Participatory Democracy, Decentralization and Local Governance: the Montreal Participatory Budget in the light of 'Empowered Participatory Governance'

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Abstract

The intent of this article is to reflect on the notion of empowered participatory governance in order to gain a better understanding of the institutional contexts and parameters that encourage a more participative democracy, and thereby bring to light the political mechanisms that contribute to broadening the decision-making process. The example we consider is the Montreal Participative Budget (PB). We focus on the impact of decentralization, more specifically on the form this took as the Montreal PB was being elaborated. We examine how much decentralization circumscribes the PB process. The Montreal Participative Budget provides an illustration of the emergence of a participative level in a political context that is, on the whole, hostile to participatory decision making. We suggest that the PB in this context benefits from a new window of opportunity. The chosen example has a dual significance: it underlines the role of temporal contingencies and scales of the process of decentralization in the participative structures at the local level, and it enables us to gain a better grasp of the problem of institutional architectures in implementing participatory democracy by emphasizing the political and social realities underlying new loci for decision making.

Participatory democracy, decentralization and empowered participatory governance

Creating participatory democracy implies decentralization, which is both a particular feature of democracy and a process in its own right. Indeed, it appears difficult to activate citizen participation and expand citizens' decision-making capacity without devolving powers to the level at which citizens can effectively influence issues. Moreover, as a project and specific democratic arrangement, participatory democracy has a particular appeal within the contemporary context of increasing multilevel governance.[1] One of the consequences of this type of governance, which is marked by the proliferation and

overlaying of decision-making levels, is the weakening of citizens' power. Decision-making processes are less linear; this further reduces the accountability of elected officials (Dahl, 1994). In such a context that privileges coordination and negotiation (Schmitter, 1997; 2002; Hooghe and Marks, 2003), the mechanisms of participatory democracy can become paramount, compensating for certain gaps in current governance, while favoring the new forms of agreement this type of governance entails (Schmitter, 2002; Grote, 2008).

While there are potential affinities between the two terms — democracy and decentralization — the linkages between democracy (understood as such) and decentralization are at the very least paradoxical. Moreover, the terms participatory democracy and decentralization have often been used to designate significantly contrasting realities. History reminds us how numerous decentralization initiatives, far from having served the cause of democracy, have led to a subordination of the power of citizens or even to the strengthening of local nepotism (see, for example, Heller, 2001). Specifically, studies carried out in Europe by Sintomer and de Maillard (2007) and Sintomer *et al*. (2008) show clearly that the mechanisms of decentralization of local governments do not necessarily engender participatory democracy; on the contrary, some of these may encourage participation only at the neighborhood level or in a public-private partnership and thus fall short of the objectives of participatory democracy (Jouve and Booth, 2003).

The above observation cannot be asserted merely by invoking the argument that elected officials are unwilling to share power.[2] Decentralization is, in effect, a complex phenomenon whose 'outcome will depend greatly on myriad individual political, fiscal and administrative policies and institutions as well as their interaction within a given country' (Livack and Seddon, 1999: v). As Livack and Seddon (*ibid.*) claim, with decentralization the 'devil is in the details'. There is a question that follows naturally from this (Cornwall and Jewkes, 1995; Cohen and Fung, 2004): under what conditions will decentralization encourage a more participative democracy?

Fung and Wright's research agenda

A tentative answer can be found in the research agenda proposed by Fung and Wright (2001) on the concept of empowered participatory governance. Based on five successful experiments, Fung and Wright presented three political principles, which, according to them, enable participatory practices to transform political decision making. The institutional forms of participation must:

- Deal with specific, tangible problems;
- Involve 'ordinary people' affected by these problems, as well as local officials, through a bottom-up process; and
- Resolve these problems through a deliberative approach.

Three 'institutional design features' (Fung and Wright, 2003: 15) ensue from these principles:

- The devolution of decision-making power to local and inter-sectoral action units;
- The coordination and accountability of these local units before a higher political body; and
- The restructuring of local government in accordance with the imperatives created by the new participatory arrangements.

Together, these factors define a model of successful participatory governance, which Fung and Wright refer to as empowered participatory governance (EPG). This systematic account aims to link the conditions of success with an ideal-type design of participatory

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2 Nevertheless, unwillingness is sometimes undeniable (IDRC, 2008).

practices. According to this perspective, participatory democracy requires a mechanism of accountable imputability, that is to say, devolution of powers and resources to new political entities, but also recentralization at an intermediary level.

The theorists advocate devolution of power that privileges local and inter-sectoral action units. These units draw upon citizens (both organized groups and individuals), elected representatives and those working for the municipal authority in diverse ways. These individuals and groups are not completely autonomous, but coordinated and accountable to a higher-level political authority. This kind of institutional architecture introduces accountability at a dual level — to a coordinating body above and to civil society below. As such, it has the added advantage of curbing two possible deviations from the decentralizing process: patronage and elitism. On the one hand, the coordinating body is not part of traditional clientelist networks. On the other hand, through their involvement in deliberative procedures, citizens establish their own priorities and decide on the way they will allocate certain resources, independently of elected representatives. It is thus imperative that participatory bodies be granted a certain decision-making power as well as the necessary resources to realize their projects (Fung and Wright, 2001; Fung, 2003; Fung and Wright, 2003). EPG therefore encompasses a program of research that necessarily allows for testing and refining the model through numerous different approaches (see, for example, Abers, 2000; Avritzer, 2002; Baiocchi, 2003b; Melo and Baiocchi, 2006; Heller *et al.*, 2007).

