

PORTO ALEGRE'S PARTICIPATORY BUDGET: INFRASTRUCTURE
ALLOCATION, GOVERNMENTAL DISAGGREGATION, AND DEMOCRATIC
INNOVATION IN BRAZIL

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Cornell University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Regional Planning

by

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January 2006

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I discuss Porto Alegre's experience under sixteen years of governance by the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Worker's Party, PT). The centerpiece of the four successive PT municipal administrations was the *Orçamento Participativo* (Participatory Budget, OP), an open and consultative process that allocated the municipal investment budget (which ranged from 2 to 15 percent of the total municipal budget). Most descriptions of the PT in Porto Alegre have focused on the internal structures of the OP and the OP's implications for citizenship. Instead, I argue that it is necessary to disaggregate the concept of "government" in order to understand the outcomes and implications of the four successive PT administrations. The municipal line agencies were critical to the success of, and were transformed by, the OP. I conclude my paper with a more general discussion of progressive governance and the construction of narratives.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jonathan Thompson received his BA in History from Reed College, Portland, Ore., in 1995. Since 2003, he has been a Research Associate at Whitman College in Walla Walla, Wash.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My research in Porto Alegre would not have been possible without the help of city officials, PT activists, and neighbors who were unfailingly welcoming, patient, and helpful. In particular, Drs Antonio and Silvia Benetti, and Jorge and Jane Maciel, opened their city and homes to me.

Financially, this project was made possible first by a Foreign Languages Area Studies fellowship to study Portuguese, and then by travel funding from the Ford Foundation, the Department of City and Regional Planning, the International Studies in Planning Program, the Latin American Studies Program, and the Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies.

Professors Pierre Clavel, Neema Kudva, Debra Castillo, and William Goldsmith all gave generously of their time. Any errors in fact or judgment that remain are of course mine alone.

The Thompson and Solórzano families continue to provide moral and material support. Nohemy Solórzano-Thompson read drafts, helped with translations, and suffered my repeated absences with good grace. She is my partner in all things, intellectual and otherwise.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CRC: *Coordenação de Relações com a Comunidade* (Coordination of Community Relations)

DEMHAB: *Departamento Municipal de Habitação* (Municipal Department of Housing)

DEP: *Departamento de Esgotas Pluvias* (Department of Storm Sewers)

DMAE: *Departamento Municipal de Águas e Esgotas* (Municipal Department of Water and Sanitary Sewers,).

DMLU: *Departamento Municipal de Limpeza Urbana* (Municipal Department of Urban Sanitation)

GAPLAN: *Gabinete de Planejamento* (Ministry of Planning)

MST: *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (Landless Workers' Movement)

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

OP: *Orçamento Participativo* (Participatory Budget)

PT: *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Workers' Party)

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 2004, some 20,000 people participated in the year-long process of controlling and allocating the investment budget of the sixth largest city in Brazil. They audited the previous year's spending, prioritized local and city-wide needs, and created a detailed investment plan for the following year. From 1989 to 2004, Porto Alegre's *Orçamento Participativo* (Participatory Budget, OP) controlled between two and twenty percent of the city's municipal budget. It functioned as a transparent and consultative mechanism for creating civic involvement, financial transparency, and redistribution at the municipal level. The OP was started in 1989 by the first *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Workers' Party, PT) administration in Porto Alegre; it became the centerpiece of four successive city administrations. The PT began the OP in response to social movement pressure and because of an ideological commitment to direct democracy. Although the PT candidate was defeated in the 2004 mayoral elections, the successful opposition candidate campaigned on a promise to continue and expand the OP. The PT's participatory budgeting effort received largely positive international attention from academics, activists, and mayors, as well as from the World Bank, UN-Habitat, and other agencies. The broad outcomes of the OP in Porto Alegre have been a significant redistribution of city investments to poor neighborhoods, an improvement in quality of life indicators, and support for a model of high-quality and responsive public sector service provision.

The English-language literature about Porto Alegre is not yet very extensive, although it is growing rapidly.¹ Unfortunately, this body of literature is limited not only in size, but also in depth. It is surprisingly self-referential, and balances on a relatively small amount of original research. The literature is politically almost of one voice, varying only from mostly-sympathetic to fully supportive of the PT's ideology.² This is not unique to the study of Porto Alegre, but it does indicate the limitations to understanding the city's experiences based on the literature alone.

Overwhelmingly, the existing literature has focused on changes in the form and quality of citizenship experienced by the citizens of Porto Alegre as a result of the OP's structures and mechanisms. This has directly mirrored the PT's rhetoric, as the party has been outspoken about their intention of creating a "rights-based" form of citizenship. This focus on building structures of citizenship based on individual rights rather than on personal connections and favoritism has tied neatly into long-standing academic debates about citizenship and governance. Giving a recursive aspect to the literature about the OP, the PT's theories and practices in support of citizenship have been deeply informed by university-based intellectuals, while a not-insignificant portion of the articles about the OP have been authored or coauthored by PT officials.

¹ In early 2005 there were perhaps twenty articles and one book in print, with many of the articles being early or forthcoming book chapters; by mid-2005 there were at least five monographs and edited volumes, with more forthcoming. The Lusophone literature is broader and often more critical, and includes books and articles by PT activists and officials involved in the administrations (e.g. Fedozzi 1997).

² Exceptions to this can mostly be found in the Lusophone literature (e.g. Dacanal and Weber 1999).

What have not been explored, however, are the interactions between the OP and Porto Alegre's municipal line agencies. I argue in this paper that these mutually beneficial interactions between the line agencies and the OP participants are central to understanding the outcomes and implications of the OP. Virtually all of the responsibility for the city's accomplishments and failures in infrastructure provision, service allocation, and changes in citizenship rested entirely on the actions of a small set of line agencies controlled only partially by the elected administrations. The line agencies leveraged their involvement in the OP's direct democracy into protection from demands from elected politicians, allowing them to form non-adversarial alliances with participants in support of high-quality public services. Participants in the OP, by supporting public rather than non-governmental or market-based service provision, gained responsive bureaucracies willing to support goals of redistribution and participation.

Too often, analyses of Porto Alegre's municipal government have relied on a simplistic division between "government" and "civil society." Conflating elected officials, their appointees, and line agency bureaucracies has served to obscure important aspects of both the implementation and the outcomes of the OP. Moreover, presenting the OP as an organic institution of the people, residing fully within and reliant upon "civil society," has glossed over the role of the elected administrations in creating, promoting, and implementing the process. Representations of Porto Alegre under the PT have been flattened, featuring only encompassing versions of the administration and civil society as actors.

Disaggregating the city government can be done in layers. The surface is the flat portrayal, where the “administration” is everything. The first level beneath that takes the term apart into the administration (centered on the mayor), the agencies dedicated to the functioning of the OP, and the line agencies. Taken to a deeper level, the line agencies can be teased apart according to their varying levels of support for the OP.

In this paper I focus on disaggregating the municipal government. However, the use of “civil society” in previous analyses has been equally uncritical. García Canclini’s (2001) description of the term civil society being “used ... to legitimize the most heterogeneous agendas of groups, non-governmental organizations, private corporations, and even individuals” is particularly apt in this case. He writes, “civil society appears to be one more totalizing concept destined to overlook the heterogeneous and disintegrated ensemble of voices that circulate throughout nations” (pp. 27-28). This criticism applies to much of the literature on Porto Alegre. Since “civil society” can be amorphous and difficult to measure directly, proxies are used, such as the number and interconnectedness of neighborhood organizations. These proxies, however, fail to capture the much wider and polyvocal realm of civil society. Most importantly, this formulation, by focusing exclusively on groups associated with words like “empowerment,” “progressive,” and “resistance,” fails to include conservative and reactionary aspects of civil society. Since the press in Porto Alegre ranged from hostile to ambivalent about the OP and the PT, the media is left out of this definition of civil society; similarly, pro-PT Catholic Ecclesiastical Base

Communities inspired by liberation theology are included, while Protestant churches advocating a conservative political stance are not.

In *Good Governance in the Tropics*, Judith Tendler (1997) describes high-quality service provision originating from a three-way dynamic between an activist central government, local government, and civil society. In this process, the central government reconfigured its relationship with local government, both adding and devolving responsibilities and powers. Moreover, the central government intentionally nurtured and strengthened civil society structures and institutions, so that the empowered civic associations then “‘independently’ demanded better performance from government, ... just as if they were the autonomous entities portrayed by students of civil society” (pp. 15-16). Tendler sets her model against the literature promoting reliance on decentralization and civil society in the form of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), rather than government, for both service provision and democratization. By substituting a three-way dynamic for the common portrayal of a two-way dynamic between civil society and government, Tendler has created a more descriptive and nuanced model. That is, the two-way model fails to account for the ways in which civil society, however defined, does not exist in a space fully independent from government actions. Moreover, by disaggregating “government” at least into local government and central government, Tendler’s model captures an important set of interactions between levels of government that can support and even create opportunities for civil society mobilization. In this way, the three-way model provides opportunities for cooperation between two parts to push for change in the third.

The context within which the PT administrations in Porto Alegre were acting, however, was not as much about decentralization to civil society as it was privatization and the promotion of a private sector model for state services. Brazil made significant steps towards “municipalization” of services in the late 1980s, devolving significant powers and responsibilities to local levels of government. However, revisions to the federal constitution in 1997, during the presidency of Fernando Henrique Cardoso, reversed this trend. Cardoso, in power from 1994 to 2002, had been a Marxist sociologist famous for his work on dependency theory. However, as president he emphasized fiscal responsibility and private sector solutions. There was a strong push during his presidency for the privatization of municipal and state agencies, particularly of public water utilities. On the whole, the PT used their base in municipal and state governments to resist privatization in favor of public sector service provision. (The third PT administration in Porto Alegre was an interesting exception and pushed for privatization of a major city utility. I discuss further in Section Four how the utility was able to use its involvement with the OP to resist the proposal for privatization.)

A deeper reading of the OP must include the institutional impacts of the participatory mechanisms on a disaggregated city government. In Tandler’s case studies, the three-way dynamic produces responsive bureaucracies. Porto Alegre already had largely responsive local bureaucracies. Instead, what was produced was a broad coalition supporting a model of high-quality and responsive public sector service provision, rather than privatization or decentralization to non-governmental entities. Rather than defunding government and supporting regressive policies, the

Porto Alegre administrations were able to raise taxes and pursue an openly redistributory agenda, while retaining broad-based electoral support.

In the case of Porto Alegre, we can reconfigure Tandler's three-way dynamic as being between an activist municipal administration, civil society, and engaged line agencies. The PT administrations used the mechanism of the OP to create strong civil society advocates for services, and to redirect much higher percentages of the city budget into public works projects under the control of municipal agencies. The line agencies benefited not only from increased budgets for construction and maintenance, but also from the increased importance given to technical considerations in the participatory budgeting process. Rather than continuing to serve as patronage machines of politicians, the line agencies interacted directly with civil society through the OP, allowing an assertion of a strong technocratic, service-based identity. Municipal agencies were able to leverage their involvement in the participatory budget to create a consensus with civil society against the pressures on the administration for privatization.

Inadvertent Research

When I traveled to Porto Alegre, Brazil, in the summer of 2000, I did not intend to do any formal research. Instead, it was to be an initial familiarizing trip only. I hoped to make some initial research contacts that I could use on a return trip, begin the preliminary formulation of future research questions, and improve my Portuguese competency through immersion.

As it happened, however, I spent my entire stay conducting interviews, attending OP meetings, and going on field visits. I arrived late on a Friday afternoon;

early Saturday morning I found myself meeting with a prominent official in the PT state government who had earlier served in a PT city administration. A Brazilian friend had put me in touch with a Brazilian Cornell alum, Dr Antonio Benetti, newly appointed as a professor at the Hydraulic Research Institute at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul in Porto Alegre. Dr Bennetti not only, with typical Brazilian courtesy, met me at the airport, found me an apartment, and fed me, he also shared my interest in the intersection of politics with water and sanitation infrastructure development. Being newly returned to Brazil, he was eager for a chance to learn more about the function and implications of Porto Alegre's OP. Dr Benetti was able to use me, as a visiting foreign graduate student, as an excuse to gain entry to city departments and field sites. For me, his professional affiliations and personal connections opened doors that would have been unlikely to open to me alone. He also facilitated the first meetings linguistically, allowing my Portuguese to come up to speed.

I ended up with more than nine hours of taped interviews, along with notes from untaped interviews; I went on numerous field visits with engineers and activists across the metropolitan area to see public works projects; and I attended both central and outlying budget meetings. In addition, I socialized informally with technocrats and activists, attended Workers' Party functions, and, in the end, left with a more comprehensive picture of the interactions of city agencies and the participatory budget than I had expected to acquire.

My first interview, with the former city official, ended with his compiling a suggested list of agencies and officials most worth interviewing. Two things became

clear during the course of this interview: officials were more open to outside research than I had expected, and with Dr Benetti's assistance and a sympathetic interviewee my Portuguese was (albeit marginally) up to the challenge. Faced with a choice between my original plan and this suddenly laid-out research agenda, I chose to run with the research.

The interviews were principally with department and section heads in municipal line agencies, as well as with two professors with overlapping research interests. Over the following two months I conducted interviews at the *Coordenação de Relações com a Comunidade* (Coordination of Community Relations, CRC), the *Departamento Municipal de Limpeza Urbana* (Municipal Department of Urban Sanitation, DMLU), the *Departamento Municipal de Habitação* (Municipal Department of Housing, DEMHAB), the *Departamento de Esgotas Pluvias* (Department of Storm Sewers, DEP), and the *Departamento Municipal de Águas e Esgotas* (Municipal Department of Water and Sanitary Sewers, DMAE). At the *Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul* (Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul) I interviewed professors in the Schools of Architecture and Administration.

Most agency visits followed a similar pattern. I conducted the interview with a highly-placed political appointee on the first day, and returned later for field visits with civil-service technical staff. Field visits failed at only one department, DEP. There was never an explicit refusal, but it eventually became clear to me that further cooperation was not likely. I conducted multiple interviews at CRC and DMAE, and had the most contact with the field staff of these two agencies.

