Accountability and the creation of public spaces at the local level

Leonardo Avritzer and Alexander Cambraia
Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais

Policy Paper for OAS

Spring 2008
The Latin American tradition of government was, up to the mid-80s, a tradition of centralized government. Brazil was an exception up to 1964 with state governments getting 56% of all levied taxes during the 50’s (Samuels, 2004). However, the authoritarian regime increased the share of the central government in the Gross National Product (GNP) along with a process of political centralization after 1964. Mexico’s authoritarianism also increased its share of the GNP through the control of oil revenues from the 70’s on. Many other Latin American countries have had a tradition of centralized government, among them Peru and Argentina should be mentioned. Centralization in Latin America did not involve only fiscal resources but also the weakening of sub-national governments, the organization of public services such as health, education and pension systems at the central government level. In the case of Brazil, elections for governor were restored in 1982 and for mayor in 1985. Together with the restoration of sub-national political autonomy, tax revenues were decentralized throughout the 80’s. In the case of Brazil already in 1982, as the opposition to authoritarianism strengthened, the automatic fiscal transfers to states and cities also increased, from 10 to 14% (through the Fundo de participação dos estados) and from 10 to 16% (through the Fundo de participação dos municípios) (Falleti, 2005).

Democratization in Latin America started to take place in 1983 in Argentina, in 1985 in Brazil, in 1990 in Chile and in the year 2000 in Mexico. Regardless of the way democratization took place, through the collapse of the authoritarian regime as it was the Argentinean case (Stepan, 1996) or through a negotiated pact as in Brazil (Mainwaring, 1996) or through elections as in Mexico (Olvera, 2003), democratization led to the revision of old paradigms of policy-making. One of them was the centralization paradigm. Policies of decentralization started to take place in most of the countries in the region. In the case of Brazil decentralization took place mainly through the restoration of elections for sub-national governments and through the creation of different types of public spaces introduced during the constituent assembly (1987-1988). The Brazilian constituent assembly opened the way for the creation of new public spaces by connecting the strengthening of sub-national politics with the participation of civil society associations in public policies. In many other Latin American countries, de-centralization took place through administrative reform of the state (Oxhorn et al, 2004).

At the same time that de-centralized public spaces for the implementation of public policies emerged in Brazil as well as in the rest of Latin America, a more informal way of public participation also emerged. These informal spaces are more related to accountability, that is to say, to public forms of control by the citizenry on acts of the government, as well as acts of public administration. Accountability in Latin America has involved public campaigns as is the case in Argentina or monitoring of government action by civil society associations as has been the case in Mexico (Peruzzotti, 2006). Public accountability mechanisms interact with legislative institutions such as Parliamentary Inquiry Commissions and the press, making many of these campaigns successful.

There have also emerged in many Latin American countries after democratization new forms of participation. Participatory budgeting in Brazil is one of the most well known of these forms. There is also a very progressive law on citizens’ participation in Bolivia, an

---

1 Brazil in comparison to other Latin American countries such as Argentina and Mexico can also be considered a much more decentralized country.
important process of decentralization with participation in Uruguay, important experiences of participatory budgeting in Buenos Aires and Rosario and important attempts to introduce participation in the Federal District in Mexico. This paper will have three parts: in the first part, I will approach the process of decentralization in Latin America showing that in order to fully understand the impact of decentralization we need to separate administrative decentralization from the devolution of power to local public spaces. In the second part, I will approach current processes of participation in Brazil from the perspective of the empowerment of local actors to take deliberative decisions on the distribution of public goods. In the third part, I will differentiate the current experiences of participation and will make recommendations for the improvement in participation and accountability in the region.

