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The Meanings of Representation and Political Inclusion in the Conferences of Public Policies in Brazil[*]

Carla Giani Martelli[**]
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1839-2140
[**]Universidade Estadual Paulista, Araraquara, São Paulo, Brazil

Carla Almeida[***]
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5555-739X
[***]Universidade Estadual de Maringá, Maringá, Paraná, Brazil

Lígia Lüchmann[§]
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2622-2106
[§]Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Florianópolis, Santa Catarina, Brazil

Participatory Budgets, Public Policy Conferences and Public Policy Management Councils, among other participatory institutions in Brazil, are altering the configuration of processes that define and elaborate public policies, while incorporating citizens and civil associations into political spaces where different mechanisms of participation and representation converge. These new institutions call for reflections concerning political inclusion and representation that go beyond electoral models. We propose to contribute to these debates by discussing the perceptions of some actors, in particular the leaders of civil society organizations, with regard to conferences' capacity for inclusion, and the meanings that they attribute to representation through conferences. The research findings allow us to identify a broadening of the idea of political inclusion and to highlight some of the tensions raised by demands for representation as presence in conference spaces.

Keywords: Political Representation; Political Inclusion; Participatory Institutions; Conferences.

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The contemporary debate on participation has challenged existing approaches to the relationship between participation and representation within participatory institutions and experiences. In the Brazilian case, in recent decades we have seen the creation of diverse participatory spaces, some of which have achieved international prominence, such as Participatory Budgeting (PB). In addition to PB, Public Policy Management Councils and Public Policy Conferences, among other participatory formats, have fleshed out the concept of Participatory Institutions (PIs), referring to a set of institutional programs and practices that involve citizens and different sectors of government in processes of discussing, implementing and monitoring public policies (AVRITZER, 2008; PIRES and VAZ, 2014).

Public Policy Conferences[1] are broad participatory meetings that bring together diverse social and governmental sectors to discuss and present proposals and guidelines in their respective policy areas. These meetings are enshrined in law and/or by regulations that determine rules like who may take part, how often they should take place and what powers they are vested with. Although there are specificities in each policy area, conferences are usually convened by the executive branch with the participation of more organized social sectors and of the Managing Councils. The conferences take place in a staggered way, starting at the municipal level and feeding upwards, through representative delegates, to the state and national levels. Although they do not have deliberative competencies, the conferences constitute very important spaces for the formation of agendas of issues and demands to be incorporated by governmental institutions. They are, therefore, "effective mechanisms for channeling social demands and assessing the situation of public services, especially at the municipal level" (CORTES, 2011, p. 140).

Like other PIs, they are structured as new modalities of political representation, constituted in events which are innovative with regard to the relationship between participation and representation. This is because, at the municipal level, they are open to different social sectors and, therefore, respect the basic principle of participation. From this stage onwards, the principle of representation prevails, since those who will participate in subsequent stages – at state and national levels – are chosen at the previous stages. In this sense, and in spite of the differences and specificities of each area that promotes the conference process, conferences in Brazil have contributed to both promoting inclusion and to a process of 'pluralization of representation'. The latter involves the multiplication of programs and instances of civil society participation in the processes of defining and overseeing public priorities that broaden and diversify the sites and actors performing functions of political representation (ALMEIDA, 2012; GURZA LAVALLE; HOUTZAGER, and

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[1]Between 1941 and 2016, 154 conferences were held in more than 40 policy areas. Of these conferences, 34 occurred before 2002. A further 72 took place during the Lula Inácio da Silva governments (2003-2010). In their diverse stages, these processes involved more than seven million people across the country, whether physically present or participating virtually. An additional 41 conferences were organized during the first government of Dilma Rousseff, between 2011 and 2016 (SECRETARIA DE GOVERNO, 2018).

CASTELLO, 2006a; LÜCHMANN, 2007, 2008). This debate fits with the international literature in recognizing that increasing complexity and social plurality challenge the monopoly of electoral-based political representation and demands reflection about the democratic legitimacy of these new arrangements (SAWARD, 2009; URBINATI and WARREN, 2008).

In the literature on such participatory arrangements, some studies have problematized approaches that view participation as the sole expression of inclusion (GURZA LAVALLE, 2011), highlighting the importance of analyzing this dimension via (non-electoral or extra-parliamentary) representation. In this sense, representation also appears as a synonym of inclusion, since 'being represented' is to be, somehow, 'politically included' (PLOTKE, 1997).

