Original article

The relationship between Participatory Budgeting and territorial justice: a theoretical and practical contribution

As relações entre Orçamento Participativo e justiça territorial: uma contribuição teórico-prática

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Abstract

Participatory budgeting (PB) is considered one of the main democratic innovations in urban management developed in the last decades. Today, most experiences lack the core values that guided the creation of PB in the city of Porto Alegre (Brazil): inversion of priorities and social justice. Based on the assumption that PB is an institutional and political object of dispute for power within a territory, it is argued that it must be studied under the lens of territorial justice. A qualitative study was conducted (document analysis, fieldwork, and interviews) in two mid-sized cities with deliberative PBs, Araraquara (São Paulo, Brazil) and Vallejo (California, USA). The results point out a significant difference between the case studies, but also to PB's relevant potential as a tool for territorial justice, demanding a context of massive institutional and political support.

Keywords: participatory budgeting; territorial justice; inversion of priorities; comparative analysis; urban management.

Resumo

O orçamento participativo (OP) é considerado uma das principais inovações democráticas de gestão urbana criada nas últimas décadas. Hoje, a maioria das experiências está afastada dos valores nucleares da criação do OP em Porto Alegre (Brasil): inversão de prioridades e justiça social. Assumindo o OP como objeto político-institucional de disputa do poder no espaço, argumenta-se que este deve ser estudado sob a ótica da justiça territorial. Realizou-se pesquisa qualitativa (análise documental, trabalho de campo e entrevistas) em duas cidades de porte médio com OPs deliberativos, Araraquara (São Paulo, Brasil) e Vallejo (Califórnia, EUA). Os resultados apontam para significativa discrepância entre os casos, mas relevante potencial do OP como ferramenta de justiça territorial, necessitando contexto de grande apoio institucional e político.

Palavras-chave: *orçamento participativo; justiça territorial; inversão de prioridades; análise comparativa; gestão urbana;*

Introduction

The 1980s and 1990s represented, globally, a particular combination of two socio-political and spatial phenomena which significantly impacted democratic institutions. First, the deepening of a crisis in representative democracy, (Rolnik, 2011; Fung, 2015) – especially in the central nations -, manifested in part of the population's loss of interest in elections, diminished popular engagement with political parties and the rise of neoliberalism, the latter perceived to instigate a sharper "capture" of democracy by capitalist logic (Santos, 2020). Second and contrary to that, the emergence of a "third wave of democracy" at the global level (Huntington, 1991), expanding to several countries previously under authoritarian regimes or fragile democracies, allowed the liberal political canon to be placed in contact with other social and spatial realities and undergo diverse experiments (Held, 2006).

The combination of these two wide processes that are both multidimensional – social, political, institutional and spatial – and multiscale – manifesting in scales ranging from the global to the microlocal (McCann; Ward, 2011; Souza, 2013) – had been noticed sharply in the urban management of several Global South countries (Smith, 2009), especially Brazil. It is in the context of a search for strategies to tackle social and spatial inequality and for new designs for participative management that Participative Budgeting (Baiocchi; Ganuza, 2014; Falanga; Lüchmann, 2019) emerges in Brazil, potentially the best-known and most widely implemented urban democratic innovation in recent decades (Smith, 2009; Wampler; McNulty; Touchton, 2021).

Participatory Budgeting (henceforth PB) may be classified as

> [...] an instrument of urban management, democratic radicalization and administrative effectiveness (sometimes comprising these three elements together, sometimes none, among other possibilities) that must, in some way, debate public budgeting, normally – but not always – at the local level. (Bogo, 2022, p. 280)

Despite the direct influence of previous experiences that sought to open up public budgeting for deliberation, as in Pelotas and Vila Velha (Souza, 2010), it is only in 1989, in Porto Alegre, capital of Rio Grande do Sul, that PB receives the institutional design that would consolidate its functioning and guiding principles. This configuration also inspired PB's later mobility – in the terms of McCann and Ward (2011) – to Brazil and the rest of the world (Sintomer et al., 2012; Wampler; McNulty; Touchton, 2021).

In the 35 years between the first steps of this democratic/institutional innovation (Smith, 2009; Wampler; Goldfrank, 2022) and the contemporary context of its adoption in approximately 10 thousand instances of government (Dias; Enríquez; Júlio, 2019; Dias et al., 2021; Wampler; McNulty; Touchton, 2021), PB has undergone significant transformations. Whether through the work of agents-actors (Steinberger, 2017) who influenced the tool's mobility, like the political and academic ambassadors of PB (Porto de Oliveira, 2016), the heterogeneous World Bank (Goldfrank, 2012) or national governments that have adopted it as an institutionalized public policy (at different levels);[1] or the limits of the instrument itself (Wampler; Goldfrank, 2022), rarely do the

currently active experiences refer to the tenets at the core of the prominent years of the Porto Alegre case (Fedozzi; Ramos; Gonçaves, 2020; Siqueira; Marzulo, 2021) and of other Brazilian PBs considered successful, like Belo Horizonte (Wampler, 2003) and Guarulhos (Cabannes, 2015). As argued by Falanga and Lüchmann (2019, p. 2),

> The transference of this approach to participation to other countries has implied the transformation of some of its key principles. In Europe, throughout the 1990s and 2000s, PBs have shifted towards goals of modernization of local administrations and recovery of citizenry trust.

Among the aforementioned principles, two of the most significant are the idea of an 'inversion of priorities' – shortly, that public investment and political decision-making should be inverted from the center and traditional actors to the periphery and peripheral subjects (Marquetti; Campos; Pires, 2008; Cabannes, 2021) – and social justice, the idea that PB should be a direct instrument to reduce social and spatial inequalities and mitigate the injustices suffered by the poorest in urban areas (Souza, 2006; Wampler; McNulty; Touchton, 2021; Wampler; Goldfrank, 2022). Furthermore, PB is believed to be an inherently territorial instrument for urban management and planning (Souza, 2006; Cabannes, 2015; 2021; Bogo, 2020; 2022) and must consequently be analyzed from the perspective of spatial and/ or territorial justice (Harvey, 1973; Soja, 2009; Legroux, 2022). Even though researchers have already dealt with the connection between PB and territory (Souza, 2006; 2010; Braga, 2012; Silva, 2017), the territorial justice approach has been little explored. Considering this, and following the methodological guidelines of Quivy and Van Campenhoudt (2017), the following research questions were formulated: '*Does participatory budgeting have the potential of working as a vehicle for territorial justice?*' (Q1) and '*How does territorial justice manifest itself empirically via PB in different realities?*' (Q2).

To answer them, in addition to a theoretical debate underpinning the relationship between PB and territorial justice, the application of a methodological combination of a qualitative nature was chosen for two comparatively analyzed case studies: Araraquara (São Paulo, Brazil) and Vallejo (California, United States of America). Both present PBs with an already significant number of previous cycles (14 and 9, respectively) and deliberative decision-making models. The array of methodological procedures included conducting field work in both cities under study, analyzing documents about both PBs' institutional design and territorial results, and the main source of data, conducting 12 semi-structured interviews (6 in each case) with individuals directly associated – in the present or past – with the PB experiences in question.

