

Civil Society Participation in Public Policy Processes in Brazilian Tourism: The Itupararanga-Sorocabana Touristic Region Forum¹

Cíntia Möller Araujo²

Abstract:

In Brazil, since the enactment of the Federal Constitution of 1988, we have been witnessing the institutionalization of new mechanisms for political participation. Thus a variety of Councils of public policies arose and spread, in several spheres of Government and in the most varied sectors. These allowed possibilities of increasing the number of players with power to intervene in public administration and public policies. This article is intended to evaluate the democratizing nature of these forums within the field of tourism public administration, via the analysis of one experiment going on at the State of São Paulo, namely: "Itupararanga-Sorocabana Touristic Region Forum". Actually, the research question this paper tries to answer is: to what extent do these bodies contribute to effectively built a more pluralistic public policy process in the tourism sector, thereby integrating in the debate of public policies, a variety of players representing a diversity of touristic interests. We relied on a qualitative approach (case study) and concluded that although we have been experiencing an expansion of the participation of civil society in public policy processes, there remains the challenge regarding the inclusion of some segments traditionally excluded from decision-making arenas.

KEYWORDS: Public Policies, Democracy, Public Policies Council.

A PARTICIPAÇÃO DA SOCIEDADE CIVIL NO PROCESSO DE POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS NO TURISMO BRASILEIRO: O FORUM DA REGIÃO TURÍSTICA ITUPARARANGA-SOROCABANA

Resumo:

No Brasil, desde a promulgação da Constituição Federal de 1988, tem-se assistido a progressiva institucionalização de novos mecanismos de participação societal. Conseqüentemente, uma variedade de organismos dessa natureza floresceu e se disseminou, nas diversas esferas do Governo e nos mais variados setores, permitindo a inserção de novos atores, que passaram a poder interferir nos rumos da administração pública e das políticas públicas. Esse artigo tem a intenção de refletir sobre a índole democrática desses fóruns, na seara do turismo, por intermédio da análise de uma experiência existente no Estado de São Paulo, a saber: o Fórum Permanente da Região Turística Itupararanga-Sorocabana. Assim, o objetivo dessa pesquisa é responder ao seguinte questionamento: Em que medida essas arenas tem contribuído efetivamente para construir um processo de políticas públicas mais pluralista e democrático, integrando portanto, no debate das políticas públicas, uma variedade de atores, representantes da diversidade de interesses existentes no Turismo? Para tanto, adotou-se uma abordagem qualitativa (estudo de caso) e concluiu-se que, não obstante a constatação de vigorosa expansão da participação da sociedade civil no processo de política pública, no contexto do Turismo, permanece o desafio com relação à inclusão de alguns segmentos tradicionalmente excluídos das arenas decisórias.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Políticas Públicas, Democracia, Conselhos de Políticas Públicas.

LA PARTICIPACIÓN DE LA SOCIEDAD CIVIL EN EL PROCESO DE POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS EN EL TURISMO DE BRASIL : EL FORO DE LA RÉGION TURÍSTICA ITUPARARANGA - SOROCABANA

RESUMEN:

En Brasil, desde la promulgación de la Constitución de 1988 han sido testigos de la institucionalización gradual de nuevos mecanismos de participación social. En consecuencia, una variedad de organismos tales floreció y se extendió en las diferentes esferas de gobierno y en diversos sectores, lo que permite la inclusión de nuevos actores, que ahora son capaces de interferir con el curso de la administración pública y la política pública. Este artículo tiene la intención de reflexionar sobre el carácter democrático de estos foros, la cosecha del turismo, a través del análisis de una experiencia ya existente en el Estado de São Paulo, a saber, el Foro Permanente de Itupararanga - Sorocabana Región Turística. El objetivo de este trabajo es responder a la siguiente pregunta: ¿En qué medida estos ámbitos ha contribuido eficazmente a construir un proceso de políticas públicas más plurales y democráticas, la integración, por tanto, en el debate de la política pública, una gran variedad de actores que representan la diversidad de intereses existentes en el turismo? Con este