We intend to contribute here to this debate, focusing on how the actors who participate in conferences, in particular civil society leaders, perceive the capacity of the conferences to promote inclusion, and the meanings they attribute to representation within conferences. We can point to at least two benefits of adopting this approach. First, exploring the meanings attached to political inclusion and representation by those who participate in conferences can bring new insights to current theoretical debates about PIs. Among studies that discuss the question of representation in conferences[2], especially those that analyze representation from an institutional perspective, for example through the rules surrounding the selection of representatives (ALMEIDA, 2012; FARIA and LINS, 2017), there has been little discussion of the meanings (of inclusion and representation) conferred on these processes by civil society leaders. Second, considering that all action is invested with symbolic constructions and communicates meanings (ALVAREZ, DAGNINO and ESCOBAR, 2000), understanding the meanings attributed to political representation by participants is a key aspect of understanding important facets of the representative process itself. In other words, even if the analysis of the 'native' categories of representation and inclusion present in the lectures does not tell us everything about the actual practice of representation, it at least allows to understand one of its fundamental constitutive dimensions. This is particularly true for PIs, which are less subject to fixed rules than traditional representative institutions.

In addressing the practical questions surrounding representation, and taking into account the meanings this notion holds for the actors participating in conferences, this work draws on the ideas developed by Gurza Lavalle and Szwako (2015) with regard to the category of "autonomy" (GURZA LAVALLE and SZWAKO, 2015, p. 176)[3]. Following the approach of these authors, analysis presupposes that the meanings of representation are inscribed in contexts, disputes and relationships, and are therefore invoked by individuals

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[2]On the impacts of national conferences on parliamentary representation, see Pogrebinschi and Santos (2011). On democratic legitimacy in national conferences, see Almeida (2013). The work of Teixeira et al. (2012) addresses the theme of representation based on analysis of documents (laws e statutes) of national conferences and councils. A systematic analysis can be found in Faria et al. (2012).

[3]In the work cited, the authors propose that autonomy should be analyzed as a practical category.

inserted in collectivities (groups, associations, movements, communities) and in relation to other civil actors, political or economic. That is to say, the analysis must consider that the practical meanings are not definitive and stable, insofar as they vary 'depending on the actor alluded to, the issues or conflicts at play and even the presence or not of third parties'.

Building upon such insights, our study had an exploratory approach. We did not start with a predictive hypothesis and instead try to gauge to what extent identifying the meaning attributed to the representation and inclusion by conference participants brings new elements to the field of studies on the representation within PIs. Our research findings have brought to light at least two elements that contribute to the current rich discussions on participation, representation and inclusion in PIs. On the one hand, they allowed for a broadening of the idea of political inclusion beyond its more common use, that is, the inclusion of groups that are "systematically absent from representative political spheres" (ALMEIDA, 2012, p. 12). On the other hand, they made it possible to identify some of the tensions surrounding the demand for 'representation as presence' (PHILLIPS, 2011), that is, a greater presence in politics of groups that are underrepresented in the institutional political sphere, such as women, afro-Brazilians, workers etc. Thus, by identifying the meanings attributed to representation and political inclusion by the actors present at public conferences, we were able to understand how the actors themselves define the legitimacy of representation exercised at conferences and how that definition relates to their judgment of 'whom' and 'what', should be included and excluded from these spaces.

Besides this introduction, the article is structured in three parts. In the first, we present the procedures, the sources and the scope of the empirical research on which our analysis is based. In the second part, we give an overview of studies within the field of PIs that seeks to build concepts, bases of legitimacy for representation, and also, inspired by their empirical findings, elements of the theories inscribed in the field of representative democracy that have looked at demands from underrepresented groups for a 'politics of presence'. In the last section, we present and offer analysis of our empirical material.

