

Games as constituent participatory process in the political production of cities spaces

Ana Paula Silva de Assis

Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais - UFMG

ap.assis@gmail.com

This article introduces three experiences of participatory games with the aim of developing critical thinking about social participation in the production of space. The street football played by the collective “Baixo Bahia Futebol Social”, a game of cards to a candomblé yard and a board game that equates the logic of private property in the collectivity of urban space will be taken as references. The proposition of these and other games as participatory tools aims to recover the emancipatory meaning of social participation at the prospect of politically produce the space of cities.

From the institutional point of view, participation is called to play a corrective role in face of social inequalities, inasmuch as it presupposes a more democratic management of the city. However the argument to be developed under the light of Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau post-political theories is that the institutionalization of participation associated with the absence of an emancipatory political project becomes fragile to be captured by the hegemonic power, and consequently, fuel the reproduction of the same domination structures to which it opposes. The post-democratic theory identifies in the last decades a process of depoliticisation and erosion of democracy, and also the shrinking of the public sphere in face of the consensual arrangements that align the politics to the neoliberal interests. Rancière criticizes the status quo of politics and the instrumentalization of democratic discourse in consensual arrangements that tend to eliminate any form of antagonism and dissensus, which for him are the very politics. The dissensus will be taken as a counterpoint to consensual orientation of current participatory policies, with the aim of revealing the limits that the institutionalized participation imposes on the constitution of political subjects in the production of space processes.

By means of a criticism of hegemony, this study intends to expand the context of debate on social participation beyond the institutionalized participatory policies. Existing studies of participatory processes in the field of architecture and urban planning alternate between those that discuss the participation from the institutional point of view and others, which are dedicated to collaborative processes for direct participation in the production of space. As a contribution to the debate about participation, this study proposes a third participative instance, which stands out from the others and could be identified as the participation in the public sphere. The aim of defining this other category, rather than separate distinct participatory instances, is to bring them together as parts of an emancipatory political project for social participation.

It is precisely in the context of participation in the public sphere that is intended to present the experiences with those games mentioned above. The following games will be presented in its context and then will be analyzed individually in their capacity for agency.

a) **Baixo Bahia Futebol Social:** The collective Baixo Bahia Futebol Social is a women's football team that has the purpose of experience the sharing of streets space through the practice of football. We highlight among the different actions of the collective the matches carried out with homeless people. These games always occur in public spaces from different cities. The event can reveal the invisibilities that the hegemonic order strives to hide from the symbolic representation of space. It reinscribes the homeless in the debate about public policies in the field of social housing and the right to the city. In another aspect, the simple act of challenges them to a football game assumes a condition of equality between the parts where normally only inequality is perceived. This minimum balance of conditions implements a universe of sharing from which a dialogue can be developed.

b) **Manzo Ngunzo Kaiango game:** It is a card game that was initially thought as a translation tool, which could help an architects team in charge of developing a project to recover the sacred settings of a candomblé yard. The game relates, through hand cards and its respective place on the board, the symbolic spatial configuration of the candomblé yard associated to the sacred meaning of their deities. In addition to its

original purpose, the game has been used in the education of children in the community and also to promote and demystify the prejudices associated with candomblé culture.

c) Occupy the Ground: This board game starts from a spatial conception based on the logic of private property, to propose a reflection on the collective effects that individual actions cause in the city as a space of collectivity. It's based on a game dynamic that collectively reward or charges all the players according to the individual actions proposed by each player, on the scale of the street, neighborhood and city.

As common features, games can promote the social mobilization, facilitate the dialogue between stakeholders and democratize the spatial knowledge. They can also enable the emergence of another spatial imaginary to the city. In contrast to Habermas' deliberative model – in which the current participatory processes are conceived – each of the three proposals has the ability to promote participative communication and exchange of knowledge by means of experience instead of rational communication. As a contribution for an emancipatory project of participation, this study aims to assert the games agency to enable the dissensual access to the public sphere as a constituent process of political subjects.