Therefore, this paper expands the possibilities for qualitative analysis of this instrument, interpreting it as a relevant tool to compare urban realities (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Sposito, 2016). It also extends comparative analysis between PBs implemented in Brazil and the USA to the local level, something carried out by authors such as Gilman and Wampler (2019) and Goldfrank (2020). This element is important because both countries are among the most influential in the implementation of PB at a global level (Dias et al, 2021) and a normative motivation (Wampler; McNulty; Touchton, 2021) is the main vector of PB adoption in their local administrations.

The paper is structured in six parts, including the present introduction. Next, parts two and three briefly concern the theoretical propositions underpinning the relationship between PB and territorial justice. After that, the methodological procedures applied are described in detail, as well as the justification for defining the spatial scope. The fifth part refers to the analysis of the results, considering the interview answers. Lastly, the final remarks and possible directions for further scientific research are presented.

Participatory budgeting: returning to the central tenets

PB corresponds to one of the main urban management innovations created in recent decades, with a high degree of transferability and adaptability across local administrations in different socio-spatial and political contexts (Smith, 2009; Cabannes, 2018; 2021). After the first experiences of the 1980s, which materialized in the Porto Alegre model, the instrument spread across Brazil (and later South America) throughout the 1990s and 2000s, with varying motivations (Souza, 2006; Wampler, 2008; Shum, 2024). Partly in a parallel manner, the 2000s were the first time frame of PB's broader export from Brazil toward other continents, especially Europe (Sintomer et al., 2012). As the authors demonstrate, at that point – the beginning of the 2010s – there were approximately 1.200 functioning PBs around the world. Nevertheless, as the 2010s moved closer to the 2020s there was an exponential increase in the number of PB experiences – whereas PB entered an era of strong decay in Brazil, for a number of reasons, described below (Peres, 2020; Bezerra; Junqueira, 2022; Lüchmann; Bogo, 2022; Wampler; Goldfrank, 2022) – especially in Europe, Africa and Asia, representing more than 12.000 cases in the world according to the most optimistic estimates (Dias, 2019; Dias et al., 2021; Wampler; McNulty; Touchton, 2021).

This popularity of PB, however, is not viewed uncritically by the scientific community. Despite the positive potential of an innovation that involves opening the "black box" of public budgeting to citizens (Smith, 2009) engaging with new institutional and socio-spatial realities (Dias et al, 2021), a variety of issues have been identified in this transposition. Among the most evident are the fiscal and administrative difficulties that many local governments face in implementing PB (Wampler; Goldfrank, 2022); the adoption of PB by political leaderships that are not genuinely interested in it (Souza, 2006); little openness to experimentation and deliberation in various cases, especially in Global North countries (Sintomer et al., 2012; Falanga; Lüchmann, 2019); the low budget allocation in most processes outside Latin America (Cabannes, 2015; Allegretti; Copello, 2018; Wampler; McNulty; Touchton, 2021); the influence of the World Bank, which promoted the adoption of PB by local governments from an administrative reform and fiscal rationalization perspective, in contrast to its original purpose of deepening democracy and addressing inequalities (Baiocchi; Ganuza, 2014; Porto de Oliveira, 2016); and the effect of this shift—the notion, more "comfortable" for

policymakers, of PB as a tool for consultation and civic education (Allegretti; Copello, 2018) rather than a mechanism for delegation of power or co-governance with transformative potential (Souza, 2006; 2010; Cabannes, 2021).

This points to the need to bring the foundational values of PB – which, in turn, are of a political and normative nature – back to the fore. This approach does not mean disregarding the limitations and challenges empirically identified by researchers. Even in the Brazilian case, widely considered the most robust based on systematic evidence produced by the scientific community (Wampler; McNulty; Touchton, 2021), findings indicate that most experiences have yielded mixed and/or limited results (Boulding; Wampler, 2010; Fedozzi; Ramos; Gonçalves, 2020; Wampler; Goldfrank, 2022), with several municipalities adopting PB merely as a formality (Wampler, 2008), as an electoral strategy (Shum, 2024), or even opportunistically (Souza, 2006).

Among the identified issues are the instability and dependence of PB processes on political will (Falanga; Lüchmann, 2019; Lüchmann; Bogo, 2022), the strain on local finances caused by the federal pact and specific legislation (Peres, 2020; Bezerra; Junqueira, 2022), the rise of neoconservatism (Lüchmann; Bogo, 2022), the political-ideological link between PB and the left, particularly the Workers' Party (PT) (Bezerra, 2022; Shum, 2024), and the very limitations of PB's design, which appears to have entered a policy bubble[2] in relation to its investments and improvements (Wampler; Goldfrank, 2022). However, these considerations do not invalidate the identified outcomes and the set of transformative principles that were at the origins of PB in Porto Alegre and which have remained present in several Brazilian (Souza, 2010; Wampler; Goldfrank, 2022) and even international cases (Cabannes, 2015; 2018; 2021). Considering the context in which this participatory program emerged – in a semi-peripheral country marked by extreme socio-spatial inequalities and the formation of vast urban peripheries, particularly in metropolitan areas (Souza, 2006; 2010; Santos, 2013; 2020; Maricato, 2015) – the first factor to be considered is its dimension of 'radicalization of democracy.'

Given that PB was created by PT, from the left, which sought to establish itself in national politics at the time with the "PT way of governing," focused on popular participation and social justice (Bezerra, 2022), re-signifying (in practice or discourse) local public management was part of its interests and mottos. Therefore, radicalizing democracy "means giving voice and visibility to those who never had a chance to express themselves, to speak about their desires and dreams; it means working to produce space with social justice" (Ferreira, 2021, p. 174). Also on the core values of PB, Baiocchi and Ganuza (2014, p. 30 and 33) argue that

> Of all the Real Utopias proposals, Participatory Budgeting has a unique status: not only is it an institutional reform that has been widely (..) it is one whose original design is self-consciously aimed at the kind of social transformation that undergirds Real Utopian thinking (...) This model aims to foster redistributive and efficient decision making that is deliberative and democratic and superior to command--and-control structures on a number of counts.

PB's implementation, therefore, is considered to generate a collective gain in two dimensions: political and territorial. The former, because historically marginalized and oppressed individuals, subjected by the heteronomous state, gain the possibility – through the delegation of power or co-governance – to participate in public decision-making (Souza, 2006; 2010; Baiocchi; Ganuza, 2014). The latter in turn derives from PB's function as an urban management tool, as information is decentralized – becoming accessible beyond technical experts – and much more significant input is allowed regarding demands for services and improvements across different parts of the city, particularly in peripheral areas (Cabannes, 2007; 2021; Marquetti; Campos; Pires, 2008).

Such a combination refers to another fundamental principle of PB, the 'inversion of priorities.' It is defined and classified by Cabannes (2018, p. 15) in three types present at the origins of PB:

> *Reversing spatial priorities:* resources are channeled to those spaces such as neighborhoods, rural and peri-urban areas, villages and remote settlements, non-legalized or occupied lands, derelict city centers, etc. that historically were and are still excluded and do not benefit as much as productive spaces from public investments and subsidies.
>
> *Reversing social priorities* consists in channeling more resources through PBs precisely to those social groups who historically had less. Such a positive discrimination towards the "have not" means as well opening up participation channels and spaces to the most vulnerable social groups. According to cities these vulnerable groups are the youth, the elderly, women, afro--descendant population for instance in Brazil, migrants and refugees, LGBT+, prime nations and ethnic minorities, etc.
>
> *Reversing political priorities*, or "power to those that were powerless", consist in opening political space for those who never had political space. PB can be, but it is not often the case, a powerful means to shift decision making power in favor of the powerless, through transferring financial decision-making power to the PBs participants and transferring them as well the power to define the PB rules.

