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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# THE STATE PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING IN RIO GRANDE DO SUL

## Some evidences from the Pampas

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**ABSTRACT:** The article presents the main results of a survey on voting behavior at the State Participatory Budgeting of Rio Grande do Sul (also known as *Consulta popular*). The research is based on a sample of 389 respondents, all residents in San Borja, city in the western border of Rio Grande do Sul (Brazil). The article aims to address participation and vote in Consulta popular, considered its role of social inclusion and promotion of political participation. After a brief descriptive analysis, in order to get a better synthetic overview of the data, we submitted the considered characters to two different multidimensional analyses, in search of possible relations among them. The analyses performed were an exploratory one (a Multiple Correspondence Analysis, MCA) and a Generalized Linear Model by hypothesizing a Binomial distribution for the nominal data.

**KEYWORDS:** Brazil, Participatory budgeting, Political culture, Rio Grande do Sul, Social inclusion

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## 1. Introduction

The amount of studies about the quality of democracy in Latin America has remarkably grown, both in quantity and in quality. Moreover, scholars showed interest mainly in the actual functioning of democratic institutions (Altman and Peres-Liñán 2002; Baquero 2006; Levine and Molina 2007; Barreda 2011; Gugliano 2013). Currently, there are several proposals for approaching the question; a well-known example underlined eight independent facets of the concept of quality of democracy (Diamond and Morlino 2005): the rule of law, participation, competition, vertical accountability, horizontal accountability, freedom, equality, and responsiveness. Other perspectives highlights one aspect over the others; according to Manuel Alcantara (2008) quality relies on the capacity of democracies to promote political participation in public debates and decisions regarding various communities' issues: for example, those related to urban occupation and precarious living conditions, in order to defend the social demands of discriminated groups, against the interests of economically dominant groups as well as promoting social justice.

However, institutions need to evaluate the effectiveness of political inclusion, especially when occurring through consistent process of discussion and deliberation of public policies. Moreover, it should be evaluated whether these political devices strengthen or not the different dimensions. Diamond and Morlino (2005) point out the importance for, at least, a group of minimum indicators. That is why, indicators should be added to or withdrawn from the eight above mentioned dimensions. Anyway, the item participation is generally defined as a procedural dimensions of quality of democracy.

The formal participation, especially in the case of political elections, is an essential element for a political regime to be recognized as a democracy. A democracy should always offer its citizens more options and alternative devices of political inclusion besides the elections. As Diamond and Morlino say:

With regard to participation, democratic quality is high when we in fact observe extensive citizen participation not only through voting but in the life of political parties and civil society organizations in the discussion of public policy issues, in communicating with and demanding accountability from elected representatives, in monitoring official conduct and in direct engagement with public issues at the local level (2005, xvi).

Nowadays, the case of Brazil has become noteworthy due to the importance given to participatory institutions, such as the Social policy councils created by the 1988 Federal Constitution (Souza 2011). Another important aspect of Brazilian case, which stakes it out in the international context of participatory trends, is a tendency to stimulate participatory budgeting experiences. Indeed, this has been achieved through the

organization of social movements and associations that often expand citizens' involvement with debates and deliberation of important public issues, via a bottom-up approach: i.e., policy is not the result of the state – or political party in power – direct influence, but a reflection of civil society (Cortês 2009; Scherer-Warren 2012). Nevertheless, the participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre – i.e. one of the most interesting experiences of direct democracy – was developed under the influence of political initiatives of the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (PT) and several popular movements linked to territorial claims.

Academic literature on deliberative democracy is well-spread in Brazil (Avritzer, 2000; Luchmann, 2002; Rouanet, 2011; Werle and Mello, 2007). Scholars use deliberative democracy theory to explore, among others, the functioning of participatory budgetings, inclusive master plans and councils of management, at the national or local government level. Furthermore, deliberative democratic theory emphasizes the role of social movements, e.g. when encourage the creation of public arenas for debate (Cortês and Gugliano, 2010). According to this perspective, participatory instruments, such as participatory budgeting, represent a manner to affect policy and public administration, driven largely by left-leaning governments, in order to promote more engagement in civil society, and greater general wellbeing.

The participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, the capital of Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul, has its own participatory system of budgeting too. This participatory budgeting is important for several reasons: first, because it represents the only instrument of direct participation in most municipalities of the State, most of which are isolated and far from the state capital. It is the case of São Borja, in the Brazilian Pampas, in the western border of Rio Grande do Sul: a town with about 60,000 inhabitants and an economy totally grounded on farming (rice cultivation, cattle and soy). São Borja stands as an illustrative example of what happens in other cities with similar characteristics in the State.

In 2014 almost four hundred questionnaires were collected in São Borja, in order to study local political culture. Some results are presented in this article. The text is organized as follows: in section two we present principal features of the State participatory budgeting of Rio Grande do Sul and its modifications along the past decades; in section three, the methodology used in this paper to verify inclusiveness of the state participatory budgeting (also known as *Consulta popular*) is described with the database, some descriptive statistic, and a model.

The aim of the research is to test the association between participation at Consulta (voted in 2013) and more traditional forms of participation (e.g. party affiliation) or civic engagement (membership in neighborhood or in other associations). It would rein-

force the hypothesis of the quality of democracy as an integrated system among different instruments of participation. The second hypothesis relates the Consulta's votes to variables such as social class, gender, and race. After all, in order to effectively promote public programs that are socially inclusive for women, colored and low-income workers, an inclusive political participation is needed.

## **2. The State Participatory Budgeting in Rio Grande do Sul**

The State constitution of 1989 introduced some changes in the cycle of the regional development, until then structured according to a top-down model, towards a new more inclusive and participatory one. This was made possible by a set of actions promoted by the regional councils of development, also known as COREDES (Conselhos Regionais de Desenvolvimento). It is, for example, on the base of lists prepared by COREDES that voters of the State participatory budgeting (called *Consulta popular*, since 2011) choose between various options of social investment to be implemented by the State government, in each region (Allebrandt and Siedenberg 2011; Bandeira 2011). The State government determines an amount to be shared among 28 regions of Rio Grande do Sul, according to a set of indicators, such as population and other socio economic indices. In short, it is through the Consulta that citizens – residents in Rio Grande do Sul – choose among different public investment options.

Participatory budgeting became an object of study, because of its configuration as deliberative arrangement, and its innovation introduced in the regionalization policy. But it was especially the number of voters (Table 1) that caught the attention of scholars: after 2011, the voting involved more than one million people (out of a total of more than 11 million residents in Rio Grande do Sul), functioning as a real instrument of political socialization, especially in the more isolated towns, such as those of the Pampas.

### *The State Participatory budgeting's reform*

The State of Rio Grande do Sul became well-known for pioneering the implementation of participatory budgeting in Brazil: e.g, it was in Porto Alegre where the first participatory budgeting was carried out. This proposal spread to several continents. Today, several cities all over the world, with different sizes, implement effective participatory budgeting.

Also, the first attempt to make a participatory budget in Rio Grande do Sul on a larger scale, involving nearly 500 municipalities, took place when Olivio Dutra, the leader of the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT), was elected as State Governor, in 1999. The proposal had low acceptance by the local mayors and ended up perishing with the end of his mandate in January 2003 (Faria 2006). With Tarso Genro's electoral victory in 2011, PT returned to the State Government and there was a great expectation on the resumption of public participation experiences in public management in the region. This was accomplished by implementing the State system of citizen participation (*Sistema Estadual de Participação Popular e Cidadã*), a proposal that was awarded the United Nations Award for Public Service, in 2014. The so-called *gaúcho* participatory system was created in 2012, in order to explore and expand the power of decision to a set of existing participatory institutions in Rio Grande do Sul, aimed at structuring a systemic model of popular participation in public management.

