# LEGITIMACY 2.0

## E-DEMOCRACY AND PUBLIC OPINION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

*Edited by*

PATRICIA MINDUS, ANDREA GREPPI, MASSIMO CUONO

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*Digital democracy has been cutting the edge in fields connected to legal, political and social theory over the last two decades but cross-fertilization and transdisciplinary approaches are still scarce. The impact of ICTs on political and governance processes seem elusive to traditional theoretical settings and mainstream conceptualizations. This is a selection of peer-reviewed conference papers originally presented at the workshop* Legitimacy 2.0: E-democracy and Public Opinion in the Digital Age*, at the IVR World Congress held in Frankfurt, August 18ᵗʰ 2011. They are also being published in the Law, Technology and Society - Proceedings XXV World Congress of IVR Special Workshop on "Legitimacy 2.0: E-democracy and Public Opinion in the Digital Age", Paper series B, ed. by Ulfrid Neumann, Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main 2012. These papers offer different approaches to findings in the field, the purpose being to go beyond the polarization between the apologists that hold the web to overcome the one-to-many architecture of opinion-building in traditional democratic legitimacy, and the critics that warn cyberoptimism entails authoritarian technocracy.*

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Giovanni Allegretti, Coimbra / Portugal

# From Scepticism to Mutual Support:

**Towards a Structural Change in the Relations between Participatory Budgeting and the Information and Communication Technologies?**

*Abstract: Until three years ago, ICT Technologies represented a main "subordinate clause" within the "grammar" of Participatory Budgeting (PB), the tool made famous by the experience of Porto Alegre and today expanded to more than 1400 cities across the planet. In fact, PB – born to enhance deliberation and exchanges among citizens and local institutions – has long looked at ICTS as a sort of "pollution factor" which could be useful to foster transparency and to support the spreading of information but could also lead to a lowering in quality of public discussion, turning its "instantaneity" into "immediatism," and its "time-saving accessibility" into "reductionism" and laziness in facing the complexity of public decision-making through citizens' participation. At the same time, ICTs often regarded Participatory Budgeting as a tool that was too-complex and too-charged with ideology to cooperate with. But in the last three years, the barriers which prevented ICTs and Participatory Budgeting to establish a constructive dialogue started to shrink thanks to several experiences which demonstrated that technologies can help overcome some "cognitive injustices" if not just used as a means to "make simpler" the organization of participatory processes and to bring "larger numbers" of intervenients to the process. In fact, ICTs could be valorized as a space adding "diversity" to the processes and increasing outreach capacity. Paradoxically, the experiences helping to overcome the mutual skepticism between ICTs and PB did not come from the centre of the Global North, but were implemented in peripheral or semiperipheral countries (Democratic Republic of Congo, Brazil, Dominican Republic and Portugal in Europe), sometimes in cities where the "digital divide" is still high (at least in terms of Internet connections) and a significant part of the population lives in informal settlements and/or areas with low indicators of "connection." Somehow, these experiences were able to demystify the "scary monolithicism" of ICTs, showing that some instruments (like mobile phones, and especially the use of SMS text messaging) could grant a higher degree of connectivity, diffusion and accountability, while other dimensions (which could jeopardize social inclusion) could be minimized through creativity. The paper tries to depict a possible panorama of collaboration for the near future, starting from descriptions of some of the above mentioned "turning-point" experiences – both in the Global North as well as in the Global South.*

*Keywords: Participatory Budgeting, ICT, Information and Communication Technologies, Participatory Democracy, the Internet.*

## I. Introduction

Increasingly, the concept of "citizens' participation" is becoming a sort of "*buzzword*" allowing very different meanings, linked to the different typologies of actors (from social movements to international financial institutions linked to the Bretton-Woods consensus), to refer to it when discussing the need to restructure both public policies and strategies for development. What Evelina Dagnino described[1] as a "perverse convergence" between radically progressive and substantially conservative approaches set in a framework of widespread neoliberal politics is somehow a mechanic consequence of that "participatory imperative," which Blondiaux and Sintomer[2] considered one of the pivotal philosophic shifts demanded by a highly complex society marked by a growing mutual mistrust between citizens and representative institutions, and by a gradual increase in social polarisations which everyday raise the number of non-citizens who inhabit our territories.

Within such a framework, is understandable why in the latter half of the twentieth century, the consolidating of democracy as a political regime in Western societies (grounded on liberal values and predominantly operating by means of representative democracy procedures) has gradually accepted to co-exist with other democratic practices. Of the latter, many governments propose to reverse processes that had led to the gradual separation of politics and citizens, opening up windows for direct democracy or throwing their weight behind a mix of the latter and the functioning of representative institutions, which – through mutual support – may reinforce both in the face of market predominance, which affects most decision-making in public life. With the mechanisms created, there has been interest to adequately respond to the crises in governance that translate into crises in confidence strategies and of the State legitimacy. It is in this context that countless forms of democratic experimentation or 'technologies of participation'[3] have been developed. These allow new roles for citizens, associated with projects and programmes traditionally carried out from within the State – which during a given historical period became the Welfare State in the North and the Development State in the South – and has had as one of its consequences an opening up to intervention experiments and citizen organisation 'backed by

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[1] E. Dagnino, Confluência perversa, deslocamentos de sentido, crise discursiva, in: *La cultura en las crisis Latinoamericanas*, Grimson A. (org.), Buenos Aires, Clacso, 2004
[2] Y. Sintomer, L. Blondiaux (2002) L'impératif délibératif, in : *Politix – Revue des sciences sociales du politique,* 15(57), 17-35
[3] J. Arriscado Nunes, *Da democracia técnica à cidadania cognitiva: a experimentação democrática nas "sociedades do conhecimento"*, working paper. Coimbra: Centro de Estudos Sociais, 2006

mobilising practical know-how and the building up of a form of knowledge guided by prudence and by attention to the consequences of the action'.[4]

The above-mentioned process of "hybridisation" was shaped in parallel with another cultural shift linked to the area of technology, where development and diversification of information and communication technologies (ICTs) led to the expansion of the so-called 'information society', posing a new set of questions and challenges to politics, from the emergence of new identities and interest groups to new forms of political action linked to several different social and political players.

The possibility of coupling a greater depth of democracy to the development of new technologies led (in extreme situations) to the creation of a new paradigm, so-called *electronic democracy* (or *E-democracy*), whose 'ontology' might be construed as 'apparent' to the extent that its designs are influenced by the different concepts of democracy.[5] This "electronic democracy" could be conceived as the set of democratic processes which enable citizen participation by means of the use of information and communication technologies and which are linked to fundamental issues about the nature of government and the decision-making processes occurring within the State, and also in the latter's relation to citizens. In the international literature, as well as in the common sense of the majority of political practices, it is intended as a paradigm which differs from the concept of *electronic government* (or *E-Government*). In fact, the latter regards governments' use of information and communication technology as part of an endeavour to modernise and rationalise the provision of public services for users, improving service quality, cutting costs, and providing services which could not be effected under the traditional model.[6] What both concepts have in common is the valorisation of information-providing processes to community members, but the two models are differently located in the progression of the "participatory ladder."[7] In the *E-Government* paradigm they are centred on

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[4] Idem, as in footnote 3.

[5] T. Addison, A. Heshmati, *The new global determinants of FDI flows to developing countries: the importance of ICT and democratization*. Helsinki: UNU/WIDER, 2003; I. Horrocks, L. Prachett, *Electronic democracy: central themes and issues*. Available at: < http://www.clubofamsterdam.com/content.asp?contentid=228>, 1995 last Access: 3rd September 2011.

[6] F. Bannister, N. Wals, *E-Democracy: small is beautiful?,* 2002 Available HTTP: http://www.tcd.ie/StatisICTs/seminars/semcontent/towards2002/frankbannister2.doc (last access: November 8th, 2011); P. Graft, J. Svensson, Explaining e-Democracy development: a quantitative empirical study', in: *Information Polity*, 11, 2006, 123-134

[7] S. Arnstein, S., A ladder of citizen participation, in: *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 35: 216-224, 1969

information, communication and consultation, while in a real *E-Governance* perspective they would privilege strategies of co-decision, co-evaluation and co-management.

Debates hinging on the effects and potentialities of the *association* between a new creative use of ICTs and innovative practices of directly involving citizens into policy decision-making have been tied to the two great families of expectations. On the one hand, positive expectations stemming from the potential contained with the linkage between democracy and ICTs refer to the redistribution of power, by means of a broadening of democratic participation in a kind of 'virtual public sphere', and also by the possibility of increasing transparency in government and its control by citizens. On the other hand, growing negative expectations ensuing from the realisation that very often, instead of contributing to the redistribution of power, E-democracy results in an even stronger concentration of power in the hands of few institutions or groups, re-invigorating market predominance or the centrality of the State and its dominant position, to the detriment of the other players in the political system and in society[8].

Taking as a departure point the contradictions that emerge from a number of relevant experiences centred on the building of innovative relations between representative democracy and participatory democracy, this paper aims above all to analyse certain facets of this ambivalent relationship at a time when to these relations must be added the challenges generated by the broadening of means of communication and by the creation of new, possible spaces for political participation, which go beyond traditional 'formal' processes, especially when they relate with the social-networking sphere. More precisely, my reflections will be focusing on a specific innovative "arena" aiming to build new relations among representative democracy, participatory democracy, and new technologies, which, in the past few years, has become prominent, acquiring its own status within the framework of institutional experimentations with Participatory Budgeting (PB).

The paper takes as a starting point a scenario in which relations between the State and civil society are tangentially characterized by the principle of 'double delegation'[9] – which translates into a separation between specialists and lay persons, and between representation and participation. In this perspective, it moves from the hypothesis that Participatory Budgeting experiences are a clear example of how the existence of strong social mobilisation and the convergence between State-associated political projects and civil society allow for consideration

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[8] K. Hacker, J. Djik, *Digital Democracy, issues of theory and practice*, The Netherlands: Sage Publication, 2000
[9] M. Callon, P. Lascoumes, Y. Barthe, *Agir dans un monde incertain: essai sur la démocratie technique*. Paris : Seuil, 2001

of democratic processes which may articulate representation and participation in a constructive and innovative way and, at the same time, create spaces for citizen empowerment and involvement in domains traditionally viewed as the 'reserve territory of experts'.

Besides these reasons given for the choice of PBs, two further reasons must be added: Participatory Budgets are very *clearly defined objects* in regards to the features and presence of technical contents, and have been multiplying and deepening, both numerically and qualitatively, in the world context[10]. Indeed, PBs – mass participatory practices applying the method of community debate (and possibly co-decision) to budget portions of local public, infra-municipal or supra-local institutions – respond well to these challenges to clarity, pertinence and meaning.

This paper is arranged into three parts. The first aims at situating, succinctly, PB experimentations in the arena of debate around the intensifying of democracy and – more specifically – on the association between democracy, technology and participation. The second part centres on the description of some experiences which offer proof of gradual intensifying of relations between PB and the use of ICTs, with the aim of offering readers concrete data of a switch from a model of relational grammar which has tended to 'subordinate' the use of technology to the building of new arenas for public deliberation (usually clustered around the physical co-presence of the different players involved) to a new paradigm of mutual collaboration. The cases presented feed the concluding section of the article where (also incorporating a brief reference to other PB mirror cases) a number of possible (partial) conclusions are presented. They leave issues open to further debate and challenges for in-progress reformulation on linkages between new technologies and broadened experiences of mass participation in building public policies for transforming and managing a territory.

