for Taiwan-based companies.

Normally, when Taiwan signs deals like that, there is a procedural line to follow: *i*) The Parliament must hold a hearing; *ii*) all the impacted industries must send representatives; *iii*) they would debate case by case and do an impact analysis. However, due to a constitutional loophole (Beijing is considered part of Taiwan in the Taiwan Constitution – along with Mongolia), in this case the Parliament did not follow the standard procedure for international agreements.

In fact, any agreement the administration signs with Beijing is seen as having the legal status of a domestic agreement, so excluding Parliamentary oversight.

By the date of this automatic expiry where the pact would automatically enter in force, protesters entered the Parliament and occupied it for 22 days, with g0v volunteers supplying Internet connectivity, broadcasting, transcription and translation platforms. Nicknamed the “0th Sunflower Digital Camp,” this ICT-enabled demonstration merged on-line and off-line struggles, once separated. It was the result of intense collaboration between hundreds of hacktivists, adding an important physical and material dimension to the insurgent actions.

With a secure, safe occupied area, the student occupiers performed a demonstration beyond the usual counter-power agenda. In fact, they were demonstrating in a “demo scene” kind of way: “How should we talk about service agreement like this?”. Led by professional facilitators, they first deliberated in the legislative building, then later on the street with help from NGOs. Environmentalists, unionists, and pro-independent activists all gathered occupiers – 500,000 on April 22 – and deliberated the topics they care about, reaching through millions of people through ICT telepresence platforms.

A few months after the Sunflower, Hong Kong’s Occupy Central forked the same system, improved by Code4HK, and again deployed the same crowd-sourced system for live broadcast, interactive maps, news and logistics support:

The political landscape has changed a lot after this events. In fact, people began to demand that political decisions could be set as the result of a deliberative democracy, not just regarding elected officials. By the end of 2014, Mayor Ke Wen-Je became the first nonpartisan elected Taipei City mayor, with a ICT-based campaign crowd-sourced from the same swift-trust principles.

The nonpartisan ex-Gogler Minister, Simon Chang, also became the Vice Premier and orchestrated a nationwide agenda on open data and civic participation, through collaboration with g0v communities, adopting an “open data by default” principle for governmental ICT systems, culminating in Taiwan’s #1 place on OKFN’s 2015 global open data index.

4.5 Online-to-Offline Deliberations (2015)

The nation-wide shift to transparency and participation caught many people by surprise. The development of Taiwan’s government institutions (the public sector) as a top-down bureaucracy in the 20th century was the result of being under two authoritarian regimes. While the first Presidential election took place in 1996, old adages, such as “obedience is the foundation of responsibility”, were still in the minds of many public servants.

If we look back at policy-making in the previous era, we can see that the popularly elected leaders appointed administrators to set their agenda, and officials from each administrative unit and their think tanks drafted policies after soliciting public opinion. The policies were then passed in legislative meetings. However, what was called “public opinion” was usually limited to some representatives of trade unions, the mass media, and certain scholars and councilors. If the public were to directly participate, it was usually only in the form of street protests. In his book, *Democratic Governance*, Professor Chen Dong-Yuan wrote:

Listening to the voice of the people is like hearing the voices of the deities in that it must be communicated through special channels... Like in folk religion, it is easy for these interpreters to manipulate the message for their own purposes.¹³

However, as ICT-enabled movements in 2014 demonstrated, speed at which the public can form bonds of mutual trust in cyberspace has far outpaced the speed of the traditional method of policy-making. The government has no choice but to make room to include these voices – directly, requiring no special channels.

The 2014 “National e-Forum on Trade and Economics” was an early attempt at soliciting direct participation. During the offline forum, live comments from the net were projected onto a wall in the government building, and people were invited to submit written comments online.

However, only 29 comments were posted during the discussion from June to July, of which five proposals were countersigned by only three to five people. After the discussion period concluded, the government did not present any specific responses on this forum, and it eventually just faded away.

Because of this, Minister Jaclyn Tsai – who joined the administration in November 2013 from the high-tech world – appealed to fellow “civilian mediators” at the g0v hackathon to launch the vTaiwan project. The goal was to jointly establish a cross-sector, online-to-offline deliberation space for any laws related to cyberspace, starting with the closely-held company bill.

In January 2015, hacker TonyQ joined the administration from the open source community. With help from the “youth advisor council,” we collected public suggestions from start-up workers, investors, attorneys, and local governments. Through a live-streamed broadcast of the multi-stakeholder panel discussion and the release of the transcript, a list of specific recommendations was created by a working group of stakeholders, which the Ministry of Economic Affairs incorporated into the bill.