In general, since the system started out, it worked under four dimensions. The first dimension was the "budgetary decisions", responsible for the planning of government policies, as well as for choosing priorities to be executed. The second was the "social control", a ball fed by a number of instances in which organized sectors of society were able to decide not only social policies, but also about subregional's development strategies and priorities. The third, the "social dialogue", aimed at being a direct channel between the main organized sectors of society and government, serving as a social interaction locale for state government action. Finally, the fourth dimension was the digital participation, which sought to enhance the ability of social networks to create virtual spaces where citizens may directly contact the governor and the main leaders of the state government (Estado do Rio Grande Do Sul, n.d.).

According to this framework, the Consulta integrated the whole of the participatory system. Roughly speaking, the Consulta is the result of local and regional meetings approved by the state forum. For this aim, the state was divided into 28 planning regions and the regional forum was given responsibility for the organization of the voting of Consulta, generally supported by the local administration (Hohlfeldt 2003). Since then, twenty-eight meetings in different regions of the state took place, in which in-depth discussions on the priorities for investment were carried out and the proposals to be submitted to population were discussed for vote. Besides that, representatives from the region to compose the Regional Forum were elected. This Forum was the main body of organization of the Consulta all along Tarso Genro's mandate. Last, the forum decided upon several demand options. These demands would be voted at a later time directly by the local residents, through either electronically or printed ballot paper. The

chosen demands would be implemented along the following year by the state government.

As we will see below (Table 1), there was a significant number of participants in Consulta in the referred period of 2009-2014, covering almost seven percent of the state's voters. In terms of investments, the last year of the Tarso's administration, the budget was about R\$200 millions.

In the first year of the new governor José Ivo Sartori (PMDB) there was a significant reduction in the number of voters in Consulta (about 560,000 participants in total), as well as in the total amount of assigned investments to be decided by Consulta (in 2015, about R\$ 60 million). The system of municipal and regional assemblies, including the regional forum, were, in fact, dismantled, even if the vote of Consulta still remains an instrument of political participation.

### *Social Capital in the Pampas*

Bandeira (2003) differentiates between the colonial North and the South of Rio Grande do Sul on the basis of different possession of social capital (Putnam 1993; Cartocci 2007): on one side, the cultural matrix of the "colonial North" – region of European immigrants, especially Germans and Italians – with a predominance of scarce small land holders; on the other, the regions of the "South" (and thus the Pampas), characterized by a different cultural matrix, with the predominance of large estates and the extensive use of slave labor.<sup>1</sup> Unlike the South, the settler communities of the north of the state had a rich associational life (recreational and cultural associations, social, music and art clubs) framework of the regional social capital. While in northern Rio Grande do Sul, roads maintenance or building a chapel, for example, were in the realm of local community initiatives and responsibilities, in the South, landowners built the chapels, maintained by their wives; farmers were invited to baptisms and weddings, but did not contribute to the construction and maintenance of the chapel (De Boni and Costa 1979; Santos et alii 2010).

It is also for these reasons that Consulta has become more important in the southern regions of Rio Grande do Sul, when compared to the metropolitan area of Porto Alegre. In the interior regions of Rio Grande do Sul, the results of participation and vote in Consulta are the most satisfactory. In São Borja, for example, in 2011, the voters resulted more than 17 thousand: nearly 30% of the residents.

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1. For the development of a theory of political culture in Rio Grande do Sul, especially when compared to other Brazilian states, see De Cew (1977). Furthermore, about the long-time crisis of democratic values in Rio Grande do Sul, see Baquero (1984; 1994).

Although in the interior of the state the percentage of participation remains higher than in the whole metropolitan area, since 2013 in São Borja a significant reduction of the voters resulted (Table 1).