The author wants to underline that there were several reasons for choosing examples like the case of Belo Horizonte (BH), the Brazilian metropolis whose PB process started in 1993, or the Portuguese cases of Lisbon (2007) and Cascais (2011) and the PBs of South Kivu in the Democratic Republic of Congo (2011). Beyond their 'relevance', in fact, and beyond their capacity of representing – if taken together – an 'evolutionary line' in the application of ICT's to the 'institutional design' of a Participatory Budget, they offer pertinent reflections and innovative

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[10] Y. Sintomer, C. Herzberg, A. Roecke, *Participatory budgets in a European comparative approach. Perspectives and chances of the cooperative state at the municipal level in Germany and Europe* - volume II (Final Report - documents), Berlin: Centro Marc Bloch, 2005; Y. Sintomer, G. Allegretti, G., *I bilanci partecipativi in Europa. Nuove sperimentazioni democratiche nel vecchio continente*. Roma: Ediesse, 2009; Sintomer, Y.; Allegretti, G. (2012, forthcoming), *Os Orçamentos Participativos na Europa. Entre Democracia Particiaptiva e Modernização dos Serviços Publicos,* Almedina, Coimbra.

points of view on institutional re-organisation trends which come from countries located in the periphery or in the semi-periphery of the world. With no wish to impose a 'romanticised' view of South-North relations in the field of the critical theory of modernity, the author considers pertinent to choose examples taken from what is often considered 'the *semi-periphery* of the world of knowledge'[11], where PBs took root and shape from the 1990s onwards. In fact, it is in the countries of the South (or in countries regarded as peripheral within the European context, as Portugal) that we may find contexts of greater social polarisation, which bear the brunt, in relative terms, of the digital divide. And – even if it appears strange to say – is often here that a more "daring" use of ICTs in connection to Participatory Budgeting has been attempted, up to now.

## II. Placing PB in the heart of participatory process of governance innovation.

What is exactly participatory budgeting? And could this definition and its main features be influential in explaining the "tense relationships" with the use of ICTs in some concrete world experiences? As Sintomer et al. demonstrated[12] through their comparative researches, the definition itself of participatory budgeting is unlikely to generate consensus, especially after the basic principles which shaped the Latin American experiences in the early 90s travelled to other continents and enrooted in several European (as well as Asian and African) countries, merging with other different consolidated participatory and/or consultative traditions, let aside the diverse socio-political contexts[13].

Today, we could generically describe PB as a democratic process in which no-elected citizens directly contribute to discuss and possibly co-decide how to allocate part of a municipal budget or another budget that affects them. Such a description implies that a PB process could be experimented not only in the definition of public institutions' budgets, but also inside cooperative and/or entrepreneurial organizations belonging to the Third Sector as well as to the private sector. Despite this "openness" of its applicability, it must be underlined that the name "Participatory Budgeting" today mainly stands as a definition to be used for pointing out processes whose

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[11] Boaventura de Sousa Santos; L. Avritzer, 'Introdução: para ampliar o cânone democrático', in Boaventura de Sousa Santos (ed.), 2002, *Democratizar a democracia: os caminhos da democracia participativa*, Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira.
[12] Y. Sintomer, C. Herzberg, A. Roecke (2005), note 10
[13] Y. Sintomer, G. Allegretti, C. Herzberg and A. Röcke (2010), see note 10; Shah, (org.), *Participatory Budgeting, Public Sector Governance and Accountability series*, World Bank Publications, Washington, D.C., 2007; M. McNeil, C. Malena, Demanding Good Governance, World Bank Publications, Washington, D.C., 2010.

pivotal aim is to recreate a dialogue with elected institutions, which represent a main difference with other procedures (as the so-called "Community Driven Development" mechanisms in which many international financial institutions and donors are involved) which also discuss budgets of public interest with local inhabitants, stakeholders and other potential beneficiaries, but without creating explicit relations of dialogue with local administrative bodies and institutions.

The doubt that political and academic literature have still not been able to solve is whether participatory budget it is only a "standard procedure", i.e. a "device" marked by clear relations between simple and recognizable factors, or (on the contrary) a series of "principles" which could be locally adapted to the point that they produce processes which are very different one from another. Under this second perspective, participatory budgeting could be possibly seen as an "*ideoscape*"[14], signifying a political model that travels globally but exists through local appropriation, so incrementally transforming the model itself through its concrete localized implementations. If the concrete experiences that got inspired by this travelling model are so diverse, it also depends from the fact that participatory budgeting showed, since the first original Brazilian experiences from the '90s, a wide range of possible goals to be reached, which enlightened a large series of different "meanings" that could be given to its experimentation, according to specific instruments and procedures used to shape its organizational architecture. Somehow, the holistic approach and the conceptual complexity on which the idea of participatory budgeting relays oblige to give attention to the coherence between the declared goals which inspire each PB experience, and the "tools" and "techniques" used to reach such specific aims.

Some recent experiments done by the literature help us to classify PBs. For example, Sintomer, et al. and Sintomer and Allegretti[15] tried to create some "orientation maps" made of "ideal-types" of different families of participatory budgeting: these are strictly related to procedural typologies characterizing each specific process, and to prevalent models of public management privileged in the context where each experiment is inserted (and often converging for experiences located in the same countries). Under a different perspective, adapting the pragmatic proposal made by Fung[16], could be possible to imagine two differentiated "macro-categories" of PB according to a sort of "reading standpoint" of the implementers: (1) the

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[14] A. Appadurai, "Global Ethnoscapes: Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology," Interventions: Anthropologies of the Present. R.G. Fox (Ed.). Santa Fe: School of American Research, 191-210.

[15] For Y. Sintomer, C. Herzberg, A. Roecke, *and* Y. Sintomer, G. Allegretti, see note 10.

[16] A. Fung, A Preface to Pragmatic Democracy: Toward Continuous Innovation in Governance (April 4, unpublished working paper, presented in the conference "Participatory Governance and Decentralization, held at the Wilson Center, in Washington DC (9-10 May 2011).

"deontological" and the (2) "consequentialist" ones. The (1) would represent experiences where innovations are valued because "they help to create right relationships among citizens and between citizens and the state", thinking that "democracy worth having simply requires greater citizen participation (participatory innovation), deliberation (deliberative experiments), and rights to information and knowledge (transparency) quite apart from any other effects that these innovations have". As Fung suspects, it is possible that this "deontological perspective" could be imagined as the main strong driver of the explosion of participatory experiments, which look to participation as "a norm of institutional appropriateness". The (2) *consequentialist perspective* would inform those experiences where the democratic innovation look to itself as more or less valuable "according to the extent to which it secures other values that we care about — policies that are responsive to citizens interests, social justice, state accountability, wiser policies, and so on". So, they look as experiences which reify their main objectives through specific tools which guarantee consequentiality and coherence between motivations, aims and results of each specific experiment. These two quotations (among others possible) help to identify the level of complexity that any attempt of strictly classifying PB experiences has, suggesting a possible meaninglessness especially of those attempts wishing to establish a hierarchization of cases based on an absolute "value" of single experiences, which is not closely related to their capacity of transforming the policies and the civic/political culture of the specific context in which any experiment takes place.

The diversity of possible "glances" on specific PB experiences reflects a spread belief of both decision makers and scholars that democratic participatory innovations are particularly important when they address specific failures and democratic deficits in the representative policy making process[17], thus somehow reverting (or completing and intervening onto) some of the "unfulfilled promises of Democracy" launched into the public debate by Norberto Bobbio[18]. In the case of participatory budgeting, such a point of view can influence even the definition itself of PB, as we can notice in the formula commonly used by the English think-thank The PB-Unit while stressing how PB is a process which "entrust a given community the right to decide" on parts of a public budget, so emphasizing the pivotal role that the construction of "mutual trust"

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[17] A. Fung, "Democracy and the Policy Process" in: Oxford Handbook of Public Policy, M. Rein, M. Moram, Robert E. Goodin [orgs.] New York: Oxford University Press, 2006, 669-685.
[18] N. Bobbio, The Future of Democracy. A Defence of the Rules of the Game, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis (original title "Il future della democrazia, 1984, Einaudi, Torino), 1987.

between citizens and political actors plays in the setting of any participatory budgeting experience.

Due to the proved difficulties of providing any "normative" as well as any "essentialist" definition of a participatory budgeting based on its goals/motivations, is possible to privilege a methodological approach in allowing a more precise characterization of what PB processes consist of. In this article, the definition proposed by the "*Comparative research on Participatory Budgets in a European Perspective*" coordinated by Yves Sintomer with the Marc Bloch Center of Berlin, is adopted. It is mainly built around five criteria which are: (1) the financial and/or budgetary dimension must be explicitly discussed, being that participatory budgeting quite everywhere involves dealing with the problem of limited resources; (2) the city level or a (decentralized) district with an elected body and some power over administration have to be involved, (the neighbourhood level is not enough); (3) it has to be a repeated process (one meeting or one referendum on financial issues does not constitute an example of participatory budgeting, but defines more a simply budget consultation); (4) the process must include some form of public deliberation within the framework of specific meetings/forums (the opening of administrative meetings or classical representative instances to 'common' citizens is not participatory budgeting); (5) some accountability on the output is required, and it could possibly be extended to the control over the implementation phase of what has been co-decided.

Although such a definition was composed for depicting the panorama of institutionally-driven participatory budgets in the European context, thus taking into account their level of slowly-evolving (and often '*light*') experimentalism, such a methodological definition could be extended as a "minimum common denominator" also to other countries and continents, despite in those contexts other elements can frequently connote PBs. So, it is according to a similar perspective that the recent study "*Learning from the South*" (funded and published by the governmental cooperation agency of Germany, 2010)[19] built its world-panorama of participatory budgets, recognizing that the fast transformation and the instability of existing practices, together with the lack of specific studies monitoring the quality of many experiences, make it difficult to exactly count and classify world PBs, even if the progressive expansion of their influence in local context is undeniable.

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[19] Sintomer, Y.; G. Allegretti, C. Herzberg, A. Röcke, "*Learning from the South. Participatory Budgeting Worldwide – an invitation to global cooperation*". *Global Dialog*, nº 25/2010, Bonn: InWent/GIZ, 2010 (versions in English and German)

In this framework, it is worth to underline that another significant difficulty comes when evaluating whether participatory budget are successful — whether on "deontological" or "consequentialist" grounds — being that often the way in which outcomes are produced is not mechanically related just to a particular innovation such as PB, but depends on a complex institutional mix that includes several different participatory innovations (either coordinated among them or not) together with more conventional representative and electoral arrangements[20] which could have different "weight" and levels of performance.

Due to the above mentioned reasons, univocally placing PB – as instruments for political innovation – in the context of the six models of democracy proposed by David Held, is more difficult than it must have been in the early 1990s, when the first experiments took shape in Brazil, within a framework of great tension associated to the democratisation of local government centred around citizen involvement in public decision-making and the idea of the constructive contribution of the 'local' in reformulating national and global strategies. Held's classification includes a construction of ideal-typical models of democracy defined as 'legal, competitive, pluralist, participatory, libertarian and plebiscitory'. The latter three could be contained in what Santos and Avritzer (2002) title 'high intensity democracies'. Especially after the 'return of the caravels'[21], that is, the phase of PB 'experiment massification'[22] – which led to the extending of the South-American example to more than 1,400 cities of the American sub-continent[23], some African and Asian cities, and some hundreds of European municipalities –, the univocal inclusion of PB in a single one of the above mentioned ideal-types becomes more risky, although it is clear, in most cases, that PB tends to fit into 'high intensity' democratic conceptions.