Democratization and Decentralization in Latin America

The understanding of the actual stage of the majority of countries in matters of their political-administrative arrangements may derive from the study of their own historical formation (Hobsbawn, 1994). Such arrangements are the result of actions, decision-makings, beliefs, values, and specific traditions that constitute the environment of these societies. By restricting this range of themes to those related to political-administrative and economic fields, interesting results are found. One of them is the observation that countries that are considered nowadays examples of democracy, such as many Western European ones, have a quite diverse historic background from their present political-economic scenario. After World War I, it was possible to observe the advent of many authoritarian regimes in this region. Social and political instabilities did compel many countries to adopt political systems with dictatorial tendencies and centralized policies. According to Falleti (2005), dictatorial regimes may be understood through three lenses. The first one is of a concentration of fiscal-economic power in the central government. This concentration would involve from the share of revenues to the destination of investments and public aid and fiscal transfers. The second is the concentration of social-political power. It refers to the weakening of sub-national governments in the implementation of national politics, particularly in matters of composition of specific public offices. In third place, the administrative concentration, referring basically to the responsibilities governments are supposed to deal with in the management of specific public policies, goals, among other obligations. Thus, Latin American countries in the same fashion of European countries, have had dictatorships that centralized their political and fiscal policies. It was at the end of this process during the 80’s that decentralization and participation emerged as part of politics in the region.

Decentralization is “...a process of state reform composed by a set of public policies that transfers responsibilities, resources, or authority from higher to lower levels of government in the context of a specific type of state.”(Falleti, 2005:328). Decentralization policies would be distinguished, as already mentioned, in at least three types: administrative, fiscal, and political decentralization. However, many times, just one or two dimensions of decentralization are proposed as policies. If administrative decentralization is not accompanied by fiscal decentralization, the final result is frustration by citizens that would not be able to see the results of decentralization due to the lack of economic resources. Within such a scenario, if no fiscal decentralization will be implemented as well, the sub national unit will remain dependent on the central government in matters of money for investment. The final picture, hence, is more work and responsibilities, yet with the same resources as previously and less political legitimacy. Thus, administrative and
fiscal decentralization should be introduced at the same time in order to achieve the key aim, namely, political decentralization.

When we compare four Latin American countries: Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, and Argentina, we see these problems emerging, particularly in the context of the reforms that introduced market-oriented economic policies (Falleti, 2005). In the beginning of these reforms, for example, Argentina and Brazil had the highest share of revenues collected by sub-national governments in the region, as well as the highest sub-national share of expenditures (responsibilities entrusted to these actors). By the end of the process, despite both countries having an increase in this last variable, only Brazil saw an increase in the former (fiscal collection at the sub-national level). Argentina, actually, saw a decrease in its sub-national share of revenues. Colombia is also an interesting third case. In 1973, 13% of the government current revenues were transferred to sub-national governments and in 2001 the comparable figure was 50% (Acosta, 2003). However, after 2001 much of the resources previously transferred to the central government were re-centralized (through legislative act number 1 and through law 715) and most of the attributions of the departments were maintained (Acosta, 2003:11-12). The reason was both the need to strengthen the central budget and the weakness of democratic political forces at the local level. The three above examples show that we may have three different processes of decentralization: a first one in which there is administrative but no fiscal decentralization; a second one in which re-centralization follows decentralization and a third one in which decentralization overlaps with the constitution of democratic forms at the local level. This means that decentralization has a political dimension at the local level that cannot be missed. In discussing decentralization processes, it is not possible to exclude the participatory element, as seen in the examples given. This means that any theoretical approach should consider not only government actors as subjects of the phenomenon, but also bear in mind the importance of social actors as strong intervening variables, with strong capacity not only to influence, but even to change the final result. In contexts of traditionally weak participation, it is supposed that top-down decentralization may be enhanced, even within democratic countries, especially because of the role played by central elites. In contexts with a strong tradition of participation, however, there should be a bottom-up decentralization, with not only the devolution of authority to sub-national governments, for example, but also with the opening of spaces for people in general to influence the decision-making processes even in key sectors, such as health care policies. I call this process the formation of public spaces for participation. I will give in the second section of the paper, the example of Brazil to illustrate this process.