**Table 1 – Consulta popular in Rio Grande do Sul and São Borja; traditional and electronic voting**

Year	<i>São Borja</i>			<i>Rio Grande do Sul</i>		
	Voters (traditional)	Voters (electronic voting)	Total (São Borja)	Voters (traditional)	Voters (electronic voting)	Total (Rio Grande do Sul)
2009	8.337	262	8.599	813.700	136.377	950.077
2010	14.744	176	14.920	1.039.471	177.596	1.217.067
2011	17.412	321	17.733	998.145	135.996	1.134.141
2012	14.707	241	14.948	907.146	121.551	1.028.697
2013	6.640	383	7.023	967.610	157.549	1.125.159
2014	6.759	422	7.181	1.059.842	255.751	1.315.593

Thus, it is important to note that, in São Borja, while the tendency to join an association is generally low, as it is the trust on local and federal policies institutions, according to Carbonai and Mattos (2015), participation in Consulta shows a better performance. Our data suggest a similar conclusion: on the one hand, over half of respondents would vote even if voting was not compulsory, only 10% of respondents were involved in partisan political life, only 11.4% participated to union meetings and only 12.7% to neighborhood association meetings, but, on the other hand, almost 20% attended meetings of state participatory budgeting.

### 3. Methodology and data-set

The aim of this research is to ascertain possible associations between participation in Consulta (2013 voting) and more traditional forms of political participation (party affiliation) and of civil activity (participation in communal or neighborhood associations or other kind of association). The exploratory analysis and the model include also other base variables: 1. Gender (two characters, in order to test the participation of women in voting); race (based on IBGE classificatory system that differentiates whites, and colored or non-whites); 3. educational level, organized in three homogeneous groups: the first includes the illiterate and the those who attended only basic education; the second group includes those who attended secondary education; and the last group com-

prehends those who have higher education and other categories; 4. Social class, organized in two categories (white collar and blue collar workers), according to Quadros classificatory system (2010). The analysis tests the association of such variables with the participation to Consulta, considering the two main hypotheses of this research. The first one refers to the relation between participation to Consulta and other forms of political or civic commitment (i.e. Consulta is not an isolated instrument, but integrated with others forms of political participation). The second one refers to the relation between participation to Consulta and such variables as social class, gender and racial or ethnic belonging; therefore, the research intends to test Consulta's inclusiveness, that is, whether it crosses genders, social classes and ethnic belongings. After all, in order to effectively promote social policies that are really inclusive of women, colored people and low income workers, participation should be socially inclusive trespassing different social groups.

#### *Voting statistics*

The sample is composed of 389 interviewees, 50,4% men and 49,6% women; all of them at least 16 years old. According to the last census data, 13,36% of the interviewees reside in central region of the city of São Borja and the rest of them in more peripheral districts; all of them, in fact, live within the urban area (the sample does not include the non-urban areas). The blocks within each district where the interviews were carried out were raffled, and the survey's subjects responded to a questionnaire in the presence of an interviewer; this part of the survey was carried out during the last few months of 2013 and the beginning of 2014. 42,9% of the interviewees (163 persons) declared that they had voted in the previous Consulta, while 57,1% (271 persons) had not. Nine persons did not answer the questionnaire. On this basis, it is possible that the values found in the sample overestimate the actual number of participants, for two main reasons; most probably, the residents of urban areas, compared to those of the non-urban regions (who were not interviewed), have better access and contact with associations and with the local political community, therefore they are more likely to participate to the vote. Besides that, considering that Consulta is carried out every year, it is also possible that those who did not vote in 2013 *Consulta* but did vote in the previous ones might have mistakenly declared he/she did.