The conceptualization above deals with relevant elements for the analysis conducted here. Firstly, because it reinforces the previously discussed territorial aspect inherent to PB, with PB being interpreted as a significant tool for producing urban space (Silva, 2017), given the power that institutional channels have in production of the city (Lefebvre, 1991). In this case, the territory is interpreted not only as the regional division listed in the institutional design, but as the relations of power manifested in space (Raffestin, 1993; Souza, 2013), specifically urban space. As argued by Raffestin

(1993, p. 60), "The territory is the political space *par excellence*, the field of action of trumps." Thus, considering the political dimension's centrality for space and territory, visualizing PB's position in such a dynamic becomes possible. Whether as an urban management innovation aiming at democratic radicalization, or as a tool for administrative rationalization, political decision-making and deliberation are central, placing the territory – and therefore, power relations – among the fundamental conditions of the program (Souza, 2006; 2010).

Thus, by dealing with the inversion of power relations in urban space and the reduction of socio-spatial inequalities, the search for ethical and political arguments significantly adds to the theoretical framework explored here. It is in this context that the debate over justice(s) emerges below.

From social justice to territorial justice in PB

Various notions of justice have been used to describe the goals and results of PB. Among them are tax justice (Carlos, 2015), economic justice (Su, 2022), climate or environmental justice (Cabannes, 2018), racial justice (Su, 2022) and, finally, redistributive justice (Carlos, 2015; Cabannes, 2018; 2021). The latter is more directly in dialogue with the dimensions of justice discussed so far. In general terms, redistributive justice may be characterized as the idea that wealth production and access to services and infrastructure are distributed unequally (whether intentionally or due to the inherently "chaotic" nature of market relations which constitute the capitalist city) in space, disproportionately burdening marginalized individuals and communities. As Legroux points out (2022,[3] p. 13),

> This view of justice is built on the notion of "parity of participation:" On one hand, the *redistribution* paradigm focuses on socio-economic injustices, which implies addressing the mechanisms of exploitation and reproduction of inequalities; on the other hand, the recognition paradigm centers on cultural injustices, which stem from social models of representation, interpretation, and communication, which are linked to cultural domination, denial of *recognition*, and contempt.[4]

The prefix "re" implies that distribution already occurs, but it is unjust and not guided according to the needs of the population (and, especially, of specific parts of it), which is supported by works that point out the contradictions, relations of power and specific interests associated with the capitalist city, with a particular focus on Brazil (Souza, 2010; Rolnik, 2011; Maricato, 2015; Santos, 2013; 2020). Furthermore, there is a clear link between this notion and that of social justice, which became a relevant focus of analysis and proposals in urban studies following Harvey's seminal work (1973). Such a connection is reflected in the argument that follows:

> As a tool for social justice, participative budgeting is expected to contribute to diminishing social inequalities and redistributing wealth produced in the city through public investment benefiting the city's underprivileged.
> [...]
> Here, the idea of distributive justice or the idea of redistribution is closely tied to social justice, based on the principle of valuing services in terms of supply and demand, where individuals with fewer resources and "necessities" have a greater right than others. Social justice is conceived as a principle (or a set of principles) with the purpose of resolving conflicting rights in society through the allocation of public resources, aiming at maximizing the less fortunate's perspectives.[5] (Carlos, 2015, pp. 153 & 169)

Therefore, the perspective of the struggle for social justice through a democratic innovation that promotes partnership or power delegation with the public sector is at the core of PB's emergence, even if PB's implementation does not reach that level in several experiences (Baiocchi; Ganuza, 2014; Wampler; Goldfrank, 2022). Even if the redistribution of expenses and public services toward the urban peripheries are the main – and most measurable – manifestation of that principle, this is not the exclusive avenue for social justice, especially given the limitation of resources normally deliberated via PB, even when they correspond to a significant part of local investments (Wampler, 2003; Cabannes, 2015; Carlos, 2015). Additionally, other elements must be considered, such as social inclusion, control of the population over decision-making, effective execution of projects and the types of such projects (Fung, 2015; Mattei; Santolamazza; Grandis; 2021; Wampler; McNulty; Touchton, 2021). Nevertheless, this combination, associated with the previously discussed inherently territorial factor in PB, points to the need to discuss PB's advances from the perspective of spatial (or territorial) justice. This paper maintains that this kind of justice is at the core of PB and must be articulated in order to analyze and interpret it.

The debate on spatial justice is long and complex, given its very polysemy, multidimensionality and the necessity of ethical and philosophical positions to define what is just and unjust (Harvey, 1973; Soja, 2009; Legroux, 2022). As the authors demonstrate, spatial justice is normally analyzed in a manner encompassing those mentioned in the beginning of this section, taking into account the broad scope of the space-time concept as developed in critical geographic science (Lefebvre, 1991; Harvey, 2008; Souza, 2013). As for conceptual delimitation – and in line with what has been discussed so far – Soja (2009, p. 3) points out that

> 1) In the broadest sense, spatial (in) justice refers to an intentional and focused emphasis on the spatial or geographical aspects of justice and injustice. As a starting point, this involves the fair and equitable distribution in space of socially valued resources and the opportunities to use them.
> [...]
> 3) Spatial (in)justice can be seen as both outcome and process, as geographies or distributional patterns that are in themselves just/unjust and as the processes that produce these outcomes.

Thus, considering the reflection on how socio-spatial inequalities lead to spatial injustices, the foundations for the connection between PB and spatial (and territorial) justice and how the latter can materialize in reality need to be presently laid out. As Harvey (1973) and

Legroux (2022) point out, a critical perspective for analyzing justice implies moral foundations associated to the world of labor, which takes a negative view of the concentration of wealth produced by workers in the hands of a small number of agents-actors. This does not entail that injustices occur only regarding income, as they are also intersectional (race, gender, class, sexuality, etc.) and mainly spatial, whether through practices, representations, or the very reproduction of profit-oriented urban space, centered on the valuation/devaluation pair.

It is in this context of injustices that demands arise, that marginalized individuals (and their allies) strengthen their fight for rights and do so in partnership with, in spite of, or even against state institutions (Souza, 2010), and PB is inserted in this landscape of struggle. The pursuit of several rights – to housing, water, food, property, existence, etc. – "are demands of a justice to be achieved through and for space. Because of that, the adjective 'spatial' becomes fundamental for justice" (Legroux, 2022, p. 14). As Harvey argues (1973), strategic alliances to pursue and achieve a tangible vision of social (and spatial) justice are necessary. Thus, spatial justice only makes sense when connected to materiality, to the "real world," not an end in itself but a constant process, of which planning instruments and participatory public policies are an integral part (Gervais--Lambony, 2017). Therefore, the fact that justice is at the core of PB's creation must be taken into account as a parameter to analyze the success and quality of cases, with quantitative and qualitative evaluations (Wampler; McNulty; Touchton, 2021; Wampler; Goldfrank, 2022).