This is due to the fact that PB sets up an 'articulation centre', increasingly key to other participatory experiences, but do not hold any 'monopoly' where possibilities arise for experimenting with innovative processes of citizen participation in public choices. On the contrary, PBs tend more and more to become 'contaminated' and to fuse with other experiments,

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[20] Fung, 2001 (see note 16)

[21] G. Allegretti, C. Herzberg, *El 'retorno de las carabelas'. Los presupuestos participativos de América Latina en el contexto europeo,* Ámsterdam/Madrid: TNI Working Paper/FMI, 2004

[22] Y. Cabannes "*72 Frequently Asked Questions about Participatory Budgeting*", UN/Habitat, Available HTTP: <http://www.internationalbudget.org/themes_/PB/72QuestionsaboutPB.pdf>, 2003 (last access: 18th December, 2011)

[23] In its updated Portuguese version, the manual *72 Frequently Asked Questions about Participatory Budgeting,* 2009, coordinated by UNHABITAT and authored by Y. Cabannes, takes into account a number of national laws which made PB a 'compulsory' urban management methodology for the municipalities of some countries (Peru, 2003, and the Dominican Republic, July 2007) and highly recommended by national governments, such as that of Venezuela.

'diluting' the features with which they started out, adopting different, consolidated techniques and thus affirming themselves in the collective imagination as 'meta-models', adaptable to different conceptions of democracy which shape numerous practices[24]. The variety of reference political 'horizons', as also the overall and specific objectives that sustain many PB practices, is particularly clear in Europe, as shown by Sintomer and Allegretti[25], evincing, at motivational level, new 'ideal-typical models' for PB adoption in the Old Continent. These relate to neo-corporatist forms (of which the forging of public/private partnerships is also an example) or pursue objectives for building 'participatory democracy', 'participatory modernisation of the public administration apparatus', or simply 'proximity democracy' or 'community development'. Besides, it is impossible nowadays not to highlight the 'entropic evolutivity' and sometimes 'schizophrenia' of PB (Allegretti, 2007), evinced in pan-European comparative research, outlining the fluctuating of concrete practices between different reference political models for each type of experimentation[26].

### III. Which new grammar when the use of ICTs connected to PB is concerned?

Adding a new variable (such as the relation between participatory processes and ICTs) to the above discussed variation in the uses and 'ordering' of PB within the different conceptions of 'grand democracy' (to employ a much-used definition in Scandinavia), might – theoretically – complicate modelling of these types of processes. However, experience tells us that in many cases ICT use does not determine new PB 'hybrid configurations'. Rather, it tends to lend new vigour to the main interpretational line of each experiment.

Until now, which kind of place did ICTs have in Participatory Budgeting experiments? As shown in a few articles[27] usually PB has tended to favour spaces for direct meeting among inhabitants and between these and the (political and technical) representatives of the institutional

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[24] L. Bobbio, Dilemmi della democrazia partecipativa, *Democrazia e Diritto,* 4, 2006, 11-26; D. Chavez, paper presented at the seminar *Jornadas Internacionales sobre Presupuestos Participativos*, Málaga, Spain, 28/31 March 2007; G. Allegretti, M. Secchi, Les Budgets Participatives (BP) en Italie : une géographie en changement continu, in: *Territoires*, 482, september 2007

[25] For Y. Sintomer, G. Allegretti, 2012, see note 10.

[26] The text by Sintomer *et alii* also presents 'six procedures of European PBs', mapping out (through a hexagonal graph) 'participation typologies' which range from 'participation of organised interest', to Porto Alegre in Europe', through 'Public/private negotiation tables', 'proximity participation' and mere 'consultations on public finances'.

[27] T. Peixoto, *Beyond Theory: e-Participatory Budgeting and its Promises for eParticipation*, in *European Journal of ePractice,* 2009*, accessible at:* http://www.epractice.eu/files/7.5.pdf (last access: 13th December, 2011); G. Allegretti, E. Schettini Martins Cunha, M. Matias, As Tecnologias de Informação e Comunicação na gramática dos Orçamentos Participativos: tensões e desafios de uma abordagem essencialmente subordinada, In: *Anais do II Compolítica*, Belo Horizonte, 2007.

sphere. This was not only due to an overall setting which has viewed PB as a space for rebuilding social ties and interrupted or 'polluted' relations between administrators and citizens, as well as the results of real experiences. But this has proved to be positive also in rebuilding a social pedagogy[28] and a negotiated solidarity[29], even in circumstances where 'concrete results' have not differed widely from that which could have been provided by the traditional exercise of power delegated by competent administrators[30].

In such an overall picture, until at least 2007 the 'grammar' of relations between PB and ICTs has mainly favoured a 'subordinate' position for technologies, in the face of possibilities for wasting energy and resources (human and economic) in activating 'hot' methods of interaction among territorial players. Viewed as a 'cold medium' for interaction (on a similar level to referenda or questionnaire-driven or telephone surveys), ICTs have been 'relegated' to the fringe of many participatory processes (and especially PBs), with proposals being submitted by real-time meetings to 'after-the-event control'[31]. This has also occurred in situations where ICT use was explicitly evaluated[32] as a 'social inclusion' factor regarding persons or groups (commuters, families residing far from the centre where meetings are held, the sick or mobility-challenged) whose timetables or rhythms do not dovetail with public offline meetings, as in the case of Modena, Italy. There – in 2006 – a pilot project integrated in the municipal system of electronic information, *Unox1*, provided online streaming for some meetings, and some temporal 'pauses' to allow for interventions and suggestions which could later be presented for presence-driven debate taking place in the PB 'main branch'.

In this reading, evaluation of the new 'spaces' under construction through the cycle of debates made possible by the existence of PB has been much more important than a reflection on the 'time' of this interaction, although this has meant broadening participation to the whole year (from January to December), or that depth has been sacrificed to evaluation techniques on the feasibility of proposals put forward by inhabitants in every situation where the PB cycle has been limited to the second half of the year. Thus, ICTs have hardly ever been valorised as regards the

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[28] D. Schmidt, *A "desidiotização" da cidadania. A dimensão pedagógica do Orçamento Participativo*. Intervento al Seminario *O OP visto pelos seus pesquisadores*. PMPA, Porto Alegre, 2000
[29] R. Abers, *Inventing Local Democracy,* London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000
[30] S. Ravazzi, *Civicrazia. Quando i cittadini decidono*, Turin: Aracne, 2007.
[31] In countless examples, suggestions put forward by inhabitants by computerised means (email or web pages with interactive files) are put to the evaluation of public meetings, as is the case in Venice Lido, Pieve Emmanuele or Grottammare in Italy.
[32] V. Borghi, La sperimentazione del Bilancio Partecipativo nel Comune di Modena. Report di monitoraggio: l'avvio della sperimentazione e la fase di ascolto strutturato, Available HTTP: http://www.comune.modena.it/bilanciopartecipativo/documenti-gen2005.shtml (last access: 14th December, 2011)

'instantaneity' component itself (capable of modifying the volume of the 'time' factor in the process), but have been submitted to deadlines of real-time debate taking place in meetings, in studios or in local and thematic working groups which characterise most of the PB 'organisational architecture'.

Only rarely was greater attention given to the valorisation of some specific ICT potentialities, such as in Jun, a municipality of little more than 2,350 inhabitants, in the Spanish province of Granada. There – since 2001 – all the families were made 'literate' so as to use computer means and were assisted in buying family computers or in using public spaces with Internet access. This pre-condition has made voting possible in the Annual Budget held in the Municipal Assembly plenary meeting almost simultaneously with inhabitants' web-based voting.[33] In this case, the temporal 'gap' between the two voting situations is politically motivated, since it aims to secure for those elected the final vote on public documents (although already voted – on a consultative basis – by the inhabitants). This represented, anyhow, a clear acknowledgment of the prominence of representative democracy.

Pilot schemes such as the one mentioned above are directed at linking the real-time components of PB processes and ICT use through a syntax based on 'coordinate sentences'. However, it would appear difficult to reproduce these on a larger scale, for practical and economic reasons. It is, however, true that – although there are as yet no comparative analyses on PB use of ICTs[34] – the impression is felt, based on fact, that the majority of experiences until recently did not aim to build virtual spaces for attributing to ICTs the function which Hacker and Djik[35] might define as 'conversation' among players, based on the acknowledgment of their capacity to stimulate the 'mental dimension' of interchange and shared understanding.

Where Vignola, Italy, is concerned, implementing the new technologies in the PB process was indeed made along different lines, not favouring articulation between real-time components and online voting. In this case, the same importance was accorded to real-time voting and online voting. This meant that the winning project was approved by almost 60% of electronic votes, even if on the overall process electronic voting did not overcome the 24% of expressions of interest[36]. A similar "divide" played as a disincentive for physical participation in meetings,

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[33] See http://www.ayuntamientojun.org

[34] Recently, the project 'ePOLIS' (Co-operative Research on ICT and Participatory Budgeting in Local Governance) was created by the TNI Institute of Amsterdam, within the VII Framework.

[35] K. Hacker, J. Djik, 2006 (sse note 8).

[36] G. Allegretti, M.E. Frascaroli, *Percorsi condivisi. Contributi per un atlante delle pratiche partecipative in Italia,* Editrice Alinea, Firenze, 2006.

leading the 2005 PB experiment to death. Such an outcome generated a widespread scepticism, which trough books and manuals[37] acted for some years as a sort of global "disincentive" to reproduce a tight link between Participatory Budgeting and the use of ICTs in voting on-line the main budgetary priorities. Such a behaviour was mainly justified by the fear of "flattening" co-decisions with citizens on very simple issues, gathering consensus through a bare "click-on-the-mouse", so depreciating more complex forms of prioritisation able to stimulate a higher quality dialogue between the citizens.

A sort of "prejudice" on PBs centred on the active role of ICTs in the decision-making phase spread around in the first decade of the 21st century, based on the impression that it was letting aside all its "pedagogic potentials" and the interest for a "high quality of deliberation" in favour of the simple summing of individual preferences indicate by inhabitants in the "grey" space hidden behind a screen. It is not a case if Sintomer and Ganuza[38] have been observing that – especially in Spain – the use of technologies for voting priorities in Participatory Budgeting experiments seems today a feature belonging mainly to the processes implemented by conservative political coalitions, whose motivation for experimenting PB is more linked to goals of administrative modernisation than of creating empowerment and fostering the access to co-decision to all of the citizens, and especially to vulnerable social groups. One clear case is that of Malaga Municipality, a city of around 600,000 inhabitants whose local government (led by the conservative Popular Party) started in 2007 an E-PB, while its Provincial Government (led by a Socialist-Communist coalition) was promoting a project for promoting Participatory Budgeting experiments in more than 20 small cities in the roundabouts, focusing on the centrality of face-to-face relations among participants. The Malaga E-PB resulted in a very efficient device, as far as the control of decisions' implementation was concerned: in fact, an integrated system of monitoring which used Internet and mobile phones (mainly SMS) was set in place, enhancing transparency and accountability of the overall "implementation cycle" of PB. What, unfortunately, remained very foggy was the phase of hierarchisation of budget choices, because the electronic mechanism which serves to aggregate the individual preferences and then sort out the list of most voted priorities remains a "grey zone", whose logics is not clearly exposed to the

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[37] For Y. Sintomer and G. Allegretti, 2009 see note 10; G. Allegretti, P. Garcia Lleiva, P. Paño Yanez, *Viajando por los presupuwstos participativos*, Malaga, CEDMA, 2011.
[38] Y. Sintomer, E. Ganuza, *Democracia participative y modernización de los servicios públicos: Investigación sobre las experiencias de presupuesto participativo en Europa*, TNI, Amsterdam, 2011.

public, so letting the clear impression that the obscurity of the traditional political culture is not even challenged, let aside modified, by the Participatory Budgeting (*idem*).

