

Governance and Citizen Participation: Foundations for Sustainable Development and Participatory Democracy in Brazil

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ABSTRACT

This text addresses the importance of governance and citizen participation in improving public management and promoting social justice in Brazil. Faced with challenges and practices that compromise trust in public management, governance emerges as a hope to restore the integrity of public services, with a focus on inclusion, transparency, and collective well-being. Governance is discussed as the State's capacity to formulate and implement policies that respond to social needs, emphasizing the importance of direct participation of civil society in decisions, ensuring that the voices of those most affected are considered. Through a detailed examination, governance is distinguished from government and governability, highlighting it as essential for sustainable and democratic socioeconomic development, transcending formal frameworks of power through collaboration and dialogue for the common good. Furthermore, the need for active citizen participation is emphasized, seeing it as a means for the redistribution of power and for the inclusion of previously marginalized people in political and economic processes. It is argued that without a true redistribution of power, participation can become just a tool to perpetuate the status quo, reinforcing the importance of participatory mechanisms that expand social inclusion. The text concludes by underscoring the fundamental role of popular movements and participatory management in promoting a more equitable society through the implementation of inclusive public policies.

Keywords: Governance, Public management, Citizen participation.

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I. INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Amid the challenges and questionable practices that have undermined trust in public management, exacerbating the vulnerability of numerous Brazilian citizens, the discussion about governance emerges as a beacon of hope for integrity in public service. In this renewed context, collective well-being no longer emerges as a tool manipulated by political strategies, but as a banner that drives the search for equity and social justice.

This article aims to promote reflection on how governance represents the State's ability to formulate and implement effective public policies that respond to social needs in an integrated and harmonious manner with governmental guidelines. This capacity is intrinsically linked to the adoption of participatory practices, involving civil society directly in the decision-making process, ensuring that the voices of those most affected are heard and considered. By focusing on mechanisms and procedures that favor inclusion and transparency, governance transforms into a fundamental pillar for the strengthening of democracy and the promotion of sustainable social development, where each decision reflects a genuine commitment to collective progress and the reduction of social disparities. Thus, a promising path opens for the restoration of public managers' credibility and for the construction of a fairer and more equitable society.

As a methodological procedure, this article carried out an analytical and reflective approach to discuss the concept of governance, differentiating it from the concepts of government and governability, and highlighting its importance for the sustainable management of resources and socioeconomic development. The employed methodology involves conceptual review based on academic literature and reports from international institutions, such as the World Bank, in addition to theories from experts in the field of public administration and politics. By exploring the dimensions and implications of governance, it seeks to analyze how this concept manifests in practice, emphasizing citizen participation and cooperation between the State, the private sector, and civil society as central elements for achieving effective and democratic management.

Thus, the study highlights governance as a phenomenon that transcends formal power structures, incorporating informal and non-state mechanisms to promote dialogue and collaboration for the common good. This approach is exemplified through the discussion on the importance of active citizen participation in the formulation of public policies and decision-making, highlighting the need for participatory mechanisms that allow the inclusion of various voices in the management of public affairs. Additionally, it discusses the challenges faced by traditional governance, such as the centralization of power and inefficiency in resource management, and contrasts it with an alternative governance model characterized by its horizontal, democratic, and inclusive approach. Through this analysis, it evidences the importance of reflecting on the necessary transformation in the relations between the State and society to promote effective governance that meets the population's needs and contributes to sustainable development.

II. PUBLIC GOVERNANCE

The concept of governance, introduced by the World Bank in 1992 and later adopted by various international institutions, is understood as the practice of managing a nation's economic and social resources with the aim of promoting sustainable development. Governance refers to the efficiency with which governments plan, set goals, formulate and implement policies for the construction of an "Efficient State." This state is defined by the integration of decision-making processes that promote collaboration between the public, private, and other social segments in the formulation of public policies (Diniz, 1995).

Deepening the discussion, it is essential to clearly distinguish between the concepts of government, governability, and governance for a comprehensive understanding of this theme.

The government is described as the entity that conducts activities backed by formal authority, using the power of coercion to ensure the implementation of established policies (Rosenau, 2000). It is intrinsically related to the ability to assume a position of power, from which it is possible to make and execute decisions, or exercise command over individuals (Nogueira, 2001).