Following the present argument, it is worth presenting an idea described in a previous paper (Bogo; Silva, 2023), that the term used in the analysis and discussion regarding PB should be *territorial justice*. The term is not exclusive to this author, as the use of territory in connection with the debate on justice or "territorial justice" itself appears in works such as those of Harvey (1973), Souza (2010), Gervais-Lambony (2017) and Lima (2016; 2020). The latter describes it as "(...) the socio-spatial situation, in which vectors promoting oppressive spaces are, effectively, confronted and eliminated, or, ideally, do not exist" (Lima, 2016, p. 12) and that "(...) territorial justice must be the horizon of public policy" (Lima, 2016, p. 16), reinforcing the importance of planning and management.

The theoretical and conceptual framework supporting the choice for territorial justice in this paper extends beyond that. Here, we start from the previously discussed assumption that territory refers to the spatial manifestation of power relations (Raffestin, 1993; Souza, 2013) and that urban space is imbued with these relations in a multiscalar and multidimensional manner. If PB's emergence as a democratic innovation occurs with the goal of inverting political and material priorities from the center to the periphery (both in the spatial and symbolic sense) then what is ultimately at stake is the transformation of power relations within that urban reality. It is an attempt – even if partial and limited – to combat socio-spatial injustices. As demonstrated here, territory is the concept most directed to such an analysis, justifying the use of 'territorial justice' henceforth. It is worth noting that, despite the fact that redistributive justice is permeated by a spatial element, its objectives are limited to material aspects and the distribution of public resources. Such features are also present in territorial justice, but it is broader, concerned with fields of action that extend beyond the

materialization of investments and which involve changes on another scale. The main conceptual reference, as understood here, gravitates around the power relations in space (Raffestin, 1993; Souza, 2010) and how they influence the injustices which occur in territories, this being the main thrust for the analyses conducted in this paper.

However, it has been made clear throughout the text that measuring justice (regardless of which dimension) is a complex task, requiring approaches that go beyond purely quantitative measures. In the case of PB, the focus should not be exclusively on the instrument itself but on the individuals engaged with this institutional innovation. After all, they are the ones who experience daily the relationship of PB with and its influence on on the territorial injustices that manifest in urban space. This article aimed to grasp these effects through the discourse of those on the front lines (Roth, 2023).

Methodological procedures and spatial scope

The use of a qualitative methodology, a foundation of the set of procedures underpinning this paper, resonates among researchers focusing on PB (Wampler, 2003; Lehtonen, 2021; Schugurensky; Mook, 2024) or comparative urban research (Snyder, 2001; Flyvbjerg, 2006; McCann; Ward, 2011; Sposito, 2016; Góes; Melazzo, 2022). In a wider perspective, Quivy and Van Campenhoudt (2017) indicate that various elements for interpreting and analyzing social reality cannot be captured exclusively through quantification, while qualitative studies demand effort from authors toward internal coherence (method and procedure) and external coherence (in relation to the rest of the scientific community).

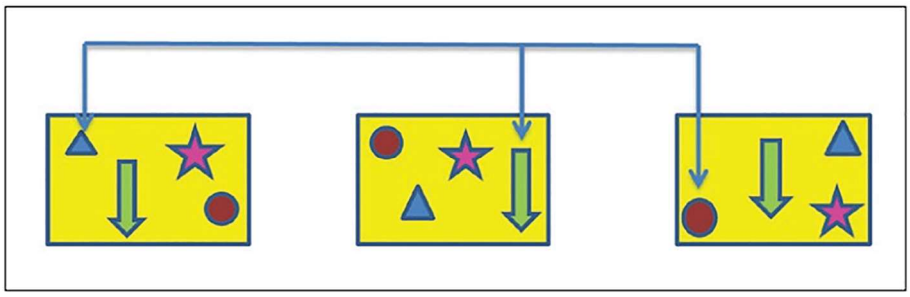
In addition to not being based on quantification techniques, qualitative investigation is traditionally associated with a smaller number of cases but deeper contact with them, seeking a considerable understanding of the objects' dynamics and many dimensions. (Souza, 2013; Quivy; Van Campenhoudt, 2017). Góes et al. (2022) argue that this model involves greater closeness and interaction between subject and object, making research a more dynamic process, with an interpretive and constructive posture. As for spatial experience, the authors point out that it has three dimensions – structural, functional and symbolic – and may be better grasped through qualitative procedures. Such a scientific structure, additionally, allows for generalizations and correlations with general processes, something not restricted to the results of quantitative methodologies, presenting its own particularities (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Góes et al., 2022).

Furthermore, this paper is founded on the principle of comparison. It is not a method or methodology, but an intellectual strategy to analyze and debate a given object (Sposito, 2016). Comparison has been essential for understanding territorial singularities and

particularities, especially in its relevance for urban studies and participatory public policy (Marquetti; Campos; Pires, 2008; McCann; Ward, 2011; Steinberger, 2017).

Although there is significant scope and flexibility regarding research subjects under this strategy, there are certain criteria and boundaries to be followed in order to avoid falling into relativism or choosing case studies that are not truly representative of the investigated processes. Focusing on urban space (even within the institutional context), it is evident that its heterogeneity may be simultaneously a field of possibilities and a trap (Souza, 2010; 2013). Based on this, Sposito (2016) argues that comparative analyses can either seek to examine all elements within a given set or focus on specific elements from different sets. This study is centered on different elements belonging to similar sets (Figure 1). In this case, those are PBs with varying institutional designs (both decision-making, but following different models) and socio-spatial and political contexts, but both located in medium-sized cities in the urban context of both countries. These cities have populations between 100,000 and 500,000 in the Brazilian context (Stamm et al., 2013) and between 100,000 and 250,000 in the American context (NCES, s.d.).

Figure 1 – Comparison between different elements among similar sets



Source: Sposito (2016).

The spatial scope defined for comparison was twofold: the cities of Araraquara (São Paulo, Brazil), which comprises 242,228 inhabitants (IBGE, 2022) and is within the region of influence of Ribeirão Preto's population arrangement (IBGE, 2020); and Vallejo (California, USA, comprising 126,090 inhabitants (USCB, 2020), part of the San Francisco metropolitan area, known as the Bay Area (ABAG, 2024). Besides deepening joint investigations of PBs in both countries (Gilman; Wampler, 2019; Goldfrank, 2020), case selection is relevant in the context of comparing international subnational entities (Snyder, 2001; McCann; Ward, 2011), given that these may provide "(...) a salutary increase in our ability to accurately *describe* complex processes, a focus on subnational units has important implications for how we *theorize* such processes"[6] (Snyder, 2001, p. 94). He also argues that studying subnational entities (here, the local power) prevents the homogenization of analyses regarding the results of public policies in highly heterogeneous countries (like Brazil or the USA).

The choice of the two aforementioned cities is based on a combination of factors. First, they are part of a broader investigation conducted by the author,[7] which allowed for the research procedures described later. The decision to focus on medium-sized cities is connected to the existence of studies on Brazilian PB cases in these urban entities – such as Ipatinga (Wampler, 2003), Serra (Carlos, 2015) and Vitória da Conquista (Novaes, 2016), for instance – and the need to understand how such mechanism operates in medium-sized cities in other countries. The internal mobility of PB within Brazil, as well as its international expansion and the adaptations it has undergone when implemented in different socio-spatial realities (Smith, 2009; Porto de Oliveira, 2016), further justify this comparison. This is reinforced by observing that PBs in the United States are mostly normative (Wampler; McNulty; Touchton, 2021) and therefore implemented based on ideological and/or political motivations, which might keep cases more aligned with the central tenets of the main Brazilian experiences.