## IV. Enlightening transformations: evidences from some cases in peripheral and semipheriferal countries.

Consulting comparative literature on PB, we see that there are four main dimensions contributing decisively to the success of 'experimentations': political will, the self-organizing capacity of the social fabrics, financial autonomy of the institutions that develop these experiments, and the institutional design of the process[39]. The latter dimensions represent factors which justify inserting PB in the context of technical processes, either because they enable social interaction on 'high technical content' themes, or because the interaction in question is enabled through complex, creative and innovative 'social engineering' procedures. These must take into account the difficulties, firstly, of stimulating public participation on an apparently complex theme and, secondly, of relating social debate to the operating of administrative apparatuses, very often displaying inertia.

With regard to the first factor, the greatest innovation of PB could even be condensed to its capacity for 'socialising' the debate on public costs (and sometimes even on revenues[40]), without trivialising it, but bringing to the fore the 'narrative' and more communicative dimension of the theme broached[41]. At the same time, it serves to demystify the more technical components of the contents through a re-politicising of the debate and to provide a 'translation' of traditionally inaccessible and 'elitist' languages. In this perspective, it is the 'architecture' of the process itself which must guarantee 'accessibility' of the themes under debate through linkage of the specific spaces given over to ascertaining the technical aspects of the proposals debated and the capacity of the process to shape awareness and 'enable' greater depth of language and knowledge to benefit participants 'in the course of action'. This indispensable engineering explains the caution

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[39] G. Allegretti, *Autoprogettualità come paradigma urbano*, Florence: Alinea, 2003; L. Avritzer, Z. Navarro (org.), *A inovação democrática no Brasil*, São Paulo: Cortez, 2002; Y. Cabannes, *Participatory Budgeting and Local finances,* Base-Document for the network URBAL N° 9, Porto Alegre: PGU-ALC/Comissão Europeia/Prefeitura de Porto Alegre, 2004; G. de Grazia, A. C. Ribeiro (org.), *Experiências de Orçamento Participativo no Brasil. Periodo de 1997 a 2000*, Petrópolis: Editora Vozes/Forum Nacional de Participação Popular, 2003.
[40] It is the case of some experiences done between 2008 and 2011 in Grottammare (Italy) or Santa Cristina d'Aro (Catalonia – Spain), where PB was also used to partially challenge the structure of revenues, discussing slices of local taxes or private/public partnerships. As underlined in Sintomer, Allegretti, Herzberg and Röcke (2010), the African context is today that where PBs shows more interest in affecting revenues through the discussion of expenditures, so evidencing an important "paradigmatic shift" in conceiving the device.
[41] G. Allegretti, 2003 (see note 36).

with which many institutions organizing PB process decisions approach the use of other elements which might be perceived by inhabitants as a tool for a 're-technicisation' of budget decisions and for a 'progressive deflecting' of inhabitants from decision-making processes, giving the impression that the political will for a true 'opening up' of the public apparatus to incisive contribution on the part of the territory's inhabitants may amount to little more than false propaganda. Usually, this type of fear affects the use of 'calculation matrices' containing socio-technical factors for vote-counting and priorities-setting in regard to those participating in meetings[42]. Similar considerations apply to ICT use in Participatory Budgeting, in roles placing them beyond a merely 'informational' use or process monitoring[43]. Presumably, it is the image of ICTs as a strong technological component and containing potentially 'elitist' elements in terms of access that determine a 'syntax of ICT use' centred on its 'subordination' to the face-to-face parts of PB cycles. What is worth highlighting is that this 'image' might represent the 'projection' of the fear of generations as yet not totally at ease with technology. This has – undoubtedly – a negative effect on dialogue with other groups (such as young people) for whom the language of the new technologies is user-friendly and even stimulates their engaging with public debate.

These reflections show the complexity of integrating PBs – as technological instruments – in debates centred on democracy and technology, just as it is not possible to place PBs univocally – as instruments for political innovation – in the sphere of the six families of democracy summed up by Held[44]. Some concrete cases can help us to have evidences which focus on how the "fear" of using ICTs in connection to Participatory Budgeting is gradually being demystified, so re-centring the presence of information and communication technologies as one of the important elements that could shape the device, without negatively affecting its outcomes and impacts.

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[42] In Europe, these matrices (very widespread in Brazil) are used only in some cases in Spain and England. Their central tenet is that the needs of those present at PB debates are not the only ones in the territory. Thus, 'pondering' the weight attributed to the votes of those present with other objective factors (number of inhabitants in an area, beneficiaries of a project, degree of need of the action proposed, capacity of the proposal to create 'positive discrimination' for more deprived social categories, etc.) may help to bear in mind – while the process is ongoing, and not just after the event – the needs of players absent from same, as also territorial sustainability features. Under this perspectives, such matrix are conceived as tools for fostering social justice and a more equal redistribution of public resources. See: G. Allegretti, Giustizia sociale, inclusività e altre sfide aperte per il futuro dei processi partecipativi europei, in: *Democrazia Partecipativa. Esperienze e prospettive in Italia e in Europa,* U. Allegretti (org.),. Firenze: Firenze University Press, 2009; A. Marquetti; G. Campos, R. Pires, *Democracia Participativa e Redistribuição - Análise de Experiências de Orçamento*, Xama, S. Paulo, 2008
[43] G. Allegretti, paper ""*Knowledge city and citizens knowledge: which help from IT to participatory process? Examples from some participatory budgeting experiences"* presented at the conference "*Knowledge Cities. Future of Cities in Knowledge Economy*", Shah Alam, Malaysia, 16-19 July 2007.
[44] D. Held, *Models of Democracy*, 3rd ed, Palo Alto, CA:Stanford University Press/Polity Press, 2006

*1. Belo Horizonte, the city which dared to start an E-PB*

The first example which is worth to quote, is undoubtedly that of Belo Horizonte, a metropolis in the central-southern Brazil, the country where PB first took shape, in a context of the re-democratisation of the nation (after two decades of military dictatorship) in which social forces endeavoured not only to restore the democratic regime, but also to re-define the very meaning of democracy[45]. The case of Belo Horizonte does not belong to that family of Participatory Budgeting whose origin put down roots in the pressures of organised civil society, as occurred in Porto Alegre (the metropolis whose success made PB be adopted by several Brazilian municipalities, at times in a mimetic fashion) or other cities in which the process was put on the way to radical horizons. Indeed, the capital city of Minas Gerais (2.4 million inhabitants in a metropolitan area with 5 million) saw the first PB edition applied in 1993, on the exclusive initiative of the government, when the Workers' Party came to power in the municipal authorities and decided to follow the national party political mainstream.

Commonly referred to as 'OP/BH' (i.e. PB/BH), the process in Belo Horizonte was always characterised by a great capacity for evolution. Initially designed to adhere to a strategy whereby the entire administration would be involved in implementing it (through the creation of a communication plan and the pre-definition of the values destined for public deliberation), as time went on, PB/BH saw its design altered in almost all of its editions, stamped by two major phenomena. The first – consonant with what had occurred in other cities – was the conversion, in 1999, to biennial cycles (as opposed to annual, as had been the case). The second might be defined as a gradual 'political marginalisation' which led the PB to be moved from the Mayor's Office (which secured its transversal control over all investment areas) to the Planning Secretariat, through the Public Participation Coordinating body, as it is the case in many countries. Another reading of this move to the Planning Secretariat is that of the institutionalisation of the process, which coincides with the creation of a specific institutional structure to put it in place, removing the need for the Mayor's role as activator of the process. Paradoxically, these changes were the result of an intention – just, but almost obsessive – to

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[45] It may be recovered that such a context worked in favour of effective de-centralisation of political power, which strengthened municipal governments and enabled some of them – those of a more progressive and innovative nature – to begin experimenting in the area of new political participatory institutions, until then in government hands. Within these democratic experimentations, PB, as a process of public deliberation on public municipal budgeting and policies, stood out given its capacity for democratising a central dimension of public decision-making until then centralised in the hands of techno-bureaucracies (the public budget), for combining direct and representative democracy, and for placing citizen-individuals at its centre, going beyond visions of social dialogue centred merely on strong pre-organised stakeholders.

guarantee that endeavours co-decided with the inhabitants could be carried out in a manner that prevents a decline in process credibility that affected other examples negatively. This same intention gave rise to three main transformations in the PB/BH format, with the aim of increasing progressive control by the citizens on the life of public works:

1) link to the Office for Planning, organised as a space which is able to secure the best concrete effects and linkage to long-term investment;

2) the creation of Citizens' Committees for Inspecting and Follow-up (COMFORÇAS) for the implementing of choices co-decided with the inhabitants, who also feature as agents for the control of building sites;

3) the creation in 2004 of a Participation School[46] aiming to create 'social multipliers' to broaden the PB social catchment area, offering training opportunities for community leadership and for other persons involved in the city's participatory network. By means of the systematising of the different initiatives that were being undertaken in this regard, the School has already, in a few years, helped expand the organisation of civil society[47].

As demonstrated by Avritzer[48], in the past few years Belo Horizonte's PB has had an average investment, decided with the inhabitants, which did not exceed 3.93% of the total budget, having had a maximum investment of 5.35% of available resources. Compared to cities such as Porto Alegre, which reached levels of investment ranging from 20 to 30% in the mid 1990s, it is easy to understand how PB/BH had a 'residual' range (instead of a 'pivotal' one), being shaped as an effective 'sector policy' in the area of social policies and recovery of auto-produced informal settlements (i.e. slums), centring around 22.29% of the capital city's population[49]. Although the variation in *per capita* investment, distributed by means of PB in the different BH districts, has hardly ever exceeded R$90[50], economic surveys show that PB/BH has succeeded in providing a

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[46] The school was set up close to civil society institutions such as the FASE NGO and the Pinheiro Foundation.

[47] L. Avritzer, paper presented at the conference "*Democracia Participativa*", CES, Coimbra, Portugal, 6 February 2007

[48] See footnote 44.

[49] Whereas in 1950 there were about 25,000 persons living in 18 shanty towns, in 2006 the number of sub-housing had become 209, with 499,000 dwellers. Today the shanty towns occupy 16.14 square kilometres, a heavily populated area which represents little more than 5% of the total area of the city (data supplied by Horizontes Institute, August 2006).

[50] About 33 Euros, on 10 August 2007. In Porto Alegre the average variation up to 2001 was of 100 to 1,650 R$, according to Pires (2003).

good equity level and sweeping distribution of benefits[51], especially in the most deprived areas of the city.

The search for this redistributive justice led to a number of innovations in the institutional design of the PB/BH in the 9 infra-municipal districts.[52] Of these, the creation of 'priority caravans' deserves special mention. These consist of collective inspections so that citizens' delegates can get a 'feel' for the sites of the inhabitants' choice of demands, believing that 'physically crossing the territory' ('*walking along it, getting your hands and feet dirty*', as the urbanist Patrick Geddes used to say[53]) helps build disseminated civic awareness and urban solidarity.

