

Journées d'études "Savoirs "citoyens" et démocratie participative dans la question urbaine" des 6 et 7 février 2009 à l'École nationale supérieure d'architecture de Paris - Val de Seine.

Summary

Democratic Innovation: What Europe can learn from Latin America?

Since the 1980s, Latin America has set the scene in generating innovative practices that have contributed to the realization of new experiences in democracy. Furthermore, in a relatively short period of time, some of these innovative practices have been disseminated throughout the world. The participatory budget would be the most obvious example of this development, although this is just the best known innovation among a substantial array of such initiatives. The use of ICTs to follow parliamentary sessions, the promotion of public audiences and citizen audits are also new practices that have been recently developed.

The return to democracy that occurred during the so called *third wave of democratization* has often taken place after a long period of authoritarian rule and/or violent interactions between different sectors of society. The twin processes of political and administrative decentralization and the emergence of a citizenship that is both mobilized and interested in the *res publica* have provided a framework for explaining the scenario in which these democratic experiences -which have been mainly developed in the local level of government- have taken place. However, these developments alone fail to explain how and with what consequences these practices are evolving.

Given the described scenario, the main objective of this proposal is to learn more about innovative democracy, to assess its outcomes, to build knowledge oriented towards the improvement of results, to build networks, and to share information and resources.

In short, the activities in the current project are the following:

- The building of a **database** that will inform us of a number of innovative practices, their characteristics and outcomes (related to: focus; territory or population benefits; objectives; evolution in time, etc.). Given the lack of a database that contains these kinds of comparative qualities, it is anticipated that its development would make an indispensable contribution to our understanding of contemporary democracy.

- The development of a series of **workshops** to be held bi-annually, which will, on each occasion, focus on a relevant issue (e.g., e-procurement systems as a tool to reduce corruption; the strengths and weaknesses of the decentralization process in reinforcing democracy; the use of ICTs to promote transparency and participation, etc.).
- The production of **scientific knowledge** based on both the above mentioned database and in-depth research developed in selected Latin American domains of experience. This knowledge will also be used to engage other fields of research developed at the C2D (these would include: e-democracy developments; political party system; direct democracy at the national level, etc.). We have identified three initiatives that will provide our point of departure:
 - ✓ **Fortalecimiento de la Sociedad Civil Patagónica:** project to improve transparency, with the purpose of controlling corruption and promoting citizen participation, which is currently being developed in five provinces in Patagonia, Argentina;
 - ✓ **AGORA, em Defesa do Eleitor e da Democracia:** an initiative to monitor the Deliberative Councils in Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, in Brazil and the interaction of this institution with a network of social organizations;
 - ✓ **Consejos Vecinales y Participación Ciudadana:** an initiative to improve the process of decentralization and citizen participation in the city of Montevideo, Uruguay.

More information www.c2d.ch

Yanina Welp
Regional Director for Latin America
C2D - Centre for Research on Direct Democracy
ZDA - Zentrum für Demokratie Aarau
University of Zurich

Email: yanina.welp@zda.uzh.ch