More specifically, the choice for Araraquara is owed to its rise as one of the most relevant PB programs in Brazil, both due to its adaptations of the Porto Alegre model and to high engagement by the population and local political actors (Carvalho; Araújo, 2011; Lüchmann; Martelli; Taborda, 2021). Precisely because it is inspired by what became the core design of PB (Sintomer et al., 2012; Wampler, McNulty & Touchton, 2021), this city in São Paulo state presentes – *a priori* – greater decision-making power for its population and rules fostering social inclusion and the inversion of priorities, that is, foundations for territorial justice. Selection of the U.S. city, in turn, occurred not only because of the aforementioned adoption model – which potentially emphasizes debates and deliberations about inclusion and social justice – but also because of the fact that Vallejo hosts the oldest, most stable, and relatively well-funded municipal PB process in the U.S., with nine complete cycles[8] and a model that is deliberative, but less complex and intense than the "original" Brazilian ones.

As Sposito and Sposito (2022) recommend, the current research, of a qualitative nature, was supported by a set of procedures. First, document analysis (Mattei;

Santolamazza; Grandis, 2022; Vrydagh, 2022), allowing for an evaluation of the institutional elements of the cases studied,[9] highlighting the institutional design of the processes and their outcomes, such as popular participation and the projects approved or implemented. Second, fieldwork (Souza, 2010; Sposito; Sposito, 2022) – conducted in November 2023 in Vallejo and on three occasions in Araraquara between May and June 2024 – in order to attend meetings related to the respective PBs, visit participatory governance facilities in both cities, take photographic records, observe the particularities of both urban spaces, and conduct the interviews.

The interviews represent the third and most important procedure, corresponding to the main source of the data analyzed. Following what Góes et al. (2022) propose, scripts for semistructured interwiews[10] were used – six in each city – with two specific types of actors: inhabitants/representatives of civil society and well-informed agents (WIA). The distinction, defined in Góes and Melazzo (2022), is due to the way the two types of agents act in relation to urban space and their degree of involvement with public management. Representatives are citizens who act significantly in regard to PB, while WIAs are members (contemporary or not) of the local power's technical and/or political personnel, also connected to PB. Recent studies such as those of Lehtonen (2021), Roth (2023) and Schmäing (2023) point to the capability and relevance of interviews with different groups of social actors involved with PB.

Starting from the idea that this procedure consists of "engaged conversations" (Góes et al., 2022) and the importance of individuals' experiences in producing space (Lefebvre, 1991), the aim is to produce information and acquire knowledge through interactions between researcher and participant, ranging from non-quantifiable elements (such as symbolic or subjective aspects) to events and data that are not publicly recorded or spatially representable. In this context, the non-scientific discourse of participants is recognized as valid knowledge to be approached by scientists.

The selection of interviewees stemmed from the researcher's contact with the respective local administrations, looking for actors that were highly involved in the process and relatively heterogeneous (Góes et al., 2022), using the "snowball" procedure (Sposito; Sposito, 2022), in which interviewees themselves suggest individuals who may be adequate for the research goals (something encouraged, too, by fieldwork). Participants were chosen based on their roles in the participatory program, aiming for diverse functions, gender, and age whenever possible. Even though the number of WIAs interviewed far exceeded that of civil society representatives – two groups with different interview scripts – an effort was made to compensate for this imbalance with the diversity in interviewees' backgrounds and levels of involvement with the program. The 12 interviews (Chart 1) were recorded using a personal smartphone, and later transcribed and processed by the researcher with Whisper software.

Chart 1 – Summary of interviewees

Code	City	Individual	Relationship with PB	Gender	Age	Duration
A1	Araraquara	Well-informed agent	PB director	Female	32	78 minutes
A2	Araraquara	Representative of civil society	President of PB Council	Female	58	72 minutes
A3	Araraquara	Well-informed agent	Former PB director and state congresswoman	Female	66	75 minutes
A4	Araraquara	Well-informed agent	PB project manager	Male	57	78 minutes
A5	Araraquara	Well-informed agent	Secretary for Popular Participation	Male	~40	51 minutes
A6	Araraquara	Well-informed agent	Former PB director and city council member	Male	~60	82 minutes
V1	Vallejo[11]	Well-informed agent	Former PB delegate	Female	64	100 minutes
V2	Vallejo	Well-informed agent	Member of the management committee	Female	~70	99 minutes
V3	Vallejo	Well-informed agent	Former member of the PB management committee and city council member	Female	48	99 minutes
V4	Vallejo	Representative of civil society	Former PB delegate and activist	Male	67	71 minutes
V5	Vallejo	Well-informed agent	PB director	Female	~35	82 minutes
V6	Vallejo	Well-informed agent	Member of the management committee	Female	75	68 minutes

Source: made by the author, in 2025.

The interpretation of the data generated with the interviews was conducted using specific excerpts that refer to the research questions outlined in the introduction, and they are debates in conjunction with insights from the scientific literature – through scientific articles, books, and theses/dissertations –, whether of a theoretical or empirical nature. The selection and analysis of the excerpts used followed the guidelines of Góes and Melazzo (2022), focusing on discourse and narrative associated with the individuals' spatial experience, and how the latter relates to institutional and urbanization vectors. Therefore, no coding or categorization of the interviews was carried out; instead, a continuous approach between interviewees' responses was chosen, connecting the investigated themes with their experiences. Consequently, different perspectives regarding territorial justice will be explored, considering the interviewees and the institutions they mention as both products and producers of urban space. (Lefebvre, 1991).

Analysis of results: the relationship according to interviewees

Initially, three findings may be outlined based on the twelve interviews conducted. First, interviewees perceive the pursuit of territorial justice via PB as a tangible possibility, but one that extends far beyond its spatial outcomes or the inversion of priorities itself, in line with the arguments of Gervais-Lambony (2017) and Lima (2016; 2020). The relevance of power relations in the city and their presence in relation to PB were also acknowledged. Social and territorial justice are not measurable in themselves, but the perspectives of those directly involved in the PB's implementation provide deep elements for analysis. Second, the author perceived a certain difficulty among individuals in grasping the concept of spatial/territorial justice, requiring explanatory effort on the part of the researcher or causing a few deviating responses at this point of the conversation. However, this effect is considered to be expected, given that even scholars working with this topic point to the polysemy and complexity of the concept. (Harvey, 1973; Soja, 2009; Legroux, 2022).

Third, there is a clear difference in discourses about the material outcomes of the investigated PBs, with the interviewees' understanding encouraging a positive perception, something much more evident in Araraquara than in Vallejo. Even if in Araraquara most interviewees are working directly of indirectly in the current PB cycle's management (except for A3, who worked in the first Edinho Silva administration) or aligned with the political project supported by the local government (except for A2, at the time a city council candidate from a party in the mayor's coalition, but not politically aligned with it), a similar context is seen among the interviewees in Vallejo. Except for V4, an activist defending the rights of the homeless, the group of interviewees is composed (albeit somewhat heterogeneously) by people who work directly in the PB's execution or are part of public management, politically and ideologically aligned with the city office. Several criticisms are present in both cases, but they are more intense – and directed at the limitations in PB's impact – in the Vallejo case.