Democratization, decentralization and participation: the case of Brazil

The Origin of Participation

Brazil was democratized in 1985. In these twenty years since its democratization, the country has gone from being a country with low levels of participation and mobilization to a country known for its participatory institutions (Santos, 1998; 2002; Abers, 2000; Avritzer, 2002a; Baiocchi, 2005; Avritzer and Navarro, 2003; Tendler, 1997; Dagnino, 2002). The Constituent Assembly marked the point of departure for building an amazing infrastructure for participatory democracy. The 1988 Constitution was considered conservative at the time of its ratification due to momentary defeats of civil society actors and progressive political society on issues such as the duration of President Sarney’s mandate and the organization of the political system (Zaverucha, 1998; Whitaker, 1989).
However, a more historical perspective suggests a radically different picture. The Constitution opened the way for important changes in Brazil regarding access to social services and the creation of participatory institutions. The 1988 Constitution has fourteen devices that allow for participation, starting with its article on sovereignty, which allows a mixture of representation and participation (Vitale, 2004). The key participatory articles of the Constitution concern health, social assistance, the environment, and urban organization (Avritzer and Pereira, 2005). These articles were the point of departure for the emergence of a very large participatory infrastructure in contemporary Brazil that now includes 170 experiences of participatory budgeting and many thousands of health councils. The statute of the city, approved in 2001, will certainly add to the existing participatory institutions (there are already hundreds of cases of participatory city master plans).

In order to understand why these spaces emerged, we should look to the organization of informal public spaces by Brazilian civil society at the end of the process of democratization. During the work of the Constituent Assembly, Brazilian civil society was energized and the constitution-making format allowed for so-called “popular amendments”. Brazil’s new civil society actors – in particular, urban social movements, health care, education activists and environmentalists – were able to propose significant institutional innovations in the areas of urban reorganization, health care and social assistance directly to the Constitution’s drafting committee. The Constituent Assembly led to a meaningful amplification of citizen participation in government on several levels. In regard to health care, the Constituent Assembly decided on universal access, organized by territory. Health posts and preventive medicine were established. In addition, control of health policies would involve the participation of civil society associations. Law 8,142, enacted in 1990, introduced health councils nationwide. At the municipal level, Article 29 of the 1988 Brazilian Constitution addressed the organization of municipalities, suggesting that they adopt laws to open access to the public decision-making venues. Such laws were to ensure “the cooperation of civic associations in city planning and the possibility of popular initiative in legal projects of interest to the city population”. The 1988 Constitution, known today as Constituição Cidadã or Citizens Constitution, expressed a new pact of political and social inclusion for a democratic Brazil.

The new participatory institutions that emerged from this Constitution have three main characteristics. The first is the incorporation of social actors into the deliberative process in various ways. In the case of participatory budgeting, social actors deliberate directly in assemblies on neighborhood priorities. Health councils and the statute of the city seek to incorporate civil society associations that presumably represent the interests of the urban poor (Houtzager et al, 2003). Thus, among many design alternatives, the one that prevailed saw the state incorporate social actors into joint deliberative institutions.

The second characteristic of new participatory institutions is that they incorporate the poor into their deliberative logic. In the case of participatory budgeting, there is what is called an “inversion of priorities” in the distribution of urban infrastructure (Baiocchi, 2005). In the case of health councils, civil society’s priority was preventive medicine at the local level. In both cases, the new institutions are in charge of these policies. Thus, these new institutions were designed to integrate poor social actors’ demands into the policy-making process.

The third important characteristic of the new participatory designs is a process of joint deliberation between the state and civil society or between social actors and the government (Santos, 1998). The decentralization of urban and health policies meant
introducing deliberative institutions – participatory budgeting councils and city health councils – at the municipal level. In the case of participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, the creation of double prerogatives guaranteed that the Participatory Budgeting Council would decide on budget allocation. Thus, both cases involve significant institutional innovation, creating new ways of incorporating social actors into deliberation on public policy. The new designs led to real changes in the participant numbers and social status as well as in who becomes the beneficiaries of public policies.