Methodological note

The analysis we will present is based on data drawn from two studies. The first involved 407 questionnaires conducted during seven municipal conferences in different policy areas (Social Assistance, Culture, Education, Racial Equality, Cities, Sport, and Environment), all held in the municipality of Piracicaba, São Paulo during the year 2013. The questionnaires allowed us to identify the socioeconomic profile of the participants of each conference. What follows is a brief summary of the findings[4]. With regard to the gender variable, there was a certain balance in the presence of men and women in the conferences on Racial Equality, Environment and Culture conferences (population data for the munic-

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[4]The complete results of the research can be found in Martelli, 2015 and Martelli and Romão, 2016.

ipality of Piracicaba also show gender balance, with 51% of the population female and 49% male (IBGE, 2010). However, in the Social Welfare and Education conferences there is a massive predominance of women (96% and 92% respectively), while there is a greater presence of men in the conferences on Sport (63%) and Cities (58%). With regards to age, with the exception of the conference on the Environment, which had the greatest presence of young people (45.6% between 15 and 27 years), the most representative group in the conferences was the 41 to 53 age group, followed by those between 28 and 40 years old. In Piracicaba municipality, 54% of the population falls within the age range 30 to 59, while 28% of the population is aged between 18 and 29, 9% between 60 and 69, and 8% aged over 70. This means that on the age variable, there is no underrepresentation in the conferences when compared to the population of the municipality as a whole. On the variable race/color, data showed that the participation of whites is higher than that of blacks and browns (the categories used by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, IBGE), except for the area of Racial Equality, in which 62% of participants were black. Black and brown people account for 6% and 21% of the population respectively, while whites account for 72%. With regard to educational profile, it is worth mentioning the high level of education of conference participants. Those who had completed a university degree were a majority, for example in the conferences on Social Assistance (76%), Sport (63%) and Education (57%). Indeed, there were high proportions with post-graduate education in the conferences on Education (26%), Culture (19%) and Cities (17%). The Conference on Racial Equality had the highest number of participants without a full secondary education (12%). In the population of Piracicaba, 14% have completed higher education (while 36% have incomplete elementary education, 19% incomplete secondary education, and 31% incomplete higher education). Clearly then, there is underrepresentation of the population with less schooling. With regard to income, it is observed that the population earning less than R$ 1,000.00 (that is, more or less the value of a minimum wage) is not represented in any of the conferences. In the population of the municipality, 37% earn between ¼ and 01 minimum wage, while 32% earn between 01 and 02 minimum wages. On this variable, there is underrepresentation of lower-income groups.

The findings of this research echoed those of previous studies, showing that whereas possible changes in outcomes depend on the policy area in question as well as factors of institutional design and scale, conferences have had little success in expanding inclusion of individuals and minority social groups traditionally excluded from the spheres of institutional politics, or who receive weak or no attention in the standard model of electoral representation, such as women, blacks, and those who are illiterate, have low education and/or have low incomes (AVRITZER, 2012, FARIA and LINS, 2017) .

To better investigate the potential for conferences to promote inclusion, we conducted six in-depth interviews with conference participants who had leadership profiles and long histories of political participation and associative activity in the municipality.

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These leaders had participated in several municipal conferences (across various policy areas), in some cases as representatives of Management Councils, and often became delegates at state and/or national level. The main objective of the interviews was to explore the leaders' perceptions of how effective the conferences were at achieving inclusion – whether through direct participation or through the representation of particular groups – for those who have traditionally been excluded from institutional policy spheres and/or who are represented weakly or not at all within the standard model of electoral representation.

In order to broaden the empirical field, we carried out a second survey with 35 participants, also with leadership profiles and intense histories of political participation and associative activity, in municipal conferences held in 2015 in the cities of Maringá, Paraná and Florianópolis, Santa Catarina in the following areas: Policies for Women, Policies for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) and Racial Equality. Questionnaires were conducted containing open questions about whom should attend the conferences, with what objectives, and representing whom and what[5]. In addition, the questions asked the participants 'whom', in their view, are included and excluded from the conferences.

The samples collected were not random – our focus was on participants with a profile of political leadership – nor did we intend them to be representative, since it was an exploratory, preliminary study. The idea is rather to shed light and produce new understandings about the degree of representation and political inclusion that exists within conference spaces, opening up the possibility for future research with broader and more accurate sampling.

Political inclusion and representation in contemporary theoretical debate

The multiplication of actors and spaces established in the name of political representation and the emergence of demands for political inclusion from underrepresented groups, have resulted in institutional innovations that have shaken up some of the fundamental principles underpinning the traditional model of representative government. For this reason, these phenomena have also stimulated extensive conceptual and theoretical debate about the relationship between political representation and democracy.