Governability, in turn, refers to the systemic and institutional conditions that enable the exercise of power. It includes characteristics of the political system, the form of government, relations between powers, and the system of interest mediation (Santos, 1997). This concept highlights the framework within which governance operates, underlining the importance of structures and political processes in facilitating or obstructing effective exercise.

Governance stands out for its importance in mediating between the State and Civil Society, an interaction highlighted by Jacobi, Gunther, and Giatti (2012). In addition to fostering alliances and cooperation, governance faces challenges brought about by conflicts arising from social inequalities. These conflicts significantly affect the environment and motivate resistance, organization, and engagement from stakeholders. Rosenau (2000) expands this notion, describing governance as a range of activities driven by common objectives that go beyond legal obligations, not relying exclusively on coercive authority for its execution. Thus, governance is understood as a more comprehensive phenomenon than governmental structures, including also informal and non-state mechanisms, promoting dialogue and collaboration between individuals and organizations to meet collective demands.

The efficacy of governance is revealed in the ability to incorporate social demands into decision-making processes, both in the public and private spheres, highlighted by Moura and Bezerra (2014). It is based on principles, norms, and procedures that direct the expectations of those involved, as described by Haas (1980). Silva (2004) adds that the state action in executing public policies, through participatory mechanisms, is a crucial aspect of this definition.

In the local context, governance is guided by the concept of "good government," proposed by Ivo (2008), which encompasses the implementation of exemplary practices marked by innovation, participation, effectiveness, sustainability, and trust. The objective is to prevent predatory behaviors such as clientelism, corruption, and other harmful practices. Thus, local governance is challenged to address the varied problems and socio-environmental dynamics that characterize each territory.

This reformulation aims to enhance clarity and understanding of the essential aspects of governance, highlighting its relevance in promoting an effective and inclusive dialogue between different parts of society.

To understand the practical implementation of good governance, it is crucial to analyze the role played by public administration. Silva (2004) argues that, although municipal government is fundamental in encouraging social participation, the necessary changes go beyond the governmental and administrative scope. This view recognizes the social evolution that repositions the citizen, from a mere voter to an active participant in the management of public policies, signaling a significant shift in the dynamics of citizenship.

This transformation requires a paradigmatic change in how society engages in social intervention, moving from a vertical and authoritarian relationship between State and society to a dynamic based on interactive horizontal networks. In this new model, the public manager is seen not only as an executor but as an essential mediator between the various social demands. This progress is evidenced by the replacement of

traditional public management models with alternative approaches that emphasize new attributes such as transparency, accountability, and inclusion, reflecting the principles of good governance.

For Silva (2004), in the traditional governance paradigm, decision-making is strongly anchored in technocracy, where the specialized knowledge of technicians prevails over lay contributions. Despite a discourse that praises participation, in practice, decisions are centralized, with authority distributed vertically among different strata of the government, which can dilute responsibility and obscure effective decision-making.

The methodological approach is vertical, strictly adherent to legalism, and often subject to a dynamic of reciprocity and interests. Evaluations are predominantly quantitative, relegating non-measurable qualities to a secondary plane.

The determination of priorities, centralized in the bureaucratic machine, responds more to the directives of the Executive than to popular needs, which can exacerbate interest conflicts. These conflicts often favor particular interests and specific groups, exacerbating social inequalities and privileging the private sector.

Regarding the management of public resources, the model is often plagued by inefficiencies and a notable lack of transparency. Accountability is insufficient, and patrimonialism — the appropriation of the public by the private — is a recurring practice.

The sustenance of this model resides in the expression of citizenship through voting, however, citizen participation is often limited to this act, amid a context of clientelism networks and compensatory policies that seek to preserve the status quo. This structure faces substantial criticism due to its inability to promote inclusion and transparency, fundamental components for good governance.

However, Silva (2004) explains that in the alternative governance model, decision-making is a collaborative process that integrates both technical knowledge and community perspectives, with a genuine commitment to active participation. The decentralization of decisions strengthens inclusion and representativeness in public policies.

In it, the methodological approach is characterized by its horizontal and participative nature, emphasizing autonomy and the validation of contributions from all involved. Evaluations are comprehensive, incorporating both quantitative data and qualitative analyses, which allows for a more holistic and fair understanding of situations.

Priorities are established in a decentralized manner and in cooperation with the community, which promotes dialogue and reconciliation between different interests, both sectoral and social, aiming at reducing inequalities and valuing the collective good.