I used an open-ended question format, in that I began with a basic list of questions while attempting to make each interview flow as organically as possible. The interviews were conducted primarily in Portuguese, with scattered use of English for mutual clarification. The exception was one case where the official wanted to practice his English in preparation for a trip to the United States. Dr Benetti arranged and attended the first few interviews; after that, he accompanied me whenever an agency or topic was of particular interest to him. Overall, he was present at about half of the interviews, and a much smaller fraction of the field visits. Only one interview was conducted one-on-one. Most of the interviewees chose to bring in one or more aides, assistants, colleagues, or other participants from within their agencies. In one case I and a researcher from a Dutch university, Daniel Chávez, arrived at an office at the same time for interviews with different officials. After initial confusion about which official went with which researcher, we decided to proceed jointly. Contrary to stereotypes of developing countries in general and Brazil in particular, I suffered no cancelled or even delayed appointments. Officials were scrupulously punctual and well prepared, and were hospitable to a fault.

One of my lasting regrets is that because of a combination of poor planning and a miscommunication I was unable to record two early interviews that turned out to be particularly informative. My first interview was with Alvaro Pedrotti, then working for the then newly-elected PT state government; he had previously held positions in PT city administrations. The interview was unfortunately not recorded, and my notes are the most incomplete of any interview I conducted. However, this interview remains one of the most valuable I did, and set the stage for the rest of my stay in

Porto Alegre. He provided a clear account, including drawing diagrams, of the yearly budgeting cycle. He also contextualized the PT's rise to power in Porto Alegre within regional and national history. More than any specific information or understanding, the most valuable thing Pedrotti provided was permission to use his name, which opened doors throughout the city.

It quickly became apparent to me that Porto Alegre was a well-researched city. Officials frequently joked in a good natured way about how often they were interviewed by visiting researchers, and about the similarity of the questions they were asked. Although I only met two other researchers in person, I was constantly encountering traces of others. Business cards, thesis drafts, and other detritus marked their paths through the Porto Alegre bureaucracies. For all that, the officials were good humored about the attention and gave generously of their time. From my reception, I concluded that foreign researchers were identified as important mechanisms for disseminating news of the PT's experience in Porto Alegre. The officials were too consistently welcoming for it to have been anything other than policy. Another factor in the openness to researchers may have been a shared intellectual culture. The PT officials and activists were consistently well-educated, and many of the key thinkers and strategists have moved back and forth between movement and electoral politics and universities. For them, academic scrutiny, particularly by overtly left-leaning researchers, was not on its surface unwelcome nor hostile. I found that we shared a language of theory and social values, having read the same authors, attended similar educational institutions, and consumed the same cultural productions.

I suspect that this sense of connection, bordering on idealization, is a central reason why US and European researchers and activists have so often focused on the PT in Brazil. Not only were they successful in electoral politics and implemented innovative policies, they were *just like us*—or rather, they were how we would like to think of ourselves. In 2000, the PT officials and activists were confident and hopeful, assured of local reelection and already looking forward to the 2002 presidential elections. Their explanations and rhetoric were informed by and resonated with leading European and American intellectuals, and they had achieved mass validation through elections. I return to this issue in greater depth in Section Three, with a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the published research on the OP, and in Section Five, with an examination of the consistency in narratives of progressive cities and political change.

Context and History

Porto Alegre is the capital of Rio Grande do Sul, the southernmost state in Brazil. It has a population of 1.3 million within the city limits, and is the center of a metropolitan area of some 3 million inhabitants. Porto Alegre is a regional center for trade, services, and manufacturing, and has close connections with the other hubs of the southern cone. Voted the city in Brazil with the best quality of life, by some measures, Porto Alegre approaches a first-world quality of life. (Hall 2002, 5) Richer and more European than the north of Brazil, the far south of Brazil has never faced the grinding poverty, deprivation, and periodic famines of the northeast. At the same time, Brazil has one of the most unequal distributions of wealth and income in the world, and Porto Alegre reflects this deep inequality. The city experienced uncontrolled

growth when it doubled in population in the 1970s and 1980s, with a concomitant deepening of the divide between rich and poor. This social gulf was compounded by long-standing policies concentrating municipal investments and services in the rich center, neglecting the sprawling and underserved periphery.

The municipal boundaries of Porto Alegre are expansive and encompass areas that are rural in character with very low population densities, and that feel quite isolated from the urban center. The metropolitan area includes twelve smaller municipalities that serve as industrial centers and bedroom communities; they are far poorer than Porto Alegre and institutions of metropolitan governance are weak. There have been attempts by the satellite municipalities to formally join the city of Porto Alegre, but these overtures were rebuffed by the PT administrations. An issue that has forced closer cooperation and communication, however, has been pollution. Because the satellite cities are centers of highly polluting industries such as leather tanning and are upriver from Porto Alegre, controlling the quality of the city's water and rehabilitating the waterfront cannot be accomplished unilaterally.

Several officials I interviewed claimed a connection between the OP and what they described as a long local history of democratic traditions. The city does have a history of strong civic organizations and political movements; during the twenty years of the military dictatorship, the area was a bastion of support for the democracy movement. There is also a palpable sense of local exceptionalism. The state of Rio Grande do Sul has a strong articulation of regional identity and particularity, with a

history of rebellions and political tensions.³ To this day, the south of Brazil feels a certain ambivalence in its allegiances. The area has much closer contact with the rest of the southern cone than does most of Brazil's largely coastal population, and talk of secession is frequent, albeit usually joking. The Traditional Gaucho Movement claims an active membership of over two million; members can be frequently seen walking in traditional garb in the city's business center and residential neighborhoods, and membership halls dot the metropolis. The region has also produced a disproportionately large number of important political figures, including the authoritarian populist and modernizer Getúlio Vargas, giving it an outsized voice in national politics. The PT administrations drew upon and nurtured this regional identity, self-consciously attempting to link their innovations with prominent symbols of the region.

The PT in Porto Alegre

The first PT administration in Porto Alegre was elected in late 1988, largely as a protest vote against the previous administration. By 2004, PT administrations had won reelection four times, giving Porto Alegre one of the longest running left-wing city governments in Latin America. A former Porto Alegre mayor from the PT, Olívio Dutra, was elected as governor of the state in 1998, although the party lost its reelection bid in 2002. Through the 1990s, the PT was increasingly successful in Brazil, winning greater numbers of city, state, and federal elections in each election

³ Between 1835 and 1928 at least three important rebellions, republican and separatist, took place in Rio Grande do Sul, and the area was deeply involved in other uprisings. The Brazilian military maintains large garrisons in the state, in part because it is still perceived as "frontier," but also as a symbol of national control.

since 1988, until registering significant losses in the 2004 elections. After three failed attempts, the PT candidate Luiz Inácio “Lula” da Silva won the Brazilian presidency in 2002 by a commanding majority. By late 2005, however, his presidency had become significantly weakened by a series of high-profile corruption scandals. Although the reputations of the municipal PT administrations in Porto Alegre and elsewhere for transparency and innovation were crucial to the PT’s national success, the Lula administration has largely avoided implementing significant participatory or redistributive measures, preferring instead to seek a middle ground of debt repayment and a modest social agenda.

The PT’s sixteen-year run in Porto Alegre ended in 2004, when the PT candidate lost the municipal election to challenger Jose Fogaça from the Socialist People's Party. The loss of Porto Alegre, along with high-profile losses in cities such as São Paulo, was a major blow to the PT. Coming at a time of intense criticism of and disenchantment with the Lula presidency, these defeats presented a major challenge to the PT’s strategy of basing national electoral success on local and state administrations. The defeat of the PT in Porto Alegre, however, was not a rejection of the OP. Fogaça won in part by asserting a more radical and expansionary vision of the OP, and by convincing voters that the OP was separable as an institution from the PT.

The PT was founded in the early 1980s when the military dictatorship began to allow the return of democracy, including opposition parties, in Brazil after twenty years of repression (see Keck, 1992). The PT had its roots in political and religious activists, unions, and social movements; many of the *petistas* had been active in the heavily repressed pro-democracy struggle against the dictatorship, and some were

living in exile.⁴ With the return of democracy in the early 1980s, the PT and other opposition parties made the strategic decision to seek power in the electoral system, rather than focus on civil society or violent revolutionary change.⁵ The PT entered electoral politics in 1982 with a narrow “pro-worker” message. This strategy met with little success—nationally, the PT won only three percent of the vote (Baiocchi 2003b, 11). The PT’s ideological movement has since consistently been one towards pragmatism and heterodoxy, and away from narrow ideological purity.

The PT, particularly in its early city administrations, did manage to coalesce around two key themes: redistribution and participation (Abers 2000, 49). Redistribution, under the label of “*inversão de prioridades*” (inversion of priorities), called for government to prioritize the needs of the poor in both policies and structure, while “*participação popular*” (popular participation) emphasized direct democracy and decentralization, and an expanded role for grassroots organizations.⁶

The common stereotype of politics in Brazilian politics centers on clientalism, patronage, and other mechanisms of vertical rather than horizontal connections.⁷ Using

⁴ Jose Dirceu, one of President Lula da Silva’s closest advisors, had been a student activist and part of the urban guerrilla movement; he fled to Cuba after being released from prison in Brazil in exchange for the kidnapped American ambassador. He received plastic surgery, training in guerrilla warfare, and a new identity, and then lived for the rest of the 1970s as a shopkeeper in a small town in the Brazilian state of Paraná. After the amnesty in 1979, he reclaimed his old identity and, with more surgery, his old face as well.

⁵ Some social movements like the Landless Workers’ Movement (MST) have had a much more ambivalent relationship with the electoral system, forming alliances but remaining proponents of a much more hard-edged vision of radical social change.

⁶ The language of “inversion of priorities” comes directly from liberation theology.

⁷ This has been explored by many authors; see for example Scheper-Hughes (1992), Gay (1994), and Weyland (1996).

both public funds and personal political capital to dole out favors directly, politicians attempt to forge bonds of loyalty with individual voters and communities, rather than negotiating with organized groups. Although observers such as Gay (1994) have described examples of the poor manipulating and benefiting from patronage politics, in general this form of political exchange has failed to address the long-term needs of the poor. Similarly, discussions of poverty in Brazil often revolve around the concepts of “marginalization,” “exclusion,” and “periphery.” The spatially-segregated poor are said to suffer intense social exclusion, cut off from the institutions and mechanisms of “normal” or “central” society. Of course, the poor are actually central, rather than marginal, to (but not responsible for) the creation and maintenance of an intensely unequal society (e.g. Pearlman 1976). They provide the labor and the votes that make modern Brazil possible. Moreover, the cultural contributions of the poor, from samba to capoeira, have become central to contemporary state-sanctioned Brazilian national identity. However, there is descriptive truth to these concepts as well. The urban poor are physically excluded from the secure and well-serviced areas of the city, and are marginalized in the concerns of politicians, except for the exchange of favors for votes.

The PT was formed in large part to fight against this model of political interaction and exclusion. The PT was founded on a radical commitment to democratic mechanisms and an “inversion of priorities” in favor of the poor. In practice, the PT’s efforts towards redistribution and participation have focused on creating responsive public institutions with service provision based on objective criteria. That is, the PT’s successful local administrations have attempted to rectify structural inequalities in

society by strengthening the state. Not every faction within the PT has supported this “reform from within” approach—there are strong elements within the party that would prefer more radical political approaches, and see any compromise with capitalist structures as an unacceptable betrayal of their values. With few exceptions the more radical factions within the party have been sidelined in favor of the more pragmatic center.⁸ Although the four PT administrations in Porto Alegre came from different factions within the PT, they shared a pragmatic focus on coexistence with capitalism, rather than a demand for instant revolution.

Seeking to combine the goals of redistribution and participation, the first PT administration in Porto Alegre came into office with vaguely-formed plans for governing through “popular councils,” an idea supported by both the movement and union bases of the PT. The popular councils were never fully elaborated in Porto Alegre, because of organizational difficulties and questions of legitimacy, the administration’s ultimate unwillingness to devolve such broad-based powers, and the criticism of the councils as too narrow and supported only the trade unions, social movements, and other mobilized sections of the PT’s base. Instead, the administration chose to follow approaches involving governing for the entire city. This met with controversy within the PT, because governing for the entire city meant supporting sectors that had opposed the PT’s election, such as the business elite. Despite the internal dissention, pitting party purists against administration pragmatists, this may

⁸ See for example Guidry and Petit’s (2003) discussion of the far left of the PT in the city of Belém; similarly, the 2004 election in the city of Forteleza was won by a radical PT candidate.

have been the single most important decision by the first Porto Alegre administration. When other PT administrations, such as Luiza Erundina's administration in São Paulo, chose to govern primarily for their base, they met with widespread electoral and popular failure (Jacobi 1994; Couto 2003).⁹

In 1989 the Porto Alegre administration implemented the first participatory budget. Avritzer reports that the OP originated from a proposal first made in 1986 by organized social movement organizations within Porto Alegre (Avritzer 2000, 9); other authors have emphasized the administration's role in crafting the OP (e.g. Abers 2000). Regardless, the OP was set off to a rocky start. The process was heavily promoted by the elected administration, party activists, and the social movements that had demanded a role in the budget process. All of this led to unrealistically high expectations on the part of the participants in the largely unstructured process, who produced a long list of demands with an investment budget that assumed the entire city budget was available for spending. However, the administration had intended that "only the 'residual' of the budget would be considered" (Abers 2000, 72). Worse, it turned out that there was no "residual"—the new administration had inherited a severe financial crisis. The financial situation was sufficiently dire that in its first year in office, the administration was unable to make almost any capital expenditures, and

⁹ The reliance of the first PT administration in São Paulo, also elected in 1988, on popular councils helps to explain that administration's failure to win reelection. The popular councils in fact were narrowly defined, relying on social movements and unions, and lacked a perception of broad-based popular legitimacy. By emphasizing its existing base, rather than transforming initial electoral legitimacy into a stable and broad coalition, the São Paulo failed both in its electoral and transformative goals.

certainly nothing as ambitious as what the first participatory budget demanded. The administration, and the OP, lost an enormous amount of credibility.

The decision in 1990 to not only continue but in fact to expand the OP was a key turning point for the new administration. In a seeming contradiction, the OP in its second year was promoted from a prominent experiment to a centerpiece of the public identity of the administration, despite its initial failure. We are able to resolve this apparent contradiction of expanding a prominent and controversial failure by looking at the political expediency of the evolution of the ambivalent relationships between the administration and social movement organizations. When the administration chose to govern broadly, rather than privilege its social movement base, the social movements lost their direct access to power. However, the fundamental commitment to direct democracy within the administration remained strong. The OP combined sufficient direct democracy with a constraint of the popular exercise of power over the executive branch.