13. Regarding this, see: <<https://goo.gl/4lqhAb>>

When the Legislation then passed the law in June 2015, it was Taiwan's first crowdsourced bill, with complete online record of negotiations and deliberations.

The key to the Taiwan model, today, lies in its "symmetry of attention." As the policies are still in the stage of problem-identification, participants exert a greater influence. Not only have the ministries committed to give an official response within seven days to any question during discussion, but also the actual face-to-face meeting agenda itself was crowdsourced by online discussion. Through live streaming and remote participation, citizens can see how all stakeholders presented their views and how much effort they have invested in the process.

As vTaiwan went on to deliberate transnational issues such the regulation of the activities of Uber and Airbnb, this model was proven to be feasible. City-level governments took notice and introduced similar ICT platforms.

In September 2015, the Taipei City Government and the gov community worked together to introduce the budget.taipei platform, an early experiment for the institutionalization of public participation. Within seven days after it went online, there were 113 comments received, and they were compiled and publicly responded to by various city agencies, while the policy-related information was made available.

New Taipei independent Mayor Ko Wen-je stated that only when the public gradually becomes familiar with open data – the same information that civil servants have access to – can citizens make meaningful proposals: "PB is part of my campaign. However, just making the city budget public is not enough. It also requires allowing city residents to fully understand the budget; only then can they participate."¹⁴

Soon after this, on October 14th, the proposal on the National Development Council's join.gov.tw e-petition platform for "making cancer immunotherapy available and speeding up the use of new cancer drugs" obtained 5,548 counter-signatures to become the first accepted e-petition. Within a week, the Ministry of Health and Welfare met with the proposer to clarify the demands, and the record of the meeting was made public.

The related background information was released in November, and the specific responses to "establishing a regenerative medicine and cell therapy development council," "drawing up a plan for relaxing the criteria for severe cancer patients to receive therapy," and "speeding up new cancer drug approval" were released on December 14th, and subsequently signed into effect early 2016. The right of initiative given to citizens by the Constitution has been put into practice in a new way in the Internet age.

14. Regarding this, see: <<https://goo.gl/4lqhAb>>.

4.6 National Land-Use Planning in VR (2016)

With the landslide victory of Ms. Tsai's presidential campaign highlighting "civic participation and open-source maker spirit", 2016 started with a post-partisan political landscape: Simon Chang became the Premier during the January-to-May transition period, and the next Premier, Lin Chuan, was also a long-time non-partisan and respected professional. DIs blossomed under this climate. The initial wave of participatory budget started with 7 local-level governments – including the Taipei City.

The right to the city, and the right to collaborate on the agenda of national-level zoning, were brought to the agenda for the first time, with the newly passed "National Land Use Act" offering legislative framework and a guideline based on participatory values. Such an innovative Law offered – years later – solid answers to some of the problems which had been at the base of the polity shift of the last year in Taiwan and the emergence of a strong ICT-based movement of civic activists.

While the "National Land Use Plan" has laid down the basic national control strategies and principles for sustainable land use, its substance still awaits being fleshed out by twenty forthcoming sub-regulations, a process that were traditionally subject to intense lobbying by local developmental and environmental interests.

The grassroot NGOs acted quickly to defuse the potential trap of region-based "weak-weak cannibalism." Starting April 2015, a series of national land use workshops brought together parties who are interested in land use issues and ensure that their mutual exchange and cooperation can promote the future implementation of the "National Land Use Act".

The workshop's ICT telepresence substrate – Hackfoldr for bookmarks, Hackpad for transcripts, YouTube for record-keeping – now include VR recording of real-time participant interaction, taking nonverbal gestures online and enables a re-visit to the workshop at <<http://beta.hackfoldr.org/NLUPA>>.

Anecdotally, use of VR recording has improved the quality of discussion. With an omnidirectional camera, people feel secure that their nonverbal expressions will be taken into account, and so turned their energy on establishing rapport to the people in the same room. Compared to the traditional talking-head recording which promoted "talking only to the camera" demagogically, a genuinely shared laughter is felt much more clearly in VR. The popularity of VR headsets also presented a novel way for each region's participants to "walk in the shoes" of different regions, and plan – in a shared, virtual space – on a shared decision theatre that allows stakeholders to present their alternate visions in an concrete, intuitive manner.

