

Searching for Alternatives: Participatory Development

Openness and the New Latin American Left: Understanding Change in an Era of Complexity

Katherine Reilly
PhD, Political Science, University of Toronto

The World Social Forum (WSF) open space methodology has important implications for the rise of the New Latin American Left. Given the politics inherent in this relationship, however, we should be skeptical of the idea of "openness." Conceptions of openness presented in literature on the WSF tend to be based in discourse rather than grounded research. This paper presents findings from a study of the Mesoamerican People's Forum (MPF), which is the Central American emanation of the larger WSF movement.

Drawing on insights from geography, ethnography, sociology and political science, the findings discuss strategies used by participants to influence outcomes in the complex environments created by open spaces. The paper concludes with some implications of these findings for how to think about the New Latin American Left.

Participatory Budgeting and Local Solidarity Governance in the City of Porto Alegre: The Contested Confluence of Civil Society Discourses and Participatory Practices.

J. Ricardo Tranjan
PhD, Global Governance, University of Waterloo

In the last four years two distinct civil society discourses and participatory initiatives have coexisted in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre. Introduced by the left-wing Workers' Party (PT) in 1989, the Participatory Budgeting (OP) initiative allows the population to decide on the utilization of a portion of the municipal budget. The OP marked a significant change in the history of the Brazilian left wherein democracy and civil society became accepted as emancipatory in themselves, rather than bourgeois manifestations or means to a greater socialist revolution. In 2004, the newly elected center-left political coalition ended the sixteen-year Workers' Party administration, kept the OP, and launched a new participatory initiative, the Local Solidarity Governance (GSL). This new initiative draws on a number of concepts associated with the post-Washington Consensus; it tries to foment social networks and promote local development projects where the state, civil society, and the private sector act as partners. Theoretical debates and political discourses have pitted the two initiatives against each other as archenemies. This paper argues that, contrary to the predominant views, both discourses and practices are only seemingly antagonist. An examination of the history of the political projects behind them shows that both programs were attempts to overcome antiquated statist models, favoured by the political left, whilst avoiding the free market option, advocated by the supporters of the Washington consensus. Moreover, a study of the functioning of the OP and the GSL demonstrates that they are operationally compatible. And interviews with social

activists demonstrate that Porto Alegre's civil society activists are diverse and experienced enough to take advantage of both participatory channels without compromising their political agendas. The crumble of dominant political paradigms and the renewed focus on civil society demand a new theoretical exercise. The civil society concept ought to embody the inherent complexity of this sphere in highly stratified societies.

Building citizenship in Medellín, Colombia

Daniel Tubb
MA, Institute of Political Economy, Carleton University

Using a governmentality perspective, this paper critically explores the rationalities and technologies deployed by the local government in Medellín between 2004 and 2007 with the goal of building citizenship in a context of violence and neo-liberalism. Specifically, I explore municipal and civil society programs deployed in the poorest comunas (neighborhoods on the edge of the city) by focusing on collaborative planning, participatory budgeting, and the investment in libraries, schools and cultural events. In the same period, the municipal government employed neoliberal discourses on globalization, public space, and culture borrowed from US and Spanish debates on urban planning. Finally, the much-publicized decline in homicide rate in Medellín should not be understood as a decline in violence, but rather be attributed to the securing of hegemonic control of the city and legalization of paramilitary forces. By exploring violence, planning and citizenship using the contributions from governmentality and critical citizenship studies, this paper shows how processes that construct citizenship in Medellín can both coexist with violence and be undermined by neoliberal policies. This suggests that Medellín's 'renewal' is incomplete and profoundly fragile. This means that unless the political-economic contradictions of illegality and inequality can be addressed, the recent gains in building citizenship might reverse themselves. Indeed, so far trends in 2008 suggest a reversal in regards to homicide rates may in fact already be occurring. This paper is based on interviews and fieldwork conducted over a three-month period during the summer of 2008 in Medellín, Colombia.¹

Empowerment through participation: assessing the voices of leaders from recycling cooperatives in São Paulo, Brazil

Crystal Tremblay
MA, Geography, University of Victoria

This paper describes findings of a project assessment on empowerment and leadership development of recyclers, achieved through the participatory sustainable waste management project (PSWM), a Canadian International Development Agency

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(CIDA) funded initiative. In March 2008, video taped, structured, open ended interviews were conducted with leaders from recycling cooperatives and associations in the metropolitan region of São Paulo, Brazil, who had participated in the project's capacity building activities, initiated in 2005. Individuals were also asked to produce a timeline diagram highlighting the events that have contributed or hindered their personal development and empowerment within the context of waste management. The interviews revealed the significance of a) the organization and mobilization of the recyclers movement (Movimento dos Catadores), b) participants experience within the project highlighting specific events that have empowered or dis-empowered them, c) inclusive public policies in waste management and d) community outreach strategies. The personal histories focused on the successions of events and processes supported by PSWM until March 2008, which include the development of a collective commercialization network, the creation of an organized micro-credit program, participation in meetings, seminars and conferences, amongst others, has contributed to develop greater understanding of the evolution of capacities and to identify 'target indicators' of personal empowerment, civic engagement and citizenship building.