The adoption of the EPG model forms part of a larger debate about redefining how welfare should be allocated within city budgets. The project is thus inextricably linked to discussions about governance that challenge ways in which decisions are made. However, while discussions about governance are concerned primarily with efficiency of decision making and with the redistribution of prerogatives and resources from the centre to other entities (Schmitter, 2002), EPG, in line with other studies on participative democracy, is first and foremost concerned with testing the democratic scope of these reconfigurations (Bassoli, 2010).[3] But this theoretical framework has not gone unchallenged. Some reproach it for its normative characteristics and the fact that it is ultimately based on relatively few specific applications. First, EPG scarcely purports to be a 'universal reform strategy' and 'in many areas of public life, conventional systems . . . work well' (Fung and Wright, 2003: 38). From this perspective, only added empirical data will determine whether EPG is limited to the few cases mentioned by the authors, and how far they can be applied to other situations. From this point of view, EPG is inextricably tied to the research agenda that accompanies it, suggesting that the model should be applied to other sites and cases. EPG was not conceived as an end result, but rather as a work in progress, which, in the end, would enable the proposals put forward not only to be refined, but also to open up discussion on the whole issue of participative democracy. Subsequently, from a heuristic point of view, EPG is a first attempt to interrelate empirical studies that, according to some, are solipsistic and fragmented, or even situation-specific (Bassoli, 2010: 488). Finally, and perhaps significantly, EPG has

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3 These studies are not specifically directed towards local governance arrangements (LGAs) (Grote, 2008). These arrangements, based on a consultative approach, require a more or less close and codified interaction between public and non-public actors, including social partners and citizens outside the direct political process (Bassoli, 2010). These points of view, which focus on the national level in order to address local situations such as urban renovation or social exclusion systematically, have failed to account for the democratic outcomes of new governance processes. The concept of participation, while wanting to give more weight to the issues involved in participation and accurate accounting, has clearly contributed to the notion of participatory government (Bassoli, 2010) and remains a wide canvas, referring to all types of cooperation involving both private and public actors (Schmitter, 2002). In such a perspective, the inclusion of citizens in the decision-making process remains facultative. Moreover, some of the studies cited focus on the macro-level (at the national or supra-national levels), neglecting the ways in which local stakeholders actually use resources (Fischer, 2003).

had the virtue of shifting attention from conditions of deliberation, which until now have dominated the debate within participatory democracy, to the mechanisms of decentralization that encourage such deliberation (Saward, 2000). Thus, not only has EPG contributed to bridging studies on participation and studies on governance (e.g. Melo and Baiocchi, 2006; Bassoli, 2010), but it has also helped to reformulate the question of the relationship between democracy and decentralization in the context of contemporary governance.

Our research perspective

If EPG has introduced a new component, an institutionalist examination of participatory arrangements, this scrutiny has tended to focus less on the political and cultural conditions within which the new mechanisms are implemented (Fischer 2000; 2006). Consequently, the analysis of these institutional architectures is not embedded in a wider perspective that reflects the power relations between actors. Yet the institutional design and the process of decentralization that underpins EPG constitute a necessary but insufficient condition for participation (Purcell, 2006). The results of institutional reforms are linked partly to the way actors take up the new prerogatives and use the new political spaces. We will need to revisit the problem of institutional architectures and situate this at the centre of a study of the political and social realities underlying the new spaces of deliberation. Where does the idea of participation come from? Who are the actors involved in realizing this idea? Which cultural and political factors make these experiments possible? To answer these questions, we have shifted the analytical perspective to the emergence of participatory arrangements themselves.

From this angle of enquiry, decentralization is no longer viewed simply as a way of organizing participatory bodies, but as one of the conditions that shape the power relations between stakeholders and will thus impinge on the establishment of the participatory body. In our view, not only are the modalities of decentralization decisive factors in defining the scope of participatory bodies, but their design is also particularly revealing of the power relations between the actors (Patsias and Patsias, 2009). Decentralization can be the result of the dynamics between actors as much as it may dispose actors more or less favorably towards participatory procedures.

If we consider participatory bodies within the context of the decentralization processes (and their attendant results), such an analytical perspective brings these mechanisms back into a debate about governance arrangements (Grote, 2008).[4] This approach allows one to use 'the conditions of emergence' as a benchmark for examining the political scale and scope of participatory democracy — a matter directly linked to the issue of decentralization. We posit that the processes of decentralization not only disclose the internal workings of arrangements but also the role of such arrangements within local governance. Several questions ensue from this: At what scale are the participatory bodies created? By which levels of government? To which mechanisms of decentralization are these bodies connected? What are the possible tensions between the decentralizing processes (those that lead to the creation of participatory bodies and others)? Finally, to what extent does such a perspective take into account the path dependency at work, and concomitantly, allow participatory democracy to be conceptualized from the point of view of its reproduction, and no longer simply from the perspective of transformations in governance (Grote, 2008)?

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4 A governance arrangement (GA) is 'a method/mechanism for dealing with a broad range of problems/conflicts in which actors regularly arrive at mutually satisfactory and binding decisions by negotiating with each other and co-operating in the implementation of these decisions' (Schmitter, 1997: 8).

