

## **The conference of urban policy of Belo Horizonte: what we could know through the newspaper O Tempo**

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The twentieth century was marked by an intense process of dispute over the democracy question. This dispute, waged by the end of each of the World Wars, revolved around the desirability of democracy, which resulted, however, in the hegemonic idea of democracy restricted only to the participation in the election processes (Souza Santos & Avritzer, 2002, p.39). This centralizing sense of democracy was not immune to the criticism that sought to approach to this idea a broader notion of democracy, to which are associated the ideas of social mobilization (Friedmann, 2006), public space as sphere of formation and expression of citizenship (Habermas, 1997) and the possibilities of creating autonomous individuals for the establishment of a democratic society (Castoriadis, 1982).

With the re-democratization of Brazil in the 1980s, the intense struggle of social movements resulted in the creation of a varied legal and institutional framework, aiming to bring society closer to planning and management of urban policies. However, the legal advances within the City Statute, Law 10.257/ 2001, legal benchmark that regulates the urban policy chapter of the Federal Constitution and establishes the "democratic management through direct participation" as a general guideline of urban policy, have not resulted in structural changes of urban space occupation. This observation leads one to question the effectiveness of the instrument of social participation as a counterpoint of the political game, for those who are historically excluded from the right to the city. In practice, what is observed is that these processes take place in a social context of strong heteronomy, where access to reliable information is fundamental for equity of access and participation in the decision-making processes (Souza, 2006, p.174).

In Belo Horizonte, the fourth largest city in Brazil, social participation in elaboration of planning legislation and in urban management has become a requirement since 1996, with the establishment of the City Master Plan by Law 7.165. Thereafter it was decided that the Municipal Council of Urban Policy (Compur, in portuguese) and the Municipal Conference of Urban Policy (CMPU, in portuguese) would be the main forums in which such participation would grow. The first CMPU was carried out from October 1998 to February 1999, the second CMPU took place between October 2001 and August 2002, and the third CMPU happened only seven years later, in 2009. By following the determination of the City Master Plan that the CMPU has to happen every four years, in 2013 should have happened the IV CMPU, but the event did not begin until February 2014, already in the midst of dispute processes and conflicts between the various actors involved.

This paper aims to build and analyze the picture of the IV CMPU which is possible to be made using only articles published in a local press vehicle, using Content Analysis<sup>1</sup> (CA) as research method. The choice of the newspaper *O Tempo* was due to the reach of its publication. Since its a digital platform with open access, it figures as the fifth largest newspaper in the country<sup>2</sup>, with over 30 million daily hits.

The CA was based in articles published between January 2013 and December 2015 (two months after the end of the IV CMPU). The search for the term "Urban Policy Conference" in the newspaper's website showed 161 articles as result. After an initial triage we chose to take into consideration only the articles where the term appeared in the title and was the subject of the text; and those where the IV CMPU was the main topic of text, totaling 41 articles. The CA was made under the following perspectives: about the objectives of the IV CMPU, we sought to identify how it was presented in the articles and to which objectives it was linked; about the conflicts, which were the conflicts presented, how they were presented and what were the actors involved; and about the actors, which were presented and what was their relation with the process.

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<sup>1</sup> Content Analysis is a methodology which describes and analyzes the content issued in the communication process, whether spoken or written (Bardin, 1977). It consists of systematic procedures of quantitative data survey, such as the frequency of occurrence of terms in a given text, and qualitative data survey, which allow the analysis of messages and inferences about collected data (Cavalcante, Calixto & Pinheiro, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Source: Circulation Verification Institute - IVC.

This data analysis is important for the reflection over the quality of information achieved by the citizen who receives information about the participation processes only by the media vehicles. Of the 41 articles considered, 10 were published in the “Cover” section and the other 31 in the “City” section, which together account for almost 70% of the accesses to the paper's website, demonstrating the relevance of the subject.

On the objectives of the IV CMPU, the articles associate its realization with a process of revision and/or adjustment of planning legislation, contributing with the idea of an eminently technical event. There are very few articles that relate to citizen's everyday issues such as urban mobility, housing, environment, culture and other public policies. The conflicts can be grouped into two types: the ones related to the convening and conducting of the process; and the conflicts related to the proposals presented. The articles exposed conflicts ranging from the obligation by the Municipal Government of convening the IV CMPU, through the schedule and the agenda of the event and the definition of its participants. On the other hand, when dealing with the proposals presented in the Conference, the articles focus in those involved with changes in urban consolidation and land's value. Despite the large number of proposals discussed and approved at the IV CMPU, a total of 647, the articles presented to their readers the content of less than 5% of the proposals. The judicialization of the IV CMPU, given the severity of some of its conflicts, was also a fairly recurrent issue. Regarding the actors, one perceives the variety of actors involved and the diversity of opinions and interests, although it is possible to notice that few have the chance to express themselves through the newspaper articles.

The processes of planning and participatory management in public policies, such as the IV CPMU, are by nature spaces of exhibition and confrontation of ideas and diverse interests. In these cases, the information is an important tool for both who are directly involved with the process and the rest of the population who will have their daily lives affected by the resulting decisions. The reading of the IV CMPU made from what was conveyed in the newspaper *O Tempo* allowed us to diagnose a level of disability, partiality and inaccuracy of the information disseminated, which can induce to mistaken opinions in respect to this participation forum and its results.

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