As can be inferred from table 2, there are significant associations between vote in Consulta and participation in partisan politics and in communal associations (see the significant values of the chi-square test in this case, while it is non-significant in the case of other forms of social participation). The social capital represented by the partic-

icipation in neighborhood or communal activities, like that of the partisan participation, favor the participation to Consulta. In this case, 21,6% of the voters were affiliated to a political party, while only 6,5% of those who did not vote were. As for the relation between participation to communal or neighborhood associations and participation to Consulta, 20,3% of the voters belonged to one of such associations while only 7,4% of non-voters did. Considered the cross tabulations, the chances of voting Consulta of a person participating to a neighborhood association is 3,17 bigger than that of a person who does not (that is, such person had more voting chances). A person who is affiliated to a political party is likely to vote in Consultation four times more than one who is not (the ratio being 3,96).

**Table 2 – Cross tabulation of the Vote (Political party, Neighborhood associations, and Others)**

		Voters		No voters		Total		Chi-square
		n	%	n	%	n	%	
Political party	No	127	78,40%	200	93,46%	227	86,97%	18,46
	Yes	35	**21,60%	14	*6,54%	49	13,03%	
	total	162	100%	214	100%	276	100%	
Neighborhood association	No	129	79,62%	199	92,55%	328	87,00%	13,66
	Yes	33	**20,37%	16	*7,44%	49	13,00%	
	total	162	100%	215	100%	377	100%	
Others associations	No	116	71,60%	166	77,21%	282	74,80%	1,54
	Yes	46	28,40%	49	22,79%	95	25,20%	
	total	162	100%	215	100%	377	100%	

Source: Data collection (2013-2014); \*Standard Residual>2 (positive association between categories); \*\*Standard Residual<-2 (negative association between the categories)

Other base variables are introduced in the section that follows: gender, educational level, (three categories), occupation, and ethnicity (table 3). The chi-square test of cross tabulation of both gender and ethnicity with participation to Consulta resulted non-significant: participation in Consulta is independent of gender and ethnic groups. However, significant values were found in association with educational level ( $\chi^2_b = 18,07$ ) and social class ( $\chi^2_c = 13,31$ ). In the former case, 75% of illiterates decided not to vote, while 47% of the interviewees with higher education did. As for social class, 58,2% of white collar workers voted, while only 36,11% of blue collar did. In the following, multidimensional methods are introduced, to explore the effects of the interactions among the different items.

**Table 3 – Cross tabulation of the Vote (Gender, Educational attainment, Occupation, and Ethnic groups)**

		Gender (a)		Educational attainment (b)			Occupation (c)		Ethnic groups (d)	
		men	women	Illiterate	secondary	high	white collars	blue collars	colored	White
No voters	n	103	114	89	69	34	53	92	60	141
	%	56,59%	57,57%	75,42%	54,76%	47,22%	41,73%	63,88%	54,54%	56,40%
	St. res.	-0,09	0,08	*2,04	-0,86	-1,47	-1,81	1,70	-0,18	0,11
Voters	N	79	84	29	57	38	74	52	50	109
	%	43,40%	42,42%	24,57%	45,23%	52,77%	58,26%	36,11%	45,45%	43,60%
	St. res.	0,10	-0,10	** -2,54	1,07	1,83	1,94	-1,82	0,20	-0,13
Total		182	198	118	126	72	127	144	110	250
		100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Data collection (2013-2014); \*Standard Residual>2 (positive association between categories); \*\*Standard Residual<-2 (negative association between the categories).

Significant values of chi-square test:  $\chi_b^2 = 18,07$ ;  $\chi_c^2 = 13,31$

Non significant values of chi-square test:  $\chi_a^2 = 0,03$ ;  $\chi_d^2 = 0,10$