We take up these questions in the specific context of the participatory budget (PB) in Montreal. Participatory budgeting emerged in a generally hostile political environment. Change in the political opportunity structure facilitated the emergence of the PB. It arose 'marginally' (at the infra-local level, supported by community groups with minimal support from the political party in power). This accounts for the new political structure's institutional fragility and its limited impact at the borough level. It underlines the consequences of a process reflecting not a project of decentralization but rather one instance in which this would occur. Participation and decentralization processes that occur as separate exercises thus remain temporally disconnected.

Our approach contains two elements: first, we wish to review the conditions under which PBs emerge by underscoring the factors that shape the processes of decentralization preceding the budget itself. This will enable us, secondly, to examine how decentralization circumscribes the role of the PB within local governance. Before exploring these two constitutive themes of our central objective, we will review the relevant literature, with particular reference to elements that affect the decentralization process. This will highlight the relevance of our empirical case and research methodology.

Literature review

Studies of governance and decentralization, as well those dealing more specifically with participatory democracy and EPG, have one element in common: they emphasize three sets of variables that can influence the nature of decentralization and the broadening of the democratic process (Heller, 2001; Bassoli, 2010): (1) the role of political parties; (2) the role of civil society and its linkages to political parties; and (3) the involvement of civil servants in the implementation of reforms. In our study, we have focused on the first two variables.

The role of political parties

Published studies emphasize that the nature of the decentralizing project is not merely the product of ideology. A political party's leadership role in such a project, its decision-making powers and its solid ties with local organizations and social movements are paramount. Brazilian studies have highlighted the role of the Workers' Party (WP) in launching participatory budgets, for these first emerged in cities already controlled by this left-wing party (Abers, 1996). In the majority of cases progressive parties have played the same role (Bherer, 2006a; Goldfrank, 2007; Heller *et al*., 2007; Sintomer and de Maillard, 2007; Patsias and Patsias, 2009). However, this tendency has decreased over time; we can see this as a sign of the success of participatory budgets as well as of specific national histories. Political-party commitment is undoubtedly the primary factor in transforming governance, for in the absence of political will participatory democracy can scarcely be realized. However, political will does not in itself guarantee the durability of these mechanisms, which need to be protected institutionally to ensure that they cannot be modified by changes of government (Cidade, 2007). By contrast, a political party's support also carries certain risks. In the absence of a relevant institutional structure or of a civil society serving as ballast, the party may be tempted to exploit participatory procedures for its own ends.

A political party gaining power does not in itself guarantee the implementation of a type of decentralization based on power sharing with citizens and groups that are traditionally excluded from decision-making networks; the involvement of grassroots community groups and social movements has proven to be a crucial component of this process.

The ongoing mobilization of civil society

The term civil society has several meanings. Our use of the term distinguishes political parties from civil society. In our view, the latter includes publicly and privately funded third-sector organizations, NGOs and social movements.[5]

The cases described in the literature underscore the role of a structured and mobilized civil society in the emergence and achievement of more participatory governance (Seddon, 1999). A longstanding presence of social movements in Porto Alegre was a determining factor in the success of this new participatory process (Abers, 2000; Avritzer, 2002; Baiocchi, 2003a; Avritzer, 2006). In Brazilian cities run by the Workers' Party, but where civil society was weaker and less organized, the participatory-budget arrangements were less well developed and the provincial public service wielded greater power. European participatory budgets developed similarly: here, only strongly involved civil societies have been able to improve local administration and democratize political life (Sintomer *et al.*, 2008). This commitment occurred at two levels: that of the population and that of the political authorities.

Third-sector organizations and social movements play a dominant role in mobilizing the population. Civil-society groups can promote learning and the necessary skills to make participatory bodies work (Seddon, 1999; Abers, 2000; Avritzer, 2002; Baiocchi, 2003a; 2003b) — indeed, in doing so, these groups make an essential contribution to the effectiveness of the decisions taken by the participatory bodies (Heller *et al.*, 2007). To take part in the actual process of public-policy cycles requires sustained participation — extending beyond the critical point of decision making — to include the establishment and supervision of projects. By mobilizing citizens to remain active throughout the entire public-policy cycle, civil-society movements help to ensure the longevity of participatory bodies and the transformation of local political culture (Evans, 1996; Fung and Wright, 2001; Avritzer, 2002; Abers and Keck, 2006; Heller *et al.*, 2007). Civil-society groups can exert influence over projects financed by participatory bodies not only during the early phases of implementation, but later too; this prevents a lapse into bureaucratic ways (Abers, 1996; Evans, 1996; Abers, 2000; Avritzer, 2002; Heller *et al.*, 2007). By providing citizens with information and resources such groups ensure that the new arrangements do not reproduce some of the social inequalities that existed prior to the discussions (Rosenberg, 2005; Patsias and Patsias, 2006; Heller *et al.*, 2007). Several examples also show that throughout the entire process, these groups monitor and exert pressure directly on the powers that be (Fung and Wright, 2005; Avritzer, 2006).

The involvement and structuring of civil society thus decisively affect the evolution of reforms (Fung, 2006). In this respect, studies have shown the importance of a special relationship between the governing party's elite and social movements: these relationships affect the attention that the latter will command before the authorities. However, there are two caveats: civil-society groups must possess a degree of autonomy in relation to government and an expertise that will allow them to engage political representatives in substantive discussions about reforms (Heller, 2001; Shah, 2007).

