

**Federal University of Bahia, Brazil (UFBA)**

**Interdisciplinary Center for Social Development and Management (CIAGS)**

**Capacity building and dissemination of non conventional (post positivists, creative), methodologies. The role of art techniques in participatory policy-making.**

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### **An Overview of the project**

The background for this project is the rising of participatory approaches to policy-making as an inescapable attitude to face the challenge of governance and transformation in our highly complex, pluralistic and conflictive societies. Although, in spite of apparently unavoidable, the call for participation opens up a new field of problems at theoretical and practical level, a new territory of which we have no chart yet and that we are struggling to explore, pushed by the urgencies of our daily life. Generally speaking we may say that, at the moment, we are not even completely able to appreciate the dimension of the “earthquake” brought about in our practices by participation if intended as following the ambitious objective of “radical democratization of democracy”,

Saying it in a nutshell what I claim here is that participatory policy-making compels us to profoundly revise our approaches at both epistemological and practical terms. Epistemological, because the classic view of absolute supremacy of scientific rationality become clearly untenable, and we have to admit the legitimacy of other forms to see and make sense of the world. Practically, because the latter admission implies, if taken seriously, the consequent reformulation of our disciplinal fields, of the competences we are teaching in our university courses, of the methodologies we are using and considering able to bring about the desired transformation, finally, of our actual concrete practices as a whole.

Accordingly to this basic consideration the development of this project is twofold, theoretical and empirical. Before describing these two – highly intertwined – aspects it is necessary, though, to set down what is the privileged field for my observation and search.

Namely, what I define as “contexts of radical exclusion” is the focus of this project, which I consider as paradigmatic examples where some general conditions of our actual participatory practices are just highlighted and exacerbated and so results easier to identify and analyse them<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth saying that my working experience in Brazil, started in 2005, explain such a choice, since those contexts are, sadly enough, much more diffused there than we would reasonable expect in a country endowed with fantastic natural resources, and development indicators which compete with those of the (so called) first world countries.

Hence my question is: if to achieve more just and healthy societies we need to involve new subjects in the caring of the public good and in the building up of a better future, it is also evident that this people have scarce idea of what the very concept of public means, do not fully enjoy their civic rights, are mainly excluded from access to education, depend greatly on favours (patronage and nepotism) to survive, and work – in many cases – based of informal (if not illegal), initiative. These subjects hardly understand the whole logic ruling the global system and hardly have anything to gain from it. Hence, it would be very unlikely we would attract them into the public sphere by the call on rationality and economic utility that is what, in conventional, utilitarian view is supposed to mobilise any social actor to enter the public domain<sup>2</sup>. A different strategy would attempt at the awakening of those human attitudes capable to motivate to public action and commitment: dreaming for changes in its own and in the external reality, being passionate with an idea, being moved and revolted by injustice, looking for beauty and harmony, cultivate a sense of solidarity and ethic. Is not “pure”, linear rationality alone which will likely to awake such attitudes but the whole set of emotional, sensitive, artistic human attitudes, with its great capacity to expand our understanding, to instigate our reflexive capacity, to amplify our sensibility to the suffering of our fellows human beings, to increase our imaginative power and – this is at stake – our eventual capacity to also design and carry out practical ways to bring our visions about. That is, apparently, a clear change in direction of the current mainstream as far as policy-making is concerned.

Although, all what I am foreseeing and speaking about rests on a new vision at theoretical and epistemological level. A vision capable to finally overcome the positivist paradigm and the drastic fractures it built up between theory and practice, reason and emotion, mind and body, art and science, opening two ways paths between these poles which we need no longer to conceive as irreconcilable, looking, eventually, for their possible unity.

Hence, my aim on this side will be to work-out a theoretical framework focused on recomposing the polarities referred above and able to guide the participatory practices of policy-making. I will be using the **analogy between participatory process and multi-actor creative process as generative metaphor for my endeavour**. The implicit is that, differently from the conventional view, the methodology guiding the process is not a prefixed succession of steps, clearly formalised and ruled by a linear rationality, and much more proximate to an artistic activity. That is: based on the valorisation of any element of the local context (seen, in this sense, as a fundamental resource), on the ability of making the best of any occurrence looking them as opportunities for learning and innovation, which is, in a sense, to be an improvisator without missing the sense of orientation altogether<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> As I already said, these radical conditions just emphasize something we growingly experience in our contemporary societies. That is, the dramatic impoverishment of the public sphere led by the exacerbated individualism, a fatalist attitude hindering the very believe in the possibility (and effectiveness), of acting on and transforming the reality around and the lack of commitment to whatever project of social transformation. In spite of such a negative view, also exist great deal of evidence (and related literature), claiming for the growing need for participation and self-expression for contemporary subjects. I will just assume the ambiguous character of this topic and go along with the observation of what the empiric materials bring forth to me.