### *Multidimensional methods*

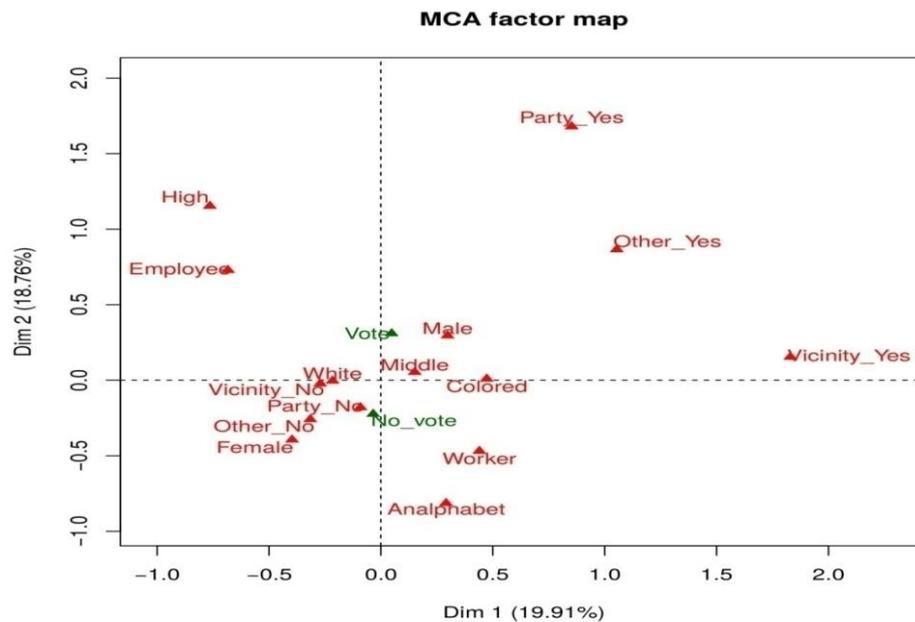
To get a better synthetic overview of the data, we submitted the seven considered characters to two different multidimensional analyses, to explore possible relations among them. The analyses performed were an exploratory by Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA; Benzécri 1973; Greenacre 2007) and a Generalized Linear Model (GLM; McCullagh and Nelder 1989) by hypothesizing a Binomial distribution for the nominal data. MCA is a technique that aims at visualizing at the best the relations among levels of nominal characters, such as the responses to questions of a survey. It is based on a distance computed between both individuals and all levels of all characters on two respective representation space, so that the closer the items the more similar they are and the further the most dissimilar. The planes are sought in order to maximize the represented distance in a reduced dimensional space. A GLM is a method that tries to estimate the parameters of a linear function able to predict either values or levels of a response character according to both values and levels of explanatory ones. Whereas MCA is merely exploratory, that is it shows possible relations between characters, a GLM that fits well the data may be used to estimate both the intensity of the relations and the way the explanatory characters influence the response one. The Binomial distribution is hypothesized to allow statistical tests on the obtained results.

The computations have been performed through the R environment (R-Core Team 2015), by using both FactoMineR (Lê et al. 2008) package and gls R function.

To prevent problems in the model identification, we withdraw the units with missing data: thus, the 389 interviewed sample was reduced to only 217. We submitted this reduced sample to MCA, considering active all characters, but the alternative Vote/No-vote, that was projected on the factors according to its level on the units.