The management of public resources is conducted with efficiency, transparency, and responsibility, honoring the principle that the resources of the "res publica" — or public thing — must serve the common interest.

In this model, citizenship goes beyond the act of voting, engaging in social networks and direct participation, fostering an environment conducive to the implementation of policies aimed at political, social, economic, and cultural transformation. This innovative paradigm marks a decisive progress in the practice of governance, resonating with the ideals of good governance.

The traditional governance model, characterized by a vertical approach, is notably marked by hierarchies and exchanges of favors. This model tends to prioritize individual interests over collective ones. Accountability, in this context, is often limited to quantitative metrics, neglecting the essential qualitative evaluation of implemented policies.

In contrast, the alternative governance model adopts a horizontal approach, based on the principles of democratic management. This methodology fosters inclusion and self-determination, encouraging citizen participation as a means of conferring legitimacy to administrative acts, a vision corroborated by Silva (2004). In this perspective, the evaluation of processes emphasizes the quality of public service as a crucial strategic indicator.

Good governance, therefore, is intrinsically linked to this alternative model, in which the right to active participation of the population is essential for effectiveness in decision-making and achieving the main goal of all public service: excellence in service provision.

In this new institutional scenario, it is vital for public administration to adopt effective monitoring and evaluation strategies for the services offered, ensuring transparency and allowing citizens to follow and assess the performance of managing bodies.

In this context, it is highlighted that the traditional governance model, marked by hierarchies and favoring individual interests, contrasts with the alternative model that emphasizes democratic management, citizen participation, and the quality of public service. Good governance is linked to this latter model, where active participation of the population is essential. In this new scenario, public administration must adopt effective monitoring and evaluation strategies for services, ensuring transparency.

III. CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Citizen participation is fundamentally intertwined with social rights, emerging as an essential pillar in promoting dynamic citizenship. This process is described as a journey of awareness that culminates in collective actions aimed at strengthening citizenship (Rizzini et al., 2005). Arnstein (2002) equates citizen participation with empowerment, suggesting that by recognizing and enhancing an individual's capacity for social and political influence, transforming them into an active citizen, participation reveals itself as a powerful mechanism for the redistribution of power.

This enables the active inclusion of individuals who were previously excluded from political and economic processes. Through this strategy, individuals previously on the margins now engage directly in the selection of information to be disclosed, the formulation of goals and public policies, the distribution of public resources, the execution of programs, and access to benefits, including outsourcing and service provision. Therefore, participation emerges as the channel through which such individuals can catalyze significant social reforms, ensuring their access to the benefits of a more welcoming society (Arnstein, 2002).

However, it is essential to focus on public spheres cautiously, as participation, without a genuine redistribution of power, allows those in power (public managers) to use social actors for their own benefit, thus perpetuating the "status quo" (Arnstein, 2002). Considering the importance of expanding popular participation, it is crucial to establish a variety of channels that promote the inclusion of various society segments in the state's decision-making process (Dahl, 1997). Agenda 21, supported by extensive literature in the field and widely discussed in government documents and academic papers, emerges as a vital instrument in urban policy through a socio-environmental perspective. Its purpose is to promote efficient and effective management, anchored in the foundations of citizen participation and governance, aiming to implement public policies that foster harmonious territorial development.

To ensure that the political structure reaches a genuinely democratic level, it becomes imperative to develop a comprehensive and inclusive political agenda. This agenda must be articulated in a way that creates a solid foundation for citizen engagement in the discussion and deliberation about crucial issues to be addressed to the State, thereby ensuring the democratization of the decision-making procedure. In this sense, it is of vital importance to ensure equal opportunities for expression and choice for all individuals, promoting awareness, both individual and collective, about the relevance of active participation in these decisions. Robert Dahl (1989) emphasizes that it is essential to guarantee each citizen the inalienable right to define the issues to be incorporated into the agenda of problems to be solved through the democratic process.

Various democratic tools, including public hearings, referendums, petitions, popular initiatives, and legislative propositions, constitute legitimate expressions of popular desire and should be widely used. Specifically, municipal administrations must remain receptive to the population's needs, addressing their requests in the most democratic way.

Within this scenario, Rodrigues (1999) emphasizes the crucial role played by municipalities in satisfying local and global demands, especially in interpreting and meeting the needs of civil society, not only welcoming these demands but also encouraging active community participation in decision-making processes.