Given that, from its first edition, the PB/BH aimed to re-direct public spending towards areas regarded as being in greater need of public investment (that is, it endeavoured to associate participation with re-distribution of public goods and services), decisions as to the object of public resources linked to the process have been sustained by harmonising inhabitants' votes with other decision-making criteria. These are territorially based and consider the lack and/or deterioration of social equipment, the population mass, and the Urban Quality of Life Index – UQLI[54] – adopted from 2001 on. Thus, more densely populated areas with a lower UQLI are the recipients of greater resources. In addition, decisions now made regarding poor or informal neighbourhoods have been included in a Global Development Plan drawn up for these areas, and participation rules set out a quorum (0.5% of each district's population) for public meetings, with a view to securing approval of priorities. The large number of demands in the area of affordable housing gave rise in 1996 to a specific PB – the Housing PB – which makes decisions on investment in this field, in a separate process coordinated by the Belo Horizonte Urbanisation Company (URBEL). 1999 saw the creation of 'City PB', aimed at defining budget priorities for sector policies, articulating planning decisions with those made in other participation arenas, such

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[51] R. Rocha Pires, *O Orçamento Participativo em Belo Horizonte e seus Efeitos Distributivos sobre a Exclusão Territorial*. Anais X Encontro Nacional do ANPUR. Belo Horizonte, 2003. Avaiable HTTP www.democraciaparticipativa.org (last access, 18th January, 2012)

[52] The city of BH is divided into nine Administrative Regions (Barreiro, Centro-Sul, Leste, Nordeste, Noroeste, Norte, Oeste, Pampulha, Venda Nova). Nowadays, the PB holds a first plenary meeting in each district, to present and discuss the process, a second 'sitting' (physically based in sub-districts) to pre-select priorities and for selection of the people's delegates, a regional caravan of priorities to inspect the territory, the Regional Forums for Budgeting Priorities (for approval of the Regional Task Plan, and election of representatives on the Inspection Committees – COMFORÇAs).

[53] See Boardman, *Patrick Geddes: Maker of the Future*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1944.

[54] The Urban Quality of Life Index, which combines factors linked to the number of inhabitants and income levels, comprises 54 indicators relating to supply areas, culture, education, sport, housing, urban infra-structures, environment, health, urban services, and urban security.

as the Public Policy Councils and the Sector Conferences (health, social security, children and adolescents, etc.). The so-called 'District OP' (the original PB design, based on priorities elected by the inhabitants of the city's districts and sub-districts) remained active for the definition of local investment.

The above-mentioned transformations during the course of the years evince a new, complex institutional design which could not have been sustained had decisions regarding change (albeit proposed by the Municipality) not been made collectively with the participation of the inhabitants, as happened elsewhere. So, the rules and the PB architectural changes have been perceived as a "collectively-decided" growth, which has been seeking for consolidation and continuous modernisation of the participatory device. Such transformations include also the use of ICTs, which – in the case of Belo Horizonte – mean essentially the Internet.

In this respect, it must be pointed out that the Internet in BH was used for many years essentially as a means of 'information' for the middle to high income social strata, with full awareness that the remaining inhabitants required investment in other forms of communication such as leaflets, cartoons, sound cars, bill-boards, advertising on community radio stations and other media. The contents of the information conveyed by the Internet were hardly ever of great consequence, regardless of the existence of a cycle of real-time meetings where communication is orally transmitted. Again, the 'works maps' funded under the PB/BH, accessible on the Internet, did not allow for the interactivity and 'mass control' regarding each of the building sites, a role attributed to the activity of COMFORÇAS. Unlike other cities (such as Seville, Modena or Porto Alegre[55]), the PB/BH web page never displayed interactive databases which could be consulted freely or by means of passwords, just as there is no detailed 'spatialisation' of mass demands projected on city maps in the Geoblog format, not even with the reduced degrees of 'interactivity', as was the case of the PB in the Rome XI Municipality[56].

In such a framework, the year of 2006 represented a greater change for Belo Horizonte, as far as the so-called 'Digital PB' was associated to the process of public deliberation on the City Budget, offering the possibility of choosing 'some' investments via the Internet. The building projects put forward for a vote within the framework of this process derived from a selection

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[55] See www.observapoa.com.br/
[56] See www.municipiopartecipato.it. Here in 2006 the 'eDem 1.0' Project, funded by the then Italian Ministry for Technology and Innovation, made available a website where – drawing on GoogleEarth maps – territorial areas, citizens' concerns, and demands are viewed. The site represents a *GeoBlog* model requiring an 'external moderator', since users cannot print their indications and messages directly onto the maps.

effected jointly by City Hall and COMFORÇAS. The building projects selected were put to the vote over an established time frame and the nine receiving the largest number of votes were selected (of the 4 initial proposals, one is selected per district). To implement the process, the City Hall of Belo Horizonte set up 178 polling stations in the city, and information was provided for those who would be present at those same stations to lend assistance to voters who came along. These polling stations were strategically placed in lower-income areas. The adoption of a spatial criterion for the distribution of equipment did not, however, take into account the fact that within each zone, including those considered higher-income areas, there are often unequal conditions of access to IT equipment. This initial survey was not carried out by City Hall. Information regarding the siting of all the voting stations was sent out by mail to all the households in the city. These stations, besides participating in the voting process, provided access to multiple types of information about PB and enabled virtual visits to the building sites, participation in debate forums, among other activities.

Additional resources were allocated to putting in place the Digital PB, increasing total investment in the PB process by about 20%. In total, the district PB became responsible for deciding on ¾ of the total available amount, the digital PB being allotted approximately ¼ of this amount; unlike the case of the real-time process, the last was divided equally among the City's Administrative Regions. The way this innovation was put in place shows us that the process was introduced with "prudence", almost taking on the shape of a pilot intervention. The main reasons given for choosing this strategy were:

1) the need not to alter excessively the PB image as an instrument that allows 'priorities' to be 'reversed', working in favour of the more fragile social strata (who very often coincide with those who do not have independent access to most ICTs, especially the Internet);

2) the need to broaden the 'appeal' of real-time PB. In fact, although weight was lent to virtual technologies, 'limitations' were placed, in order to persuade internauts to take part in face-to-face offline meetings so as to retain the onus of the proposals themselves within public debate.

Opening up a space such as the digital PB naturally led to a clear definition of participation rules, this having been opened up to all the city's voters, i.e. every citizen above the age of 16, the voters in BH. Each voter may only vote once, to this end using their voter's number. Of a total of building works put to the vote – totalling 36, which corresponds to 4 per each of the 9 districts –, each voter was able to choose one per district.

As for the overall reason for introducing the 'Digital PB', the Municipality explained the need to reverse a number of 'reductionist' trends in the participation of the district PB inhabitants.[57] Since the Digital PB functioned as a complement of real-time/face-to-face PB, endeavours were directed at broadening existing levels of participation and at strengthening PB interaction with urban and social intervention, of great importance for the neighbourhood-based PB. In the first edition of the Digital Participatory Budgeting, which lasted online for 42 days, 172,266 voters took part, a total of 503,266 votes having been counted (since each voter could cast up to 9 votes, one in each district). In that same year, approximately 38,300 persons participated in the real-time PB. These two types of participation – in meetings, in real-time offline PB, and via the Internet, in the case of the Digital PB – are counted each one autonomously.

In the first edition, the 9 building projects receiving the most votes (one per district) were: two refurbishment projects of social equipment, two road improvement projects, two ecological parks, restoring one medical centre, restoring a leisure area and one sports facility. Although it is not possible to establish a comparison with the typology of building works approved in offline PB, it is worth to remember that in the latter's thirteen years' existence before the birth of the Digital PB, 67% of building works approved corresponded to projects for infrastructure building and urbanisation (802 out of 1,184)[58].

The second edition of the Digital PB happened in 2008 and counted on the introduction of some alterations in its design, the first one being the shrinking in number of the approvable investments (only 5) and the second their concentration in critical focal points of the city mobility system, in terms of traffic jam. A third change related with the volume of investments, much bigger than in the first edition (around 40 millions of Brazilian Reais) which represented 50% of the fixed amount of 8 millions devoted to real-time off-line PB. The number of polling stations in the city also raised up to 275, while a bus equipped with computers and Internet facilities continues to go around in the most deprived neighbourhoods. In the Digital PB webpage two new

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[57] In the thirteen years' existence of the district offline PB – carried out in annual cycles between 1993 and 1998 and in biennial cycles from 1999 to 2006 – mass participation displayed great fluctuation. Up to 1996, participation levels underwent a progressive increase; this dropped off significantly in the following two years. The introduction of biennial cycles led to a further increase, which became consolidated in the first two cycles, but this trend was again reversed in the 2003/2004 cycle, with a reduction of 13,000 participants in regard to the 2001/2002 cycle. It was in this context that the digital PB was introduced. In the 2005/2006 real-time cycle, there was another surge, increasing participation numbers in the district PB by about 8,000.

[58] If we add to these projects the building work carried out in the areas of health and education, we find that this percentage rises to 88%. Building works covering social security, culture, sports, and the environment account for a mere 12% of the sum total of building work approved.

tools were also provided: 5 forum for discussion on each votable priority, and 4 thematic web-chats related to specific public policies, where both citizens and municipal officials could take part. Finally a green telephone helpline was created in order to allow telephone-voting, so to reach inhabitants without access to Internet (it was used to vote by 9,24% of the overall participants). The more reduced period for voting (26 days) was possibly one of the responsible of the decrease in voting (124,320 persons), but possible all the new feature contributed to modify the perception of the process, which took the configuration of a sort of "Strategic Choice" voting, with limited degree of freedom for the inhabitants.

A third edition of the Digital PB was organized in 2011 (being the experiment interrupted during the electoral year of 2010), proposing a methodology more similar to the 2006 experiment: 9 districts voted for choosing an investment priority in each area, out of four possibilities previously discussed with CONFORÇAS. A total of 25.488 registered citizens voted trough the Internet and in the more than 270 places equipped by the Municipal Government, expressing 92.724 votes, equally distributed among man and women. Voters under 20 years represented the 27,8% of the overall participants.

During the three editions of the Digital PB in Belo Horizonte, 110,000 Brazilian Reais were invested for implementing the 19 selected priorities, which received a bit less than 720,000 overall votes by local participants[59]. A we-game called "*QUIZZ - Conheça BH e as obras de uma maneira divertida*" was also created in 2008, with the aim of attracting more young people and testing their knowledge of urban spaces. The votes cast by phone represented around 10% of the overall votes.