Moreover, popular mobilization around the budget could be used to highlight the extent to which the financial crisis inherited by the PT was not the fault of the new administration. Created by the previous administration's last-minute gift of a 110 percent raise to the municipal employees, "this committed 98 per cent of the ... budget for the following year to wage costs" (Bruce 2004, 40). Also feeling the effects of a property tax amnesty, the new administration was clearly unable to meet the demands and expectations of the mobilized participants. However, by turning to a scrupulously public process of budget transparency, and by giving the participatory budget participants control over the spending of the municipal investment budget, the

administration could simultaneously insulate itself from criticism over unmet promises and effectively co-opt the participants into making the difficult and controversial decisions involved in partitioning an inadequate investment budget among many needy neighborhoods.

During its first years in office the administration in Porto Alegre took drastic steps to balance its books, including wage freezes and substantial increases in tax rates and tax collections. Additional revenues came through the rewritten Brazilian constitution, which provided for substantially increased federal transfers to cities.¹⁰ The constitution had been rewritten in 1988, and by 1990 the transfers were already increasing, although the increases were not fully phased in until 1993. By the second year of the OP, the administration had a substantial budget for infrastructure and service investments, and this budget increased through the mid-1990s. Fedozzi shows that the percentage of the budget available for investments jumped from around three percent in 1989 to ten percent in 1990, and was at seventeen percent by 1992 (1997, 135).

In addition to allocating a significant investment budget, the administration devoted the resources necessary to structure and sustain the process for its second year. Two city agencies, answering directly to the mayor, were created to coordinate the public and technical aspects of the OP. Activists were recruited to mobilize

¹⁰ The “municipalization” in the 1988 constitution came out of an alliance of convenience between parties of the far left and right who worked together to support a constitution that increased resources and autonomy for municipalities. Both saw their most likely immediate success coming at the local level. Moreover, both wanted the freedom from oversight and central control that would allow both innovation and kleptocracy.

communities to take part in the process. Facilitators were employed to give a standard structure to every OP meeting. In 1990 the OP acquired most of the features still present in 2004, including its administrative structure and a reliance on “objective criteria” for decision-making. The new agencies drew up comprehensive rules for the internal organization of the OP, as well as for the prioritization of demands, the funding process, and the technical criteria for proposed projects. Apart from the addition of thematic forums in 1993 and the compression from two discussion rounds to one in 2002, changes have been more in the nature of fine-tuning the process rather than changing it at its core.

It is important to clarify the limitations of the OP. Most importantly it did not control the entire budget of the city. Instead, the OP controlled only the discretionary portion of the budget available for investments, and the administration decided what this portion would be. In most years, the investment budget was fluctuated between 15 to 20 percent of the entire municipal budget. The municipal payroll was kept under the administration’s control, as was the maintenance of the municipal physical plant. Additionally, some aspects of the OP’s control over investments have been more ceremonial than real. Large externally-funded projects, such as World Bank loans, went through the process, but were not fully under its control. As one official explained, “the government discusses [these projects] with the Participatory Budget Council, because no investment can be done without passing the Participatory Budget Council, but in reality it is not [controlled by the OP].”¹¹ There were also other sets of

¹¹ Interview, CRC, May 24, 2000. Translation mine.

services outside the rubric of the OP, either because these services are controlled by the state or federal governments, such as in the case of policing, or, as in the cases of education and healthcare, because municipalities did not have budgetary autonomy over these services and were instead required to spend a fixed percentage of revenues on them.

The boundaries between “investments” (under the participants’ control) and “institutional spending” (under the administration’s control) were repeatedly contested. Santos (1998) reports that the conflict over this was “often quite open,” with representatives of the OP fighting to widen its purview into areas such as cultural spending even as the administration resisted.¹² Complicating Santos’ version of boundary contestation is that according to some authors, the OP had formal authority over the entire budget but simply never chose to exercise that authority. According to Bruce, for example, the OP had “the right, in principle, to decide upon and alter the whole of the municipal budget” (2004, 49). The reasons he presents for the failure of the OP to take on this more formal role, such as fixed costs such as municipal power and phone bills being non-negotiable parts of the budget, are seemingly practical, but do not get to the heart of the matter.

The real reason for the continued limitation of the OP’s powers, which Bruce only alludes to, is that the administrations were simply unwilling to give up more power than they had already devolved to the OP. The OP controlled only the new, or expanded, piece of the budget pie. That is, the OP’s control over investments did not

¹² In fact, since the time at which Santos was writing, the representatives of the OP have been successful at gaining some control over cultural spending.

take money out of existing budget allocations for personnel, maintenance of existing investment, or other important parts of the construction and support of bureaucratic structures. The OP in some ways controlled the rate of growth of municipal departments, but did not have the ability to shrink or reallocate baseline departmental budgets, nor impinge on mayoral authority. The OP representatives claimed the legitimacy of direct democracy and that the administration was unreasonably trying to limit decentralization; the administration asserted the legitimacy of electoral democracy and asserted that some topics “engage the city as a whole and ... cannot be submitted to a debate that tends to produce particularistic solutions” (Santos 1998, 497). On the whole, the tendency over time has been for compromise solutions that have slowly expanded the role of the OP, against the pressure of the administration assertively protecting its executive powers.

In the next section, I move from the broad context within which the OP sits to a consideration of the nuts and bolts of the process itself. Most depictions of the PT administrations in Porto Alegre, including the self-presentation by the administrations themselves, have focused in tremendous detail on the specifics of the OP. It is necessary to tease out the details of the process, in Section Two, before considering the strengths and weaknesses of the literature in Section Three.

CHAPTER 2

THE FORM AND FUNCTION OF THE *ORÇAMENTO PARTICIPATIVO*

In this section, I discuss the form, timeline, and internal organization of the participatory budget in Porto Alegre. I begin by contrasting the participatory budget process with the previous, less open budget process. The move towards transparency and broad-based participation led to radically different outcomes than in the past. Although the underlying formal budgeting process had not changed, the scale of the consultation changed significantly. Timelines of the OP and discussions of its organizational structure have been most commonly presented as participant-centric. I discuss not only the OP as experienced by the participants, but also its nature as a government-initiated and –led process. The four PT administrations formed the OP into a tool for mobilization and direct democracy, as a result of which the OP formed a powerful element of their electoral success.

The OP has often been portrayed as forming a clear break with the previous budgetary system in Porto Alegre. Instead, I argue that the key changes have been less in the formal budget process and more in increases in transparency and inclusion. Certainly, the transparency and the excruciatingly public nature of the OP made the previous budget process look secretive and clandestine. The old budgetary process followed a “normal” form: the budget was hammered out in closed sessions between the mayor, some top aides, and the city legislators—perhaps a total of twenty participants. In contrast, in 2004 the OP involved over 20,000 participants in an open process. However, the OP actually followed the same four steps every federal, state, and municipal budget in Brazil must take. Under Brazil’s legal system, every budget

must pass through the phases of preparing the budgetary proposal; discussion, voting, and approval of the budget; execution of the budget; and auditing the budget (Fedozzi 1997, 107). The OP in Porto Alegre followed the exact same steps.

What changed was the scale at which these steps were carried out. In turn, this shift in scale in transparency and inclusion produced markedly different outcomes than did the previous budget process. Most obviously, investments in infrastructure and services were spread across the entire city rather than being concentrated in the wealthier neighborhoods of the urban center. Less visibly, but at least as important, the relationships between the administration, the city line agencies, and the public were reconfigured, with line agencies and the participants using the OP to advocate for and defend a model of high-quality, public service provision.

The Participant-Centered Timeline

The OP devolved powers to the participants through an institutionalization of a new set of practices. These practices were developed through negotiations between and refinements by administration officials and participants. The process began with public meetings at which anyone who attended, in theory, had a voice. It then moved through a series of smaller meetings towards large public presentations of the results of the decisions of the elected participants. At the micro-level on the participant side of the process were the neighborhood meetings, taking place early in the cycle and looking at hyper-local concerns. Larger in size and somewhat broader in scope were the regional assemblies with which the OP began in March. The regional and thematic forums were composed of elected delegates, representing the thousands of participants at the early stages, and were able to consider questions of quite wide scope. The

Budget Council, composed of elected councilors, was small numerically but performed on a very public stage, and had the most freedom to explore a wide array of possibilities.

The timeline of the OP has been most commonly represented by the PT administrations and scholars of the OP as a circle, beginning in March with the preparatory meetings, and circling around to discussions and voting in December and January. (See Figure One.) Showing the timeline as circular, rather than as a unidirectional path, underlines the administration's assertion that this is a central process that will be repeated indefinitely, rather than a short-lived experiment. As a schematic, it is clean and neat.



Figure One: OP Yearly Cycle¹³

For the participants, the cycle would begin in March, when the first round of meetings of popular assemblies were convened. The assemblies were held throughout the city, open to anyone interested (although only residents of that region have voting rights), and were advertised widely. The promotion of this early part of the process represented a significant part of the administration's advertising budget. An official responsible for coordinating the community outreach told me, "The people end up knowing in one way or another, because they read the newspaper, they watch

¹³ Porto Alegre 2004.

television, they see an ad in the bus, they listened to the radio; this is where the administration invests most of its advertising funds.”¹⁴

The popular assemblies introduced the split between regional and thematic concerns that ran throughout the budgeting process. The city was divided into sixteen regions, broadly following the boundaries within the 1979 master plan, with populations of each region ranging from 40,000 to 300,000. Thematic assemblies were added in 1993 in an attempt to address criticisms of parochialism and the inability to develop city-wide strategies, as well as to try to increase participation among the middle and upper classes. The regional assemblies considered any issue but were geographically constrained; the thematic assemblies considered only one issue but examined it in the context of the entire city. The thematic assemblies began as four in 1993, grew to five in the following year, and were later expanded to six topics.¹⁵

The regional and thematic assemblies were conducted in parallel, and, in addition to the accounting of the previous year’s budget, produced ranked lists of investment priorities and the election of delegates. Although the exact formula changed year to year, broadly speaking the delegates were allocated in proportion to the number of people attending the meetings, rather than, say, in direct proportion to the population of an area.¹⁶ This drove up attendance at these early meetings, because

¹⁴ Interview, CRC, May 24, 2000. Translation mine.

¹⁵ The six thematic areas (Circulation and Transport; Health and Social Assistance; Education, Sports, and Leisure; Economic Development, Taxation, and Tourism; City Organization and Urban Development; and Culture) represent a regrouping of thirteen themes, each tied to a particular city agency, into a more manageable six.

¹⁶ The proportion of delegates to attendees began at 1:10, then 1:20, and continued to decrease as participation in the OP rose.

by increasing attendance at the beginning a group could ensure a strong voice later in the process. According to an official, the definition of who was eligible to put forth delegates was deliberately broad: “So it could be a neighborhood association (*associação de bairro*), ... it could be a group of street dwellers (*moradores de rua*), ... there has to be a thing that characterizes the group and that states that the group is going to have the right to a delegate.”¹⁷

The conversion of ranked demands into amounts of money was not random or ad hoc. A key difference between the first, failed year of the OP and later years was the implementation of “objective criteria” for determining priority of regions and themes. Originally composed of four criteria of imperfect objectivity (popular mobilization, the region or theme’s importance for the city’s urban development, deficiency of service or infrastructure, and regional population), it was reduced to three more overtly objective criteria: deficiency of service or infrastructure; regional population; and regional thematic priority.¹⁸ Weighted grades from the objective criteria (determined by the administration) were combined with the ranked demands (produced by the participants). In this way, regions and themes received a point score that determined their funding.

The meetings concerning the ranking of priorities of demands continued as an “intermediate round” until the second round of regional and thematic assemblies

¹⁷ Interview, CRC, May 24, 2000. Translation mine.

¹⁸ “Mobilization” still plays a strong role, in that greater turnout early in the process results in more delegates, producing a stronger voice later in the process. However, its earlier overtly political meaning—attempting to measure a neighborhood’s left-leaning political mobilization—has been lost.

began in June. The second round featured a further set of elections from the regional and thematic forums, this time to the city-wide *Conselho do Orçamento Participativo* (Participatory Budget Council). Through the end of September, the *Conselho* and the administration, with the municipal agencies, worked through the ranked demands and finalized a draft of the budget proposal prepared by the administration. Presuming that it passed a vote, the budget proposal was submitted to the mayor's office. The months between September and December were spent hashing out the concrete details of the budget—exact expenditures on specific projects in specific places. When this was completed, approved, and voted upon, the mayor formally submitted the completed budget to the *Câmara dos Vereadores* (Chamber of Deputies), the legislative arm of the municipal government. Throughout, public meetings were held around the city to present the budget as it was developed.

Organizational Form and State Activism

What is most noteworthy about this timeline, however, is what it doesn't show: the vast amount of municipal work and resources that went into creating the yearly cycle. The timeline emphasizes the roles of the participants while minimizing the roles played by the administration. This timeline is drawn from the point of view of the participants helping to create the budget. The timelines for organizing the process, or spending and auditing the budget, are different, and were not publicized in the same way. The commitment of administration and agency resources, as well as the demands on the time of the participants, was significant. In fact, it was less an issue for many of the participants, because they generally take part only in the pieces of the process that

are of interest to them. The administration and agency officials, however, were at meetings night after night throughout much of the year.

The officials I interviewed shrugged off the commitment, saying that the rewards justified the work. One told me, “This is the main rule: to be patient, and to hear, to hear everybody. It is a learning process—you don’t get citizenry without learning.”¹⁹ However, I repeatedly saw the mayor, cabinet officials, and agency heads at small meetings far out on the urban periphery, late in the evening on weeknights. Porto Alegre is well south of the equator, so the May through July stretch of intense regional and thematic meetings came during the worst of the winter weather. In the poorer areas of the city, the meetings were almost invariably in unheated, open-air structures, sometimes with rain gusting in from the side. The dedication of high-profile personnel and fiscal resources is often the best way to judge the importance an organization gives to an activity, so for top city officials to repeatedly bundle themselves into coats and blankets and sit on hard metal folding chairs in a school patio, listening and responding to local residents for hours sent a clear message about the centrality of the process to the administration.