We see two important trends in this theoretical debate. On the one hand, there is increasing recognition of the importance of representation in studies focused on participation, and in particular on PIs. On the other hand, the demand for inclusion in studies on electoral representation, which raise questions about the legitimacy of political systems

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[5]The municipalities included in this study were selected on the basis that they were the headquarters of the project Programa de Cooperação Acadêmica da Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (Capes) (Programme of Academic Cooperation for the Coordenation of Development of Individuals in Higher Education), in which we participate.

that reproduce the political exclusion of particular social groups, for example those with a small number of women in parliament. We present here the more general background to these two trends so as to highlight the important interconnection between them, in the sense that in both a concern with political inclusion provides the framing for discussing the legitimacy of representation.

Regarding the process of the pluralization of representation, new arguments have been developed in order to recognize the democratic importance of different forms, actors and practices of representation in contemporary societies. In particular, they highlight processes that point to shortcomings in the model of electoral political representation in fulfilling the democratic requirement of political inclusion. Whether to critique the structural limits of the electoral representation model; or to diagnose a supposed crisis of the representative system, attributed to a combination of factors such as political-institutional distrust, political apathy and electoral abstention; or even to recognize increasing complexity and social plurality, what is clear is that the monopoly of the suffragist model of political representation is being challenged, along different analytical lines, in the face of a pluralization of spaces and actors who claim (SAWARD, 2009) to have representative legitimacy vis-à-vis society and traditional political institutions (governments and parliaments).

This multiplicity of representative demands and practices, which in many cases transcends the territorial boundaries of national states, have given rise to different interpretations of their possible contributions to democracy (URBINATI and WARREN, 2008). Thus, a set of arguments that seek to recognize the legitimacy of these representative practices can be found in the more recent literature, especially directed to more informal representational practices pursued by different social actors (DRYZEK and NIEMEYER, 2008; CASTIGLIONE and WARREN, 2006; GURZA LAVALLE and ISUNZA VERA, 2010; REHFELD, 2006; SAWARD, 2009).

Nationally, this debate has made an important contribution to the field of PIs, in particular by highlighting the extent to which these institutions have operationalized inclusion within the register of representation (ALMEIDA, 2010; GURZA LAVALLE, 2011; LÜCHMANN, 2011). Following this line of analysis, it is important to assess to what extent these new institutional modalities incorporate democratic principles of representation in close articulation with the dimension of inclusion, as these forms of political representation are based on institutional and legal aspects that normalize a type of representation aimed at formulating and/or overseeing public policies that affect broader social sectors.

According to some authors (CASTIGLIONI and WARREN, 2006; GURZA LAVALLE and ISUNZA VERA, 2010; REHFELD, 2006), if democratic political representation implies making present those who are absent, acting responsively in the interests of the represented (PITKIN, 1972), it is necessary to think of forms or mechanisms that are equivalent in some way to the mechanisms of authorization and accountability within the model of

electoral representation, that can perform the democratic function within PIs.

In the Brazilian literature, there has been an important shift away from the premise of authorization and towards a requirement that representation be 'accountable'. Gurza Lavalle, Houtzager and Castello (2006a) refer to 'presumptive'[6] or 'virtual representation' of alternative representation practices that do not necessarily involve authorization mechanisms, with special emphasis on those performed by civil society organizations. When separated from an initial act of authorization, accountability is sustained through relationships or connections with those represented, opening up the possibility of thinking about legitimacy in terms of the processes through which civil organizations internalize, define and adapt the priorities and purposes of their representation. The dissociation between representation and authorization is also found in the work of Avritzer (2007), who emphasizes that in cases of representation of civil society in institutional spaces, it is not the authorization, but affinity or identification with themes and life circumstances which give these actors legitimacy for a playing a representative role, guaranteed by the "simultaneous linking of social actors, themes and the forums capable of bringing them together" (AVRITZER, 2007, p. 445).

However, others have contested such arguments and assumptions about new forms of representation, in particular regarding what term should be used to describe them and where their bases of legitimacy lie. Thus, if there is general consensus about the limits of electoral democracy in fulfilling the ideal of political inclusion, we should note that the new practices mentioned above are not always seen as advancements or improvements to the widely recognized problems that are typical of traditional institutions.

For Miguel (2011), for example, practices named as representation - and without authorization - remove the possibility of 'constituents' to autonomously building their interests and preferences, leaving them dependent on the good intentions of those who call themselves representatives. This becomes more problematic if we consider that representatives and represented are not equal in terms of their access to resources and information.