The relevance of studying the Montreal Participatory Budget and methodology

First, while the PB constitutes a privileged tool of participatory democracy that has spread throughout a number of continents, North America still remains relatively untouched by such experiments. Reported experiments here have been few and relatively

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5 By social movements we mean groups and organizations that, without struggling to attain power themselves, have resorted to dissenting collective action in order to defend their world view and to promote social change (Neveu, 2000).

poorly documented. In Canada, apart from the Montreal borough of Plateau Mont-Royal, only Toronto and Guelph have produced participatory budgets. The latter two have deviated significantly from the Porto Alegre model. Toronto's is primarily geared towards issues of social housing (Lerner and Wagner, 2006), while Guelph's pertains more to a model of 'community development' in which links between institutional politics and participatory structures are more tenuous (Sintomer *et al*., 2008: 231; Pinnington *et al*., 2009). Until now, the Plateau Mont-Royal PB has not been widely discussed, even though, in North America, it most closely resembles the Porto Alegre model (Latendresse 2006; Rabouin, 2009).

Secondly, the Montreal PB shows the emergence of a participatory body both within a process of decentralization and within a model of multilevel governance. In 2002, the Quebec provincial government initiated a major restructuring of municipal government. Municipalities were amalgamated in order to ensure better sharing of resources as well as more efficient management. This reform provoked a revolt amongst certain amalgamated municipalities, especially those in Montreal's suburban belt. Its consequences for Montreal were twofold: a process of decentralization at the infra-local scale with the creation of boroughs, and a process of recentralization at the supra-local scale with the establishment of an Agglomeration Council (covering the whole Island of Montreal).[6] This council included the mayor of the city centre, city councilors and mayors of towns that had chosen, after the 2003 referendum, to separate from the new entity, which had been formed through the amalgamation of the municipalities surrounding Montreal.

Politically, these institutional reforms brought to the fore the question of the citizen's place within what is commonly called multilevel governance (Drouilly and Gagnon, 2004). On the one hand, through the creation of a new infra-municipal level, the borough, and a city-wide mayor elected by direct universal suffrage, this reform of municipal structures made Montreal one of the most decentralized cities in the world (Collin and Robertson, 2005; Latendresse, 2006). In addition, once Montreal's central services had allocated funds between nineteen boroughs, each of these sectors had full control of the financial resources linked to its responsibilities. It was also possible for these sums to be topped up by tax levies or special fees (Hamel, 2009). On the other hand, the Agglomeration Council exercised important powers on questions that directly concerned citizens' needs (social housing and security, among others),[7] although its members were not directly elected. So the question of democratizing higher levels remained problematic (Isin, 1992). By creating this scale, the provincial government wished to retain the spirit of municipal amalgamations from 2001, which had sought to achieve fairer cost sharing across the Island of Montreal. Some said that, overall, the City of Montreal suffered from infra-decentralization (of the strong boroughs) and from supra-decentralization (the Agglomeration Council). There was an outcry in the local press, denouncing a weakening of the power of the municipal council; the latter, claimed critics, would henceforth be the government of an 'ungovernable city'. Infra-decentralization was singled out in particular. Yet one wonders if it was not the feeble democratization of the two higher levels that needed to be called into question (the City of Montreal's central services and the Agglomeration Council).

Thirdly, the Montreal PB exhibits a number of the features cited in the preceding literature review. Plateau Mont-Royal's PB exercise continued for 3 years: 2006, 2007 and 2008. It was expected to be prolonged to 2010, but the new political party (Projet Montréal), which gained the majority in 2009 in the Plateau borough, decided not to renew the PB experience. After a pilot project in 2006, the PB, inspired by the Porto Alegre model, took on its present form, which allowed an involvement of citizens in the municipal decision-making process on the investment budget. Indeed, the PB

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6 The Island of Montreal is composed of Montreal city and other municipalities called the suburbs.
7 Close to 60% of the budget of the 16 municipalities is managed at this scale.

process deals with a portion of the budget, the Triennial Capital Expenditures Program (TCEP), the objective of which is to identify investments in the borough's infrastructure and capital projects. As in Porto Alegre, the budgetary exercise concerned investments that could improve everyday neighborhood life (children's parks, traffic regulation, green spaces, swimming pools, and so on). The TCEP represents approximately 10% of the borough's total budget. The rest of the budget is earmarked for operating costs, namely municipal salaries and operational costs of buildings and infrastructure.

The first stage of the decision-making process consisted of holding a meeting for each of the borough's three districts. These district meetings sought to provide citizens with information and solicit projects for investment for the district and/or the borough. These projects were the central focus of an initial technical and financial evaluation by the borough's civil servants. The contents of these studies were posted on the borough's internet site and communicated to the citizens during three new district meetings. Through a deliberative exercise, each of these meetings aimed to classify the projects hierarchically and to elect twelve citizens who would sit at the annual summit. This annual summit consisted of 36 citizens representing districts, 12 representatives from civil society, named by the borough, and seven elected representatives from the borough (who did not have the right to vote at the summit). The priority projects that were to be included in the TCEP were selected after a day-long deliberation meeting that was concluded with a secret ballot. In 2008, an extra stage was added to the start of the process: the organization of popular education workshops, intended to explain the workings of the PB and develop citizens' skills.