The above mentioned strategies show that in Belo Horizonte the objective of extending participation in the PB process has become apparent not only in larger numbers, but also in the endeavour to reach other social sectors in order to include new players in the process. Thus, there was an attempt to capture the attention of new social strata and new social groups, especially the youngsters, up to then visibly absent from the process. In fact, unlike other PB experiences, Belo Horizonte did not create mechanisms specifically directed at attracting the participation of younger people (the so called "*Children or Teenagers' PBs*" or "*School PBs*"; so introducing

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[59] See news posted on January 27, 2012 in this page: thttp://portalpbh.pbh.gov.br/pbh/ecp/noticia.do?evento=portlet&pAc=not&idConteudo=55033&pIdPlc=&app=salanoticias and the "Relatorio do resultado da votação do OP Digital 2011" published by the Belo Horizonte Municipality, 2012 (http://portalpbh.pbh.gov.br/pbh/ecp/files.do?evento=download&urlArqPlc=Relatorio_da_votacao_do_OP_Digital_2011_2.pdf – last access February 15, 2012).

new technologies into the process, promoted by the Digital PB, aimed to a very large extent to reach this group. On the other hand, the digital PB was conceived to acquaint the population with the city as a whole. Participation in real-time offline PB enables each citizen to gain an in-depth insight into the district and neighbourhood where he/she lives, for it is at this level that citizens' participation is promoted. Giving people the opportunity to choose a building plan per city district, City Hall endeavoured to create a mechanism whereby a broader view of the city could be gleaned by those who participated in the Digital PB. Lastly, and despite the fact that the amount available for the digital PB was significantly lower than that for offline version, the only building work chosen for voting was that of a more structuring nature and which embodied regional interest. The focus of this choice was to identify building work requiring a higher investment sum and which would never be approved at the real-time PB, given its high costs. Voters were thus urged to choose construction work that would serve the totality of their district and not just their neighbourhood.

*2. Emulating or overcoming the Belo Horizonte's paradigm? Shifting perspectives in recent Participatory Budgeting were ICTs represented a pivotal feature.*

Although, undoubtedly, in the first decade of the Belo Horizonte's Participatory Budgeting the stress was laid on the issue of 'efficacy' of public policies (including its distributive justice feature), the introduction of the Digital PB – as mentioned earlier – marked a transition towards seeking greater 'efficiency', i.e. towards greater amplitude of the process, with costs increasing only slightly[60] and a wide international visibility[61]. It also marked a move to a greater broadening of participation in the PB process, by means of 'seducing' new participants, through use of the new technologies.

Even if the Digital-PB experiment was not implemented in Belo Horizonte between 2008 and 2011, and only recently reappeared (no explicit explanation was given for such a large period during which the experiment was suspended[62]), it explicitly inspired several other Participatory Budgeting examples around the world which – in the following years – tried to experience

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[60] Cf. speech by Júlio Pires, Secretary of Planning, Budget and Information of Belo Horizonte City Hall at the seminar "*Participatory Budgeting: Building Participatory Democracy and/or Improving Municipal Finance*", 21 June 2006, Networking Event of the UN-Habitat "*Third Urban Forum – WUF3*", Vancouver, Canada.

[61] See the data of pages consulted from 68 country, exposed in Nabucco, Macedo, Ferreira (2009).

[62] See the webpage of Participatory Budgeting, which only traces the historic of the old experiences: http://portalpbh.pbh.gov.br/ pbh/ecp/comunidade.do?app=portaldoop

different forms of integration with ICTs[63]. The majority of them only referred to the use of Internet, and only few (as the Malaga case mentioned in the end of paragraph II) used a broader range of instruments, as SMS or the social networks, in order to foster new forms of "fidelisation" to PB of a very diverse panorama of citizens' groups. Moreover, some of them did not even manage to contribute to produce any new communicational culture, using technologies as a mere "support" for very traditional practices of social interaction which self-denominated as "citizens' participation", where transparency and a light consultation on budgetary issues were the only real component of the project[64]. Unfortunately, many of those processes are very recent, so that is not possible to extract major conclusions regarding experiments which have been under way for only one or two years and about which serious evaluations have still not been conducted. Despite this, being that some of their results are already visible and – in any case – the shift of model that they represent sounds clear, they are worth recording briefly in this paper.

The first case that could be interesting to quote in this perspective is that of Lisbon, the first European capital (and one of the major cities of the continent, together with Seville, in Spain, and Colonia, in Germany) to introduce a Participatory Budgeting process in the city. Unlike in Belo Horizonte, the use of ICTs for proposing and voting priorities in Lisbon became – since the beginning – a central feature for Participatory Budgeting, and not merely a complementary

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[63] E. Peruzzotti, M. Magnelli, T. Peixoto, "*La Plata; Argentina: Multi-Channel Participatory Budgeting. Estudo de caso para o projeto Vitalizing Democracy through participation*". Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2011. Disponível em: http://www.vitalizing-democracy.org/site/downloads /277_265_Case_Study_La_Plata.pdf. (last access: 16th December, 2011); J.C. Abreu, Andrade de, Do Analógico ao Digital: Democracia, Internet e Orçamento Participativo, in *EnANPAD* 2011, Rio de Janeiro. Proceedings of EnANPAD 2011, 2011, 1-20; J.C. Abreu, Andrade de; D.R. Armond-De-Melo, Motta, G.S., Modelos de Democracia Eletrônica: Analisando o Orçamento Participativo Digital, in *EnAPG – Encontro de Administração Pública e Governança*, 2010, Vitória – ES. Anais do EnAPG – ANPAD, 2010. v. 1; N. Best, M. Ribeiro, R. Matheus, J.C. Vaz, Internet e a participação cidadã nas experiências de orçamento participativo digital no Brasil, in: *Cadernos PPG-AU/FAUFBA*, v. 9, 2010, p. 105-124; T. Peixoto, *E-Participatory Budgeting: e-Democracy from theory to success?*. E-Working Papers, 2008. Disponível em: http://edc.unige.ch/edcadmin/images/Tiago.pdf (last access: 4th February, 2012); E. S. Ferreira Dimas, *Inclusão, participação, associativismo e qualidade da deliberação pública no OP Digital de BH,* in: *34 Encontro Anual da ANPOCS, 2010*, Caxambu. Programa e Resumos – 34 Encontro Anual da ANPOCS. São Paulo : Anpocs, 2010.; R. Sampaio, *Participação e deliberação na internet: um estudo de caso do Orçamento Participativo Digital de Belo Horizonte*, Master Tesis in Social Communication, Belo Horizonte: UFMG, 2010

[64] In 2004, the Italian Ministry of Technological Innovation opened a huge call for projects on "E-Democracy", approving 57 out of 129 projects, for a 9.5 million Euros funding. Nine out of the approved ones were about Participatory Budgeting, trying to link its experimentation with new possibilities coming from ICTs. They came before the Belo Horizonte experiment and so were not able to take advantage of that experience. One of the most promising (called *"Telep@b",* coordinated by the Union of Mountains Communities in Tuscany) gathered 29 municipalities, all together summing 260,000 inhabitants. Funded with only 200,000 € (then complemented by the Tuscany Region) it made explicit reference to the ongoing Belo Horizonte experiment. But it was able only to create a common platform of transparency for municipal accounts (through a specific software) and a lower political will of participating municipalities prevented the realisation of a real integration of "light" PB models with ICTs in contexts with a strong degree of isolation of part of municipal territories. Only rare cases like the city of Abbadia San Salvatore managed to create more innovative form of integration, namely attracting young local people.

device to the engineering of face-to-face meetings. The Lisbon PB was one of the first in Portugal to be a co-decisional arena, committed to respect the order of priorities voted by the participants, which could and still can include also commuter workers or citizens interested in Lisbon transformations, beyond the mere category of "residents"; the majority of Portuguese experiment since 2003 had always been "consultative PB", with no degree of really co-decision making included[65]. In 2007, when the new socialist mayor attempted to create the pre-conditions for experimenting a city-wide PB through the organisation of some "decentralised assemblies" in some urban districts, it already existed an on-going experiment implemented by the communist president of the Carnide District Government in one of the 53 sub-municipal institutions which compose the capital[66]. But when the Lisbon PB really took shape in summer of 2008, it was decided that it was only going to count on a "virtual mechanism" for proposing and voting the priorities within a "package" of 5 million Euros[67] that the municipality devoted to the co-decision experiment. The choice of shaping the Lisbon Participatory Budgeting as an experiment totally enrooted in the "virtual sphere", constituted by an Internet website, was mainly due to practical reasons, and first of all to an economic motivation: the lack of funding for implementing the start-up. Being that the implementation of PB was mainly a request made by a minority party supporting the new municipal government (the Bloco the Esquerda), it possibly appeared risky – to a substantially sceptical executive cabinet – to invest big money in a new experiment whose success was far from being granted, and which could be strongly attacked by the opposition taking into account a merely short-term cost/benefit perspective. While the so-called "decentralised meetings" in the city continued, a "Charter of Principles for Participatory Budgeting" was also approved, taking the form of a sort of "constitution" which set the values, the goals and the mission of the new process, so to inspire and govern the future transformations of the concrete tools and devices for its implementation.

In 2008, the new Internet-driven PB of Lisbon preferred to invest in areas as the training of civil servants (together with the "OP Portugal" EU-funded project) and the construction of a cross-departmental working group that could take care of the results of the new experiments and granted its sustainability. An internal light system of monitoring and evaluation was also set, in

[65] G. Allegretti, N. Dias, "The variable geometry of Participatory Budgeting: which lessons from the new Portuguese explosion", in: *Proceedings of the Conference "Learning Democracy by Doing: Alternative Practices in Citizenship Learning and Participatory Democracy*, October 16-18, 2008, OISE/Toronto University, 2009.
[66] For Y. Sintomer, G. Allegretti, 2012, see footnote 10.
[67] Out of an investment budget of around 140 millions, at the time.

order to offer data for progressively bettering the process. According to the data diffused by the Lisbon Municipality, 1.732 citizens registered during the different stages of the PB 2008, and 577 proposals were evaluated and put on-line for voting in all the different sectors of action, being the majority (around 45%) related to infrastructures, mobility, green spaces and urban regeneration. The 5 winning projects gathered 1101 votes during the very short PB cycle (which occurred between October and November 2008); they mainly belonged to these thematic areas and were supported by an interesting mobilisation of social networks and through collective action of bikers and environmental activists. According to the 2009 Municipal PB Report, 74% of the final 2809 votes awarded proposals related to the requalification of public and green open spaces[68]. Before conceiving the new 2009 PB cycle (related to the 2010 provisional budget), an inquiry was conducted by the Town Hall on the registered internauts, which showed 34% of answers, and a good degree of satisfaction for the new process, but also evidenced several proposals for bettering the first experiment, and some structural limitations related to the age and literacy structure of participants[69]. As in the interpretation of the municipal team, despite all its positive aspects, the mere Internet-driven nature of the 2008 Participatory Budgeting had played as a "factor of exclusion" (idem) that needed to be reverted in the future.

So, the 2009 edition of PB was submitted to several additions, which rebalanced the "weight" of Internet in the overall architecture. Eight "public assemblies" (both during the proposal phase and the voting phase of the cycle) were created, and a bus (named as "autocarro do OP") started travelling around the city, being equipped with computers and trained facilitators linked to the municipal team. Such "stepping back" from a merely internet-based process to a more balanced architecture undoubtedly determined a change in the average profile of participants, raising the number of elder participants and also revealing a more "inclusive" capacity of inhabitants living in vulnerable areas[70]. All the global indicators of the process came out modified, as registered citizens increased to 12.681, but also voters raised from 1.101 (2008) to 4.719 (2009) up to 11.570 (2010) and proposals reached the number of 927 in 2010, giving prevalence to new sectors of action as culture, sport and social services.