For others, accepting the significance and potential of new forms of representation that do not fit within the procedures of the traditional electoral system does not mean accepting the legitimacy of practices that suspend the requirement of authorization (ALMEIDA, 2015). This applies in particular to PIs like management councils, in which the actors present have the power to decide on the use of public resources and a range of issues. If the right to sit in these decision-making bodies occurs without any form of authorization, their institutional design should be adjusted to ensure proper control of the representatives by the represented. A practice of 'representation' would need to meet this

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[6]"The public presumption of representing someone is not equivalent to effective representation, even if empirically supported by the performing of activities that, in principle, presuppose the exercise of some form of political representation. However, commitment to the interests of the represented is a vital component of representation, irreducible to institutional mechanisms" (GURZA LAVALLE, HOUTZAGER and CASTELLO, 2006a, p. 89).

minimum requirement and to differentiate itself from practices that can be grouped un-
der the concept of 'participation', and which relate to actions that, a priori, are legitimate
because done in their own name and thus do not require justification.

Beyond the questions of accountability and authorization, another central issue
within the debate on PIs concerns the profile of representatives and links directly to dis-
cussions about the idea of political representation as presence, in intrinsic relationship
with the question of inclusion. Here we turn to discussions that, in conversation with the
field of electoral representation and focused on the notion of a system that guarantees 'fair
representation', are concerned with inclusion of underrepresented groups within institu-
tional politics.

The expressions "politics of presence" (PHILLIPS, 2011) or "groups representa-
tion" (WILLIAMS, 1988) are central references in this debate, both of which highlight the
problem of a large disparity between the diversity of groups that compose society and
the homogeneity observed in the composition of representative institutions in terms, for
example, of gender, ethnicity and social class. As Phillips (2011) argues, when represen-
tatives share common characteristics, diverging from those of the electorate as a whole,
"there is a clear case to say that something is wrong. These 'characteristics' are obvi-
ously relevant in their own right, and some groups become more powerful than the others"
(PHILLIPS, 2011 , p. 342). For her, the consequence of these findings is that democracy
should not have the individual as an exclusive unit of political recognition, since group
belonging is a decisive factor in providing or restricting access to opportunities and re-
sources.

These arguments face the challenge of delimiting the groups that must be recog-
nized for political purposes given the variety of social groups that exists. For Williams
(1988), for example, groups worthy of political recognition are those whose individual
membership is involuntary and unchanging. That is, belonging in these cases is not a sim-
ple result of a preference or choice. For Young (2006), the groups worthy of this recogni-
tion are those that result from long historical processes that crystallize social structures
that, in turn, unequally position individuals in society in terms of access to opportunities
and resources. Similarly, for Williams (1998), these are groups that have undergone his-
tories of discrimination and oppression that, having been reproduced for generations, un-
dergird structural inequalities that constrain the possibility of individuals participating 'as
equals' in social and political institutions. It is thus necessary to compensate for the ab-
sence or precarious presence of individuals belonging to subordinated or oppressed social
groups. This raises the questions of who can speak for whom and of which group belong-
ings matter. The politics of presence draws attention to the 'messenger itself', emphasizing
that this impacts upon the very content of representation.

The question of how much and how effectively 'presence' itself impacts upon the
content of representation is the subject of rich theoretical debate (YOUNG, 1990, 2000),

which is largely beyond the scope of this article. What is important to note here is that this way of framing the problem of the legitimacy of representatives in terms of their membership in the same group of represented differs from that related to the "politics of ideas". In this last, the legitimacy of representatives is associated with advocacy. Then, what makes representation legitimate is the discourse and defense of ideals and projects of different social sectors. In the words of Urbinati (2010), who defends such a view, "although every citizen can, in theory and de jure, become a representative, citizens select those who seem to be better advocates. They do not choose randomly, nor do they think that it is enough for the candidate to belong to the same group as them" (URBINATI, 2010, p. 84).

As we shall see, during interviews some evoked a conception of representation as presence, but also revealed certain tensions arising from the expectation that presence should also produce advocacy. That is to say, they allowed us to perceive how conference participants attempt to reconcile the tense relationship between the politics of 'presence' and of 'ideas'. In addition to this, we observe a widening of the notion of inclusion towards the idea of expanding communities of debate, in the sense of activating relationships, promoting meetings and channeling diverse actors into the same fields of public policy. In these registers, the presence or absence of individuals and groups in conferences relates not only to the importance of presence as measured by population profile, with a focus on minority groups and sectors, but also to conflicts motivated by issues related to the legitimacy given by different belongings and identities which define who has the right to speak and provide representation.