Participatory budgeting emerged as a proposal for deliberation on the distribution of public goods at the urban level at the beginning of the democratization process in Porto Alegre (Baierle, 1998; Abers, 2000; Avritzer, 2002b; Silva, 2002). In the beginning of this process, neighborhood movements created a new umbrella organization in Porto Alegre, the Union of Neighborhood Associations (UAMPA). It was UAMPA that proposed the participation of the population in regional assemblies in which members of neighborhood associations would decide on budget issues (Avritzer, 2002a). It was UAMPA that rejected Partido Democratico Trabalhista (PDT) administration’s first participatory proposal. In addition, it was members of UAMPA and local neighborhood associations who demanded the redesign of the administrative districts of Porto Alegre in order to adapt them to the participatory dynamics of social movements (Avritzer, 2002b). Of the four main institutional innovations introduced by participatory budgeting, two can be traced to civil society associations: (1) the idea of a budget that would incorporate the ongoing participatory practices of the population and (2) the idea of a regional deliberation process that would allow the population to express its preferences at the local level. Thus, we can see that the formation of a public space for social action is at the root of the important forms of participation that emerged in Brazil after democratization. Civil society actors at the public level were the authors of the proposal for participation during the Constituent Assembly. Civil society actors at the local level were the proponents of participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre.

The roles of UAMPA and the local Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) exemplify the role of public spaces in the emergence of participatory institutions. Participatory budgeting was not the result of a proposal made by a political actor; rather, it was the result of multiple actors’ initiatives. The emergence of the format has to be attributed to UAMPA and merged at the public level. However, its proposed design would never have worked because it was too anti-state. On the other hand, the local PT proposed a popular council format that would never have been accepted by City Council. Integrating regional assemblies with a council was a good solution for both the neighborhood association actors and the PT, incorporating proposals from both.

The emergence of Health Councils is a similar case of social action at the public space leading to participatory institutions. Indeed, health movements became the most widespread participatory institution in democratic Brazil. They can be traced back to civil society organizations even more than participatory budgeting can. The health movement had two main actors, the sanitary movement (Arouca, 2003) and the popular movement for the improvement of health conditions that emerged in São Paulo during the late seventies (Sader, 1988; Doimo, 2003). The format of health councils emerged in the Eastern district of São Paulo at the beginning of the democratization process. At that point, the Catholic

---

Councils in different formats have a long history in Brazil’s institutional life. Institutions with participation of civil society actors have been called councils since at least the 30’s when Vargas Minister of Culture created the Council for the preservation of historical landmarks. During the 50’s CNPQ, a council for
Church in São Paulo (Casanova, 1994; Doimo, 2004) was sponsoring the organization of the urban poor. The format of the councils emerged in São Paulo’s São Mateus and São Miguel Paulista regions in one of the early mobilizations of the democratization process. The population wanted to control the quality of health services in the region but lacked the means of doing so. It discovered an existing local law on councils in São Paulo and demanded its implementation. In 1979, 8,146 people participated in an election for councilors in the East of São Paulo (Sader, 1988: 276). However, the council format that emerged after the mobilizations in the Eastern District of São Paulo did not incorporate, at that point, the acknowledgement of the joint deliberative format by the state. It would take two additional moments, the VIII National Health Conference and the Constituent Assembly for the health movement to reach that format. The popular health movement and the sanitary movement combined during the VIII National Health Conference, where the agenda for the Constitutional Assembly was established. The popular health movement demanded a state-run health system but was defeated by sanitaristas and politicians linked to the health movement who advocated a mixed system that became the most popular proposal for the Constituent Assembly. In this mixed system, the idea of local councils with community participation was preserved. Thus, in a way similar to the case of participatory budgeting, in the case of health councils, the institutional format which progressively emerged was the sharing format, due to the actions of different social actors with different concerns. The health popular movement linked councils to participation and the sanitaristas introduced the state into the participatory equation.