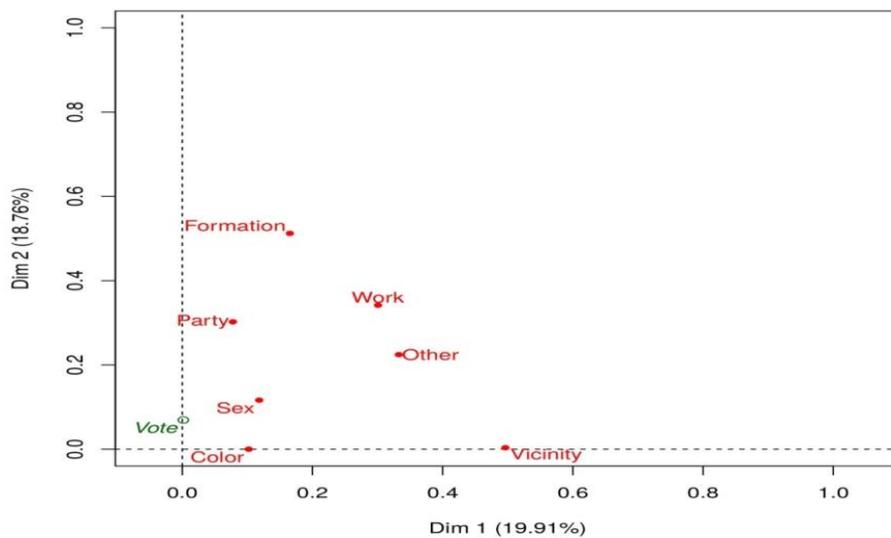
Only the first two factors of MCA have been taken into account, because the others appeared too small to be considered. In Figure 1 the characters are represented according to their correlation ratio with the first two factors and its significance was also tested. Thus, *Vote* results in a not very far position from the origin (corresponding to the independence) along the second factor only: its quality of representation on this axis is limited to 6.9%, though statistically significant. This allowed us to admit the existence of a significant relation with the other characters that are also significantly correlated with this factor; namely: *Employment*, *Education*, *Gender*, *Party*, and *Other* (i.e. Other association), whereas both *Color* and *Vicinity* (to be involved in a membership in neighborhood associations) could be dropped because significantly correlated with the first factor only.

Fig. 1 - Multiple correspondence analysis plot for dimensions 1 and 2 (categories)



In Figure 2 all characters' levels are represented on the first factor plane. It is evident the pattern of variation of the levels of *Race* and *Vicinity* along the first factor only, and that of the *Others* along the second factor. We may interpret the pattern on this plane by saying that the main factor distinguishes the interviewed that participate to *Vicinity* and *Other* groups from the others, in opposition to *Employees*, meaning that the latter preferably do not participate, whereas *Workers* and *Colored* people are preferably among them. Indeed, these aspects do not seem relevant for our purposes, whereas mayor interest is the position of the levels along the second factor. Here, we find *Party* participants, *High* educated, *Employees*, and *Males* on the side of the *Voters*, opposed to *No participants*, *Illiterate*, *Workers*, and *Women* on the side of the *No voters*.

Figure 2 - Multiple correspondence analysis plot for dimensions 1 and 2 (variables)



A GLM was thus estimated considering the simple effects of all characters with two procedures: *forward*, that creates progressively the model by including step by step characters, provided that the resulting quality of the model significantly improves; and *backward*, that tells apart from the complete model characters, should their withdrawal do not significantly reduce the model quality. To test the quality of the models, the Akaike's coefficient was considered, a statistics that evaluates the model residual in connection with the number of explanatory characters. In the forward method *Formation*, *Vicinity*, and *Work* resulted significant; their interactions were tested, but no

improvement resulted. Thus both *medium* and *high formation* and *participation* to vicinity groups favor the interviewed to *Vote*, whereas being *worker*, instead of *employee*, disfavors it. Considering the interest to cope with the results of MCA, we modeled also *Vote* according to *Party*, *Formation*, *Work*, and *Gender* only. Both backward and forward procedures limited significance to *Formation* and *Party*, resulting in a less relevant model. In this case, both *medium* and *high formation* and *belonging to party* favored the *Voting*.

The two considered models are the following:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Vote} &= -1.2162 + 1.4094 * \text{FormationHigh} + 1.5112 * \text{FormationMiddle} + 1.6959 * \text{Vicinity\_Yes} - 0.6259 * \text{Worker} \\ \text{Vote} &= -1.3170 + 1.2973 * \text{FormationHigh} + 1.2895 * \text{FormationMiddle} + 0.9227 * \text{Party\_Yes} \end{aligned}$$

The residual deviances of the models are 261.0 and 272.6, respectively. It must be observed that both *Formation* and *Vicinity* coefficients are highly significant, whereas *Employment* and *Party* coefficients significance is slightly over the usual 5% threshold value (6 and 6.7%, respectively). The chi-square test issued by the ANOVA comparing the two models has a *p*-value smaller than 0.0007. Thus the first model is significantly better than the second one.