What do leaders think about inclusion and political representation?

As we have tried to show, public policy conferences have stimulated new theoretical debates about political representation and inclusion. On the question of representation, they present a number of new features: 01. like other PIs they present themselves as constituting a new kind of space, distinct from parliaments, that is open to a pluralization of actors able to exercise representation at later stages of decision-making processes; 02. they offer a challenge to the perspective in which representation is centered on dimensions of accountability and authorization, proposing alternative perspectives, such as 'presumptive' or 'virtual representation'; 03. they reinitiate the debate around the profile of representatives, revisiting and updating the concepts of 'politics of presence' and 'group representation'; and 04. they innovate in a fundamental way because, through the activities and actions of conference leaders, they bring to the surface tensions around the problematic 'on behalf of whom or what' do participants speak - a debate that has not yet been seriously addressed in the literature on PIs.

From the perspective of inclusion, conferences bring potential for innovation because they challenge current understandings that would limit inclusion to the potential of conferences to incorporate minority individuals or groups. This is the first way in which

the concept of inclusion is understood. However, two other meanings of inclusion emerged in the interviews: inclusion as the 'insertion of themes, interests and causes' to be considered in the processes of discussion and decision-making; and inclusion as the 'enlargement or expansion of the community of debate', in the sense of activating relationships, promoting meetings and channeling diverse actors into the same field of public policy. We also see how these meanings also present challenges to debates about representation.

The first aspect is significant to the representation debate because of the arguments, presented earlier, that defend the idea of a clear bias in representation in cases where there are strong disparities between the characteristics of the population in general and the characteristics of representatives. In such cases, authors arguing for a conception of representation as presence argue that this reflects injustices that need to be redressed through the inclusion of underrepresented or absent groups within decision-making bodies. Some of our respondents presented discourses along these lines:

> ... as a representative I can say what profile is typical at municipal conferences: they're people with a high level of knowledge, they're usually white people with higher education and who are doing a master's degree or doctorate, who are involved in academia. So I guess the conference is excluding working people. Mainly some groups such as black people, who one way or another end up being excluded, especially if it is not on an accessible day, at an accessible time, the working population will have difficulty participating. So I think it excludes workers, and especially those who know that they do not have the level of education to engage with what is raised at the conferences (INTERVIEWER 01, 2015)[7].

> I don't think you can say that there is real representativeness at any conference. Just because those directly involved with the theme are often not present. In the case of social assistance or the child and adolescent, those who are the targets of policy: beneficiaries of care or healthcare services, children and adolescents, also aren't there. If they are, it's to appear in the photo, they don't miss that at least, but it's not for them to be involved and considered (...) (INTERVIEWER 02, 2014).

Regarding the first proposed meaning of inclusion, we see that the first respondent complains about the absence of individuals, mainly black people and those with low levels of education, echoing a lot of research that have highlighted the elite profile of participants. We can also identify other relevant issues in this quote speech: the target audience – the users or direct beneficiaries of the policy – are not present. This includes female workers – domestic, small business owners, businesswomen – absent from the conference on women; in the conference on culture, neither artists nor the general public are present; parents, students and university students are absent from the education conference; beneficiaries of social assistance do not participate in the social assistance conference. The

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[7]In order to preserve the anonymity of the interviewees, the cited passages are identified with a number that corresponds to one of the participants interviewed. In the references, are the public policy areas of the conferences in which they participated and the municipalities in which they occurred. The interviewees gave free and informed consent, as well as permission to publish the interviews.

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rules of the conferences help to determine the profile of the participants, since many of them occur at times that are not convenient for the target audience. This dimension of inclusion refers to the debate on representation that, also in the context of PIs, relates democratic legitimacy to the presence (through direct participation or representation) of those who will be subject to decisions taken in deliberative processes. In this sense, identifying the profiles of the actors involved is a central element in evaluating their capacity to promote political inclusion.