Looked at organizationally, however, the central role and the operational complexity of the administration become clear. The OP was coordinated and directed by the city administration. The mayor took the most public role, opening meetings and representing the administration throughout the cycle. Two dedicated agencies mobilized participants, facilitate meetings, served as information conduits, and

¹⁹ Interview, CRC, May 24, 2000. Translation mine.

provided technical backstopping. Municipal line agencies were present throughout, both for technical oversight and as participants. The citizen participants took part directly in regional and thematic meetings to negotiate priorities, and elected delegates and councilors to represent them in later stages of the process. The delegates finalized the regional and thematic priorities, and the councilors created the actual investment plan.

The *Gabinete de Planejamento* (Ministry of Planning, GAPLAN) and *Coordenação de Relações com a Comunidade* (Coordination of Community Relations, CRC²⁰) were the two municipal agencies created to do the heavy lifting of making the OP happen. GAPLAN was created in 1990 and had responsibility for the technical aspects of the budgeting process. As an agency, CRC dates back to 1981, but in 1989 it was reformed and charged with mobilization and coordination of the participants and the process. GAPLAN did much of the actual budgeting work for the participants, writing drafts, making sure numbers balanced, and that technical criteria were being followed. CRC was process-heavy, focused strongly on questions of citizenship, rights, and participation. I found officials with CRC to be among the most theoretically sophisticated of the officials I interviewed. They articulated their work as grounded in an explicit praxis of social action and academic theory. CRC and GAPLAN also served as key conduits of information from the administration to the participants and to the rest of the world. They produced and distributed a huge array of

²⁰ *Coordenação de Relações com a Comunidade* was later renamed *Gabinete de Relações com a Comunidade* (Ministry of Community Relations). For consistency in this paper I am continuing to use the old name.

brochures, pamphlets, and posters, as well as other media, as well as hosted visiting officials and researchers. Delegates and Councilors were elected without necessarily having any prior knowledge of budgeting or city governance; CRC and GAPLAN were responsible for bringing the participants sufficiently up to speed so as to be able to take on meaningful roles.

I was repeatedly told by officials that the OP was an “autonomous” process, with structures that are explicitly mutable at the hands of both the administration and the participants in the OP: “the OP is autonomous, it is free, it is not controlled by the municipal government, it is not controlled by the Chamber, it is not controlled by anyone.” Although many observers agree, with Santos describing the OP meetings as taking place “without the interference of the municipality” (1998, 469), this was clearly not the case. The meetings were convened, organized, and facilitated by administration workers. At every meeting, “the government gives an accounting of what it is doing, what are the public works for the region, what is happening”²¹—the previous year’s budget is presented and accounted for, and administration officials define the parameters within which the current year’s participatory process will take place. This transparency and consistency were fundamental to the OP—they were the central basis for claims of legitimacy. Because high-level administrative and agency officials were present, their explanations of the previous year’s spending could be immediately and publicly challenged.

²¹ Interview, CRC, May 24, 2000. Translation mine.

There was a clear and overt hierarchy of power within the OP's structures and meetings. For example, at every meeting I was able to attend, the organizers created a visible stratification so familiar as to be almost unremarkable. Administration officials and key activists sat at the front, facing the assembly, often with elected or appointed participant representatives to their sides. At the largest of the meetings I attended, the annual City Congress, color-coded badges were handed out at registration tables at the entrances, and ushers helped group attendees by affiliation. At no meeting I attended did I have any difficulty immediately decoding who represented authority and who did not. On the one hand, that high-ranking officials were present and directly personally accountable for promises and assertions is a radical recognition of "citizen power." On the other hand, the mechanisms for allowing that citizen power reified the central authority of the city officials. The officials were in effect hosts of the meetings, rather than attending on the sufferance or request of the participants.

The OP meetings fell into common patterns of pseudo-egalitarian spatial articulations of status and authority. Arrangements like "townhall meetings" are ostensibly used to open spaces of power and allow unmediated exchanges across severe power differentials. However, the effect is one of distance and control, with legitimacy concentrated at the front of the room, and attendees and participants cast as supplicants. The OP did indeed open new spaces for people to speak and be heard, but the illusion of autonomy and egalitarianism was never, to my eyes, convincingly maintained.

At the meetings I was able to attend, city officials could be easily spotted not only through seating arrangements, but also by gender, skin color, height, and

clothing. Although several authors have done careful studies of gender relations and impacts among participants in the OP (e.g. Abers 2000; Baiocchi 2005), I am unaware of any serious examination of gender among the organizers of the OP. Every municipal department head I interviewed was male, although most had high-ranking female subordinates in visible positions. Women were better represented among the activists and lower-level organizers at the neighborhood level, and certainly most of the city employees and Party activists working to register and facilitate attendees at meetings I attended were female. The gender balance among participants at the meetings I attended were more mixed, which matches Abers' and Baiocchi's findings. Brazil, like the United States, continues to suffer from racially-based discrimination and segregation; unsurprisingly, city officials were on the whole lighter-skinned than the participants at the meetings I attended.²² In a country where food insecurity remains a serious problem for many people, the officials stood out for their height and good health. Clothing choices were carefully calibrated to the complicated hierarchy of the OP meetings. On the whole, administration officials dressed less formally than they did for high-level political meetings. At the same time, their clothes were of noticeably better quality and cut than those of the majority of the participants. A few officials routinely wore the outfits associated with the Gaucho traditionalists to the meetings, although I rarely saw such outfits in the offices and buildings of the administration.

²² As Telles (2004) discusses, racial categorization in Brazil is complicated and nuanced, not following the same patterns as in the United States. As such, my observations should be read as provisional and limited. See also Oliven's (1996) discussion of identity and race in Rio Grande do Sul.

The PT administrations self-consciously created and nurtured a specific form of “civil society” mobilization, dependent on state instigation and support, but with real and effective transformative powers. Taken together, these efforts at large-scale popular organizing on the part of an elected administration amounted to a clear example of what Tendler calls an “activist central government.” The commitment of resources was extended beyond the individual efforts of senior officials. At the institutional level, the PT administrations created and restructured agencies tasked with the implementation and coordination of the participatory budget process. Additionally, line agencies had to devote resources not only for attending and supporting the OP meetings, but also for direct community organizing and outreach efforts.

In the process, boundaries between Party and administration, and between electoral and direct democracy, became blurred. To the outside observer in particular, the separation between Party and administration was not always clear. Party loyalists were employed as organizers and outreach workers within the structures of the OP. Similarly, there was an imprecise line between the OP mobilization apparatus and the PT reelection efforts. By championing specific forms of direct democracy, and in the process largely erasing the city legislators from the budget process, the PT administrations were able to sustain their own repeated success in the electoral arena. As I discuss in Section Four, this deliberate movement of the OP’s legitimacy from electoral to direct democracy, and back again, has also played out in the patterns of infrastructure development practiced in Porto Alegre.

In Section Five, I discuss in greater depth the implications of how and why we discuss these progressive administrations, and the position of the researcher in relation to narratives of social change. Here, however, I wish to point out that the strategic benefits enjoyed by the Porto Alegre administrations are not unique to left-wing governments. Creating deliberately ambiguous boundaries between party and government, and shifting claims to legitimacy, have long been part of effective electoral politics. That a left-wing party like the PT learned to use the tools and mechanisms needed to win elections is perhaps noteworthy. That these methods were not fully congruous with the rhetoric of transformation, transparency, and empowerment expressed by the PT is less noteworthy. If anything, the intense scrutiny received by left-wing administrations like the ones in Porto Alegre, and the scrupulousness with which observers have teased apart every perceived contradiction, represent serious challenges to these administrations. Grounded in contemporary social and critical theory, the discourse presented by these administrations is both powerful and far-reaching, but is at the same time vulnerable to critiques of its intellectual and operational legitimacy, and subject to expectations that can be unfairly high.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE

The existing literature on Porto Alegre's OP has succeeded at carefully examining the structures of the OP and its linkages with civil society. The literature has been much less successful at achieving critical distance from the ideology of the PT, and missing almost entirely has been any consideration of the interactions between the OP and the line agencies. The authors also largely failed to consider writings about progressive cities in the United States and Europe, and the broad literature about decentralization, "good governance," and devolution in the developing world. Much of the literature is instead self-referential and insular.

More troubling than the self-referentiality, however, has been the authors' reliance on a small range of sources. Their acknowledgement pages repeatedly thank the same short list of officials and activists who facilitated my own research. Conceivably this could be a comment on my research skills: that I was able to within weeks meet, interview, and get to know the same key sources developed over time by more advanced researchers with extensive local contacts and fluent Portuguese. More likely, however, it suggests that a small number of genuinely friendly, outgoing, and well-informed municipal officials and PT activists have served as combination gatekeepers and native informants to a significant number of foreign researchers. I believe that this reliance on a limited range of sources not only sympathetic to but actually deeply involved in the creation and promotion of PT policies explains the slight sense of "deja-vu" one can feel upon reading the academic literature about Porto Alegre. In fairness, the 2003 volume edited by Baiocchi may represent a newer, more

critical turn in the scholarship on the PT's urban governance. With more comparative work, and the inclusion of both Brazilian and US scholars, the book's chapters are less whole-heartedly supportive of the PT. The criticism is muted, but includes, for example, discussions of less successful and failed cases of PT governance.

In this section I trace the four main threads within the literature on Porto Alegre's experience with participatory budgeting. Most of the academic literature on Porto Alegre's participatory budgeting can be divided into two camps, one focused on civil society and the other on the structures of the OP. The third, and smallest, academic thread is a less rigorous, decontextualized literature of political hope—explicitly left-wing, it has sought to draw inspiration from a highly visible leftist city government and its innovations as exemplified in the OP. The fourth is the development “best practices” literature, not only depoliticized but focused on a model of “good governance” that avoids both context and actors. The first two are the most significant, with the larger of the two foregrounding the structures of the OP, and the smaller foregrounding civil society. In his review of Abers' and Avritzer's books, Wampler sums up these contrary approaches as:

Represent[ing] the poles of the Participatory Budgeting debates. Avritzer places the explanation for the program on the development of a new civil society, in which civil society organizations pressured elected officials to create new institutional types. Abers, on the other hand, attributes the creation and the success of the Participatory Budgeting program to the PT's ability to foster the growth of a denser civil society. (2005, 248-249)

Two other key distinctions exist between these approaches. First, there is a relatively minimal contact between these approaches. Wampler and Avritzer's article, for example, buries their only mention of Abers, Baiocchi, and Santos in a footnote suggesting that these authors could be referred to for more information on the OP's structures (2004, n. 36). Wampler's article "Expanding Accountability" does refer to Abers, but does so only as part of a critique of her single-case methodology—he believes that relying on a single-case "limits the generalizability of the theoretical insights that can be gleaned from the cases" (2004, 75). From the other direction, Baiocchi's chapter in *The Left in the City* (2005) cites neither Wampler or Avritzer.

Second, the literature that foregrounds civil society is comparative, while the literature that foregrounds the structures of the OP is based on single-case analysis. The single-case literature is heavily ethnographic in approach, and is more overtly connected to the political project of the PT, whereas the comparative approach, by being more sympathetic to civil society and social movement groups, maintains more critical distance from the PT's ideology.

Jacobi (1994) is the first serious analysis of Porto Alegre's PT government that I have been able to locate in English.²³ He compares the experiences of the PT administrations in the cities of Porto Alegre, São Paulo, and Santos. São Paulo in particular was seen as a crucial test case for the PT because of its size (it is one of the largest cities in the world) and its economic dominance within Brazil; the PT failure there was a major setback for the party. Because the PT administrations across Brazil

²³ A Spanish-language version was published in 1995.

were swept into power on protest votes, they were under enormous pressure to produce results immediately. Jacobi finds that the key dilemmas for the new PT administrations were centered around the question of how to resolve the “tension inherent in the desire to continue to be a party of action and social mobilization ... seeking to establish autonomy from the state ... while at the same ... becoming a producer of public policies on the municipal level” (p. 3). This tension became, in essence, a struggle between the Workers’ Party and the administrations—the Party wanted ideological purity and the administrations needed the room to make workable negotiations. Jacobi concludes that the Porto Alegre administration represents “a real possibility for the construction of a democratic conception of government closely associated with administrative efficiency” (p. 23).

Wampler and Avritzer, strong proponents for the primacy of civil society in understanding the outcomes of participatory budgeting (Wampler 2000, 2004; Wampler and Avritzer 2004; Avritzer 2000, 2002), make the direct assertion that “the expansion of Brazil’s civil society led to the creation of participatory, deliberative policymaking institutions” (2004, 291). They compare relations between administrations and civil society in Porto Alegre, Recife, and São Paulo, looking strongly at questions of accountability. They trace a history of the OP that has it originating from an umbrella organization of civil society groups in Porto Alegre, rather than stemming from the first PT administration.²⁴ In this history, the administration was reacting to popular pressure for substantive input in the budgeting

²⁴Avritzer (2000: 11) has a table of proposed structures for the OP from the PT, city administration, and civil society.

process, rather than leading the way as an activist regime.

An interesting outcome of their comparative approach is that Wampler and Avritzer downplay the conflict between the administration and the legislative branch of the city government in Porto Alegre. Wampler claims that in contrast to Recife and São Paulo, the first PT administration in Porto Alegre had extensive support in the city council, and that without this support the OP could not have been successful (2004, 86-88, 96). This is an intriguing claim, in that it directly contradicts the administration and line agency officials who repeatedly described to me opposition from the city council to the OP. Further, it is not fully clear in Wampler and Avritzer's analyses how the relations between the administrations and legislatures were articulated in these cities. It is particularly unclear why, if the legislature was as supportive and on good terms with the administration as Wampler suggests, the Porto Alegre administration gave them no substantive role in the budgeting process. My overall impression is that Wampler and Avritzer have made a set of important observations, but have not fully explored the interplay of actors in each city they discuss.

The comparative approach was continued in Souza's comparison of Porto Alegre and Belo Horizonte and Heller's comparison of Porto Alegre, Kerala, and South Africa (Souza 2001; Heller 2001). These writers, like Jacobi, emphasize the administrative decisions, and the context in which they are made, rather than the mechanisms of the budgeting process. In this approach, the structural importance of the OP itself is diminished, in favor of giving more attention to the particularities of each city's situation. Souza, in particular, shows that there is a range of successful structures and forms that a participatory budget can take. For example, in Belo

Horizonte the administration avoided conflicts with the Câmara by bringing them into the process and giving them a formal (if less empowered) negotiating role, rather than marginalizing them. She notes, “In Belo Horizonte, city councilors continue to submit many budget amendments that seek to deliver public works projects to their electoral bases, while knowing that such amendments are rarely, if ever, actually acted upon by the mayor” (2001, 172-173). In other words, the administratively created structures are given less importance than the particularities of the cases and the outcomes.