The PB of the Plateau differs from European PB arrangements in a number of ways: the latter are characterized by a consultative approach, top-down processes, an only very partially autonomous civil society and the absence of a countervailing power (Sintomer *et al*., 2008: 227). With its range of decision-making powers regarding the use of TCEP funds, and with its involvement of community groups and social movements, the Montreal PB certainly embodies a participatory dynamic, symbolized by Porto Alegre. Still, one needs to be cautious in speaking of the emergence of a fourth power and of the participation of the most oppressed strata of the population. Indeed, initial evidence shows that participation is particularly strong among young people (some of them students with relatively low incomes) and middle-class citizens already involved in the neighborhood. Only a more extended timeframe would allow us to speak about the rise of a fourth cooperative sector exercising power. Nevertheless, the PB's mode of operation has changed municipal practices, for it has introduced a new collaboration between the town hall, citizens and civil society, or at least certain representatives of these elements.

How can we account for the emergence of a form of the PB so close to Porto Alegre surfacing in a specific borough of Montreal? Why this borough and not another? How did the different decentralizing processes impinge on the PB? What role did the actors play in this? What strategies did they adopt? What position did the PB occupy within Montreal's governance?

In order to answer these questions, we conducted a qualitative survey within the borough of Plateau Mont-Royal, which is situated near downtown Montreal. Two of the authors of this article were members of the Montreal Urban Ecology Centre (MUEC), a centre that became crucial to the PB's emergence. We were thus in a privileged position to observe the development and elaboration of the project. Our study combined two main parts: interviews with key actors and an exhaustive study of relevant documents. We thus interviewed the leaders of groups involved in the PB and the elected officials of the borough, including the mayor at the time. These semi-directed interviews enabled us to retrace both the genesis of the PB and the actors' different positions. We also held less formal discussions during different 'citizens' summits' that brought together the principal local actors. We attended borough council sessions on the establishment of the PB as well as borough press conferences when statements about the PB were on the

agenda.[8] These different meetings gave us an opportunity to confirm information obtained in the course of interviews and to get a better grasp of the position of actors and their interrelations. Finally, we consulted documents drafted by community organizations or by the municipality, for example, the program of each citizens' summit as well as the report of the external consultant who had been hired by the Plateau's borough council (Latendresse *et al*., 2011).

Empirical analysis: the making of the Montreal PB

The Plateau budget emerged after a wave of decentralization between 2000 and 2003, which was marked by the creation of boroughs. Financially, the Plateau benefited from a budgetary envelope from the TCEP, awarded to each borough and reflecting devolution of responsibilities in management and urban planning. Politically, the creation of boroughs allowed borough mayor Helen Fotopoulos to take office at the infra-municipal level of 'Le Plateau'. Although a member of MICU (Montreal Island Citizens Union) — the current city mayor's party, which holds the majority on the municipal council — Fotopoulos retained a strong attachment to participatory democracy from her days with the Montreal Citizens' Movement (MCM). The idea of more extensive democratization is far from 'new' in Montreal. It had been part of the MCM's program since 1974. Community groups have also campaigned for it. The end of the 1980s and the 1990s were difficult years for Montreal's social movements in the face of rising neoliberalism. The participatory ideal was dormant, but remained latent, and in 1999, when Porto Alegre's mayor came to Montreal, the participatory spark of PBs was reignited. The Montreal Urban Ecology Centre (MUEC), helped by other community organizations that campaigned on questions of democracy, promoted the PB, which appealed equally to urban movements and elected representatives (Rabouin, 2009). In 2001, when the mayor took office in the borough, the advocates of participatory democracy were few, but they were ready to step into the breach.

Between 2002 and 2005, activists from the MUEC led about 40 workshops on the PB; these sessions provided information on the participatory arrangement to organizations within the Montreal urban movement. Concurrently, members of Montreal's civil society forged links with the Global Justice Movement networks and, from 2001, attended several Social Forums, including one held in Porto Alegre. Swayed by the two organizations' various actions, the Plateau's mayor also travelled to Porto Alegre in 2005, taking advantage of her stay there to meet the elected representatives of that municipality and to discuss its PB. The spread of the PB also benefited from the establishment of Montreal Citizens' Summits (created through the impetus of the MUEC), which brought together elected representatives, citizens and representatives from civil society around specific key themes (Latendresse, 2006). Moreover, in 2004, while she was taking part in the third Montreal Citizens' Summit, Helen Fotopoulos voiced her intention to attempt to develop a PB within her own borough. She publicly announced the project several months later, following her return from the 2005 World Social Forum in Porto Alegre. The first installment of the participatory budget was presented the following summer.

The PB formula described above was applied gradually, resulting from the involvement of leaders from the community movement who acted as advisers and 'watchdogs' of the participatory project. One activist from the MUEC was hired as a consultant to propose to the borough a way of developing the PB. In 2004, this professional community organizer had spent several months studying the PB in Porto Alegre. He had also accompanied the mayor during her meetings with local elected

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8   Notably, we attended the press conference of the official announcement of the PB on 25 April 2006.

representatives and professionals from Porto Alegre during her participation in the 2005 World Social Forum. The MUEC also initiated the creation of an independent follow-up committee for the PB, comprising local representatives of community organizations and representatives of citizens' associations. Made up of various organizational units from Plateau Mont-Royal's urban movement, this committee was supportive, though critical, of the elected representatives and the PB experiment. It endorsed the experiment before participating community organizations, as well as before the borough's citizens. Indeed, citizens were urged to respond positively to the invitation from the borough council and to assert their presence during the PB sessions. Moreover, the mayor and the borough council needed the urban movement's support, for the latter would ensure the sustainability and credibility of the experiment.