To illustrate the ICT-savviness among Taiwan's contemporary NGOs, we end this section with a snippet from the real-time transcript, spoken by the director of Citizens of the Earth Foundation, the long-time environmental activist LEE Ken-Cheng:¹⁵

The key problem brought up by the southern group is on “translational interpretation”. This situation is particularly important for us today. With all kinds of transmission channels on Facebook, whether or not your content can attract your audience or trigger them to do something is very crucial. This problem involves the different generations. The kind of people that young people like us can appeal to are other young people. [...] Another is the language being spoken. Those who have worked in the government or served as representatives have a better idea about how to communicate with the public and how to deal with people in the way they expect.

Second, everyone also brought up the cross-region sharing platform. It involves the “hackfoldr” that was just mentioned is used as a national platform or not. It has been used like this these past two days. Being able to include all counties and cities in this is a possibility. Having them all together allows us to observe and learn from other counties and cities. [...] Each region has a contact person who can directly provide the contact information.

In conclusion, the demand in the first stage is about the gap between the central government and the local governments. The gap can only be bridged through open data and public participation. Can we all agree to go to our local governments and convince them to plan at a consistent pace? If everyone agrees to do this, we can organize the issue of information openness into a clearly stated demand.

This means that when the time comes, we have a well-defined issue to pressure the central government with. This will make it convenient to make bullet points for all documents on the existing channels of information. This is something we should be able to accomplish”.

The progression – from crowd-sourced Open Data to ICT-mediated mutual understanding; then to actionable agenda – seems today a natural and powerful one, and in stark contrast with just a decade ago. In the early 2000s, NGOs and governmental agencies often worked in the reverse progression: Fixed, slogan-based agenda; using ICT only for broadcasting and not listening; and opaque in their data production and requirements.

Taiwan has come a long way toward ICT integration. Indeed, this is something we should be able to accomplish.

15. See more: <<https://g0v.hackpad.com/ep/pad/static/d6lANjhb2wY>>.

5 SOME (OPEN) REMARKS

This short essay, divided into three parts (two of which are told by their protagonists) focused mainly on the following research question: at what extent and through what mechanisms city-based participatory processes can influence policy making at another scale than the local government?

With such a question in mind, we tried to focus on a specific face of the right to the city, intended as the right to participate and influence the decisions that regulate the production of urban space, even when: *i*) these are made at another scale that is do not correspond with the administrative boundaries of elected democratic institutions; *ii*) the kind of actors at play in decision making at supra-local scale are not limited to elected officials and institutions but include also a range of non-elected players (as for example private corporations, financial institutions or international organizations).

As is it possible to infer, answering to this question exhaustively and a generalizing the possible conclusion of this essay would require additional extensive comparative research able to include also other case studies. In fact, the two cases analyzed are extremely different in terms of cultural and institutional context, number and kind of social actors engaged, explicit and hidden objectives pursued by the various social component at play, and even tools put at work to reach the objective which animated the promoters of the described changes.

Nonetheless, in the narrative of the shifts which have been happening in the last decade in this two peripheral countries, it is not impossible to observe some common tendencies, centered on the role of hybrid networks in opening supra-local decision making processes and influence the agenda setting towards topics and issues regarding urban political life. In both cases, hybrid networks worked as activators and drivers of new participatory spaces, even if significant differences appear when the two cases are compared.

5.1 Network Players

The backbone of Portuguese network is composed by a limited number of structured actors: CES and other actors coming from the academic environment had a pivotal role in the diffusion of participatory practices from the first pioneer cases to a larger number of municipalities, together with the support of strong ONGs as InLoco. Then, the network has grown thanks to the direct activation of small and medium municipalities that reached a significant influence able to push national institutions to back them and open the possibility to promote participatory practices at national level. The model of the networks between local authorities has been developing in European countries along the last decade as a

reaction to public sector reforms that increased decentralization while at the same time reduced funds transfer, pushing the lower tiers of the public sector to become the agent of dismantlement of public and common goods (what we called in the introduction “asymmetric subsidiarity”). This context introduced a new attention and sensitivity in local authorities (municipalities and parishes or boroughs in the case of Portugal) toward DIs as a mean to share with the citizenship critical and unpopular choices, while at the same time as a space to build coalitions to raise their claims at a higher level. Anyway, it is evident that the Portuguese case hasn't been backed by an equal activation of less structured social actors as Social Movements or network of associations. Furthermore, ICT technologies did not appear to have been playing a specific progressive role in Portugal transformations. Instead, they were often used in top-down strategies of local or national institutions as a tool for proposing regressive governance models, unable to transform transparency and accountability opportunities into collective actions and aimed at substituting public deliberation with one-to-one “light” occasions of dialogue between citizens and single elected officials.