Heller, unusually, sets up a comparison of a city, a state, and a country, on three different continents. He links the three cases of “democratic decentralization” through three points of similarity. Each has “a high degree of central state capacity, ... a well-developed civil society, ... [and] a political project in which an organized political force—and specifically non-Leninist left-of-center political parties that have strong social movement characteristics” (2001, 138-139). Heller sees the outcomes of the OP in Porto Alegre as stemming from a two-way dynamic, claiming that “social movements can transform politics and ... political projects can provide focus and institutional expression to social movement dynamics” (p. 158).

Another set of writers, who between them have produced the bulk of the literature on Porto Alegre, have taken a very different tack. Instead of situating Porto Alegre within Brazilian cities, they have situated Porto Alegre, and in particular the OP, within a constellation of theories surrounding democratization, participation, and governance. In this approach the mechanisms of the OP take on tremendous significance, and each of these writers devotes significant space to explaining and delineating the OP cycle and its evolution over time. In this category the most prolific

writers have been Abers and Baiocchi, who have both turned their dissertations on Porto Alegre into articles and books (e.g. Abers 1996, 1998a, 1998b, 2000, 2001; Baiocchi 2001, 2003a, 2003b, 2005). Santos's analysis of the OP process in Porto Alegre is remarkable in its clarity (1998); Goldsmith and Vainer's article on Porto Alegre situates the process nicely (2000); and Kooning's article brings this approach to the present (2004). Although each has their particular theoretical biases, and approaches Porto Alegre's governance differently, they share more than they differ. Starting from relatively openly supportive positions of the PT's project, they look closely at the implications and meanings of the OP mechanisms, PT political claims, and large-scale questions of political economy.²⁵ These writers give primacy to the structures of the OP, with Baiocchi asserting that the OP has "made for effective governance and created an environment where civic activism in general has been energized" (2005, 37).

Santos's article is typical of this set of analyses, although he foregrounds his political sympathies more strongly than most.²⁶ Calling the OP "the embryo of a redistributive democracy," Santos claims that it represents "a model for sharing political power" through deliberation and empowerment (1998, 484, 491). Much of the article is devoted to the mechanisms and institutions of the OP, and his analysis is based on their interactions. Having located the OP as a revolutionary praxis, he then

²⁵ There is crossover, however: Abers published an article in 1996 that sought to situate Porto Alegre within five other PT-governed cities, but did not continue this approach in subsequent articles.

²⁶ For example, perhaps optimistically, Santos links the OP process in Porto Alegre to "counterhegemonic globalization" (1998, 461-2).

probes the question of its autonomy and sustainability, warning that “a destabilizing idea that succeeds in converting itself into a sustainable practice always runs the risk of losing its destabilizing potential as it succeeds.... However, the tension it creates may be itself sustainable ... provided that the participants engage in reflective self-subversion: a constant radicalization of political consciousness focused on the limits of the radicalization of political practice” (1998, 506).

Abers, Baiocchi, and Koonings are more restrained in what they see as the successes of the OP and the PT. In essence, Abers finds that empowered participation leads to redistribution and increased civic involvement (2000, chs. 1 and 11; c.f. Macpherson 1977, ch. 4). In her book, she claims that the OP transformed the city’s political economy: “The state-society relationships that occurred in Porto Alegre in the context of the participatory budget policy set in progress a chain of events that ultimately transformed entrenched political traditions in the city” (2000, 226). In an article, she goes further, calling the PT governance “radical democracy” and saying that “the Porto Alegre administration ... has developed an entirely ‘bottom-up’ system of participatory governing in which openly elected forums have a great deal of deliberative power over an expanding number of policy arenas” (2001, 33) Similarly, Koonings sees the OP as a success on the grounds of efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability:

the participatory budget has produced a synergy between civil associational life, government action, redistribution of basic public goods, and the exercise of formal democratic freedom and rights both in conventional and new public domains.... There has been a real redistribution of public goods, a gradual

broadening and deepening of participation, improving governance on the basis of results, transparency and stable institutional arrangements. In this sense, citizenship has become more substantial and inclusionary. (2004, 95)

Baiocchi, relying heavily on Wright and Fung's theories of Empowered Deliberative Democracy (EDD), argues that, by creating "the conditions for participants to engage in the open-ended public-minded discussions heralded by democratic theorists" (2003a, 68), the OP "seems to fit the [EDD] model and confirm its best expectations: high numbers of participants from several strata of Porto Alegre's society have come together to share in a governance structure that has proven efficient and highly redistributive" (2001, 63-64).

Next, there is a set of writings that, although published in respected journals, are less scholarly analysis and more political journalism. These articles tend to give an overview of Porto Alegre and the OP, and then extract an overtly political message. Hammond's (2003) piece in *Latin American Perspectives* about the 2003 World Social Forum is a good example. After describing the World Social Forum's identity crisis (that is, is it simply an NGO network, or should it attempt to "present a hegemonic challenge" and welcome state interactions?), Hammond writes:

Most people saw little need to choose but were happy to breathe the exhilarating air of global solidarity and share experiences with others from around the world. They returned home invigorated to carry on the struggle against war ... and for social justice and popular sovereignty in their communities and in their countries. (2003, 11)

In these sorts of texts, Porto Alegre's participatory innovations serve as a leftist shorthand for a whole slew of attitudes and beliefs, anchored in the legitimacy that the OP's "mass" connection provides. Hammond writes that the OP "is a highlight of the social forum, representing as it does not only the city's proud accomplishment but a concrete realization, with teeth, of the power of participatory democracy"(2003, 6). Missing here, of course, is an appreciation of the organizing effort involved in the PT's governance, and of the context within which it was possible.

Lastly, Porto Alegre's OP has often been discussed in the "best practices" literature of international development. In a direct reversal of Hammond's focus on the PT's leftist politics, texts such as UN-Habitat's "Best Practices Database" present a depoliticized portrayal of the OP (UN-Habitat 2004). In this portrayal, politics, leftist or otherwise, is conspicuous only in its absence. The focus is on "good governance," which is described in curiously passive language, such as "availing the corresponding required resources to achieve effective service delivery." The PT is never mentioned in the two paragraphs about Porto Alegre, nor is any aspect of the broader political project within which the OP was positioned. Instead, "the city of Porto Alegre has been involved in an innovative experiment in the budgetary process," and in doing so has "institutionalized the participation of civil society." Not only has the richness of politics become a muted form of "governance," but lessons are drawn that appear to be divorced from reality. The section on Porto Alegre concludes that:

The Participatory Budget has also proved that the creation of practical participation tools and the commitment of the government in implementing the decisions made by the population are critical to the removal of bureaucratic

barriers and to strengthening citizenship and civil engagement. (UN-Habitat 2004).

This is at best only partially true. The “removal of bureaucratic barriers” was never a major focus of the OP—if anything, it added layers of participatory bureaucracy, and it dramatically increased the roles played by line agency bureaucracies. As I discuss in the following section, the OP functioned to insulate the line agencies from short-term demands from politicians. Moreover, there is an implied hostility to electoral democracy in the concluding sentence from UN-Habitat, in that good results were possible only through “the commitment of the government in implementing the decisions made by the population.” The implied greater legitimacy of direct democracy, and decentralization to an ambiguous “civil society,” ignore the political realities within which the OP was implemented. The PT administrations were able to successfully use the legitimacy gained from a direct democracy process to bypass the elected city council, but were careful to do so in ways that buttressed their own electoral legitimacy.

In short, the best practices literature glosses over questions of the scale and depth of the OP in order to emphasize its possibility as a transferable tool of administrative innovation. Doing so, however, misrepresents the OP quite seriously. By presenting the OP as anti-bureaucratic—and by implication, anti-government as well—the authors miss the central relationship in the OP. As long as the rich and nuanced connections between the participants and the line agencies (read: bureaucracies) continues to be omitted, these “lessons learned” will not provide workable models for the transference of innovative practices. It is to this relationship,

and its implications for our understandings of the OP, to which I turn in the following section. Through a detailed consideration of a disaggregated municipal government, we are able to see how the OP has served the needs both of the line agencies, the administrations, and the participants. Far from weakening or eliminating bureaucracy, this government-led process significantly empowered Porto Alegre's line agencies, and transformed their relationships with both elected politicians and citizens.

CHAPTER 4

THE *ORÇAMENTO PARTICIPATIVO* AND THE LINE AGENCIES

In the first two sections of this paper, I followed, albeit critically, the PT's self-presentation of the OP in Porto Alegre. Section Two in particular was focused on the aspects emphasized by the PT, including the OP's structure and institutions. In Section Three I demonstrated that the existing literature is largely in agreement with this surface portrayal of an autonomous OP and its connections to citizenship. In this section I look beneath the surface in order to examine the interactions between the OP and the line agencies. The OP only controlled between two and twenty percent of the municipal budget—the vast majority of the budget was channeled to the line agencies using routine, non-participatory methods. In other words, the devolution of power to participants in the OP, although real, was sharply limited—if devolution and exercise of power are proxies for “citizenship,” the OP's links to citizenship are more tenuous than has been commonly asserted. The line agencies, on the other hand, have radically transformed their relationships with both elected politicians and ordinary citizens, and in the process have transformed the city.

Analytically, disaggregating the municipal government and examining the interactions of the line agencies with the OP allows me to make two key observations. First, that many of the transformations and improvements in the city credited to the OP were in fact dependent on a set of relationships developed between the line agencies, the elected administrations, and the OP participants in which the line agencies came to play an active and central role. Second, that the line agencies, through these

interactions with the OP, have helped to create a pattern of urban development and service provision that is strikingly different from the Brazilian norm.

By submitting to a process based in wide-scale direct democracy, Porto Alegre's line agencies gained an important layer of insulation from the short-term demands of elected politicians, and were instead able to forge coalitions with OP participants in favor of long-term planning and integrated development. In a combination of technocratic and participatory approaches, an emphasis on communication, mobilization, and direct democracy was combined with a forceful articulation of the need for a reliance on technical and objective criteria, producing high-quality public provision of infrastructure and services.

On the one hand, the term "participatory budget" could not be less controversial: it meant a highly structured, year-long, participatory-based mechanism through which the city administration of Porto Alegre allocated the investment portion of its municipal budget. On the other hand, its meaning is highly contested, and has been given radically different interpretations by different observers. Dacanal and Weber answer the question, "What is the Participatory Budget?" thusly:

It is a euphemism for designing instruments and methods of-, for-, and towards illegality of political action with the objective of skirting, digging into, annulling, and destroying a legal order. (1999, 63; translation mine)

Other authors give a completely different reading of the same set of processes, actors, and events. Calling the OP "the embryo of a redistributive democracy" (1998, 484), Santos claims that it represents:

the manifestation of an emergent, non-state public sphere where citizens and community organizations, on one hand, and the municipal government, on the other, converge with mutual autonomy. (1998, 491)

These radically disagreeing views stem more from fundamental political differences than from any specific disagreement on the evidence. Diametrically opposed in their evaluations of the worth of the OP, these authors nicely bracket the existing literature on Porto Alegre's participatory budgeting. Dacanal and Weber see the OP eroding the legal framework needed by a representative democracy, while Santos presents the OP as empowering the citizens through an effective exercise of direct democracy. Both, in fact, are in agreement that the PT's governance in Porto Alegre represented a radical break with the past, and that the OP was a central part of that rupture. Like most authors writing about the OP, they believe that the impacts of the OP can be seen in the structure and practice of citizenship.

This academic focus on citizenship has been echoed in the claims of administration officials. There was a deeply recursive process at work here, with officials influenced by academic theories of citizenship, and researchers of the OP following the PT's rhetorical emphasis on citizenship and civil society. When I asked city officials why they continued to support the participatory budgeting process, I consistently received two answers. One answer was short-term and pragmatic: "it works." They claimed that the OP, irregardless of its political implications, had produced immediate high quality results in terms of city-wide planning, redistribution across class and geographic lines, and prevention of fraud. The main answer, however, was long-term and idealistic: "citizenship." The officials repeatedly spoke of "creating

a rights-based citizenship,” and saw the OP as central to this aim. They were explicit about wanting to create a break with what they described as the paternalist model, where resources are dispensed through personal patronage, in favor of a model where resources are disbursed following objective criteria available to all.

The central mechanism by which the OP was to accomplish these changes in citizenship was through a recursive relationship between an organic and autonomous OP and civil society. In this view, the OP acted as a catalyst for an authentic expression of the people’s will. The OP’s structure allowed unsupportive groups (such as the legislative branch of the city government) to be bypassed. The PT administrations, in this view, were facilitators, and the line agencies, in following the investment plan drawn up in the OP, were simply following the will of the participants. Through taking part in the OP, deeper connections within civil society were formed, and marginalized groups were empowered to express their views. This may be true, but fails to fully account for the underlying issue of accomplishing change.

A central flaw in this portrayal is the insistence on viewing the municipal government as a monolithic entity—at most, the government is separated into the executive and the legislative branches.²⁷ In fact, an elected mayor has comparatively tenuous control over city agencies, able to select only a handful of political appointees and activists to oversee agencies dominated by long term employees. In terms of Porto

²⁷ Abers is somewhat of a counterexample to this. She nicely delineates civil society and administrative actors, but still fails to fully articulate the dynamic between the line agencies and the OP (2000).

Alegre, the surface view takes as a given the cooperation of the line agencies in the OP as arms of the administration. However, the line agencies' cooperation with the OP was not, in fact, at all a given. The line agencies are composed primarily of civil servants and had long traditions of cooperating with paternalistic politicians and regressive budgets. In my short visit, I was able to see a range of attitudes towards the OP on the part of senior civil service employees, from the overtly sympathetic to the dismissive. Some agencies had radically reshaped the type of projects they did in order to support the OP's demands, while others relied on restrictive technical criteria to, as much as possible, continue old patterns.

There is a deeper story here, involving the interactions of the line agencies with the budgeting process, that speaks to the question of the public sector in an era of austerity. Returning to Tendler's three-way dynamic, Porto Alegre's version points to a way to build support for the services and expertise of public sector agencies. By bringing the agencies into the process as responsive entities able to support a vision of high-quality service provision, rather than as unresponsive antagonists or tools of patronage, coalitions became possible. One coalition was cross-class: both the lower and upper classes have an interest in receiving good infrastructure and services, for example. Another was between participants and the agencies: although the agencies are subordinate to the executive, by working with the OP they were able to help shape budgets that gave the agencies prominent roles, and supported long-term technocratic endeavors.