However, within the city, support for this initiative was far from unanimous. First, the city ran up against the most conservative wing of the Montreal Island Citizens Union, which dreaded an extension of the PB arrangement on a city-wide scale and any challenge to the sovereignty of elected representatives. The initiative then provoked the distrust of the boroughs' civil servants, who perceived it as a threat to their expertise. Finally, even within social movements and community groups themselves, the idea of implementing a PB was not wholly accepted. Some feared that the PB would be a new way of simply giving the appearance of consultation to decisions that had already been adopted by elected representatives. Because the PB allowed for direct participation from non-organized citizens, others saw it as a threat to relations that they had cultivated with political authorities over the years.

Yet the mayor's persistence and the MUEC's mobilizing energies defeated the opponents. Overall, three elements explain the emergence of this process: (1) the opening of a window of opportunity owing to the creation of boroughs; (2) the will of the executive; and (3) the mobilization of a fringe of the third sector that had long been well organized.

Outcomes of the analysis: the Plateau's participatory budget — decentralization and political context

In several respects, the Montreal PB confirms the conclusions of the existing literature: decentralization constitutes a necessary but not sufficient condition for a PB. It is at once potentially innovative and problematic.

A potentially innovative decentralization

The originality of the Montreal case lies in the dual nature of the decentralization. Distinct in terms of timing and involving different scales, the two processes were thus both upstream and downstream of what PB advocates were advancing. Those who called primarily for participative democracy mobilized only at the local and infra-local level. Their inability to influence upstream processes accounts for the limitations of the effectiveness of the PB.

The PB was an indirect consequence of the process of municipal amalgamations, and de-amalgamations begun in 2002 on a province-wide scale. Although decentralization was not explicitly linked to the creation of participatory bodies or to modernized administration, it opened a window of opportunity by allowing political representatives who encouraged the arrangement to take power, which finally led to an annual budget. Decentralization helped to strengthen the power of the elected representatives, and as a result, the mayor managed to impose the PB on a party caucus that was far from convinced of the benefits of the experiment. From this point of view, participatory democracy certainly benefited from the reform of representative democracy. However, decentralization is a precondition that explains only partially the successful

implementation of the PB. The emergence of the PB would have been impossible without the goodwill of the ruling political party and the intervention of a small number of fringe social movements.

The PB specifies the roles of political parties. Of course, it confirms the importance of headship by a party, but underlines the role its leaders play, and the need for strong ties between party organization and social movements. The PB corroborates the theory posited by Sintomer *et al*. (2008) following a comparison of South American and European processes: the articulation between political parties and social movements helps to foster a cooperative counter-force enabling compromises to be made between political authorities and representatives from civil society — compromises necessary for these actors to work together — while ensuring that representatives of civil society are not mere pawns of the political authorities. Through this articulation of political forces, the Plateau arrangement also demonstrates how privileged ties with leaders and the executive can be essential, for without the will of the mayor and her close supervision, the PB would never have seen the light. However, previous party affiliations proved more important here than membership in the MICU. Indeed, the latter was reluctant to extend the PB experiment to other boroughs or to the City of Montreal itself. By exposing the potential political costs of such experiments, the Montreal case also qualifies the claim that the executive exploits these participatory processes for its own ends. While she wished to bank on this experiment to reinforce her authority and reputation, the Plateau mayor had to endure some of the criticisms leveled at her by opponents during the 2009 municipal election campaign. Some detractors believed that the PB threatened the power of the elected representatives and encouraged the abdication of their duties and responsibilities. Others criticized the mayor for having failed to form a committee or body that would have involved other elected representatives from the borough, citizen representatives and representatives from the community movement. In other words, the mayor was accused of having made the PB her personal agenda rather than that of the entire elected body and citizens.

The Plateau's PB confirms the essential role of social movements and civil-society organizations as project initiators, mobilizing agents of organized and non-organized citizens, and guardians of the participatory process. However, only the most radical segments of these movements were involved here. Successful mobilization hinges on leaders who are few in number, yet strongly motivated. The Montreal example contradicts claims that the participatory exercise requires the emergence of other types of deliberative counter-powers, adapted to the particular dynamic of participatory arrangements (Fung and Wright, 2005). Some strongly dissenting social movements can, indeed, act as watchdogs of participatory arrangements and can, in part, adapt to the demands of more deliberative discussions (Patsias and Patsias, 2009).

In Montreal, there has been both historical rupture and continuity in the community movement's implementation of the PB. Rupture, because the realization of participatory projects was contingent on networks, closely affiliated to social movements, gaining access to power. Continuity, because many of these projects have been in existence for some time, having been developed when the groups were still counter-powers (Latendresse, 2006). A more far-reaching retrospective of Quebec participatory experiments provides a clear background to this picture (Bherer, 2006a; Patsias and Patsias, 2009). The scenario also features in Porto Alegre and other Latin American experiments (Abers, 1996; Sintomer *et al*., 2008). By contrast, the European experiments, which are less participatory, developed quite differently; here the participatory bodies are initiated by an already established local power, left-wing in the majority of cases, seeking to re-legitimize its authority through the implementation of new arrangements (Sintomer *et al*., 2008). In these instances, the role of social movements is simply that of ensuring mobilization.