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² Possui doutorado e mestrado em Administração Pública e Governo pela Fundação Getúlio Vargas - SP. Atualmente é professora da Universidade Federal de São Paulo - UNIFESP, Brasil, atuando no curso de graduação em administração e no mestrado de gestão de políticas e organizações públicas. Ministra as disciplinas de planejamento e gestão de operações, qualidade e produtividade e políticas públicas. E-mail: cintiamolleraraujo@terra.com.br.

fin, hemos adoptado un enfoque cualitativo (estudio de caso) y se encontró que, a pesar de la constatación de la vigorosa expansión de la participación de la sociedad civil en el proceso de políticas públicas en el contexto del turismo, el reto sigue siendo relativa a la inclusión algunos segmentos tradicionalmente excluidos de los espacios de toma de decisiones.

PALAVRAS CHAVE: Políticas Públicas, Democracia, Consejos de Políticas Públicas.

1 INTRODUCTION

In Brazil, the thriving of new direct and active participation and deliberation mechanisms in public policy processes, suffered a strong boost as of the enactment of the Federal Constitution of 1988. In fact, according to Bobbio (1986), the wave of decentralization and reform of the state favored the rise of innovative forms of citizen participation in public policy, revealing the advent of a new model of citizenship and governance structures inspired by the belief that representative democracy and direct democracy are not mutually exclusive, and are instead compatible with each other.

In addition, it is worth noting that in the Brazilian context, the debate concerning the decentralization and devolution of the decision-making process in public management leads to other issues, such as the expansion of autonomy of subnational units (states and municipalities), which also contributed to strengthen the creation movement and dissemination of public policies co-management spaces.

Thus, new social and political players who had historically been outside the decision-making process began having deliberation powers in the scope of the new emerging power arenas, many of which have been institutionalized since 1988, becoming instruments capable of influencing the public policy process.

Therefore, given the young nature of the Brazilian democracy, the current relevance of the discussion concerning the participation of civil society in decision making, as well as the fact that tourism management, as an autonomous activity, is still a recent novelty in our country (since the very creation of the Ministry of Tourism dates to 2003), our goal is to ponder to what extent the existence of these new deliberation *loci* has been contributing to the democratization of the public policy process in the field of tourism, in Brazil.

Indeed, regarding the tourism field in Brazil, the lack of research on the topic of participation of civil society in the course of public policies is quite noticeable, which reinforces the exploratory and innovative character of this paper and its importance to encourage new studies related to this subject. We choose as the object of study the "Itaparanga-Sorocabana Touristic Region Forum", the creation of which was in 2009, being comprised of both state players and members of the civil society from thirty-two (32) municipalities.

The referred arena is a deliberative and consultative organism, conceived with the mission of assisting the

Executive Branch in the public policy process regarding the tourism field. Therefore, it aims to stimulate the articulation among municipalities and the insertion of its several players (public, private and NGO players) in the public policy process.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Diniz (2001), in the last decades of the twentieth century, one of the guidelines most emphasized by the State reform plans in Brazil refers to decentralization. Indeed, the appearance of a new configuration of the Brazilian State, veering toward a reformulation process, led to the acknowledgement of the need to reduce the autonomy of governmental players in the production of public policies, and stimulated the rise of new types of State relations with the various political, economic and social players. (BRESSER-PEREIRA; SPINK, 1999; BRESSER-PEREIRA, 1998; KETTL, 1999).

Meanwhile, in light of decentralization (in its various forms: administrative, political, fiscal, etc.), Brazilian state and municipal bodies, began to experience an expansion process of their autonomy, incorporating new responsibilities, mainly in the context of policy-making (ARAUJO, 2011). Due to these changes, both member states and municipalities start to participate more actively in the formulation and implementation of these guidelines, and thus it was also observed under these instances, the emergence of various deliberation bodies, which sought to promote the incorporation of the civil society in public policy decision-making. (AVRITZER, 2002, 2005; KERBAUY, 2002; CARNEIRO, 2006; GOHN, 2000; ZAPATA 2009).