Under the previous system of budget allocation, investment and service allocation decisions were imposed on line agencies from above. Although the political

appointees heading the line agencies had some input, the line agency technical staff had almost none. A major change was intra-governmental. Before the OP, although formal authority rested with the mayor, the line agencies' budgets were heavily controlled by both the mayor and the city legislators. The politicians were able to use their control of the line agencies' budgets to reward supporters (clientalism) and continue investing most heavily in wealthier areas (regressive redistribution). Citizens had indirect input through their elected representatives, and directly through petitions and protest. Under the OP, the underlying structure did not change, but the implementation was very different. The OP's effective removal of the legislators from the budget process meant that the line agencies no longer had to balance conflicting political demands. According to the supportive officials, the process was far better than before: "Before, what would happen was, no one explained anything, the administrator did not plan, did not discuss with the community, did not answer to the community."²⁸

The OP, these officials argued, was a technocrat's dream. Not only could they veto unrealistic projects on technical grounds, but they had a voice from the very beginning in the planning, design, and execution of infrastructure and services. Moreover, the participants in the OP—coming largely from neighborhoods underserved by the previous pattern of infrastructure and services—gave a prominence to line agencies that they never before had. Basic sanitation, paving, and housing became high priority items, and significant funding was poured into the agencies

²⁸ Interview, DMAE, May 29, 2000. Translation mine.

responsible for their provision. The example I was given by officials at DMAE, responsible for water and sanitary sewers, was that in the past politicians frequently attempted to buy votes by having DMAE install water pipes, regardless of whether or not the agency could actually supply water reliably or not. Sewerage collection, and even less so sewage treatment, was not seen as a vote-getter, and consequently was rarely funded. The OP, however, enabled participants to articulate their strong demand for sewerage, and DMAE was able to ensure that expansions to their networks were done in ways that would ensure high-quality service.

The line agencies came to play an involved and public role in Porto Alegre's participatory budgeting, despite their limited formal role. At the beginning of the cycle their role was heavily explanatory, defending their actions and proposing solutions. As the OP cycle continued, however, and moved to the point of addressing problems, the agencies became more interventionary. Formally, their role was to provide technical advice and feedback, and to ensure that proposals were technically viable and appropriate. The procedure was for the participants to raise a question that CRC would bring to the agency, or for GAPLAN to submit a proposal for the agency to review. In practice, however, the agencies were involved in more nuanced and negotiated ways. By working directly with the assemblies, the agencies could ensure that proposals were technically viable. They were also able to articulate their visions of infrastructure development and service delivery on an urban scale—of particular importance when dealing with the hyper-local concerns of neighborhood groups. An official at DMAE explained how this could work:

For example, a community requests that a *vila* (poor neighborhood) have water supply, but in order for the water supply to happen, DMAE needs to construct reservoirs and water treatment stations.²⁹

Rather than simply executing the demands of the OP, or vetoing them as technically impossible, line agencies were able to shape those demands in ways that created a qualitatively different pattern of infrastructure. DMAE officials explained how they provided technical training to OP representatives:

The department itself gave courses, for the *Conselheiros* of the OP ... we gave courses on what is a sanitary sewer, ... how we did the connections, so that they had the ability to understand...³⁰

The agencies had to learn how to speak to the communities, and to the OP participants, as well:

After a bit, the technician literally began to learn how to speak with the community ... Now, the technician who has spent some time in the participatory budget process, he is ready to go into the community and respond to the community.³¹

A central point of controversy stemmed from the fact that the OP was never legally codified. Supporters made the assertion that despite not being “regulated in the law,” the OP “is legal because under the Federal Constitution all of the power emanates from the people and it can be executed in the *Lei Orgânica* of the city, that is

²⁹ Interview, DMAE, May 29, 2000. Translation mine.

³⁰ Interview, DMAE, May 29, 2000. Translation mine.

³¹ Interview, DMAE, May 29, 2000. Translation mine.

the city Constitution which says that the executive power (*poder executivo*) must consult the communities to do its investments.”³²

Opponents of the PT, however, criticized the extent to which the OP was used to bypass the constitutionally-defined role of the legislative branch of the city government. The *Câmara de Vereadores* (Chamber of Deputies) was famous for its practice of patronage politics. The PT was never able to win a majority on the Câmara, whose members were elected at large, and which had, on paper, the power and responsibility for passing the budget. Faced with a hostile Câmara controlled by opposition parties, the administration was able to use the mass participation of the OP to sidestep the Câmara’s control over the budget, leaving the Câmara in the position of rubber-stamping the final product of the OP: “So this is what one does, after one formulates a piece of the budget we send it to the Câmara, and the Câmara can’t mix it up.” One official I interviewed insisted that the Deputies still have a function, albeit limited: “The Câmara continues having a function, but with the function of legislating. Not of making those little deals, those exchanges of favors, those things that used to be.” The Câmara fought this marginalization of their role, largely without success:

A big fight with the Câmara is that the Câmara wants to regulate this in the law and we are radically opposed to this. We have a violent fight with them. If you make a law to regulate the OP you are going to be limited by the *Câmara de Vereadores*... And there when [the OP participants] want to change the rules

³² Interview, CRC, May 24, 2000. Translation mine.

of the game, they are going to have to go to the Câmara, and the Câmara is going to want regulate, at full speed, because of that.³³

On one level, this was a disagreement about the competing legitimacies of direct versus electoral democracies (albeit a form of direct democracy created by elected administrations as a counter to elected legislators). As an “autonomous” process that had not been legally formalized but had widespread popular support, the OP allowed the administration to counter the legislative branch’s de jure control over the budget.

More fundamentally, however, it reflected a disagreement over what should be the pattern of infrastructure development. The OP process, with its deep reliance on the technical expertise of the line agencies, promoted a development vision that was, along with functioning as a redistributory mechanism, fundamentally technocratic. Long-term planning using technical criteria was emphasized, and the impact of the particular on the whole was given prominence. This was repeatedly contrasted by officials to the “old way” of doing infrastructure development, where line agencies acted only at the behest of elected politicians trying to buy votes and were unable to successfully argue for technically appropriate projects. The officials described how the old system, based on supporting a politicians electoral needs, produced a patchwork system, leaving them unable to supply high-quality and reliable services.

Two line agencies presented particularly clear stories of transformations in their relationships with citizens. The *Departamento de Esgotas Pluvias* (Department

³³ Interview, CRC, May 24, 2000. Translation mine.

of Storm Sewers, DEP) was “very marginalized internally in the administration” and in the city “there was a negative image of DEP” as an ineffective agency notable only in its absence: “When it isn’t raining no one remembers you, and when it rains it floods some place, and they remember to beat you.” Sewerage, both pluvial and sanitary, was one of the first priorities of the OP, and remained so for many years. DEP responded to its suddenly high-profile work by creating the first “environmental education program approved by the *Conselho* of the OP.” By configuring an educational program as an investment under the auspices of the OP, DEP changed its public perception and internal image to one of effective response, important to the environmental health of the entire city: “today we are remembered when it doesn’t rain, for the works of environmental education, for the programs that changed the relation of the citizenry with the streams, with the question of maintaining the city clean, not throwing trash in the street.”³⁴

DEP’s transformation was incomplete, in that it was still said to be one of the agencies with the most technical inflexibility. Certainly, I saw officials from DEP less often than some other agencies at the budget meetings I attended, but without following an entire budget cycle it is hard to be certain about the patterns of participation. As I mentioned before, not all agencies were equally embracing of the OP. This resistance, however, was coded due to pressure from the mayor’s office on appointed agency heads for overt cooperation by their staffs. I was able to see the resistance only tangentially, in indirect ways. Technical staff at some agencies spoke

³⁴ Interview, DEP, May 30, 2000. Translation mine.

disparagingly of the process off the record, complaining that fulfilling participant demands for small-scale redistributive projects took time and resources away from their “real work.” Some agencies, such as DEMHAB, had far less of a public presence at the OP meetings I attended, sending a representative only when necessary. Officials supportive of the OP complained of other agencies blocking “good” projects on inflexible technical grounds, resisting the OP trend for small scattered projects in favor of larger, more central projects, just as in the past. DEP struck me as sitting somewhere in the middle of the spectrum, not showing the resistance of some, but neither embracing the process as thoroughly as DMAE.

By the end of the 1990s, the *Departamento Municipal de Águas e Esgotas* (Municipal Department of Water and Sanitary Sewers, DMAE) had become one of the best-performing water utilities in Latin America. Institutionally, DMAE was a largely independent publicly owned utility; as an agency, it “is administratively and financially independent from city hall, but subordinate to it on political and regulation issues” (Maltz 2005, 29). DMAE was responsible for many of the quality of life improvements in the city, such as potable water and sewerage connections. Unheard of for a major Latin American city, by 2004 the municipal tap water was potable and 99.5 percent of residents had access to it; 84 percent had sewage connections; and it was predicted that by 2010 fully 77 percent of the collected sewage will be treated (Maltz 2005, 30-31). Although water tariffs were steeply progressive, the utility had consistently run annual surpluses of 15 to 25 percent; these surpluses were largely reinvested as investments through the OP. Of all of the line agencies, DMAE had

perhaps the closest relationship with the OP, and had internalized its procedures and values the furthest.

As a demonstrably profitable entity, there had been intense pressure to privatize DMAE. In 2000 I was told by DMAE technical staff that PT city administration officials were sympathetic to privatization, although I did not independently confirm this.³⁵ At that time there was strong pressure within Brazil and Latin America for the privatization of large municipal- and state-owned water utilities, and many were sold. Nevertheless, DMAE spent 2000 and 2001 fighting the push for privatization, and in 2002 was successful. At heart, the issue was the technocratic vision of public service within DMAE—what Tendler calls “high dedication” by workers (1997, 136). Before the OP, they had been forced by politicians to extend water supply in technically inappropriate ways, “because electorally, it was very easy to begin your water network but not to take care of it nor to supply it.” By supporting community organization and taking part in demand formulation within the OP, DMAE finally had a way to resist political demands in favor of a strongly technocratic vision:

With the OP, the community began to organize and ... we were able to stop attending individual demands. The same with the legislators... The vote-buying (*negócio de cartãozinho*) by the legislator or the mayor was ended. In

³⁵ There was clearly a push for privatization of DMAE, as Maltz (2005) describes. What was not clear to me at the time, however, was how much of that push came from the city administration, and how much from the state or federal governments.

order to solve the situation, we had only one way: in an organized way ... in the *Conselho* of the OP.³⁶

In its effort to avoid becoming privatized, DMAE went a step beyond simple participation in the OP. In its interactions with civil society, it highlighted the extent of its reinvestment in the city and its responsiveness to citizens. Raising the prospect that Porto Alegre would receive what many Latin American cities had—an unresponsive company, sending profits overseas, and failing to provide clean water—DMAE was able to align itself with the same popular legitimacy that allowed the administration to cut the legislative branch of the city government out of the budget process. The city administration had no choice but to drop the bid for privatization, and as of 2004 DMAE remained a public entity.

In creating her three-way model, where an activist central government nurtures a proactive civil society, Tandler is arguing against the common two-way model featuring a unidirectional dynamic between civil society and local government. In this model, “flexible,” “dynamic,” and “experimental” civic organizations are set against “bureaucratized, standardized, top-down, and unsympathetic” local government (1997, 158). Decentralization is required, in the form of a “unidirectional transfer of power and funding from central to local” (pp. 146-147), as is a reliance on civil society for advocacy and service delivery. This model is effectively unidirectional, with an independent and self-sustaining civil society pressuring government. Tandler’s model, in addition to adding the third component, introduces a bidirectionality, whereby civil

³⁶ Interview, DMAE, May 29, 2000. Translation mine.

society still pressures government, but needs to be actively nurtured by government in order to be able to do so.

A variation of this can be clearly seen in the stories of line agency transformation in Porto Alegre. The story of the OP is commonly told in unidirectional ways: Power was devolved to citizens, enabling them to reshape their city. Or: citizens organized, demanded a devolution of power, and reshaped their city. Looking at the line agencies allows a more complicated reading of these stories. Instead, we see a civic process, enabled by government, in which the agencies are able to take an active role in shaping not only their own future, but also the shape of infrastructure and service provision for the entire city. Working with this empowered civil society, the agencies were able to establish a new dynamic in their relationship with the elected officials. They are still subordinate politically, but now have the ability to foreground a technocratic vision of service delivery and responsiveness whether or not it serves the immediate needs of the politicians.

CHAPTER 5

WRITING THE PROGRESSIVE CITY

My thinking about Porto Alegre and the OP, and progressive city governance in general, has evolved significantly during the course of this project. Before I traveled to Porto Alegre, all I knew about the OP came from a small set of articles which shared a common portrayal of the OP as an autonomous and transformative endeavor. However, the processes and issues I found during my research suggested a very different portrayal of the OP. To more fully explain the OP, I found it necessary to disaggregate “the government” sufficiently to describe the roles played by the line agencies.

As I completed this project, I have come to realize that I am looking at two things. First, there is what happened. This is the “real” story, with actors, dates, and events. In the preceding four sections I told this story, discussing in some detail the implementation and implications of Porto Alegre’s participatory budget, and ending with a consideration of the interactions between the OP and the line agencies. Second, there is the construction of a narrative (or of narratives)—the story of the story. Popular participation interacts with the thinking and writing of the intellectual elite; recursively, the narratives that are produced have impacts on the “real” city.

In this section I begin by establishing the parameters of a definition of progressive cities. Most fundamentally, progressive cities are defined in relation to normal cities. McGovern suggests that “in progressive cities, government assumes an activist role in pursuing a range of regulatory, redistributive, and developmental policies to promote social equity and citizen participation in the policy-making

process” (McGovern 2003, 5). On the one hand, progressive cities are defined positively as cities that, unlike normal cities, combine redistributive and participatory policies with an explicitly articulated pragmatic theoretical framework. On the other hand, they can be defined by their relative lack of negative attributes associated with normal cities, such as oligarchical power, regressive policies, and corruption. Because normal cities often appropriate innovations developed by progressive cities, the distinction between normal and progressive cities must necessarily rely on the rhetoric and presentation of the administrations’ theoretical bases at least as much as on policies. Policies and administrative actions do not take meaning only from their impacts, but also from the frameworks and stories given by officials, researchers, and commentators.