Montreal social movements made it possible to monitor the operation of the PB; along the way, they established workshops to educate the population, organized mobilizing

activities and created a monitoring committee. The heavy involvement by certain groups encouraging the PB should not obscure the divisions within the progressive local movement. This ambivalence within some groups has lent grist to the mill of elected officials who were hostile to the project (Rabouin, 2009); it also diminished the PB's empowerment and restricted the emergence of a cooperative counter-force to the normative political process. Beyond each group's strategies, this division reflects different visions on the 'left' of political engagement and participatory democracy. The Montreal PB was the result of a breach in administration that was quite hostile to an exercise in participatory democracy. Social movements preferred to exploit this political opportunity, although the PB was limited to the level of the district. Short of a true reform initiated from above, the defenders of the PB attempted to colonize the municipal structure by starting with the weak link. Beyond this, a number of activists believed the borough to be an appropriate scale through which to demonstrate the PB's viability prior to reproducing it at a city-wide scale. Recently, in several of Montreal's 19 boroughs (for example, Verdun, Park-Extension), coalitions of community actors set up citizens' committees that made encouraging citizen participation a key issue for their district. The first Montreal Citizens' Summit, held in 2001, reverberated in certain districts (for example, in Verdun); these communities are now seriously considering the development of a PB in their own borough. In such a context, in which mobilization efforts are beginning to bear fruit, the continuity of the Plateau's PB is essential in order to retain its reputation as a successful experiment, and as one that could be implemented on a larger scale.

If in certain respects the PB constitutes a genuine success in the Montreal context, it is circumscribed, limited to the 'local of the local', and very removed from EPG's broader significance and its institutional complexity. The PB remains at the periphery of Montreal governance and this results in undeniable weaknesses. The first problem resides in the fragility of the PB's very existence; at the borough level, it can be called into question at any moment.[9] A second problem is the risk that public policies will be balkanized (Fung and Wright, 2001). More particularly, within a context of increasing multilevel governance, one cannot act exclusively at one level of government without undermining the implementation of coherent policies or without forestalling the possibility of impinging on the whole set of parameters involved in the decision-making process. A third shortcoming of the Montreal PB is its inability to make up for the lack of civic involvement from which the city suffers; this issue applies particularly to the upper decision-making levels. The implementation of the PB at the infra-municipal scale only would preclude any control and sharing of decision making at the higher levels. Thus, true democratization of decision-making processes would be lost. The question is: why was the PB limited to the infra-local level?

Decentralization: a serious problematic

The major reason for limiting the PB to the infra-local level is the discrepancy between the decentralization project and participatory democracy, as these two processes were not conceived as part of a single process, nor thought of in terms of a common agenda. The municipal amalgamation in 2000, a provincial government project, was a reform that sought to improve urban governance through economies of scale and better sharing of resources between municipalities (Drouilly and Gagnon, 2004; Collin and Robertson, 2005). Municipal democracy was clearly a secondary concern, at least until

9   Projet Montréal, the new party that came to power in 2009, appears more distrustful of the PB arrangement. While the party's representative promised during his electoral campaign to maintain the PB, on 11 November 2010 he stated during a public meeting organized by the neighborhood groups, that citizens failed to show up at a meeting devoted to extending the PB, which had been under evaluation in 2008, thus suggesting lack of local interest in the initiative. Consequently, the party decided to suppress PB. However, ongoing discussion among citizen groups asking for a new PB remains prominent.

the mobilization of opponents who forged their discourse around political participation in their neighborhoods and exercising of citizenship (Bherer, 2006b). In Montreal, decentralization to the boroughs corresponded with a second stage of reform, which was intended as a response to protests from certain municipalities and to maintain the project even if it meant subjecting it to significant changes (Collin and Robertson, 2005). However, the actors who were advocating participatory democracy lacked the resources to intervene at the higher political levels. Moreover, in Canada, political parties that engage in provincial and municipal politics are not the same organizations. Finally, at the city scale the social movements that were involved could only act at the neighborhood scale, while the dominant political party in Montreal municipal politics, historically in favor of a more participatory democracy, was destroyed in the 2001 elections and only regained power by reconstituting itself politically, at the infra-local scale, in 2005. This inability of actors to intervene at different political levels reflected the overlapping of urban management and participatory democracy, two decentralization projects whose path dependency and actors differed. In Quebec, after the failed 1995 referendum, the project of political (and not merely administrative) decentralization was postponed indefinitely. Meanwhile, the traditional alliance between the progressive social movements and the Parti Québécois (provincial party) disintegrated. These changes prevented the idea of participatory democracy from exerting influence at higher political levels. Historically, participatory democracy has been a project designed at the local and urban level (indeed at the neighborhood scale), while in Canada, cities fall under provincial jurisdiction. Montreal participatory democracy is destined to remain confined to the periphery of urban governance, as its actors don't know how to, nor are they able to, emancipate it from its original level.

Conclusion

Our analysis confirms the observations of the current literature. However, it goes further by first showing how institutional design affects the PB process, and then highlighting the importance of the timing of reforms.