On the opposite, in Taiwan the progressive growth of the civic network followed a different path, and empowered through different tools. A core group of “champions” coming from the civic hacker world have been playing a central role as activators of a fabric of horizontal relations, which has not been so strictly linked to geographic delimitations since the beginning. We highlighted how the growth of the network reached the national level passing through distinct waves of engagement of the de-territorialized community of taiwanese hacktivists before and the social movement and organization of the civil society later on, while institutional players were engaged at the top of this expansive mechanism (when they did not try to step in with ridiculous and anti-productive actions). In this case, in addition to a greater initiative of non-institutional groups, the relational strategies mediated by ICTs enabled the active engagement of several individuals not necessarily linked to active groups or organizations.

5.2 Translation Mechanisms

The different nature of the two networks observed in the two narratives is reflected in different mechanisms of knowledge production and dissemination throughout the networks. We refer here to the kind of mechanisms of translation used, intended as the process through which “the identity of actors, the possibility of interaction and the margins of maneuver are negotiated and delimited”.¹⁶

16. Michel Callon, “Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation: Domestication of the Scallops and the Fishermen of St Brieuc Bay,” *The Sociological Review* 32, no. S1. 1984, p. 196-233.

In the Portuguese case, based on the strong identity of structured actors, translation seems to rely on consolidated mechanisms, where the research and the university have a pivotal function in elaborating a theoretical framework, proposing models of implementation to the institutional players, studying and evaluating cases of implementation and developing dissemination literature. Expert knowledge have been steering the process of translation, even if it must be highlighted the self-reflexive methodology in place in the Portuguese case, where *i*) the institutional actors have been actively engaged in the process of knowledge creation and dissemination; and *ii*) knowledge production have been influenced by the standpoint of researchers that, in many cases, have been also active change agents of the same processes they were studying.

Other important variables to take into account are the pre-existent translation mechanisms and knowledge transfer within the public sector, enabled by a common language and an high level of procedural standardization defined by explicit law provisions.

In the Taiwanese case, instead, translation mechanisms seem to have been more decentralized. At the core of this case there is a pre-existing common cultural framework of free culture movements.¹⁷ Such background enabled the progression from crowd-sourced collection of Open Data to ICT-mediated mutual understanding till the capacity to collectively set an actionable agenda able to influence policy makers at local and national levels. Nonetheless, also in this case it is important to recognize the role of expert knowledge in a translation mechanism based on data mining and the risks of power concentration in a limited number of super-skilled individuals. The risk that we could call as a sort of “nerd suprematism”¹⁸ was effectively reduced by a constant attention to maintain collective action plural and diffuse, so to counterbalance individualities emerging (generally with a highly positive role) during the process of cultural and political transformation. The agents of “counterdemocracy” (Rosanvallon, 2007) guaranteed a self-reflexive approach, through mutual control and respect of the differences between the “thousands of tiny empowerments” (Sandercock, 2004) that joined to compose the movement for change.

5.3 Territorial Outcomes

As it is almost obvious, the cases brought here to public attention confirm that the nature of the actors as well as the mechanism for translation carried out influence the outcome of each network and their capacity to incise in the modification of

17. L. Lessig, *Free Culture: The Nature and Future of Creativity* (Penguin Publishing Group, 2004), <<https://books.google.it/books?id=1hs1GWwnx-wC>>.

18. Collettivo Ippolita, *Nell'acquario di Facebook* (Milano: Ledizioni, 2012).

institutional polity making with different intensity and scope. In the Portuguese case, waiting for the possible implementation of participatory processes at national scale, the main outcome regards the diffusion of participatory practices at municipal level, backed by national networks and institutions. While it can represent an advancement in terms of opening and inclusiveness of new participatory spaces, it is questionable the actual capacity to challenge the sectorialization and fragmentation that is commonly attributed in literature to experiences as PB. Furthermore, although some PBs showed the capacity to overcome a certain degree of inertia typical of public administration organization and gradually modify traditional bureaucratic institutional behavior, the pace followed by such transformation remains too tightly connected to the capacity of self-reform (although ‘under pressure’) of a political-administrative environment. Indeed, it is not possible to observe coalitional strategies able to quickly challenge the neoliberal tendency to privatization of public and common urban spaces and externalization of services, and open new solid spaces for communing strategies. At the same time, the growth of a new generation of inhabitants used to interact in institutionalized participatory spaces could lead to a significant efficiency of national level consultations.