I argue that there are clear patterns to the ways in which narratives of progressive governance are constructed, centering on the roles given to “organic intellectuals,” the articulation of a political agenda, and the place of the author and reader within the narrative. Through a consideration of the methods used to discuss progressive cities, I move to the question of why these cities receive the attention they do. Although often taken as self-evident—because they are “innovative,” for example—this question deserves more careful attention. The methods used to write about progressive cities are attractive precisely because of where the narratives locate the author and reader, and because of a consistent vision of local government as an accessible and powerful locus within the larger structure of power. The result is a powerful narrative of social change stemming from theoretically-grounded

interactions between intellectuals, social movements, and local government bureaucracies.

What is “normal”?

What are the general characteristics of a progressive city, and how do progressive cities differ from normal cities? Katznelson (1976) identifies the management of social inequality as the central problem facing cities in the United States. He calls big city governments “arbiter governments” because of their colonial-like dependence on a combination of suburban politics and state and federal funding. Their weakness means that these city governments must “*manage the consequences of their inability to solve urban problems*” (p. 220; emphasis in original). Clavel (1986) defines progressive cities through their responses to these inequalities. Their redistributory and participatory policies, which are meant to address, rather than simply manage, inequality become the central characteristics of progressive cities. McGovern’s (2003) definition takes Clavel’s policy-based criteria and adds an explicit “activist government” aspect, reminiscent of Tandler (1997).

I am calling normal cities “normal” because they are the norm against which we understand unusual cases like progressive cities. Normal cities constitute the vast majority of cities in both Brazil and the United States. Of course, calling them “normal” implies that progressive cities are “deviant,” an assertion I am less willing to make. To be progressive is to be for something; to be deviant is to be in violation of societal norms and values. In truth, calling progressive cities deviant might be sustainable, given that administrators and researchers of progressive cities often assertively cast these cities in radical terms and that resistance to them is so severe as

to imply the stigma of deviance. However, the term “progressive” is a deliberate recasting of a number of terms with currently negative associations such as “socialist.” My use of the term “normal city” is especially problematic because it serves to normalize and permit the regressive and oppressive practices associated with such cities. However, the language of “normal” and “progressive” follows current conventions, and, imperfect as it is, it is the clearest I could find.

Administrations in normal cities support mildly or deeply regressive policies based on property development and an often oligarchical exercise of power. Normal cities feature bifurcated infrastructure and service delivery systems, with the wealthy receiving high quality public services, and the poor relying on a patchwork of poor quality and expensive private and public networks. The admitted range of policy possibilities is narrow, and issues of structural inequality are considered neither deeply problematic nor within the realm of municipal governance. Normal cities sometimes incorporate innovations, such as participatory mechanisms, borrowed from progressive cities as part of “good governance” efforts. However, the depoliticization and decontextualization of these innovations can mean that they serve more as mechanisms of cooptation rather than instruments of change. Conversely, the adoption of these innovations can have unexpected consequences, opening spaces for inclusion, and raising expectations of public service.

Table One: Differentiation of Progressive and Normal Cities

	Progressive Cities	Normal Cities

Redistribution	Progressive	Regressive
Political process	Participatory / Transparent	Exclusionary / Opaque
Services and infrastructure	Universal	Selective / Tiered
Urban development focus	Neighborhoods	Property development

In both Brazil and the US, normal and progressive cities can be differentiated along a common set of axes. (See Table One.) These axes are deeply interconnected. For example, the universal provision of services and infrastructure was a central aspect of redistribution in Porto Alegre, made possible by a participatory political process and an administration with a focus on neighborhoods. Although this chart with its binary divisions appears to sharply separate normal and progressive cities, in truth the boundaries between normal and progressive cities are often neither rigid nor clearly demarcated. Normal cities can appropriate, cynically or genuinely, the tools and symbols of progressive governance. Conversely, ostensibly progressive cities can, beneath visible participatory and redistributive programs, function like a normal city.

Normal cities in both the US and Brazil feature closed decision making, limited citizen access to power, and little accountability, all of which are conducive to corruption and clientalism. Relations between the city administrations and neighborhood organizations is often hostile or strained to the point of creating serious administrative discontinuities. Leeds describes how parallel systems of governance have developed in the favelas of Rio (1996). The process she describes was driven by cocaine distribution, heavily armed and highly organized gangs, and physical and social exclusion from surrounding middle- and upper-class neighborhoods. In many

ways Leeds is describing an extreme case. Rio's favelas are unusual in their close proximity to rich neighborhoods and the urban center, and the gangs in Rio became exceptionally organized and politicized through alliances made in prison with political prisoners during the dictatorship. However, the impermeability to state institutions, violence, and exclusion she describes are true of poor neighborhoods across Brazil.

Physically and socially closed neighborhoods do not exist disconnected from the rest of the city, of course. People come and go for employment, there are transfers of goods and services, and even the poorest neighborhoods matter at election time. Moreover, there is a need for interlocutors who can move between these closed neighborhoods and centers of political power. In Gay's (1994) description of the negotiations between the leader of a neighborhood organization and local politicians, we can see an example of an interface between a closed system of power and a poor neighborhood with needed votes. By presenting a unified front, and negotiating with competing politicians, the neighborhood leader was able to broker a deal providing needed infrastructure and services to his neighborhood.

These personal deals rely on politicians being able to directly control the flow and supply of public resources. The closed nature of budgetary and other negotiations in a normal Brazilian city facilitates this sort of patronage politics, and enables politicians to reward supporters and punish opponents. Additionally, it allows widespread and large-scale corruption to take place. Sometimes hidden but often blatant, this corruption siphons off resources that, if spent otherwise, might perhaps begin to alleviate the infrastructure debt in poor neighborhoods.

For politicians practicing patronage politics, having a parallel structure of governance in poor neighborhoods is not a problem. Despite its potential challenge to state legitimacy, and its clear rejection of a state monopoly on violence, the parallel structure of governance gives the politician a clear set of actors with whom to negotiate. Regardless of the permeation of drug trafficking, organized crime, or even support for urban guerrillas, poor neighborhoods still have the votes needed by politicians. Conversely, the resources of even the most successful drug trafficking networks in urban Brazil lack the financial and technical resources of the state, limiting their ability to independently provide high-quality infrastructure for neighborhood residents. In this way, there is a mutually reinforcing dynamic between the centers of power and neighborhood power-brokers in Brazilian normal cities, whereby public subsidies controlled by politicians reinforce non-democratic power structures within poor neighborhoods. Residents of poor neighborhoods benefit in that even poor service provision is better than none, and organized criminal structures can provide an important buffer from a repressive state security apparatus.

To the extent that normal cities share an explicitly articulated theoretical framework, it is one of modernization and development. Echoing the cliché “a rising tide lifts all boats,” the theory in normal cities promotes ostensibly universalist investments such as infrastructure for private automobiles, rather than public transportation. Of course, these investments are in no way universal, but instead function as regressive subsidies for the better-off. Vasconcellos, for example, shows how transportation policies in São Paulo have benefited the rich at the expense of the poor (1997, 2001), while Holston (1989) follows the contradictory development of

Brasilia. The limited nature of the benefits of these narrow policies serve to further divide the normal city between those benefiting from public infrastructure subsidies and those lacking access to these high-quality networks.

Throughout the world, normal cities feature dual and even triple networks for supplying infrastructure and services. Most commonly discussed in the case of water supply, these parallel networks serve to supply a minority of citizens with subsidized, regular connections, while the majority rely on a disjointed system of private, public, and illegal supplies. The outcome for the poor is strikingly higher pricing—the World Water Council reported that across the developing world the poor pay on average twelve times more for water than do the rich; in some countries, like Haiti, they pay as much as 100 times more (World Water Council, 1999). This is true for almost every service and infrastructure network relied upon by the poor in normal cities in Brazil, including trash pickup, sewage collection, mail service, policing, and electricity. This is less visible in the US, where most poor urban neighborhoods receive at least minimal public infrastructure such as water, electricity, and telecommunications—often a legacy of past publicly subsidized industrial development in the inner-city areas now inhabited by the poor. Deep inequalities remain, however, in the networks supplying services such as policing, schools, and transportation. As was seen in the case of the 2005 inundation of New Orleans, publicly funded planning has often favored the needs of the middle and upper classes. This dual network of planning has channeled resources to the elite, leaving the poor to manage disaster response, economic change, and social displacement largely on their own.

In Section Four I briefly discussed how patronage politics can also reinforce the provision of patchwork networks and force unworkable and unsustainable network expansions of visible services such as water supply, while failing to invest in less visible services such as sewage collection. In addition to this, clientalist politicians in countries like Brazil have also deepened these divisions between high- and low-quality service provision by allowing and encouraging illegal land occupations to reward supporters. Without land title, and often building on environmentally inappropriate areas, residents of these settlements have had a limited ability to claim the right to services and infrastructure. Not only has service provision been tied to legalization of tenure—which can be a distant goal—but the physical form of these settlements can prevent the introduction of standard models of infrastructure provision. Facing routine violence from security forces and neighboring political rivals, these settlements are deliberately built defensively. Narrow lanes, high walls, and a maze-like pattern prevent easy incursions of state authority. However, these same development patterns, and the often difficult physical geography of marginal land, can prevent the easy introduction of standard urban infrastructure networks. Sanitary and pluvial sewers, for example, often rely on streets of a minimum width and grade; mail delivery and utility billing both depend on standardized addresses and safe access for employees.

Progressive city government

Progressive cities exist in counterpoint to normal cities. The federal and state environments in which both normal and progressive cities function are the same, but the physical, social, and policy choices made by the progressive cities can be very different. The overall urban pattern is the same—all cities, progressive or not, in

Brazil have segregated populations, extremely high rates of violence and crime, and deep inequalities. Progressive cities, however, explicitly articulate a theoretical framework emphasizing equality of access to power, services, and infrastructure. Instead of equating urban development with property development, progressive administrations in Brazil and the US have created a model that connects mildly redistributive policies with strong participatory mechanisms. Emphasizing responsive bureaucracies and accountability, these administrations have produced a strikingly different pattern of infrastructure and service extension into the poor urban neighborhoods.

Katznelson's (1976, 220) observations about urban politics in the United States offers a different perspective on progressive innovations such as the OP. One implication is that progressive city governments—or at least those successfully managing to implement redistributive and participatory policies—may have broken the impasse and acquired the theoretical and practical tools to address urban problems. In other words, it is possible that in a regressive national environment, policies that devolve power to urban residents are paradoxically powerful mechanisms for effective urban governance. There is a seeming contradiction in this argument, with the suggestion that giving up power to citizens could result in a government gaining the power to address a city's problems.

Katznelson makes explicit this tension, and ties it to social control over populations made restive by the inequalities of market capitalism. He claims that “urban political institutions became terribly important as mechanisms of social control” (p. 223). The redistributive and participatory endeavors we associate with

progressive governments—but that of course are also used with varying degrees of cynicism by governments of all political stripes—are the only tools that can give municipal governments traction in addressing urban problems. At the same time, the institutions created to manage and implement these programs function as mechanisms of social control in progressive cities as much as any other.

Katznelson attempts to resolve this through a discussion of the shift from party power to bureaucratic power. He is specifically discussing the creation of government programs to take the place of personal and clientalist help distributed through party networks. However, we can remap this onto the move from social movement to administration taken by elected progressive city governments. Katznelson suggests that these bureaucratic programs become “potentially more vulnerable to challenges from below” (p. 225). The transparency and rules-based approach of bureaucratic structures leave openings for citizen action. The same rules that govern bureaucratic operations can be used, he argues, as standards to which institutions can be held, or to create leverage over appointed officials. At the same time, these often distanced and unresponsive agencies create increased dissent with every demeaning and unsatisfactory interaction.

The openings for action and autonomous citizen action suggested by Katznelson are exactly what so many scholars of Porto Alegre’s OP are portraying with their depictions of increased citizenship and “deepened democracy.” However, at least in Porto Alegre, the creation of anomie by unresponsive bureaucracies has been largely avoided through the implementation of the OP. On the contrary, responsive and open bureaucracies have become integral parts of the city’s progressive endeavor.

(This is not unique to Porto Alegre: recall also the centrality of responsive bureaucracies and institutions in Tandler's model of good governance.) This suggests that Katznelson's description of the breakdowns in urban political processes may not be fully extendable to cases of progressive cities and activist government.

I would argue, however, that Katznelson's model nicely captures a major dilemma for normal city governments. Even if devolving power and pursuing redistributive policies were to be proved an effective approach to the problems facing these cities, the normal city governments are unable to pursue these policies. Lacking the movement base and theoretical framework of progressive administrations, these normal governments are locked into development- and growth-centric policies, and continual crisis management of their urban problems.

Frug (1999) convincingly argues that US cities exist in a disempowered political and legal space, caught between individuals and the states, and unable to resolve their problems with their suburbs. Progressive cities are caught in the same broad dynamic of disempowered and atomized municipalities beset by structural issues in a regressive national system. However, progressive cities in the US and Brazil have been able to reposition themselves within this dynamic, in the process renegotiating internal and external power relationships. For example, the normal Brazilian city is underfunded not only because of inadequate federal transfers, but also in large part because of the interrelated problems of visible corruption and low rates of local tax compliance. By providing visibly effective and transparent governance, PT-governed cities such as Porto Alegre were able to raise property tax rates and increase tax compliance. Similarly, although all US cities were heavily dependent on federal

transfers for low-income housing provision, a progressive regime in Boston used “linkages” to directly connect large-scale real estate development to neighborhood service provision, especially low-income housing (Bach, Carbone, and Clavel 1982).

Writing the progressive city

A central outcome of these successful progressive policies has been a *narrative of change* with theoretical and practical implications. It is not only that these cities became less dependent on federal transfers (or rather, by becoming less dependent on these transfers for meeting minimum needs, they could use the transfers more creatively). Nor is it simply that these progressive cities used the legitimacy and administrative empowerment provided by the public devolution of power to reconfigure local power relations. The big picture remains unaltered—the poor remain poor, and nationally regressive policies are untouched—but in these examples and others we can see how fairly minor power renegotiations based in participatory and redistributive mechanisms can create at least some level of local structural change. Cities that have devolved power to citizens appear to end up with more institutional and financial autonomy than normal cities, and have a radically expanded range of options for addressing urban problems. As Bach et al write, “two aspects of city government—legitimate political authority and democratic control—make them an ideal vehicle for implementing progressive programs” (1976, 4). This narrative of the city as an empowered site of change is a direct rebuttal of motifs such as “the city is disempowered.”