Jacobi (1999) argues that it is the public power's responsibility "to foster policies that stimulate citizen participation through an interdisciplinary approach, strengthening dialogue," as well as "to understand processes from their social, economic, ecological, spatial, and cultural dimensions."

In Brazil, the right to popular participation is guaranteed by Article 204, clause II, of the Federal Constitution of 1988, which advocates the participation of the community, through representative entities, in the formulation of public policies and in the oversight of actions at all levels of government (Brazil, 1988).

Local popular movements emerge as crucial vehicles for community action, claiming before government bodies — federal, state, and municipal — their fundamental rights to the city, as conceptualized by Lefebvre (1968). These rights include access to decent housing, adequate infrastructure, basic sanitation, quality public spaces, and green areas, among other essential needs.

The inclusion of the population in participatory management spaces and deliberation on policies, resources, and public equipment is an evolutionary process. This process begins with the establishment of a legal framework and a culture of participatory democracy but requires the development of skills and methodologies that make such spaces truly effective in promoting quality of life and democratizing political decisions, as highlighted by Albuquerque (2004).

In this context, it is imperative that public administration, in the realm of urban policy, seek strategies to combat the inequalities and injustices resulting from spatial and territorial organization. Fernandes (2009) points out that social contradictions create heterogeneous spaces and territories, intensifying conflicts, especially in disputes over housing.

The active participation of various social groups is essential to mitigate these inequalities, especially when they manifest against state negligence and claim rights to basic services, according to Ammann (1991).

Therefore, urban movements seek policies that improve collective well-being, questioning the State's performance and promoting debates about social paradigms, (Fernandes, 2008).

However, the main challenge faced is not state indifference but the prevalence of individual interests that can alienate the collective, limiting awareness and political participation, as criticized by Mill (1963, cited by Pateman, 1992). To overcome this barrier, it is crucial to foster critical awareness about the role of the State, combined with education aimed at the common good and development, (IICA, 2003).

The freedom of a nation passes through the decentralization of power, with the interaction between state institutions, parties, unions, churches, foundations, cooperatives, companies, social movements, and NGOs in building a more equitable society, as highlighted by Fernandes (2009). This requires expanding public spaces for civic participation, valuing the contribution of organized civil society in public management.

For Silva (2004), citizenship, understood as a political strategy for democracy, implies the diffusion of a culture of participation. This democratic management, centered on governmental responsibility, the recognition of social rights, and openness to broad participation, as described by Santos Júnior (2001), materializes in practice through the democratization of power and stimulation of public debate, as Jacobi (1999) points out.

Therefore, the consolidation of democratic ideals depends on a political agenda that allows the population to express its aspirations and have its needs met, thus improving its quality of life.

IV. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Governance, introduced by the World Bank, focuses on the efficient management of resources for development, involving government, private sector, and society. It differs from 'government', which is about authority, and 'governability', which deals with the conditions to govern.

The essence of governance lies in its ability to integrate social demands into comprehensive decision-making processes, both in public and private spheres, emphasizing the importance of principles, norms, and participatory mechanisms in the implementation of public policies. This focus, aiming to promote innovative, participative, and sustainable practices under the concept of "good government," seeks not only to prevent predatory behaviors but also to address complex local socio-environmental issues. Thus, governance emerges as a fundamental pillar for dialogue and collaboration between the State, civil society, and other actors, reinforcing its crucial role in building a more inclusive and just society.

Citizen participation is highlighted as a central element in promoting an active and dynamic citizenship, based on individual and collective empowerment for the redistribution of power and inclusion in political and economic processes. This empowerment allows previously marginalized individuals to actively participate in the formulation of policies, the distribution of resources, and the execution of programs, promoting significant social reforms. However, for this participation to be effective and not merely a tool to perpetuate the status quo, a genuine redistribution of power is essential, with the expansion of participatory channels for various society segments.

Therefore, popular movements and participatory management play vital roles in combating social inequalities and promoting a more equitable society. The implementation of inclusive public policies, the fight for fundamental rights such as housing and infrastructure, and the development of a culture of participatory democracy are fundamental for the democratization of the decision-making process. These actions require collaboration between various institutions and the active civic participation of civil society, aiming to build a political agenda that responds to the population's needs and promotes the improvement of quality of life.

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