Regarding the relevance of societal participation in decision-making processes, we point out that this issue began to gain expression in the second half of the twentieth century, particularly from the 1960s on, strongly inspired by popular and union mobilizations occurring especially in Europe, which sought to achieve a greater involvement of the community in the process of government public policies. Indeed, the alluded movements laid the foundations upon which the ideals of participatory democracy were strengthened. Its advocates centered their criticisms on the reduction of civil society participation in the electoral periods (BACQUÉ; REY; SINTOMER, 2005).

Thus, it is noted that in the last two decades of the twentieth century, the experiences of citizen participation in decision-making processes have been multiplying worldwide, driven by several players. This list includes: World Bank experts, radical left wing parties, nongovernmental organizations, pressure groups, etc... (VILLASANTE, 1995; BACQUÉ, REY, & SINTOMER, 2005; AVRITZER, 2005; BENEVIDES, 1991, 1994).

In particular, it's worth noting that, according to Pasquino (2004), despite evidence of growth in the interaction between a multiplicity of interests, groups and associations

within the decision-making processes, we need to recognize that, frequently, politicians and public officials are not at the same level as the rest of the players who participate in the public policy process, often rallying greater power to define the government agenda.

In Latin America, in various countries, the democratization process gained strength and importance at the end of the 70's and from the 1980's on, resulting in a renovation of the local associative life. As a result, through the subsequent years, it became apparent that the thematic of public participation appeared as a subject to progressive institutionalization, with obvious implications to the scope of public governance and public policies.

Therefore, in Brazil, as a reflection of this process, new forums emerged in the wake of the promulgation of the Federal Constitution of 1988, contributing to the spread of participatory experiences, through which society was allowed to opt for its involvement in the production of public policies. This context confirmed the important role given to citizen participation within the Brazilian political democratization process, even if, at times, the interference by the citizens does not proceed at the desired manner and pace. (AVRITZER, 2002, 2005; AVRITZER; WAMPLER, 2004; KERBAY, 2002; FARAH; JACOBI, 2005; VITALE, 2004).

Actually, based on Lavalle, Houtzager and Acharya (2004), a great variety of experiences of institutional innovation emerged during the course of the Brazilian democratization process, as such different modalities of Public Policy Councils (in among others, the health, education, social welfare, tourism, as well as other areas), at municipal, state and federal levels.

The aforementioned experiences aimed to expand the societal participation in public governance, beckoning the possibility to create conditions to grant political voice to marginalized groups or to those with negligible weight in the traditional political channels. In fact, the institutionalization of these boards has stimulated a "rearrangement" of political forces in order to facilitate the entry of new players into decision-making arenas, which means that political parties and Parliament are no longer the only areas of policy making.

Based on Abers and Kech (2008) and Vera and Lavalle (2012) points of view, it remains clear that currently the democratization process in Brazil has reached very high levels of demand by its citizens who claim their right to participate in public life and want also to be part of the decision-making process related to public affairs. According to Lavalle (2011), this trend was reflected in the proliferation of participatory experiences, aimed at, among other objectives, increasing the quality of public policies, through the expansion of social control on them. Consequently, over the years, one has witnessed the expansion of the territorial capillarity of these organisms, which have been contributing to stimulate the insertion of several social actors, as well as to the diversification of social actors who participate in these bodies.

Indeed, Avritzer (2008) stresses that Brazil has

evolved throughout the 20th century, from a country of low propensity of participation in public affairs mainly by low-income citizens to become one of the countries with the largest number of associative practices in the beginning of the 21st century. In accordance with the referred author, another interesting characteristic to note in this context consists of the variety of the existing participatory institutions which reflects a very diversified participation infrastructure with differentiated institutional designs.