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[68] CML – Câmara Municipal de Lisboa, *Orçamento participativo 2009. Relatórios de Avaliação*, Câmara Municipal de Lisboa, Lisboa Janeiro 2010
[69] For example, 52% of voters were under 35 years old, and 855 out of 1101 hold University Education or more.
[70] CML – Câmara Municipal de Lisboa, *Orçamento participativo 2010. Relatórios de Avaliação*, Câmara Municipal de Lisboa, Lisboa Janeiro 2011;CES/ CML – Câmara Municipal de Lisboa, *Orçamento participativo 2011. Relatórios de Avaliação*, Câmara Municipal de Lisboa/CES, Lisboa/Coimbra, Janeiro 2012

One of the more interesting aspects of such an evolution is that the new face-to-face assemblies demonstrated to be much more dynamic spaces for creating consensus around proposals: this is clear when noticing that in 2010 the 53% of the overall list of proposals emerged from territorial assemblies (despite only 374 participants appeared) and 5/7 of the winning projects originated in these spaces. The trend was confirmed in 2011 when 27.042 citizens made their registration in the new website of "Lisboa participa" (an umbrella-project which gather together several different participatory experiments conducted by the municipal government), and 17,887 voted for 228 project which intended to merge together 808 proposals which were sent though the internet or emerged (more than half of them: 417) during the public meetings held around the town.

So far, the municipality decided to invest more in face-to-face events, and the expanded cycle (that for 2011 lasted from late April to November, while in 2012 possibly it will start earlier, in the end of march) started including also a series of thematic meetings targeting schoolchildren, universities and professional categories. These new experiments opened room for a new special pilot-PB process devoted to the schools of the deprived district of Marvila, which will be progressively extended to the rest of the city, starting from 2012. The changes in the "territorialisation strategy" of the Participatory Budgeting determined a modification both in the back-office bureaucratic structure leading the PB implementation, as well in the use of Internet, where a new space was opened for geo-referencing the proposals and winning projects, so to increase the level of interaction between participants and the website, providing a better understanding of how the participatory process interacts with the urban space. It sounds interesting that – analysing the quality of the survey done in the end of 2010 by the Town Hall[71] to measure the satisfaction and receive suggestions of citizens to better the PB for 2011 – it emerged that the great majority of participants (especially among those who attended the face-to-face meetings) entered in contact with PB through information received by friends and neighbours, being the Internet only the second tool for spreading effective information on the participatory process[72].

Despite all this positive changes, which were centred on the idea of building a more "balanced grammar" in term of coordination of on-line and off-line tools, the Participatory

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[71] 2363 citizens answered, being the 18,45% off the registered participants (they were 30% in the end of 2009, but out of a much lower global number of registered inhabitants).
[72] CES/OPTAR, *Relatorio sobre o OP de Lisboa*, draft, CES, Coimbra, 2011

Budget of Lisbon has not been able to overcome what Nelson Dias described (see image below) as a "competition of ideas" model of PB.



FROM CONSULTATION TO CO-DECISION/
FROM INDIVIDUALISM TO DELIBERATION WITH CONSENSUS

Source: Dias, 2011
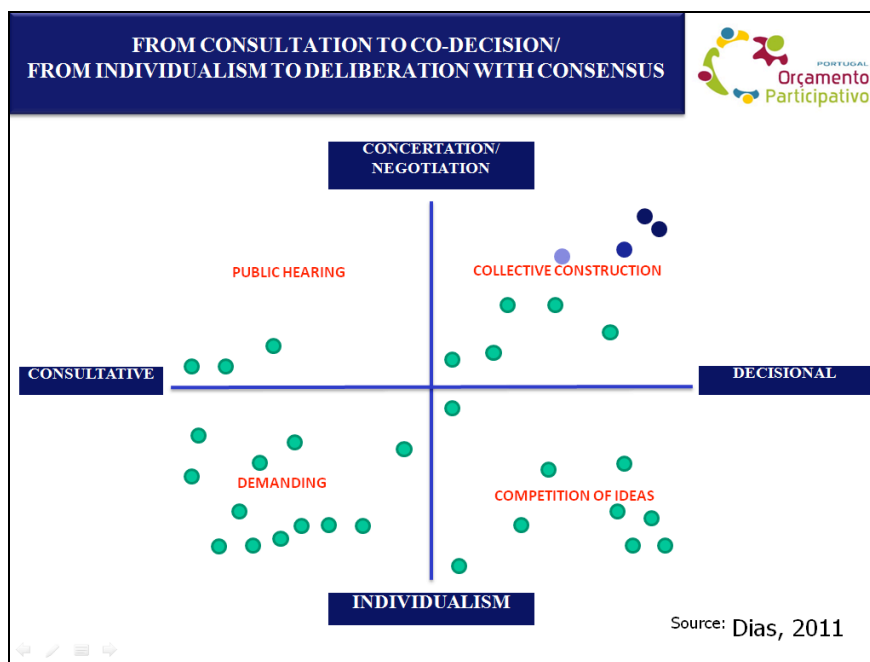
Such a model is still not able to reach a good "capacity of synthesis" through collective negotiation of proposals and projects, so that the feasibility of a high number of proposals (927 in 2010; 808 in 2011) has to be evaluated by the municipal services before being exposed to citizens' voting, while is highly doubtful that the voters will read and evaluate all of them before voting, as an independent research of the "OPtar" project recently demonstrated[73].

Is it possible to imagine that such a still not completely mature model of public discussion of citizens proposals partially enroot its limits in the "unbalanced start-up" of the Lisbon PB, all centred on a Internet-driven tool, which is normally used to gather together individual preferences through a majority-wins method, instead of trying to foster the construction of a shared understanding and of a negotiated consensus among different perspectives? This is a possibility to be undoubtedly verified, together with the centrality of a municipal expectation on the process which much centred on the "quantity" of participants and citizens' proposals, forgetting to take into account that their exponential growth could deeply threaten the "quality"

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[73] Thre Project called "OPtar" is led by the author of the present article, but its results are still not exposable in details, due to an agreement with the Lisbon Municipality. They will be public before the beginning of the 2012 cycle.

of the proposal discussed, the feasibility of the tasks of the back-office municipal team and also the awareness that participants have about the variety and specificity of all the proposals running for final voting within every year cycle of PB. Such reflections explain why in the pre-evaluation meetings held at the Town Hall in July 2011, one of the main point of discussion was how to create "intermedium filters" which can allow the Lisbon Participatory Budget to gradually circumscribe the number of proposals which could e voted in November while granting to them an enhanced quality, and without frustrating inhabitants with a "top-down selection" using technical or political criteria of filtering. Similar[74] questions are posed in other participatory processes around Europe (as for example the small city of Canegrate in Italy), which count on the Internet as a space both for "proposing" and "voting" priorities, or where proposals could be addressed through questionnaires and other tools which do not imply a presence and a high commitment level of the proposers.

One possible answer to such a doubt comes from a neighbour municipality to Lisbon, that of Cascais (around 190,000 inhabitants), administered by PSD, a right-wing political party which since two years started to be interested in Participatory Budgeting, deciding to invest on a co-decisional model, even if starting from a limited pot of 1,5 million Euros. Taking into account the difficulties of managing a territory marked by very disperse urban nuclei, often socially polarised, the Cascais administration took two years to define its specific model of Participatory Budgeting, enrooting it in a strong training of municipal team and in a previous process of Agenda XXI which is so far one of the more interesting in Portugal for its tools and results. Cascais, too, decided to use the Internet as a central feature for voting, but in its "Charter of Principles" there is only one reference to the use of ICTs in a context in which is clarified that the pivotal goal is to "assure communication with different socioeconomic and age groups […] and the geographic representativity of citizens". So far, the strategy of Cascais emerged from a specific reflection on the above exposed graphic elaborated by Nelson Dias (who is also a consultant of the municipal team), with the aim to create a model of PB which could mainly foster "collective construction" of ideas and tighten social links among participants. In this perspective it is understandable why the idea of PB territorial assemblies (9 dispersed in all the municipal territory, to guarantee accessibility) become so central for "self-filtering" ideas. In fact, proposals of investments in Cascais can only be done during public meetings, whose organization is twofold: in the first part "consensus tables" gather between 5 and 9 persons, who are supposed

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[74] See http://www.canegrate-partecipa.org/seo/

to negotiate and elaborate (through the help of a trained moderator) 2 common proposals in each table; in the second part of the meeting, the two investments selected by each table are socialized and presented by their proposers, so that the entire audience can vote the top 5, which will converge for the final on-line competition. Despite there are still no analysis done on the results of such a mechanism (which was only in its first year of experimenting), for those who have been able to follow the process it is clear that the method chosen has been highly satisfactory for participants, determining a very high level of interaction and promoting networks of citizens and social organizations interested in increasing the collective action. The first satisfaction questionnaires elaborated also show that no frustration bitters the participants whose proposals has not been approved, on the contrary motivating people to come back with more detailed proposals, organizing support, and acting as "multiplier" of the process. The fact that the good working environment is guaranteed by the presence of coffee break and some wall-panels where participants are requested to leave their coloured hand-print, is not marginal: such elements, in fact, allow informal moments and transform every event into a sort of common celebration which continues for hours – sometimes – even after the official end of the meeting, usually outside the venue. So far, the increasing success registered during the 9 meetings of Cascais PB 2011 and during the voting phase (who saw more than 6,900 participants) raises only one central doubt; how to maintain the provided "organizational architecture" of the process, if the number of participants will become so high that it will jeopardize the feasibility of the present structure (because of the time requested by presenting and filtering the proposals of every table)? Anyhow, the chosen model of Cascais Participatory Budgeting shows the need to reduce again (compared to Lisbon) the centrality of ICTs' use in some phases of the discussion and co-decision cycle. Learning from Lisbon, it tries to valorise the interactional aspects of the participatory process, in order that proposals could be the outcome of real negotiation, which include a debate on the quality of presented proposals. Learning from three years of Lisbon experience, Cascais did not need to "step-back" from an Internet-driven process to a more balanced one, because it tried to balance the different tools (distributed in the different phases of the cycle) since the beginning, as stated in its Charter of Principles.

Despite its capacity of offer a more "adult model" of participation based on the "collective construction" of proposals since the early stages, Cascais is also far from having reached a mature capacity of using the different range of possibilities offered by the rich plurality of ICTS. For example, SMS are still not imagined as instrument for monitoring the implementation phase

which will come after co-decision on investment priorities, and the same website of Cascais PB is still not prepared to support a monitoring geo-referred function, which cases of other PBs as in Seville, Belo Horizonte or Porto Alegre showed to be one of the most important features for guaranteeing a success to Participatory Budgeting. The Facebook Page itself, which was opened to give a visibility of the Cascais PB is still not capable to explore all the possibility of networking that it would have, and it play the "minimal role" of a dead support for considerations of the municipal team, which is still not able to facilitate and foster a feeling of ownership by the group of around 250 people which is in touch with it. Such a mistake appears very common in several Portuguese Participatory Budgets, including experiences which specifically target young citizens as the OPJ of the Trofa municipality[75]; while in other countries (has happened in Canegrate, Italy) specific trained personnel is in charge of dialoguing and chatting with internauts for some hours a day, in order to try to explore and exploit the most interesting possibilities that social networks can offer according to the specificities of their structure and their audience.