<sup>3</sup> A great deal of research is actually being developed on the potential of improvisation theories as leading the creative process in the building up of pieces of art or other “artefacts”. The hypothesis is that the – at least partial – openness that the improvising attitude asks from us is appropriate and valuable when leading with complex and open systems. The analogy with social contexts and the task of participatory policy-making seems all but awkward or inappropriate.

At methodological - practical level is then time to recognize that a brand new family of tools is gradually emerging to face the new challenges. It is what I call “non conventional methodologies”, which are all those currently in use to lead all sorts of group working, to build of interactive knowledge, to valorise practical and traditional knowledge beyond the technical and scientific ones. These methodologies admit the existence of no just one form of rationality (the linear and strategic one that positivist way of thinking has used us to), but of many **rationalities**, often unacknowledged and unappreciated. In spite of the quite extensive use, this all family of tools suffers yet of many ambiguities in terms of theoretical foundation, as if the very attempt of going beyond the deterministic and dualistic inheritance of positivism was too bold and hazardous to be stated flatly. Hence the first of this project objectives (just stated above), is of pointing out a theoretical frame-work relevant to the actual conditions of our practices, as to strength and legitimate the use of such tools when aiming at the main goal of mobilizing the full human being.

Here it comes then the second objective of this project that is **mapping the use of art techniques** (theatre, dance, music, photography....), **as a key resource to involve in the public sphere radically excluded subject**, that is those people who would be excluded otherwise (even unintentionally), namely for not being familiar and at ease with the rational and verbal codes usually dominating the participatory processes.

The attention to and actual use of such approaches is blowing up and spreading around the world. In the “third” as well as in the “first world” countries, the quantity of experiences is growing and still lacks of systematic analysis. Just hinting at a very first perception of this universe of practice, I may refer to the many examples spread around in Brazil (Porto Alegre, Rio de Janeiro, Salvador de Bahia, among many others), to the case of Canada (e.g. British Columbia), and to the Italian one<sup>4</sup>. But I am sure it will be a matter of cooperation and synergy with fellow researchers and professionals, the possibility to collect a much bigger deal of information on what is going on and to develop some good reflection on recurrent typologies, problems, results in such innovative field of action.

Finally, the occurrence of this project at the Interdisciplinary Centre of Social Development and Management (CIAGS), in the Federal University of Bahia (Brazil), provides the institutional framework for such endeavour, whilst giving the opportunity to design relevant strategies for capacity building and dissemination of these new and important tools of inclusive, participatory policy-making. The exchange of experiences among qualified social managers in a mutual learning-teaching exercise will certainly contribute to help us in the creation of a more useful concept and practice of social management for our Country.

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<sup>4</sup> Just to mention some first points of reference of my mental map in this respect I will highlight the case of “ Oi Nós Aqui Traveiz”, em Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, BR, of “Centro Teatro do Oprimido”, Rio de Janeiro, BR, do Fórum Comunitário de Combate à Violência, in Salvador, Bahia, BR; the case of CRANE programme (Conflict Resolution Arts and Intercultural Experience), at the University of British Columbia, Faculty of Law, in Vancouver BC; the case of the Laboratorio l’Ombrello (Umbrella Laboratory), at the Venice School of Architecture, and the Jolly Association, in Italy. All these subjects of quite diverse nature are experimenting the use of theatre, dance, music, photographs, as tools to instigate participation in the public sphere.

## **Brief description of the CIAGS**

The CIAGS (Interdisciplinary Centre of Social Development and Management), mission is to be a space for articulation of theoretical and practical knowledge in community development and social management. It aims at approximating different sectors of academic and non academic public, students-professors-researchers-professionals-operating in the university or in the professional world, in the public, private or third sector. The CIAGS is recognized by the Brazilian National Council for Scientific and Technologic Research, as the first centre in Brazil implementing a full post graduation programme in social management offering certificates for the Extension, Specialization and MA level, beyond thematic and short duration courses on specific themes. As a promoter of social and community development the CIAGS looks for identifying social technologies, and innovative methodologies able to foster social transformation, effective policy-making and eventually socio-economic inclusion. Is especially in this respect that the present project strengthens a strategic line of action to further develop the Centre capacity to being a point of reference, at national and international level, in building capacity for using and disseminating non conventional methodologies.

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