The popular amendment on health was presented at the national Constituent Assembly by representatives of both the health popular movement and the sanitary movement (Whitaker, 1989; Rodrigues and Zauli, 2002; Avritzer, 2005). These movements also lobbied hard for the incorporation of participatory devices into the elaboration of infra-constitutional legislation. Thus, among the four main institutional devices introduced in the area of health, civil society played a key role in two: (1) the idea of deliberation among state and civil society actors; (2) the idea of incorporating regional representatives into health councils. The role of political society in the emergence and implementation of health participatory institutions is different than in the case of participatory budgeting. The approval of health participatory legislation required a broader political coalition. The Brazilian Communist Party played in this process a role at least as large as the P.T. due to the historical leadership of Sergio Arouca in this process (Oda,2000; Escorel, 1998). Arouca organized the VIII National Health Conference while in the Health Ministry and the conference produced a very organized civil and political society lobby to act at the Constituent Assembly. The P.T. joined the coalition of forces proposing participation during the Constituent Assembly giving up on its proposal of a nationally unified health care system (Pereira, 1996;). This broad civil society/political society coalition won the main elements of the new legislation in Congress in spite of the strong conservative lobby of the health sectors. Since the approval of participation by civil society associations in the law, local administrations in more than 98% of the Brazilian cities have health councils today. Yet, the effectiveness of the participatory arrangement even in the case of cities with strong civil society organization depended upon the willingness of the local

---

3 This data is provided by IBGE, the Brazilian Census Bureau but it needs to be seen more cautiously. IBGE asks the city administrations if there is an active council in the city and all cities who have legislation respond positively. However, not all legalized councils are active. See Tatagiba, 2002.
administration to transfer prerogatives to the participatory institutions. Political society role in the implementation of participatory institutions in the area of health has been: (1) proposing a mixed format between private and public services and adapt the councils to the new format; (2) negotiating the extinction of the INAMPS system which was a segmented form of access to health care based on the insertion in the formal labor market (Arretche, 2004) and last but not least to guarantee the participatory format when Collor Minister of Health wanted to thwart it (Pereira, 1996). Table 2 below summarizes the role of civil and political societies and the local administration in the emergence of participatory institutions in health.

Three Types of Public Spaces

Thus, the formation of forms of participation in Brazil is directly linked to the formation of three different types of public spaces:

The first type of public space is what I call “informal public spaces for the control of government decisions.” These informal spaces have been constituted by NGO’s, social movements concerned with the control of government actions, opposition MPs. In these spaces both the issue of participation in public policies and the issue of control of government actions has emerged. Movements that have been generated in these spaces are FNRU, Forum Nacional pela Reforma Urbana, Movement for Ethics in Politics, National Front for the Defense of Children and Teenagers, Frente Nacional para a Defesa das Crianças e dos Adolescentes; and the National Front for Political Reform. The main characteristic of these spaces is that they are articulated outside government but deal with issues that concern governments such as urban reform, teenager rights or political reform. They may or may not involve members of parliament. They unleash campaigns at the public level in order to achieve their aims that may be related to public policies as well as to administrative practices.

Secondly there are hybrid public institutions in charge of public policies. In the case of Brazil during the Constitutional reform process, new institutions emerged in the areas of health, social assistance, environment and child and teenager policies. We call these institutions policy councils. Policy councils are local institutions formed by both civil society and state actors. They usually involve parity of representation and have two principles of membership: state actors are indicated through an administrative process and civil society actors elected by their representative through some kind of informal process. In the end, a public space of interaction between civil society and the state on public policies issues is constituted. This space may determine the nature of a specific public policy, it can determine changes in the coverage of public policies beneficiaries and it also involves the transparency of the decision making process of the specific public policy. In the case of health in Brazil members of health councils have to approve the finances of any local administrative branch.

Third, participatory processes unleashed by governments lead to the creation of public spaces in the so-called “participatory budgeting”. Participatory budgeting is an open process of decision-making by the population of budget priorities launched by local government in Brazil and other parts of Latin America as well. Participatory budgeting differs from hybrid institutions because the participatory process is all concentrated in the hands of citizenry and civil society actors. The results of the participatory process are later negotiated with state actors. Participatory budgeting also involves an accountability
process because after the deliberation there is the need to control the process of implementation of decision. In most of the cases participatory budgeting involves the formation of a committee in charge of controlling the implementation of decisions. Experiences of participatory budgeting exists today in Brazil (around 174 experiences) (Avritzer, 2006), as well as in Buenos Aires, Montevideo and in Peru.