Other fragments of the interviews highlighted the second meaning attributed to inclusion, that is, inclusion as an insertion of themes, interests and causes to be considered in the discussion and decision-making processes. This meaning appeared prominently in relation to conferences in public policy areas directed at specific publics (the women, LGBT and racial equality conferences). In the case of conferences involving groups that are underrepresented in traditional representative institutions, the expectation of influencing public policies was often associated with the idea of 'struggling for a cause' and 'making specific voices heard'. That is to say, the desire is to influence public policies from a certain 'positional location' or under a specific banner associated with a group, 'the cause of woman' or 'the gay cause', for example. In this case, therefore, we should emphasize that conferences are recognized by the very audiences they address as important spaces for political inclusion because they allow 'the voice' of those groups that are under-represented in traditional institutions. What they include, above all, are themes in the public sphere:

> ... being part of government, currently working in government, I see that maintaining dialogue with civil society [...] is so important for the construction of public policies. Because, although the government may have a lot of good will to develop public policies for equality, in relation to social rights, it is the activists who really understand the subject, and have experience, and who even have experience of other places that they can bring to our city and who can help us build (INTERVIEWER 03, 2015).

This notion of inclusion also brings interesting insights to the question of representation. In conferences aimed at specific audiences, such as women, LGBT groups and black people, when participants were asked about 'who' or 'what' should be represented in these instances, many respondents referred to a 'cause' or broadly mentioned the specific groups to which the conferences are addressed, such as 'women', 'blacks', 'LGBT groups', evoking the concept of advocacy, where content is associated with a 'politics of ideas'.

But within this more general understanding – of conferences as spaces that allow for the representation/inclusion of the causes of the particular audiences to whom they are addressed – there are different emphases underpinning the criteria of the legitimacy of political representation: criteria of responsiveness, of advocacy or of presence. Of course, political representation can – and for some, should – respond simultaneously to these three criteria of legitimacy. But it is precisely because the connection between them is not an

a priori given, but something that may or may not be present in a particular instance of representation, that these different emphases carry tensions that deserve recognition.

Thus, on the one hand there are those who argue that political representation should be anchored in what is decided at the conference, even if the agent of that representation, that is, the representative, belongs to a specific movement or 'segment'. In this direction, when asked about 'who or what should delegates represent', or 'on behalf of whom or what do you act as delegate', we received the following answers:

> In the name of what or whom? From an institution? It's something I think is wrong, you know. You're not defending your institution, you're there defending [...], you come as a citizen to attend a municipal conference and you go to the state conference defending what your municipal conference has approved. So, I think the question of "ah, so I'm going to defend what my institution stands for" is wrong. No, [you] defend your institution beyond the front door, my dear, but from the moment you start discussing here, you're going to have to defend what was discussed here. But I come for the movement for urban women workers, that my area (INTERVIEWER 04, 2015).

> I think they need to represent the debate that is held collectively at the municipal conference. You can't go there and just speak of the top of your head. It's a collective debate, and it's accumulated over time, because it's already the second conference, a space of social control that has accumulations, and the second conference will be a reflection of these accumulations, and I think delegates should defend this, which was decided on collectively (INTERVIEWER 01, 2015).

In addition to this conception, which refers to the idea of 'responsive representation', that is, based on respect for the deliberations approved and defended by the body of the represented, we also have the other meaning – that relates the legitimacy of representation to the defense of causes, regardless of group belongings:

> All LGBT people, or all people who are LGBT, regardless of whether they are in a specific movement, of whether they are linked to NGOs or not, of the people who speak for them and their community, for the area where they are. People who work with human rights regardless of whether they are LGBT or not, but who have the conception of human rights, and know what human rights are and want all people to be equal, etc. and so on. These people should speak and vote, elect and be elected (INTERVIEWER 05, 2015).

On the other hand, there are participants who stress the importance of maintaining the identification of the agent of representation with the group or 'segment' to which he belongs, defending, above all, that 'the messenger' matters to the content of the representation, evoking a conception closer to the 'politics of presence'. This argument almost always referred to differences cross-cutting conference audiences, such as, for example, black and/or lesbian women in the wider interior of the women's group, or black youth in the black group. Let us see how this concern appeared in some respondent discourses:

> They should represent their groups, of black women, indigenous women, quilombolas, trans, lesbians and other women with disabilities. These groups, yes, because it is from the voice of these groups that we can better understand and propose appropriately. Because where we are, some privileges we have at certain times, we can't understand or speak for another segment. For example, peasant women, we who are from urban areas, we will never be able to speak for them, because we're not there; we don't experience the same things as disabled women. So we need to hear all these groups because they need to be represented (INTERVIEWER 06, 2015).