In the Taiwanese example, framework and tools of free culture and civic hacktivism influenced the self-selection of the agenda’s topics, especially in the initial stage characterized by the massive use of “hackaton”’s model for citizen engagement (substantially shaped on barcamp models) and successively evolving in hybrid methodologies as in the case of *Sunflower Camp*. Nonetheless, with the expansion of the G0V initiative and the engagement of new groups of actors the agenda started to cover a greater range of topics, often following the trends existing in mainstream public opinion (ie by providing alternative opinions and sources of counter-information as in the case of the *real-price* incident). Finally, such a strategy reached the opening of a large scale debate on the “National Land Use Act”, a common topic in the debates on the right to the city, being able to create a common space for the interaction of an heterogeneous coalition of hacker, activists, social movements and organizations, including representatives from local and national governmental levels.

5.4 A contribution to re-signify participation?

As seen in these open concluding remarks, the differences between the two examples described here are dense and visible, both in terms of organization and outcomes.

Despite this, both open an important convergent space for a resignification of the conception of participatory processes. The reason is twofold. On one side, in fact, both cases invoke a reflection on the possibility to overcome the “local trap” through a variable geometry of transformations and alliances, which scale up from environments close to the everyday experience of citizens to a larger domain

of power relations. On the other side, in both experiences the promoters seem to have dedicated part of their work of “weaving networks” to the visualization of participatory processes as commons.

This has not been a simple work, as far as often DIs tend to be imagined by different actors as their own property (Smith, 2009), and so spoiled of their characteristic of a “third space” whose rules must be constantly renegotiated in public in order to maintain the participatory space as the pivotal driver of a chain of reconstruction of mutual trust between citizens and representative institutions.

In the two cases highlighted in this essay, it seems to us quite clear that the different organizations which have been playing a role of engine in trying to promote a shift in political culture have been acting with the awareness that, in order to avoid the “tragedy of commons” (Hardin, 2008) and produce meaningful and effective collective action out of an originally “dispersed” wish of citizens to be present and active in the public sphere, a careful attention to organizational matters and a constant “publicity” given to the spaces of rule creation is needed.

So, an explicit goal of the two very different movements that lead the struggle for strengthening and consolidating participatory decision-making spaces in Portugal and Taiwan has been that of constantly safeguarding the nature of these processes as “commons”, devoted to maintain an incremental approach to the accumulation of knowledge and the deepening of democratic intensity of relations among actors. Hence, the nature of participatory processes has been necessarily conceptualized as a permanent hybrid, where the presence of multichannel options - able to attract and commit different interested publics to undertake collective actions - has to be constantly conjugated with multiple goals to be pursued jointly. In such a perspective, attention was needed to safeguard the joint/parallel natures of participatory processes as spaces for building a civic pedagogy through learning by doing together, but also as an opportunity for recognition of differences within an equality setting, and also a space for acknowledgement of urban and social polarization and socio-spatial injustice and, thus, a driver for a struggle aimed to redistribution of powers in society.

In such a perspective, it is worth to notice how the described dynamics necessarily took place alternating moment of patience and impatience, acceleration and slowdowns, supportive actions and un-negotiable call for immediate changes in public institution behaviors. This alternation had (and still has) the aim of negotiate pragmatic reformism and the maintenance of radical horizons oriented by the awareness of the need to enforce soon many still unsatisfied components of the right to the city.

First of all, what was felt as an impellent need, was that of reconceiving participatory processes (especially those shaped by top-down actions in the form that

Ibarra, 2006, defined as “process by invitation”) in order to implement a concrete “centrality of citizens” in decision-making. In fact, in many case, it appeared only in the discursive plan, but had no correspondence in reality, which was marked by a “substantial marginality” of social actors in front of institutions which seem mainly engaged in trying to dominate and over-control participatory mechanism, to cherry-pick just their outcomes which can be considered more convenient for their hidden agendas and interests. From here, we can understand why the struggle to reform institutions an mechanisms of decision making in order to incide in a transformation of political and civic culture of both institutions and citizens has been considered (in the two case) as a priority, being imagined as a precondition for a large and more sustainable change of pace of policies able to embody new enforcement of the right to the city.

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