

Deepening citizenship rights: democratic innovations to promote local economic development in Tuscany - Italy

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Given the growing disaffection towards representative democracy as well as the decline of political participation in many democratic countries (Fung, et al., 2005; Lewanski, 2013), new models of public participation in local governance has been flourishing around the world.

My interests in public participation and human rights, lasts back to my early childhood in my home town - a small Island in northern Mozambique, called Island of Mozambique. At the time of the peak of 16 years civil war in my country, I grow up confronted with situations in which, today I believe could be evitable and manageable through a horizontal and intercultural dialogue (between the combatants, government and citizens -, the victims of the war).

Furthermore, with the Peace Accord signed in October 1992 in Rome, my country had full-flagged democracy and witnessed the re-emergence of the rural economy. These facts, raised Mozambique to the best example of post conflict progress in Africa. However, today, We ... Mozambicans, fail to resolving our differences and, consequently, it retreated our country to a escalation of new armed conflict and high level of poverty.

So, *what's gone wrong?* After a considerable progress, I know that, many factors has been influencing the contemporary crisis in Mozambique, however, together with government and opposition part, citizens should be involved in the process of negotiations and peace-deliberation.

My research in the topic of public participation and human rights, makes me an "eagle-eyed" who search for good practices and innovations in democracy and human rights over the World to learning, adapting and applying to the context of my home country. Therefore, with objective of framing my Phd dissertation based at Coimbra University in Portugal, entitled "*Humanizing human rights: the role of participatory budgeting in promoting local economic development*", I travelled to the Interdisciplinary Centre Science for Peace of the University of Pisa in Italy (thanks to Sylff Research Abroad for financial support) to access the Tuscany experiments on public participation.

There is strong evidence in the literature to show that public participation directly contributes to good governance and promotes human rights in the jurisdictions that have adopted it around the World. Consequently, public participation in the local economic development is an integrant part of participatory democracy

(good governance) and human right (citizenship rights).

In this perspective, the Italian region of Tuscany, steps forward to securing citizenship rights to participate in the local economic development by initiating in 2007 a process in which, residents (both Italian citizens and foreigner residing permanently in the area), firms, schools and local authorities are asked to participate in the local deliberative forum, to find consensus to local development priorities.

In December 2007, the Regional Council had approved law n°69/2007 to encouraging and promoting new methods of participation, by means of the construction of new participatory institutes, shared pathways and rules for discussing large and small community issues, and the evaluation of possible solutions through dialogue and comparison, between arguments of the citizens and institutions (Florida, 2007).

This innovation on democratic practices and human rights issues, has granted Tuscany region a remarkable position in the light of good governance. Although, a number of local governments had attempted to incorporate public engagement in their routine, e.g. participatory budgeting in Brazil, and other initiatives on town planning. Many Cities worldwide, had also stood *ad hoc* practices to institutionalize public participation, e.g. the Office of Public Engagement in the United States of America, the region of Catalunya in Spain and Montreal in Canada, have created departments or independent authorities such as the French *Commission Nationale du Débat Public* - CNDP to deal with citizens engagement.

However, these and other governments feiled to provide a legislative framework to regulate and support this process indeed, the region of Tuscany stood first in the World, by legitimating and regulating public engagement through participative regional law on promotion of public participation in the local affairs (Florida 2007; Corsi, 2012; Lewanski, 2013).

The law emerged from a two years discussion (2005 - 06), involving citizens, experts, politicians and other stakeholders. As the theoretical framework of the law, there was discussed issues related to *empowerment* at two dimensions: the first, was about the tradeoff politicians-citizens -, the combination between the role played by citizens in decision-making forum and the role of the politicians; the second dimension was, about the grass-root militants in the process of participation.

To thinking the role of the citizens and the grass-root militant in this process, according to our informant, Dr. Antonio Florida, civil servant on charge of the Regional Government in Tuscany, the law responds to these concerns by adopting discursive accountability or logic of pre-commitment. It means, the construction of bottom-up power capacity to influence decisions. Hence, the law goes beyond by bounding the proponents of participatory projects with a pre-commitment to motivate,

involve and accept (fully or partially) the decisions of citizens .

Despite this theoretical journey in the Tuscany participatory and deliberative democracy, I dedicated my second half of the research, to exploring the practical impact of the local mechanisms of public participation through participant observation of the local social and economic life and also, by attending public meetings on participatory-deliberative democracy.

Therefore, I found that the law on promotion of public participation in regional and local affairs, had played important role in granting people autonomy of the local issues and also, in reducing conflicts of interests among private companies, local government and citizens. To make it clear, I invite you to go back to the law, and we will found that, there is clearly proclaimed and oriented two levels of participatory processes. At regional level, and local level.

At regional level, because the existing procedures - environmental impact assessment, failed to be sufficient to resolving conflict, people were asked to participate on discussing and debating issues about large infrastructure projects having a significant environmental or social impact and conflicts on a regional scale. In this level, the regional government aims to dealing pro-actively with the fixing of projects that may give rise to considerable conflict.

At local level -, the second approach of participation aims at promoting participation at grass-root level. The process in this level is available to four categories of proponents: citizens, schools, firms and local government (Lewanski, 2013). In this sense, citizen takes actively part in the local governance; not only, as *informed or consulted citizens*, but, as a full participant to contribute with their experience and improve the quality of collective decision-making.

At the end, I found that, two aspects was determinants to the success of Tuscany deliberative and participatory democracy, the political will and the decentralized law n°69/2007 on promotion of public participation. Assembled, these aspects had contributed to motivating ordinary citizens to negotiate and discuss local plans and budget allocations made by their local authorities to ensure a consensus-based local development.

Furthermore, this approach on public participation will form a significant part of my dissertation since it can provide a insightful understanding of tensions raised during the process of public participation in the policy-making forum. And also, a form to contribute to grow social capital in my home country.

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