When we analyze the types of public spaces formed in Latin American countries in the last 15 years we can differentiated them according to their effectiveness in the control of governments, according to their effectiveness in democratizing government and according to their effectiveness in giving access to public goods to the poor. Table 1 below systematizes the role of these spaces in each one of the cases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of public spaces</th>
<th>Informal</th>
<th>Hybrid</th>
<th>Bottom-up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capacity to control Government</td>
<td>Dependent upon degree of mobilization. Very effective in cases of high mobilization</td>
<td>High and institutional. Effectiveness is dependent upon civil society organization</td>
<td>Mixed. Dependent upon mobilization. Effectiveness depends on both civil society org. and state willingness of implement deliberations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity to democratize governments</td>
<td>Low due to its extra-institutional dimension</td>
<td>High due to its institutional dimension</td>
<td>Mixed, depending on the willingness of government to implement decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity to generate inclusive public policies</td>
<td>Informal institutions do not generate public policy.</td>
<td>Mixed, depending on civil society organization. It may be higher when civil society and state interact well.</td>
<td>Very high when civil society and the state interact well.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important to determine the conditions for the success in each one of these spaces. Informal public spaces for accountability are very effective in situations of high mobilization. Impeachment processes in Brazil, Venezuela and Ecuador are a good demonstration of this capacity which is an ex-post capacity. The cacerolaco in Argentina also seems to be a good example of informal mobilization cases. However, we do not see in the Latin American cases of informal public spaces for mobilization an ex-post capacity to democratize government. These public spaces seem to play a different role of sanctioning bad government in punishment without being able to influence the formation of new government. The best example of this is the Argentinean motto coined during the cacerolaco “que se vayan todos”. In the end, Peronistas with very traditional practices of governance stayed.
A second case for evaluating the success of public spaces is councils’ capacity to establish control upon government actions. There are few comparative works on the effectiveness of councils in Brazil (Avritzer, 2007). However, the available work shows variation in performance according to civil society organization and its interaction with political actors. In the cases in which civil society is strong, councils tend to be effective in their capacity to make public policies more democratic and more inclusive. In this sense, hybrid institutions have a stronger capacity to democratize government than informal institutions. This capacity follows directly from the institutional dimension of hybrid institutions. The fact that decisions are mandatory gives them capacity to sanction non-compliance and to establish a long-lasting democratizing effect.

The third case of public spaces is participatory budgeting. It is the most democratic and accountable of the forms of participation available but it is also the most dependent upon the willingness of government. Participatory budgeting is a bottom-up, open entry institution with a high degree of mobilization of social actors in the public space. The initiator of the process is always from the political system and there is the need to have a strong civil society in order to make the public space created by participatory budgeting effective. Participatory budgeting is the most democratizing form of public space when all the conditions are in place (Baiocchi, 2005). However, these conditions are very rarely present.

Recommendations for the introduction of participatory spaces and greater accountability

Based on the descriptions of the three types of public spaces, I will propose policy recommendations to improve the formation of these spaces in the Americas. It is important to have in mind that public spaces do not emerge automatically from top-down policies as the Brazilian examples from section 2 make clear. However, policy recommendation can play the role of facilitating the emergence of such spaces.

1. The first recommendation I will propose is to increase the access to public information to social actors. Government information on public policies and administrative decision-making is a key tool to be worked on by civil society actors. Civil society actors may start to interact with government when they have access to information, such as how much is going to be spent in social policies, which cuts will be made in the process of budget negotiation, which will be the priorities in public works. All these types of information usually arrive very late into the hands of civil society actors and should be made available as early as possible to these actors. It is also recommended that in processes of interaction between civil society actors and the state, information should always be made accessible well in advance and civil society actors may be allowed to propose items on the agenda of negotiations. This is an important feature to make state-civil society interaction a two-way process.