Thus, after more than two decades since the enactment of the Federal Constitutional of 1988, the discourse of participation is widespread in various social sectors and many organisms (such as the Councils of public policies and participatory budgets) have already become part of the political and institutional structure of the State, performing as *loci* of expansion of public deliberation, supporting political inclusion and contributing to improve social control of the State. (AVRITZER, 2010).

Nevertheless, despite the advances and the rapid spread of participatory institutions, throughout the national territory, it is necessary to point out also, that some of these arenas only exist on paper, while other bodies, even if in operation, were captured by local elites or co-opted by State structures with little commitment to the processes of democratization, enjoying therefore, reduced autonomy, which also suggests that, in these cases, the relevant policy-making takes place far away. (ABERS, KECH, 2008; ABERS, 2000).

In this regard, Bava (2005) argues that for these spaces to be effective, it is crucial the firm and continuous presence of the civil society as a player who is constantly watching the government actions and decisions, with the final aim of producing changes in the culture of democratic participation. Santos Jr. (2005) and Rizek (2003) opinions aligned with Bava (2005) and so, they highlight that the consolidation of participatory arenas also demands the articulation of collective players, especially the ones that have a relevant role in the public scene. In other words, in order to promote the entrenchment of these forums it is fundamental to have the support of a proactive civil society, aiming at strengthening the representativeness of social organizations.

In addition, Santos Jr. (2005) and Rizek (2003) also mention another threat that hangs over the participatory bodies, namely: the lack of associative culture, since only small portion of the Brazilian population has ties with civil associations and few social segments have effectively, organizational capacity and political expression. In fact, from the readings of Benevides (1994) and Dagnino (2004), it is reasonable to infer that there is a strong relationship between such characteristics above mentioned and the possible difficulties of inclusion of certain segments, in the various spheres of power, especially those who were historically excluded from same.

Vitale (2004, p. 240) notes that the current Brazilian Constitution, formulated in 1988, upon following the tendencies of countries with a long democratic tradition,

adopted the “principle of semi-direct democracy, through which the representative system is complemented by institutes of direct participation in decision-making processes”.

Thus, in addressing this question, the author recognizes the fundamental character of the representative system, which constitutes a necessary and indispensable form of citizen participation in public life, contributing to a viable democracy in contemporary societies. However, she warns that the representative system has limitations, which may contribute to distort the democratic principles and objectives, and therefore it completes itself with the instruments of direct participation.

Nevertheless, the author points out that the implementation of participatory democracy in Brazil, in its various forms, has been marked by gaps in social effectiveness and thus, the direct participation of civil society in the exercise of power has not been realized in its fullness. Regarding this point of view, Benevides (1991, 1994) also alerts to the existing barriers that can hamper the consolidation of these organisms compromising the extension full citizenship to all members of civil society, in Brazil.

In particular, she mentions that the appearance of these participatory forums was opposed to the long and distorted tradition of the private handling of public affairs, which since its inception, was one of the hallmarks of the policy-making spaces in Brazil. As a matter of fact, the author emphasizes that the potential contribution of these bodies to the process of improving democracy is highly evident, helping also in encouraging the progressive establishment of a “culture of rights.”

As for the democratizing role of councils, Carneiro (2006) highlights the fact that they distinguish themselves from the strict movements and manifestations of civil society, given its structure is legally defined and institutionalized. Also, it is noted that its reason for being is based on the possibility of a joint action with the state apparatus aimed at the development and management of public policies. Thus, these bodies are public spaces (not state), *loci* for argumentation and redefinition of values, norms, procedures and identities, arenas for processing preferences, creation of wills, opinions and consensus. Moreover, it is noteworthy that these forums have power of agenda and of placing issues of public interest.