The main reason for these differences lies in the institutional design of the PBs in question, something identified both through document analysis and the interviews. As defined by Wampler (2003), Cabannes (2021) and Mattei, Santolamazza and Grandis (2022), institutional design encompasses the 'rules of the game' and PB's management framework, defining the structure of participation, the citizen decision-making model, the role of technical experts, the territorial delimitation of projects and proposals, the size of investments and how these are applied. Despite both cases presenting deliberation stages, formation of delegates and election of representatives (a PB council in Araraquara and a managerial committee in Vallejo), two key elements differ: the program's regionalization (Souza, 2010) and the share of public resources available for deliberation (Cabannes, 2015).

Even though there were minor changes to the regionalization design in Araraquara when PB returned in 2017 – after eight

consecutive editions between 2001 and 2008, it was suspended with the election of a *Movimento Democrático Brasileiro*, center--right administration (Carvalho; Araújo, 2011) –, which was criticized by interviewees A3 and A6,[12] the flow of the process has continued the same (Lüchmann; Martelli; Taborda, 2021). As shown in the public records, the city is divided into 11 regions (including one encompassing three rural settlements), in turn divided into 27 sub-regions. At these smaller subdivisions, debate of proposals and greater dialogic interaction between citizens and technical experts take place. The projects collected in the sub-regions are then voted in regional plenary sessions, which elect the main demand from that region to be included in next year's budget, not necessarily restricted to the first places, something that is underscored by A4, in charge of developing and executing projects. During the cycle, six more thematic plenary meetings[13] take place and a city plenary meeting too, each with an elected project. Consequently,

> *So... There are works, lots of public works. And we're like… you have a complex around 18 works a year total. Today we would have almost 100 works only considering participatory budgeting, which is the priority. Then you start counting second, third* [places]…" (Interviewee A4).

On the other hand, in Vallejo, since the project began in 2012 with consultancy from the NGO Participatory Budgeting Project[14] – the most important in the USA regarding the topic (Goldfrank, 2020) – there has been a city-wide format, that is, without a regional division to condition the vote or implementation of the chosen projects, something that is evident in that PB's institutional portal. Projects are proposed by citizens or NGO representatives through submissions in the city hall's online platform or deliberation during plenary meetings which, as declared by interviewee V5, coordinator of the process, have been conducted remotely since the COVID-19 pandemic (2020 e 2021). It is up to the management committee to debate the feasibility of projects and keep track of their execution (a similar role to the PB council in Araraquara), which are defined according to an absolute vote by citizens, until reaching the maximum cap of investments, previously established by the committee, with specific values for public works and services, the latter carried out by NGOs. The estimated budget for interventions is often exceeded, something mentioned by interviewees V1, V3, and V5, all of whom have played active roles (in the past or present) in the management committee responsible for project implementation and monitoring. One example of this is visible in V1's statement, that "There was another project to beautify a neighborhood for US$24,000. It was a bit vague, but they decided to tile the stairs on Capitol Street. [...] So, US$24,000. Well, it ended up costing more than US$300,000."

This difference in design, which had already been pointed out at a national level by Gilman and Wampler (2019) and Goldfrank (2020), is manifested in specific cases demonstrating the impacts reflected on the territory. Although the city-wide model is considered adequate (or even ideal) by most interviewees in Vallejo – the only contrasting opinion being that of V3, a city council member who would like to see investments directed toward the most vulnerable areas –, the

investment cap established may be interpreted as a severe, if not the most important, restricting boundary. Furthermore, the originally low value has also progressively diminished over time, given that

> *The first couple was like 3% of an entire measure, so it was in the US$3,5 million marks, US$2,5 million and then it was US$1 million for cycle… I think four, five, six, then seven was the pandemic and that's when that million got reduced to US$500.000. Cycle eight was US$500.000, because we skipped a year, we added two pots worth together for cycle seven and cycle eight and that's how we had a US$1 million fund for cycle eight. Then cycle nine will be back to US$500.000 unless we change the timeline to make it cycle nine, but two fiscal years.* (Interviewee V5)

That is, the interviewee, PB director since 2017, states that the nine cycles provided, in total, US$ 14 million for direct citizen deliberation via PB. It may be observed through the institutional portal that the decrease in funding has also affected the number of projects, which had reached 12 in the 2013 cycle, falling to only 5 in 2023. Even though estimated figures are often exceeded during execution – something stressed by interviewees V1 and V3, both city council members in charge of approving the budget for projects – the local management of Vallejo has conceded, on average, US$12,33 of power per cycle to each inhabitant. In the latest editions, this per capita amount is only US$3,96. According to Souza (2006; 2010), Cabannes (2015) and Allegretti and Copello (2018), the low budget share destined to PB is evidence of little political commitment to the program and a limited capability of social transformation, affecting the population's trust and participation in PB.

Considering the infrastructural difficulties, the socio-spatial inequalities and the peripheralization that occurs in Brazilian cities, even medium-sized ones (Souza, 2010; Santos, 2013; Maricato, 2015), it makes sense that their PBs – at least the more impactful ones – point to correcting such failures. Wampler and Goldfrank (2022) argue, therefore, that PBs in central countries (like the USA) tend not to address such issues, as the population is already well-served with goods and services. However, taking into account the heterogeneity of the urban network and public policy (Snyder, 2001) in a country like the USA, that is not necessarily true, especially considering that it is the most unequal developed country in the world (Harvey, 2008). The peripheral position of Vallejo within the Bay Area was brought up by all interviewees, regardless of their trajectories or relationship with the PB, including high crime rates (V5), low property values (V3), the high number of homeless people (V3 and V4) and infrastructural and public investment limitations (all interviewees),[15] besides the fact that the city has gone bankrupt (V2; V4; V5; V6). Thus, there is worry and criticism regarding the Vallejo PB's current potential to make an impact on the territory.

> […] *our council and our steering committee see our success as numbers, how many people are actually participating in this and when I'm seeing that decline* [in participation] *it's scary now. and when we decrease the funding in participatory budgeting in Vallejo it decreases the amount that we can allocate towards projects. So, in capital infrastructure projects we have a cap of US$300.000 when we have US$1 million, so it's 30%. Now we're at US$150.000, and it's difficult enough to roll out a capital infrastructure project that can be impactful with US$300.000, nonetheless US$150.000.* (Interviewee V5)

> *But now they're trying to subject this, it's a small piece of money, $1 million. And I don't know, I don't recall how much they received from the federal government and all these other local taxes and things, but that million dollars doesn't go far. It really doesn't go far at all. And then when it's consumed by new radios for police, right?* […] *I mean, there should be at least 3 million, maybe 4 million dollars to address the needs of the community in order to make the community healthier.* (Interviewee V4)

The excerpts above highlight an issue raised by individuals in very different positions. In the first case, it is the program coordinator expressing frustration with investment limitations, in a power struggle with the city council. In the second case, we have an activist suggesting that allocated funds are insufficient, from position external to local power. V4 also mentions the recent purchase of a building for the police force for $23 million, far exceeding the total amount allocated as the PB's budget cap over nine deliberation cycles.