Some comments about the results may be summarized as follows: according to the size of the coefficients (first factor), the *Voting* is essentially due to the *Formation* of the interviewed, probably because the other characters correlated with the second factor are largely represented by this one, in particular in what concerns the influence on *Voting*. On the opposite, some relation between *Voting* and *Vicinity* may be detected, very weakly related to the second MCA factor, clearly independent from *Formation*. This relation is captured effectively by the modeling but not by MCA. In fact, considering also *Vicinity*, the ratio between total deviance and the explained one is about 12%, whereas in the other model it is limited to 7%.

These figures may be compared to the ratio of the model including all simple effects (12.5%), but without a statistical difference, and the quality of representation of *Voting* on the complete MCA solution, which does not exceed 15%. Albeit the first model approaches the optimum possible considering only simple effects, and that interactions did not result significant by the method, one should expect that other factors, not taken into account here, might influence the choice whether to vote or not.

#### 4. Conclusions

First of all, descriptive statistics show a better performance of Consulta with respect to other forms of political participation; secondly, crosstabulation analysis tests the Consulta's feature to overcome class and groups barriers (as showed by chi-square test of associations); thirdly, the multiple correspondence analysis significantly improves the comprehension of the collected data; however, one should expect that other factors, not taken into account here, might influence the choice whether to vote or not.

It is also important to note that the model explains only a residual part of the variance. In other words, which explains the participation has yet to be discovered. Other factors linked to the relational context of respondents, the primary socialization, or perhaps, the institutional context may explain the participation; after all, the State of Rio Grande do Sul – its political agenda and apparatus – may encourage or not the Consulta, and the whole participatory budgeting system.

Generally speaking, participatory budgeting can not be reduced to the act of voting, or choosing between alternative options for public investment; activating social networks, symbolic and cultural capital, political participation, participatory budgeting enables a more inclusive debate with purpose beyond the vote itself, i.e. a "school of democracy" in the sense of Cohen and Rogers (1992). For example, as suggested by Faria (2006) in the government of Olívio Dutra (PT), the introduction of public assemblies enabled the government to expand its social base: after discussing and voting on the Government's proposals, proposed and sustained by the participants, they legitimized the policy implementation. The assemblies in the government of Olívio Dutra served thus to politicize certain programs that would hardly be put in practice should not they get this popular support.

Because of the direct participation, Consulta balances the decision-making process in favor of the policy taker; in the case of reduction of total public investment expenditure, when Consulta is debated and discussed, participants legitimate policy implementation: they chose, they voted. It indirectly validates a less public intervention in terms of available resources because of procedural democracy.

There is also an informal network and a social capital activated by Consulta. First of all, at the moment, Consulta is entirely voluntarily organized by the members of Coredes (the so-called "*coredianos*"), generally supported by the local government. For this reason the *Consulta* begins in the local Comudes (i.e. the *Conselhos Municipais de Desenvolvimento*) including other actors along the process; it generates a rich set of activities in terms of regional and municipal meetings, assemblies, until the voting.

Although an exact number of these meetings is impossible, it is important to note that in 2012, for example, there were 542 municipal assemblies in 494 municipalities)

while it is not possible to calculate meetings of neighborhood association. The debate around the selection of investments is public, but also the local party organizations, such as trade unions or other associations, debate, internally, while participating the same to the municipal assemblies. It is a very complex and fragile decision-making process, necessary for public investment by the state government.

In 2015, for example, the total vote was reduced to R\$ 565,558 (443,761 ballots and 121,797 on the Internet) whereas Coredes had only two weeks to organize municipal and regional assemblies – which are usually conducted over two months –, and without public funds for advertising in support of Consulta.

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