Finally, we refer to Diniz (2001, p. 21), who points out that it's fundamental to consider, within the scope of these forums, the degree of organization of civil society and of the interests represented, their willingness to participate, the density and quality of the representations, as well as to assess the legitimacy and range of the representation. In summary, with reference to Brazil, there is no doubt that the spread of these arenas has been making room for endless possibilities of changing the dynamics of interaction between government agencies, market agents and other social players, despite authoritarian traditions and other barriers that could hold up their progressive consolidation. Additionally, it is evident that the appearance of these bodies has been contributing to

point out to the governments, especially municipal ones, the challenge they face regarding their real capacity to manage and harmonize interests of the government with those of the civil society.

Indeed, it is worth noting that after more than twenty years of the enactment of the Brazilian Federal Constitution of 1988 and also considering this pos-participatory scenario, these arenas have disseminated in all fields (education, health, social assistance, environment, tourism, etc), sometimes in significant number. Actually it is noticeable that these bodies are present even in fields where there is no constitutional obligation to establish participatory councils, i.e. in areas where the creation of these instances is voluntary (depending only on the will of the different levels of the public administration and on civil society pressure). As a matter of fact, it is known that these forums can be identified in approximately one third of the municipalities, worth mentioning that in certain sectors, such as tourism, their presence comes to a one fifth of the municipalities. (FARIA, RIBEIRO, 2010)

3 DATA AND METHODOLOGY

We decided to use a qualitative approach and conduct a case study related to the field of public management of tourism in the State of Sao Paulo. Thus, we selected an empirical object of study, namely the “Ituparanga-Sorocabana Touristic Region Forum”, due to its relevance which will be explained in a subsequent topic to this one. In fact, we adopted the following research model: first, we examined the most important policies that enabled the establishment of this body and also set its *modus operandi*. Therefore, we analysed a variety of laws, plans, norms and procedures related to this council.

In order to acknowledge the profile of all players that took part of this organism and to learn more about the agenda forming process, we then read twenty-four minutes of the plenary meetings (since the first ones depicting the initial discussions related to its inception in 2009 until the latest minute we could obtain, dated July, 2012) and attended fourteen plenary meetings. To this respect, our objective was to identify the issues at stake and try to link them to each agent /group integrating this arena.

We also conducted interviews with two of the key leaders – the President and the Vice-President of this forum. Looking forward to enrich the analysis of all the collected data we rely on the content analysis technique (BARDIN, 2011).

In fact, by using this powerful data reduction tool, to exam textual material, we also aimed at unraveling its latent content, as well as: a) achieve a better comprehension of actors' opinions regarding the democratizing nature of this forum; b) understand the actors' views about challenges they think this arena faces in relation to its capacity of influencing the public policy process.

The results, though far from conclusive, gave us the

required support to have a more accurate perception of the role these organisms play in public policy making concerning the tourism sector, and the challenges they face to include some segments traditionally excluded from the decision-making arenas.

4 RESULTS

The details of the “Itupararanga-Sorocabana Touristic Region Forum” constitution were discussed along seven meetings held on a monthly basis during the second semester of the year of 2009. At the beginning, these meetings attracted only a few players (five to nine persons).

However, when the regulations and norms depicting this forum functioning were to be submitted to a final assessment, fifteen municipalities government representatives were present on the voting event, not to mention the presence of several public servants associated to various entities with interests related to tourism activities, also including members of the three most significant universities of the region. Thus, at the end of 2009, with the support of the above cited players, the referred body was institutionalized and its board of regents elected (President, Vice-President, 1st and 2nd Secretaries).

The following act was the definition of its main objective: to stimulate the interaction of the multiple players (private and public players, ONGs agents, etc.) related to the tourism sector – and also belonging to the thirty-two municipalities that composed this arena –, aiming at improving the benchmarking among them, looking forward, at the end, to a more sustainable tourism development. It is noteworthy that the four members of the “Itupararanga-Sorocabana Touristic Region Forum” board are public administrators from the cities of Itu, São Roque, Ibiúna, Salto, which are the most active touristic municipalities, among the thirty-two municipalities selected to integrate this body.