In contrast, the investment and impact landscape in Araraquara differs significantly from that described above. Documents provided by the city's administration show that since 2017, corresponding to five deliberation cycles – in 2020 and 2021 PB was interrupted due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and in 2024 the cycle was composed of "conferences" focused on reassessing the program and its institutional design, without electing new projects – the total amount of investments allocated to PB is approximately R$177 million. This corresponds to an average of R$146 per person per cycle, a significantly higher amount than in the Californian case, even considering the current unfavorable exchange rate in relation to the US dollar, which would correspond to US$26.21 *per capita*.[16] However, it is worth highlighting that the impact of this amount in the Brazilian context is much greater than in the U.S., especially as regards infrastructure projects.

Despite this amount being beneath the most prominent Brazilian cases, like Porto Alegre (Souza, 2010; Siqueira; Marzulo, 2021) and Guarulhos (Cabannes, 2015), it reveals a deeper level of PB commitment and impact, especially in a context where Brazilian PBs are largely weakened in their fiscal component (Peres, 2020; Fedozzi; Ramos; Gonçalves, 2020). Additionally, it is important to consider the interventions carried out by the PB program during Edinho Silva's previous administration (2001–2008), for which there are very few records – an issue emphasized by interviewees A1 and A3, both involved in coordinating the PB at different times – and which was focused on addressing urgent demands of the population, (particularly in health, education, and road paving), mostly in peripheral areas (interviewees A3 and A4).

In terms of territorial justice, beyond the high project execution rate (70%, according to interviewee A4) and record participation in 2023 (8,884 people), the key element to highlight in Araraquara is which populations are impacted by the PB. Those elements refers to shifting power dynamics, extending beyond the material component of justice. When asked who benefits the most, interviewees indicate that "I think it's the population that truly needs the state. [...] those who benefit from the project, in general, are the people who most need the equipment, and that is undeniable." (A1), and that "this instrument will benefit those who organize themselves better, those who manage to organize. But who organizes? Those in need. So, in the end, it benefits

more the people who require most public services. Or political minorities." (A6). Even though both interviewees mentioned above are aligned with the current administration – the first is the current PB coordinator, and the second held the position between 2017 and 2020 – this suggests that elements of territorial justice are explicitly present within the technical and political personnel that manages the program. Furthermore, all other interviewees from Araraquara point to the PB's benefits for peripheral populations, regardless of their relationship with the process in the past or present. This is reinforced by A4, who is responsible for mobilizing communities for meetings and argues that "[Region Two] is where we have the lowest participation. Why? They're people with higher purchasing power. [...] So, these are not the people who benefit, so much so that they don't participate

The excerpts above point to an effective occurrence of the inversion of priorities, as defined by Baiocchi and Ganuza (2014) and Cabannes (2018), and that they are territorially directed by an effective institutional design, even if without complex redistribution rules like those found in Porto Alegre (Siqueira; Marzulo, 2021), Belo Horizonte (Wampler, 2003) and Vitória (Carlos, 2015). Besides the fact that interviewees were unanimous in claiming that this phenomenon is taking place in Araraquara, even the "inversion of the logic of power" was mentioned in the interviews with A1 and A5, both of whom are part of the administration and have direct ties to mayor Edinho. Although the limitations of PB within the Brazilian urban space must still be considered, especially in contemporary times (Fedozzi; Ramos; Gonçalves, 2020; Wampler; Goldfrank, 2022), these examples indicate the tool's potential to change the relationship between state and society, something that is manifested in the territory. This is because PB does not work in isolation; rather, it must be understood as an instrument for planning (a point reinforced by interviewees A3 and A6, both former program coordinators) and as part of a broader framework of popular participation, as claimed by A5 and A6, individuals who do not have their professional or political background in participation itself, but in food safety and culture respectively.

Such findings do not imply, however, in a 'failure' of the Vallejo case. Despite the reduction in investments and participation, something that can undermine credibility among citizens (Wampler; Goldfrank, 2022), advances have been identified. Some construction works had high symbolic impact, like the skatepark mentioned by interviewees V2 and V3, who both oversaw the execution and outcomes of the projects in their roles within the management committee. Others (V1, V4, V5 and V6, all bearing different perspectives and trajectories regarding the process) pointed out that the service projects have served vulnerable populations, who would not have their demands heard without PB. Even if there is no rule specifying that, interviewee V1, formerly a city council member, stressed that "I think the people that benefit are probably more low income people benefit than just the general population, which is great". However, the limitations are Always pointed out, as of

> [...] *I would like to see more, whether it's through PB or through some other neighborhood revitalization programs, a more targeted investment in some of our poorer neighborhoods, certainly with programs and services, but also streets and roads and just general infrastructure improvements.* (Interviewee V3)

However, specifically considering territorial justice, the difference between the cases becomes evident. Although this cannot be reduced to works and investments, or redistribution itself (Soja, 2009; Lima, 2020), the weaknesses pointed out by the Vallejo interviewees indicate a gap between the material and institutional implementation of the PB and the pursuit of justice in the territories. Despite the positive response from interviewee V1 – and nevertheless remarking "You know, on a very small scale, you know, with a million dollars." – when asked whether the PB plays a role in territorial justice in the city, the statements were

> *No, I don't see that. No*. [...] *since that it was it was just finite projects that they were finite projects. They didn't address social injustice. They didn't address the under education of children, schools and all. It did not. PB does not address that in a pretty short city. The city wouldn't permit that anyway. It's not a tangible thing.* (Interviewee V4)

> *For social or territorial justice? I don't think that in general that's our focus. I think maybe it's not the mission. Specifically, it's more of opening the doors to anybody that wants to participate, but to say that we target groups to broaden equality... I don't think that that's our mission.* (Interviewee V5)

Interviewees suggest that territorial justice is not present in the Californian case, from different perspectives. In spite of the fact that both understand justice as something broader, V4 – an activist with a long track record of urban struggle and participation in NGOs – sees it as something intangible and which lies, in fact, outside the scope and objectives of public power; V5, on the other and – a public manager and directly responsible for operating the local PB – views territorial justice as a public policy aiming at equality, something that is also not seen in this process. Therefore, there is a clear difficulty as regards modifying the power relations already established in that urban space.