The limited, albeit growing, academic literature on participatory governance in Porto Alegre recalls other hopeful literatures of progressive social change. Scholars of

the progressive movement in late nineteenth and early twentieth century American politics, the movement-based activism of the 1960s in the United States, Europe, and Latin America, transnational NGO networks in the 1990s, and the recent resurgence of the left in Latin America have written remarkably consistent descriptions of hopeful yet, in the historical cases, ultimately largely fruitless moments for change.³⁷ Authors such as Scott have looked for presumably desirable behaviors such as “resistance” in ongoing everyday life of the disempowered (e.g. Scott 1985, 1998). This more quotidian focus moves innovation and change away from sweeping historical moments, instead portraying an ever-present progressive and communitarian force located in the daily lives of the poor. Remaining, however, is the central emphasis on examples of positive effort for change, rather than on the acceptance of repression or inequality.

One explanation for this focus on positive, or potentially positive, examples, rather than overt failure and despair, is that it functions as an implicit response to Gouldner’s critique of Selznick, Michels, and others whom he accused of “resurrecting a dismal science,” where “much of the discussion of bureaucracy and of organizational needs seems to have provided a screen onto which some intellectuals have projected their own despair and pessimism, reinforcing the despair of others” (1955, 507). That is, this focus on positive examples is perhaps meant to function to inspire and motivate those seeking change, rather than increasing their hopelessness.

³⁷ For the progressive movement, see Goodwyn (1978). For the urban governance outcomes of the 1960s in the US, see Clavel (1986). For international NGO networks, see Keck and Sikkink (1998); for a US-focused variation, see Rubin (2000). For the resurgent Latin American Left, see Chavez and Goldfrank (2004).

However, there is another explanation for the enduring appeal of this focus on the positive, focusing on reading these portrayals of social change as *narratives*, with stories, actors, and authorial voices, rather than as factual descriptive accounts of political and social processes. Looked at in this way, we can see striking similarities in where these narratives locate agents of change, and how they depict success and failure, that function to better explain their appeal. These narratives of potential change collectively and repeatedly locate a specific type of intellectual—generally a version of Gramsci’s “organic intellectual”—on the cutting edge of social change legitimized by movement-based organizing. This is a tremendously appealing narrative for university-based researchers, often with activist pasts, who correctly perceive their marginalization in mainstream American politics. These narratives locate people *just like them* as key agents of change. Moreover, the narratives often portray social change as being grounded in theoretical innovations produced by these organic intellectuals, giving an even more prominent role to the intellectuals.

There are four central components to these narratives. First, the reader is meant to identify with the protagonist. Second, the municipal innovations are grounded in accessible intellectual theory. Third, these innovations foreground participatory and redistributive policies, but without impinging on the values and privileges of the (elite) reader. Fourth, the importance of the narrative is demonstrated in the stiff, often violent, resistance met by the protagonist.

A *New Yorker* article about the mayor of Tirana, Albania, is typical of this approach (Kramer, 2005). The article tells the story of Edi Rama’s path from “art to politics,” and of his simultaneously high-brow and pragmatic municipal innovations as

mayor. He was an university-educated artist from an elite family. After a stint as a professor, and attracting a dangerous amount of attention from the Albanian communist authorities, he moved to Paris to live as an artist. He returned to Albania in 1998 for a visit, and was quickly appointed Minister of Culture by the Socialist Party Prime Minister. The article, as is common in these stories, glosses over the mechanisms of this sudden promotion. It is hinted that Rama was more deeply involved in Albanian politics than the “artist in exile” story suggests. Clearly, he was from an elite family, and moved comfortably in the world of the politically powerful. Functionally, however, downplaying his elite identity, and instead emphasizing his connections to and identity as a member of the international intelligentsia, helps to create a sense of connection between the reader and Rama. In the article, his central contributions to making Tirana a city of note are pragmatic implementations of intellectually-based policies. We read that he had the façades of the central city painted in vibrant colors, for example. Many of the innovations reported in the article are highly symbolic—cleaning the city; planting trees; rebuilding the city center—and represent values (environmentalism, preservation, openness) held by the intellectual elite. Eschewing traditional left / right identities, Rama speaks the language of “good governance”: “The ideology *we* need to embrace is the ideology of work. Right and left are only a question of how you distribute” (Kramer 2005, 58; emphasis in original). However, Rama has survived assassination attempts, and we read that his agenda is opposed by the mafia-like developers and contractors who own most of the central city.

Here, then, we have a prototypical example of a mayor recognized by the UN, rebuilding a poor city with symbols that resonate well in the cultural centers of the US and Europe, and whose story is told in a way that allow the reader to think, “that could be *me*.” Rabinovitch and Leitman’s (1996) article about Curitiba, Brazil, tells effectively the same story, albeit centered on technical rather than aesthetic innovations. In this narrative pattern, change is effected by an organic intellectual (using Gramsci’s term loosely)—someone who combines a Western intellectual foundation with local cultural knowledge, and in the process makes inroads on supposedly insolvable problems. The resistance is fierce, but the opponents are uncultured and violent, and can be neutralized through the popular legitimacy of participatory methods.

These narratives are told within the US as well. The June 20, 2005, issue of *The Nation*, for example, featured eight profiles of progressive municipal politicians (Nichols 2005a). The repeated story is of a theoretically informed person making commonsensical innovations valued by the cultural elite. The short profiles do not have the space to develop the full narrative of progressive urban governance, including the theoretical bases and opposition. The narratives are present, however, in their abbreviated versions. One mayor “trumped the city’s business and political elites,” while another “committed in 2002 to have city operations abide by the [Kyoto] treaty’s greenhouse gas reduction goals” (Nichols 2005a, 18). The stories of these local politicians are being told through identifiable narrative elements, linking them to a broader tradition of change.

This narrative explicitly identifies city government as a key location of change. Local government is presented in this way not only because of the “legitimate political authority and democratic control” that Kirshner et al described (1975). These narratives have power because municipal government is at once hyperlocal and everywhere. There is a universality to city government. Aside from outlier cases such as Singapore where the state is the city, and anarchic and balkanized urban zones such as Mogodishu, Somalia, through much of the late twentieth century, local government pretty much anywhere in the world looks quite similar. Local governments generally have responsibility for basic infrastructure and services that have immediate and tangible impacts on urban residents. Whether elected or appointed, local officials are available and approachable in ways that distant national politicians are not. Neoliberal and free trade policies have changed the balance of power between cities and companies in all countries. As a result, the reader can empathize with an account of urban governance and transformation in a very direct fashion—differences of legal systems and culture can be glossed over in favor of a more universal urban experience and identity.

At the same time, the narrative of progressive governance is assertively local. Contrary to Augé’s “non-places,” progressive city narratives focus on the nurturing and creation of places and identities specific to that city. Non-places are the anonymous locations of modern commerce and urban development such as airports and shopping malls. Moreover, “the real non-places of supermodernity—the ones we inhabit when we are driving down the motorway, wandering through the supermarket or sitting in an airport lounge...—have the peculiarity that they are defined partly by

the words and texts they offer us” (Augé 1995, 96). Augé is here contrasting the control and anonymity of contemporary urban development and culture with a (perhaps imagined) organic local, found in the past and in the rural. In narratives of progressive cities, reference is made repeatedly to the politician-actors finding the essence of the local, and through participatory and other progressive policies, allowing this localness to be brought forth and developed. In Augé’s terms, this localness is itself a text, written against the “globalized” interconnectedness that allows these narratives. The “local” in the narrative must be local enough for the reader to identify it as such, without being so culture- or place-specific as to prevent a connection. Kramer highlights Rama painting Tirana’s center, while every narrative of Porto Alegre focuses on the real or imagined spaces of the OP.

This paper largely follows the narrative pattern I describe. I deviate from the pattern slightly in two ways, however. First, I chose to tell the story of the administrations and the line agencies, rather than telling the story of the OP through the individuals involved. These institutions can certainly be read as protagonists, and provide a sense of identification to the reader. Moreover, this is common to an entire genre of academic texts—read unsympathetically, it is the narrative equivalent of the passive voice, serving to obscure actors and motives; read sympathetically, it effectively focuses attention on administrative processes and interactions. Secondly, I do not focus heavily on the resistance to the OP. This resistance was at times severe, but was never a key factor in the interactions between the line agencies and the OP I examine. In particular, I do not focus on the resistance to the OP because it dropped over time, to the point that in 2004 the PT candidate was defeated with promises of

expansion of the OP. Given these caveats, this paper demonstrates the narrative conventions I describe.

Individual PT officials and activists are repeatedly presented as being of the same intellectual culture as the readers of this paper. I explore this in the greatest depth early in the first section when discussing the development of my research. I again allude to this shared culture in the beginning of the third section in my consideration of the role of specific officials and activists as gatekeepers and informants, and in the fourth section about the line agencies. My descriptions cast the line agencies as ethically concerned actors taking part in a participatory process to the benefit of the city's residents. This positive portrayal is to the best of my knowledge accurate, but I am also aware of how I consciously structured the portrayal to support the narrative. For example, the following sentence from the first page of Section Four contains an entire array of assumptions and loaded language:

By submitting to a process based in wide-scale direct democracy, Porto Alegre's line agencies gained an important layer of insulation from the short-term demands of elected politicians, and were instead able to forge coalitions with OP participants in favor of long-term planning and integrated development.

In this passage I am contrasting "good" concepts to which I expect my reader to be sympathetic, such as "direct democracy," "coalitions," and "integrated development" with the "bad" "short-term demands of elected politicians." Of course, there is more going on, including a tension between direct and electoral democracy, and contrasting

paths for (in Hirschman's terms) voice and loyalty (see Hirschman 1970). Because the narrative of progressive cities focuses so heavily on participation, however, electoral democracy becomes important chiefly as an initial legitimization and institutionalization of the newly-elected social movement or reformer. After that, electoral democracy often appears in an obstructionist role, such as portrayals of Porto Alegre's city legislators.

Rhetorically, this paper follows the conventions of academic writing on progressive cities. Because there has been so little interaction between the writings about Porto Alegre, US progressive cities, and good governance in the third world, I have taken as much care as possible to be conscious of terminology and assumptions. The language of my paper—"citizenship," "participation," "redistribution," and "transparency"—derives directly from both the language of the PT officials and from the broad literature on progressive cities. The central ethical assumption within all of these approaches is that of equity. This shared assumption provides a grounding point for the reader—the officials, the PT, the researchers, and this author all articulate a common concern for physical and social equity.

The PT itself provides much of the expected identification for the reader of this paper. An electorally successful party that combines mass and intellectual support is a heady idea for US leftist intellectuals who have generally felt ignored at the national level, at least since the 2000 election of Bush, and often for much longer. The PT has never emphasized anti-intellectualism, unlike some populist-left movements. More importantly, the PT has repeatedly governed at the local, state, and now national level without threatening the privileges of the elites. Because of this, I am able to cast the

PT in an especially sympathetic light. My descriptions of the PT's legitimate accomplishments in redistribution and participation do not need to be tempered with caveats about intellectual repression or capital flight.

I did not set out to follow a classic narrative of progressive government. It was only after writing the first four sections of this paper, and rereading a range of texts about progressive governance, that I became aware of this as a pattern. I do not think that having or following narratives of this sort is necessarily problematic, as long as one is aware of the implications. This narrative is one that serves to explain and create a model of political change based in local involvement and activism. It also serves as an interesting counterweight to totalizing narratives of development and change. Stories of progressive cities do not directly contradict the free market model, for example, but they do inevitably end up forcing nuance into the model. Direct democracy and local specificity are actually quite powerful elements, and serve to give the narratives of progressive cities much of their weight.

These assertions of local specificity serve as a central legitimizing mechanism in these narratives. Contrary to the normal city, which is implied to be full of, if not entirely made of, non-places, a progressive city is one that not only *has* places, but *is* a place. The central actors—the progressive politicians and officials—are defending and nurturing a place with value, traditions, and meaning. When the progressive city itself is not defended as a highly specific place, the mayor instead is presented as specific and a contrast to the standardized politicians of non-places. Nichols quotes the mayor of Lawrence, Kansas, as describing himself as “an ex-hippie, disabled guy with a

funny name.” Evidently his style is funny as well: his first message to city residents began, “Greetings, citizens! Let the wild rumpus begin!” (Nichols 2005b, 13).

This rhetorical assertion and defense of place specificity is the central appeal of these narratives of progressive urban change. The assertion that a specific yet universal city, governed by specific yet universal politicians, can be a nexus of structural change is powerful. Telling the story so as to cause the reader to identify with the actors in their shared set of theoretical and social values completes the narrative’s appeal.

Pratt asserts that travel writing “*produced* ‘the rest of the world’ for European readerships” (1992, 5; emphasis in original). Similarly, the recursivity between reader and writer, politician and researcher, suggests that in writing about the progressive city, one is *writing* the progressive city. These narratives provide context, form, and meaning for our understandings not only of the unusual places they present, but also for our understandings of the non-places in which we actually live. The portrayal of change coming not from unique and specially gifted individuals living in unrecognizable places, but instead from people like ourselves living in places much like our own creates an impetus towards action.

It is possible to add another layer to this portrayal, suggesting that more than just identification may be possible. In this reading, the narratives themselves become vehicles for change: narratives *of* change become narratives *as* change. Taken to an extreme, this reading can suggest “all is text,” or that the narratives operate fully independently of the actions described within. However, to suggest a recursivity whereby the thinking and writing of elites—themselves influenced by what they

observe—interacts with popular protest and agendas so as to have an impact on what happens is not unreasonable. I can acknowledge the possibility that my paper will have an impact in the world of action, without that being my purpose in writing it.

These narratives have as a central attraction the legitimization of progressive intellectuals through portrayals of mass appeal. The actors in these cities, speaking an idealistic language and implementing pragmatic policies, have received the endorsement of both voters and participants in progressive programs. Narratives that feature a combination of electoral and direct democratic legitimization are an endorsement of a specific model of pragmatic political action. It is not revolution on the one hand, nor depoliticized “good governance” on the other. Instead, these narratives combine the intellectual and cultural values of the elite with a claim to broad mass appeal. In what could be labeled “progressive democratic populism,” these narratives seek to reject anonymity and passivity in favor of a specific form of political engagement. Seen in this light, descriptions of Porto Alegre’s OP, including my own, walk a narrow line between elitist fantasy and grounded description.

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