Actually we found out they were elected based on the recognition of their experience, reputation and capacity of leading this body to accomplish its democratic goals. Needless to say that the constitution of this arena, involving such a diverse range of entities/players – although the great majority are still public players, i.e., related to public entities – was also a novelty in the Brazilian political scenario.

As a matter of fact, usually, in the past, initiatives of this nature, if existed, were traditionally designed and organized by the federal sphere of government instead of by municipalities or state-members, allow quite exclusively public servants and government entity representatives and rarely welcome a variety of civil society members.

During 2010 and part of 2012, the “Itupararanga-Sorocabana Touristic Region Forum” proved to be the most active and respected of the three forums of this nature in the state of São Paulo owing to the regularity of its meetings – seventeen meetings held in twenty-one months – and also in light of its achievements as will be described below. To this respect, it is worth commenting the significant role played by

the leading municipalities of the “Itupararanga-Sorocabana Touristic Region Forum” (i.e., Itu, São Roque, Ibiúna, Salto) in improving the articulation among an assortment of municipalities belonging to this body and also in endorsing the importance of the tourism activity as a factor of development.

So, some of the strategies and action plans of the referred four leading municipalities served as models of innovative and sustainable tourism practices - especially in the field of rural tourism and ecotourism - inspiring other municipalities to promote benchmarking that resulted in several joint actions while raising the level of professionalism within the local tourism industry.

Indeed, some practical results could be noted such as: joint promotions (joining a variety of municipalities), development of common promotional material, organization of instructive seminars and lectures and an increase in participation of several municipalities in touristic events (e.g. fairs, expositions etc.).

Additionally, in acknowledgment to his achievements in this arena, the President of the “Itupararanga-Sorocabana Touristic Region Forum” was chosen to have a seat and represent three similar existing forums cited before, in the “São Paulo State Tourism Council”.

This council brings together representatives from all active tourism councils of the mentioned state, including civil servants, private players and NGO members, and is entitled to contribute to public policy processes conceived by the State of São Paulo, in the field of tourism.

To conclude, despite the accomplishments of the “Itupararanga-Sorocabana Touristic Region Forum”, it is evident that the greatest challenges to its consolidation are: attracting the civil society and improving the quality of contributions given by some members that join this body.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Though the institutionalization of the “Itupararanga-Sorocabana Touristic Region Forum”, as a participatory mechanism, represented a huge achievement - notably in a context of a young democracy, as it happens to be in Brazil -, it is important to underline “that the majority of the members who designed this project (and who have also been taking part in meetings held by this arena on a regular basis) are from the public sector.

Therefore, one could infer that the most evident fragilities this body faces nowadays are: few civil society members participating at its debates (which jeopardizes the goal of building a more democratic process of public policies), not to mention the poor quality of contributions given by some of its members.

In other words, it is clear that the main challenge of the “Itupararanga-Sorocabana Touristic Region Forum”, in order to become an actual pluralistic body, resides in proving its ability to integrate all kinds of players (public, private, NGO members, etc.) in the public policy process, as well as

to leverage the quality of contributions given by some of its affiliated members.

However, regardless of the embryonic character of this body and of the fact that tourism management, as an autonomous entity, is still a recent novelty to our country, it is undeniable that the existence of this arena encourages reflections, especially concerning the importance of enhancing the democratic system towards a more pluralistic public process policy with the purpose to represent all touristic interests at stake.

Indeed, as we have already mentioned in this paper, even in fields where there is no constitutional obligation to establish participatory councils, i.e. in areas where the creation of these instances is voluntary (depending only on the will of the different levels of the public administration and on civil society pressure), these arenas are present and sometimes in significant number.

As a matter of fact, it is known that these bodies can be identified in approximately one third of the municipalities, worth mentioning that in certain sectors, such as tourism, their presence comes to one fifth of the municipalities.

Finally, due to the lack of research on the topic of participation of civil society in the course of public policies in the field of tourism, in Brazil, we hope this paper could encourage new studies related to this subject, given the need to expand the knowledge about this trend and its peculiarities in the Brazilian tourism sector.

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