2. It is very common for governments across Latin America to agree with the formation of public participatory spaces without implementing them. Legislation is introduced regarding participation and accountability but nothing happens in cases of non-compliance. Sanctions should be introduced in cases of non-compliance. There are two kinds of sanctions: the first relates to monetary sanctions that have worked very well in Brazil in the health system. Those cities which do not submit their accounts to health councils have federal transfers of health resources...
suspended. Other kinds of sanctions can be implemented, though as symbolic sanctions. A list of the non-participatory or non-accountable cities may play the role of a negative incentive that cities or governments may want to avoid.

3. International institutions may take actions to review and to provide assistance with regulating legislation concerning rights to assemble and to communicate. It is very important that actions that may lead to the formation of new public spaces not be thwarted by inadequate legislation. Many Latin American countries still have important limitation for the registration of voluntary associations. In some cases, they need to be registered with the state (Mexico for instance); in other cases they cannot be branches of important international organizations without the authorization of the Ministry of Justice (Brazil for instance). It is important that associational life be completely de-regulated from its dependency vis-a-vis the state, as has, up to now, been the Latin American tradition.

4. Important public policies in areas such as health, education, social assistance, urban policies and water management should require the creation of participatory committees in charge of supervision of actions taken by government. This is a tendency that already exists in many Latin American countries. In the case of Brazil, health councils are in charge of supervising the accounts of municipal health authorities. In Brazil the development of urban policies in cities larger than 20,000 people has to be ratified in public hearings. Public hearings also exist in Bogota and in the Federal District of Mexico (Myers and Dietz, 2002). Public joint deliberation exists in cities in Brazil such as Porto Alegre, Belo Horizonte and Recife, in cities in Argentina, such as Rosario and Buenos Aires (Peruzzotti, 2007). Thus, the recommendation is to strengthen existing forms of public participation, principally in two ways. First by expanding the issues to be considered by participatory institutions. In some Latin American countries very few issues fall within the purview of these institutions. In particular, budgetary issues are outside the scope of civil society organizations. If these institutions are disempowered, social actors engaged in participation are likely to shun such participation. Secondly, participatory institutions should be made more deliberative. There are still many cases in which participatory institutions are merely consultative and their recommendation are not fully taken into account by governments. Finally, governments should have accountability mechanisms which show how civil society recommendations were incorporated into public policies; in cases where recommendations were not incorporated, an explanation should be provided.

5. International institutions and governments should give incentives to increasing the number of NGO’s concerned with participation. NGO’s may play a positive role in the initiative to create new public spaces. These spaces need to be autonomous and it is nearly impossible to create them through social engineering. What international institutions and governments may do is to generate positive conditions for the formation of these spaces. There could be two kinds of incentives: the provision of financial resources for the formation of civil society organizations where they do not exist. For example, if there are not enough self-help organizations in a country there should be monetary incentives for their formation. If there are not enough environmental organizations, incentives should be given to increasing them. It is very important that monetary incentives for the formation of civil society associations not be linked to any mechanism that may
lead to their control. These associations should be free to play their role without intervention by financial sponsors. The second incentive is to establish a benchmark on positive experiences of participation at the local level. Information on these experiences should be accessible to social and political actors across the region. An attempt to exchange experiences and to implement experiences of participation could help increase public spaces for participation.

6. A sixth recommendation would be positive incentives for the creation of a public inventory of participatory cities or states. This inventory could constitute a positive incentive for the introduction of participatory policies and the creation of local public spaces. The more accountable and participatory a country or a city is, the greater its qualification for resources from financial institutions. Accountable and participatory state/cities should pre-qualify for many programs from international agencies and institutions. They should also be allowed to integrate their participatory practices, according to their own dynamics, into programs sponsored by these agencies, thus, expanding the local dynamics for public participation.

This list is by no means exhaustive but it may constitute an initial step towards more democratic and accountable politics. Latin America has gone a long road from authoritarianism to democratization. This road transformed a cultural tradition that was not participatory and horizontal into a more democratic tradition. This is the reason why we are seeing so many experiences of participation in the region today. These experiences may be advanced by the introduction of a set of new practices that may help to promote more positive experiences, in addition to those already taking place in the region. It is up to social actors, state agents and international institutions to make their contribution to the successful accomplishment of this important task.
REFERENCES