Undoubtedly, is very important that future experiences of Participatory Budgeting could look at ICTs in a more complex way, taking not only into account the need of a "well-balanced" articulation between the use of Internet and that of face-to-face meetings, but also valorising the richness of other instruments, which are sometimes used in an interesting way in other projects of consultation or social mobilisation. Some examples are starting to appear, even in the Southern World, where the digital divide is deeper and not all the ICT tools can be reabsorbed in a strategy of participation centred on social inclusion and widespread access to all citizens. One interesting case, for example, is the recent process of promotion of 8 municipal Participatory Budgets promoted by the Provincial Government of South Kivu and the World Bank Institute, which started in the Democratic Republic of Congo on February 2011. In fact, after a serious country diagnostic, it was proved that the use of mobile phones is hugely spread in the area, even in villages where electricity is lacking and so TV, Radio and the Internet cannot be accessible by inhabitants. So, the project of promotion of PB counted on free-of-cost SMS (through an agreement with the bigger local telephone service provider) which can inform citizens on the meeting of participatory Budgeting, but also be a tool of transparency and monitoring for the implementation phase of co-decided investments. In one area, a Beta Test is also being conducted since April 2011, to verify if opening to voting through SMS could substantially modify or – on the contrary – respect and enlarge the voting preferences on investment priorities which have

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[75] See http://www.facebook.com/opjovemtrofa

been expressed by local citizens during the territorial assembly organised in this first year. The important goal of this test is to foster a better diffusion of the process for the future, but avoiding that it could become an instrument of social discrimination and a risk for the inclusivity of the Participatory Budgeting experiment.

**V. From "E-gov" to "We-Gov"? Some final remarks**

In recent years, several experiences trying to conjugate Participatory Budgeting and the use of ICTs acquired significant visibility through receiving international awards such as the Bertelsmann Stiftung's Reinhard Mohn Prize 2011 given to the Brazilian City of Recife, or the ESPA Award 2009 received by the Municipality of Cologne. As mentioned previously, many experiments of articulating real-time PB with digital PB had as one of their main objectives that of expanding participation in the process and reducing transactional costs. In merely absolute terms, this expansion is undeniable in the majority of experiences, even if the nature of the new wave of participation – and the level of quality of outcomes – cannot, however, be directly compared to that emerging from processes centred on face-to-face negotiation between social actors.

If in some cases (as Belo Horizonte) the articulation was set in order to avoid "competition" between on-line and off-line participation, in other cases (as in Lisbon) the recent decrease of inhabitants in face-to-face meetings needed to be the object of specific reflections on how it is possible to avoid mechanisms of 'disincentivation', which tend to operate when participants have exactly the same options and advantages in either intervening personally or just choosing to raise their voice or indicate their preferences by means of a simple "virtual presence".

It also has to be taken into account that in many cases (as in Belo Horizonte or Lisbon) the decision to implement the digital PB gave rise to some public criticism, especially as regards info-exclusion[76], with the risk of dirtying also the image of Participatory Budgeting as an instrument fighting against social and territorial marginalisation. Possibly, integrating the existence of a digital-PB within a wider programme of social inclusion could guarantee the permanent placing of ICT equipment in the more deprived areas of a city, for uses other than

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[76] Field work in BH made it possible to talk to several persons living in deprived areas. It was apparent that the initial decision to proceed with the digital PB process had not been well received in these communities. In this regard, mention should be made of the fact that the City Hall stepped in, the end result being the articulation of the digital PB with a programme of digital inclusion. As already stated, many polling stations were set up all over the city and persons were trained to man these stations throughout, in order to assist the voting process.

proposing or voting priorities. This feature is particularly relevant. Research recently carried out in Europe[77] on governments who innovatively adopted electronic tools to support democratic practices shows that motivations are much more pragmatic than substantive or normative. Most municipal governments that adopted electronic processes for democracy did so because they already had the technological means (hardware, software, specialised staff and specific departments) enabling them to promote democratic processes through ICTs, or they could attract new resources specifically provided by other levels of the State. In same cases, though, proposals for integrating ICTs in Participatory Budgeting schemes were able to go far beyond this pragmatic orientation, fostering specific interventions with a view to securing the resources deemed appropriate to enable the experimentation in tandem with a proposal to enlarge democratic participation.

It might be said that, often, the integration of ICTs in the overall PB processes is not conducted so as to form hybrid processes that might combine in a balanced way face-to-face interaction and differentiated technological instruments. In actual fact, some Digital PBs (as that of Belo Horizonte) were created as complementary processes to the territorial-based ones. Thus, under the Digital PB, the choice of priorities is effected individually, without real social interactions, and without the possibility of having this interaction alter individual preferences, much less the possibility of building up collective preferences during the course of the process. Thus, decisions become confused with the vote inherent in any electoral process and the Digital Process shows a completely different logic from the face-to-face one, which declares a mission of building solidarity and capacity of negotiation among social actors. The latter is, indeed, another feature that is important to problematise. As both the Lisbon and the Belo Horizonte case illustrate, the civil society players that are better organised are often able to spend resources on campaigns designed to call for web-voting in favour of their choices. So, although the digitally designed PB makes a strong contribution to mobilise organised civil society, it also creates unequal action-taking capacities as the outcome of available resources. Here, one should recall the example of Vignola, in which the ease through which young members of a Sport Club were able to overcome all the other citizens in "clicking" to vote their priority on-line killed the entire process.

This paper set out to reflect on the trajectory which is slowly modifying the relations between representative democracy and participatory democracy against a backdrop of the fact

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[77] Graft and Svenson 2006, see footnote 6.

that these complex relations must be considered in relation to the added factors and challenges presented by the introduction of new technologies aimed at expanding the formal spaces of political intervention. The PBs of Belo Horizonte and Lisbon, as exemplary cases of these relations, served as a script for this debate, complemented by the quoting of other "mirror cases" that can enlighten and contribute to a more articulated perspective on the use of ICTs as a plural category which contains several tools which could be related to several different specific phases of a Participatory Budget.

As can be inferred, resorting to new technologies in participatory processes and policy decision-making takes on very different forms: it can be taken as a limited inclusion, serving as information instruments or, at most, as assisting inspection, monitoring or debate, or, in certain cases, it can make a more advanced use of the potentialities deriving from these, assisting the policy decision-making processes themselves. The cases we have presented throughout represent these different configurations, showing a diffuse research agenda on reaching a "balance" between the different advantages that face-to-face meetings and a "virtual sphere" can provide.

The cases of Belo Horizonte and Lisbon emerge as clear examples of the differences between a 'subordinate' use or a 'coordinate' use of ICTs in democratic processes. In some cases "stepping back" is needed when a mainly Internet-driven conception could threaten the main objectives of the process. The "coordinate model" is a result of applying hybrid or complementary processes that unite forms of face-to-face interaction with different technological instruments/means.

An enlarged conception of e-democracy makes it possible to think that it is not simply governments that can be its agents, but also individuals and organisations within society, who can now establish new forms of information and communication relations. If, on the one hand, governments can use ICTs as a means of increasing participation and legitimising decisions, society can use them as a means of accessing the information relevant for its political organisation and to mobilise around issues it considers pertinent, through (for example) social networking. On the other hand, government use of technologies can strengthen the technocracy specialising in information systems (or *infocracy*), which can attain importance and independence in regard to the government itself[78].

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[78] K. Hacker, J. Djik, 200 (see footnote 8)

As shown by Sheila Jasanoff[79], the affirming political literature that the quality of solutions directed at solving problems depends on the adequacy of its initial framing has become an undeniable truth. In this reading, if an issue is too narrowly, or too vaguely, or simply wrongly framed, the solution chosen will suffer from the same ills (*idem*). What the positive examples of Cascais and South Kivu PBs show us is that the 'framing' of the issue is as important as the process itself. If we are faced with iterative processes (as PBs try to be), whoever takes part in them will end by being able to redefine the framing and adapting it to actual needs while the process itself is under way. Because of the novelty of these two experiments, their adaptive capacity and reinvention are still open-ended.

One of the conditions for securing wider citizen participation (which implies ensuring their inclusion in the processes irrespective of gender, ethnicity, age, income, education, inaptitude, language, or technological experience) is the provision of ample and varied means of access, including an understanding and use of these means. A second condition is making the necessary information available, not only to ensure the quality of participation in the deliberative processes (understood here both in the sense of debate and decision-making[80]), but also to ensure its transparency. A third condition regards the diversity of means and processes which make participation viable, including different ways of acquiring information, expression and deliberation, especially on the part of those who will be affected by decisions. A fourth condition is related to responsiveness and government commitment to carry out the decisions made in processes of this nature.

As participation technologies, PBs are in a position to configure processes that instead of reproducing separations which are very much present in several democratic models (separation between representatives and those represented and between specialists and lay-persons), contribute to promoting cognitive citizenship. This capacity requires citizens' involvement – endowing them with decision-making capacities – in processes involving technical dimensions (including social technologies) and which interfere in a sphere of State intervention in an area traditionally configured as the preserve of State regulation. However, neither democratic reinforcement nor the contribution to citizen empowerment can be attained solely through introducing ICTs. In processes such as those presented here – combining social technologies and material technologies – we conclude that the potential for citizen involvement and empowerment

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[79] S. Jasanoff, S., Technologies of Humility: Citizen Participation in Governing Science, in: *Minerva*, Vol. 41, 3, 2003, 223-44.
[80] L. Avritzer, Teoria democrática e deliberação pública, in: *Revista Lua Nova*, 50: 25-46, São Paulo: CEDEC, 2000

is more in face-to-face assemblies than in phases more centred on the use of digital technology. In the former, participants must have a good grasp of the process and its working rules in order to participate in it; in the latter, where participation can be reduced to using a given technology, participants do not have to know how the relevant technologies work (telephone, SMS, the Internet, etc.) in order to use them.[81] Summing up, it is not enough to amplify the process democratically in terms of participation, it is also necessary to democratise it in terms of knowledge, especially if we want to shift from *a paradigm of "e-governance"* (conceived as a sum of individual preferences expressed in separated spaces that are not in contact with one another) to *a paradigm of "we-governance"* where the construction of social convergence and the canalisation of tensions into constructive projects would be a central goal.

In fact, is not marginal to observe that when existing instruments of participation do not provide an opportunity to show how society is capable to face complexity, to support solidarity and to negotiate choices in the common interest, a sort of "vicious circle" tends to be activated in which the persons in key roles within representative democracy tend to have a negative image of society (as a set of egoistic and uninformed individuals incapable of making rational choices and having complex visions) and to reduce the spaces of democracy open to the active contribution of citizens[82]. Such a reflection suggests that the activation of "virtuous circles" for fostering spaces of participation capable of redesigning a "highly intensive" democracy is especially likely within a framework of incremental experimentations which step back from using tools that only "count" individual preferences in central positions, instead of activating fruitful processes of collective construction of policies and projects.

*Address:*
*Giovanni Allegretti*
*CES – Centro de Estudos Sociais*
*Universidade de Coimbra*
*Colegio S. Jerónimo, Largo D. Dinis, Apartado 3087*
*3000-995 Coimbra, Portugal*
*allegretto70@hotmail.com*

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[81] A situation which B. Latour characterised as being the result of the 'black boxing' process, i.e. when technologies function properly, scientific and technological work is invisible. Paradoxically, this means that, as technologies enter our everyday life, the more opaque and obscure they become. See B. Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies*, Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1999.

[82] The case of Cascais is very interesting in this respect, because when votes had been cast in December 211, the Mayor decided to increase of around 50% the resources devoted to the implementation of most-voted priority. The justification for such a decision, given by the Mayor Carlos Carreiras in the final meeting (organised on November 26, 2012 in the Congress Centre of Estoril) could be meaning that the quality demonstrated by public meetings and final results convinced the administration to trust the process and its audience to a larger extents than what initially imagined.

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## Note