Thus, a notion may be noticed that the relation between PB and territorial justice demands more political, institutional and territorial effort than has been made in Vallejo, a reflection of the limitation of most American PBs (Goldfrank, 2020), regardless of the fact that some of them are normative or discursive about social justice (Wampler; McNulty; Touchton, 2021). Within the comparison carried out here, the data obtained from document analysis, fieldwork, and interviews provide evidence that the Araraquara case, despite its instability – linked to the non-institutionalization of Brazilian PBs (Lüchmann; Bogo, 2022) -, displays a significant material and symbolic alignment with territorial justice. When asked about the topic, interviewees pointed to various elements that extend beyond the material manifestations of PB, with effects that transcend public policy itself, as follows

> *It is also a goal. It is territorial justice, social justice, serving the people who need the most, giving voice to the population. Justice in all forms, right?* [...] *there are lots of things that were achieved, there are lots of daycares, lots of schools, lots of health stations.* [...] *But it's justice that, over the years, makes you see that difference, see the difference all over reality, in the sense of even needing the state less. Of creating opportunities.* (Interviewee A1)

> Yes, very, very much. In my opinion yes, and I think in the opinion of many, too. Even those who speak against it, deep down, if they look, will accept that it is. Because it's not promises, it's being done, understand? Because it's no use promising and not coming through, so, within those needs people have, it's being done and it's visible that it's being done. (Interviewee A2)

> *When you establish this system of inversion of priorities, which is participatory budgeting, you definitely do social justice. You do justice with those people who most need public policies, I have no doubt about that. – And was that achieved in Araraquara? – Oh, yes. The objective was achieved. Many times it was an uphill battle, because it's not easy to make popular participation happen, but I think it was achieved. Today Araraquara is another city.* (Interviewee A3)

> *It's as Dom Mauro spoke, it is in territory that people have a face, a name and an address. So I think that appreciating the city as a territory, which as public policy deserves to be changed and transformed in light of that which is a desire for social justice, I think it's fundamental.* (Interviewee A5)

The four excerpts indicate different interpretations of territorial justice, but also a consensus among interviewees that PB is a relevant tool in its pursuit. A1, the program coordinator, interprets that such an objective is related to material achievements together with a broader perspective, like the emancipation of peripheral populations from their dependence on the state. On the other hand, A2, a community leader who engaged with the process only through coordination of the PB Council, sees justice through the materialization of projects into physical works, adopting a more instrumental approach. Lastly, A3 and A5, experienced figures in public management with extensive political trajectories, view justice through the lens of public policy and the state's function as an essential agent-actor in tackling socio-spatial inequalities, while also emphasizing the educational process. This set of perspectives aligns with scholars' conceptualizations of territorial justice, even if presenting particularities deriving from the individuals' lived experiences. In the analysis conducted here, it may be noticed that there are contributions to modifying established power relations in the urban space of Araraquara, even if circumscribed to the scope of the PB itself as an urban management tool.

Therefore, the findings obtained in this research connect with Wampler and Goldfrank's (2022) arguments that PB is an exhaustive instrument which demands a favorable combination (of institutional design, political will, participation and external factors) for its results to be tangible and deep. Despite imminent instability, as the Araraquara case largely gravitates around the figure of Edinho Silva – something perceived by Carvalho and Araújo (2011), Lüchmann, Martelli and Taborda (2021) and also mentioned in the interviews – who finished his fourth term in 2024, the city seems to accomplish partial territorial justice, in constant improvement and transformation Finally, PB has the potential to be a relevant instrument in the struggle for territorial justice, for and together with peripheral individuals. In spite of its limits and its decadence in recent years in Brazil (Lüchmann; Bogo, 2022; Bezerra; Junqueira, 2022; Wampler; Goldfrank, 2022), experiences that may serve as inspiration for

a possible national public policy regarding PBs beyond the metropolitan areas (Bogo; Silva, 2023) and for international enthusiasts, like Vallejo, are still active.

Final remarks

This paper sought to answer two research questions regarding the relationship between participatory budgeting – one of the most relevant democratic innovations in recent decades – and territorial justice, based on a comparative study of two medium-sized cities, Araraquara (SP, Brazil) and Vallejo (CA, USA). To that end, a qualitative methodology was used, grounded on a set of procedures, namely document analysis, fieldwork and semi-structured interviews with representatives of civil society and well-informed agents, the primary empirical material referenced in the analysis.

The conclusions point to an affirmative answer for both research questions. As regards Q1, '*Does participatory budgeting have the potential of working as a vehicle for territorial justice*?,' going beyond just the theoretical debate promoted in order to connect the fundamental principles of PB (such as the inversion of priorities and redistribution) with territorial justice, the case of Araraquara made it evident, based on data drawn from public documents and the discourse of interviewees, that PB has a considerable potential for the pursuit of these goals. Even with its limitations and the high political-administrative effort required, PB can play a decisive role in systems for planning and popular participation with tangible results in terms of public policy, being relevant for combating socio-spatial inequalities, too, in non-metropolitan contexts.

As for Q2, '*How does territorial justice manifest itself empirically via PB in different realities*?', it is believed that this paper demonstrated how to approach the impacts of PB in different socio-spatial and institutional realities. Although the scope of the work prevented a deeper spatial analysis of the projects and participation – which would entail the use of mixed methods – the qualitative treatment given to the data from the interviews proved sufficient to understand the differences between the two cities, their PB processes, and the manifestations of spatial justice. This reinforces the reach of qualitative procedures, adding to the efforts of authors such as Wampler (2003) and Lehtonen (2021).

Evidently, this paper is not without its limitations. The interviewed public could have been more diverse, including especially more young people and members of civil society, under-represented in relation to well-informed agents. The political alignment of the groups, especially in Araraquara, may also have caused a confirmation bias in part of the responses. Additionally, deeper document analysis and a more detailed description of the differences in the governance structure would also contribute to a better understanding of how institutionality shapes space and the political individuals in question. The geographical situation of the

cities in their respective urban networks could also gain in prominence, bearing an influence especially in the case of Vallejo.

As a suggestion for future studies, there is significant room for quantitative and spatial studies approaching territorial justice in its most tangible dimension: investments and projects. It would also be relevant for the scientific communities if similar studies were to be conducted between cities in the same country, or between significantly different PB designs.

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Notes

(1) Among them are Angola, South Korea, Ecuador, Russia, Indonesia, Peru, Poland, Portugal and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Dias et al, 2021; Wampler; McNulty; Touchton, 2021).

(2) A phenomenon that occurs “when governments overinvest in a single policy instrument beyond its instrumental value in achieving a policy goal and that overinvestment is sustained over a relatively long period of time.” (Jones et al., 2014, p. 149 apud Wampler; Goldfrank, 2022)

(3) Originally in Portuguese.

(4) Italics in the original.

(5) Originally in Portuguese.

(6) Italics in the original.

(7) Funded by Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo (FAPESP) under projects nº 2021/04556-0 and 2022/12767-3.

(8) Information obtained from a database provided by Ingrid Haftel from the Participatory Budgeting Project. Available on <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1TA9QTjFV2GUOVQTCEcFQ30fiCH4qVjQ5LOYpSkK-6nk/edit#gid=924976785>. Access on Sep. 3rd, 2024.

(9) Via documents provided by interviewees or accessed on the respective institutional portals of the Araraquara (https://www.araraquara.sp.gov.br/orcamento-participativo) and Vallejo (https://www.cityofvallejo.net/cms/one.aspx?pageId=17560973) PBs.

(10) Available in the supporting materials (like the excerpts) and adapted from the interview scripts of project 2018/07701-8, also from FAPESP.

(11) The interviews in Vallejo were conducted in English and the ones ins Araraquara in Portuguese, being later translated to this version.

(12) Both were involved in PB between 2001-2008. A3 as coordinator of the project throughout the two administrations and A6 as an active participant, before directly getting involved in governance in 2017.

(13) Black population, LGBTQIAP+ population, disabled people, women, the elderly, and the youth.

(14) Information given orally by a former Vallejo city council member, in a meeting conducted on July 28th, 2023.

(15) During fieldwork, the researcher could perceive, in several records, how the low quality of urban infrastructure and the high number of homeless people are underlying issues in the city, especially in the central area.

(16) As of September 2024.

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