In the first instance, a top-down movement that ensures strong political guidance is necessary to ensure a successful participatory budget (Bobbio, 2007; Bassoli, 2010). A tabulation of existing experiments in participatory democracy enabled us to distinguish between two models. The first model is 'inter-scalar', with participation often resulting from a shift of the centre. The creation of participatory bodies involves a top-down movement and coincides with the process of decentralization or at least of delegating funds and responsibilities. This political centre can be very remote to citizens and may contain several political scales. The participatory imperative is thus seen by the centre as a means of eliciting support for its policies, of making it more visible to the citizens (Magnette, 2003; Jenson, 2007). The second model brings together experiments in which the participatory movement is bottom-up, but here the risk is one of circumscribing the experiment at the local level and forfeiting any impact on the devolution and sharing of resources at the higher political levels. In general, both of these mechanisms may be effective, but their efficacy and capacity to influence policymaking is decidedly limited. This result is intrinsic to their original constitution (Purcell, 2006). Concrete experiments have tended to underscore the importance of top-down processes that enable experiments to be generalized and regulated; in particular, they facilitate the integration of participatory bodies into processes of decentralization.

The timing of the decentralization process is also crucial. On this issue, the Montreal example is unequivocal. Not only is involvement required at the centre, but decentralization and participatory democracy must take place concomitantly, especially

when the process involves multilevel governance. The objective is to ensure that participatory democracy is not confined to the periphery of urban governance. Decentralization is often perceived as a singular and unitary phenomenon; but more often than not, it presupposes not one, but several processes of power delegation that can be in conflict with each other. This holds true particularly in the context of contemporary governance, which has produced a horizontalism in relations between the centre and the peripheries (Grote, 2008).

Such horizontalism, while reducing hierarchies, promotes the overlapping of decentralizing processes and their potential competition: depending upon scales, actors and unfolding histories, there are tensions between the various decentralization projects. Concomitance of decentralization and participatory democracy, mentioned above, presupposes a political will that has a better chance of emerging when actors are able to *operate at different scales* (Grote, 2008). The Montreal example reminds us that decentralization and participatory democracy need to be considered within a temporal landscape and a specific political context. In studying participatory democracy's potential for innovation, one must therefore be cautious not to forget to reverse the perspective — that is, to probe the way participatory democracy remains the product of power relations defined within representative democracy (Lavalle *et al*., 2005).

The different forms of participatory democracy are also the fruits of some particular aspects of representative democracy. This last point brings us to our concluding remarks, which concern the relationship between participatory governance and participatory democracy. We look at these concepts first from the point of view of political realities and then from the point of view of analytical perspectives. The Montreal example, following other models, shows that affinities between participatory governance and participatory democracy do not clearly point to similarity between them, since we still need to determine the role of participatory bodies within governance, an issue inherent to the objectives of participatory democracy. Participatory bodies can indeed be seen as a tool for broadening democracy within specific pockets in a political context in order to expand governability or at the very least avoid 'ungovernable democracies'. Based on this view, participatory democracy may only be window-dressing in the interest of further economizing on local budgets and of augmenting political legitimacy without offering much in return (Grote, 2008). In other words, far from satisfying the goals of EPG, the tools of participatory democracy can reproduce the political system through local governance arrangements. Thus compartmentalized policy arenas can proliferate, leaving tensions between processes of decentralization unresolved or resolving these at a purely micro-spatial scale (Schmitter, 2002: 25). If the local level is the level at which participatory democracy can emerge in its strongest form, this is also its Achilles' heel. The local level operates at several scales within multilevel governance, and only the complexity of institutional architectures will allow the bodies working on expanding participatory democracy to realize their goals.

The foregoing observations have some theoretical implications. The shift from the term EDD (empowered deliberative democracy) to EPG (empowered participatory democracy) registers the less salient modalities associated with the term deliberation (Elster, 1998), but it also leads to possible confusion between two distinct types of literatures and analytic angles. Fung and Wright (2001) have generated an institutional debate about participatory democracy that borrows certain elements from studies on governance, notably enquiries into decentralization and political scales; this has extended studies beyond the issue of deliberation. However, at the same time, Fung and Wright have set themselves apart from these studies by reversing the initial question, since the objective has become to determine the conditions of governance that contribute to participatory democracy. Andrew and Goldsmith (1998), cited by Grote (2008: 25), 'underline that governance has entailed, initially, more authoritarian and exclusionary rather than democratic and participatory elements'. There is nothing surprising in this.

Participatory local governance arrangements do not all share the ideological objective of participatory democracy.

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Résumé

Cette réflexion entend participer à l'agenda de recherche autour de la Empowered Participatory Governance lancé par Fung et Wright. Après avoir dressé un bilan d'analyses consacrées à différentes expériences participatives, afin de préciser les configurations institutionnelles et politiques favorables à une gouvernance plus participative, nous examinons ces résultats à l'aune du Budget Participatif du Plateau Mont-Royal à Montréal. Notre étude s'attarde plus particulièrement sur les liens entre décentralisation et démocratie participative, soulignant la nécessité d'une analyse qui prenne en compte les rapports de force entre les acteurs au sein des systèmes de gouvernance antérieurs à l'instauration des instances participatives. Si la présence de mouvements sociaux et de partis politiques, soutenant le projet participatif, s'avère incontournable, un mouvement uniquement bottom up risque également de cantonner la portée transformatrice de la démocratie participative à sa portion congrue.