> In my case, as my interest is in black youth [...], I think I represent young black people who come from public schools, from schools in the periphery. A public from the periphery, you know (INTERVIEWER 07, 2015).

> Delegates have to represent women and, in that representation, they have to give separate attention to black women because our specificities are different from non-black women. So, there has to be a separation because, according to the IBGE [...], the lowest salaries in Brazil, even if it is on the same level [as the others] are among the black woman. [...] Did you see the opening table? How many black women did they have at the opening table? (INTERVIEWER 08, 2015).

In a study on the III National Conference for Disabled People, Garcêz (2015) highlights this dimension:

> Physical presence in itself says who they are and what experiences of suffering or shared discrimination they have experienced historically. The use of sign language during presentations, the presence of wheelchairs, and other physical characteristics show a condition of experience that embodies a strong source of authority among those who experience the condition of being deaf or of being a disabled person (...) The presentation of proposals comes accompanied by a body that expresses who they are as a source of authority (GARCÊZ, 2015, p. 20).

However, our interviews show that for the conferences directed at specific audiences intra-group and inter-group differences constitute a point of tension for defining the content and the agents of representative practice, revealing the major dilemmas embedded in a 'politics of presence'. These include essentialisms and cross-identities, issues which, as we have seen, have been the subject of debate in the field of representative democracy. The following testimonies are quite revealing in this respect:

> The last women's conference here became hilarious because the first clear thing about the conference was the lack of male presence. As if the question of women were particular, exclusive, seeing the question from a gender and not a relational perspective, and not requiring the presence of men. Those who were present had to justify themselves, there was even one who was representing a Congresswoman, who couldn't attend. It was decided that they could stay, but they couldn't open their mouths or even vote [...] it was also decided that only the delegates could speak in the plenary. I only saw that. You have to have the right to a voice, just because you have to question who the delegates are. The selection of delegates is so random, so uncritical, no one is representative of anything. I don't think you can say that there is real representativeness at any conference.

Just because those directly involved with the theme are often not present. In the case of social assistance or the child and adolescent, those who are the targets of policy: beneficiaries of care or healthcare services, children and adolescents, also aren't there. If they are, it's to appear in the photo, they don't miss that at least, but it's not for them to be involved and considered (INTERVIEWER 09, 2014).

There have been very complicated movements arising out of the idea of respect for diversity. They put themselves forward for the representation of particularities. Delegates have to be representative of particular identities. So in the case of the woman's conference, there had to be an old woman, a teenager, a young woman. There were transsexuals there. Then it went wrong. They said they had their conference to go, the diversity one. It wasn't this one. But she's more woman than me because she decided to become a woman. How can you not represent them? They had to go to the diversity conference. Your place is not here. It's only women here. Question of identity. A fragmentation has been produced, a creation of ghettos: divide and rule. That the fight is there between the ghettos and you lose the most universal dimension of politics. This has been recurrent in the national conferences, especially in public social policies (INTERVIEWER 09, 2014).

Although we find different meanings of representation in the same policy area, there are, in fact, important differences between areas, as these intra and inter-group debates and conflicts emerge in particular in areas of minority rights advocacy. As we have seen, the meanings of representation are inscribed in contexts, disputes and relations, and are invoked by individuals inserted and in relationship with different actors, spaces and collectivities (GURZA LAVALLE and SZWAKO, 2015, p. 176). The dilemmas of the politics of presence cross-cut conferences marked by a focus on identity, in which certain groups or sectors are fighting for recognition. These are not observed in other sectors, such as culture, sports, education and the environment.

Unlike the tensions identified above, which relate to a notion of representation in which inclusion amounts to presence, we identify another sense of inclusion expressed in the following response:

At the environmental conference I felt that the excluded were not there: street sweepers, informal workers in the area, cooperatives, waste pickers. The conference was about waste. There was no effort by the organization to encourage their participation. It's been a failure for as long as the organization has existed. The invisibility of these actors comes from the very organization of the conference, because we make no extra effort to bring them into the conference process. On the other hand, the conferences bring people who are already more knowledgeable about the theme, who work professionally in the environmental field, students etc. So it has the role of expanding the community that is already working on questions related to the theme, but not those involved in the day to day discussion of public policy in the area. So, in this sense, the environmental conference had a role of inclusion, not inclusion of those excluded from a socioeconomic perspective, but an expansion of the community involved in the debate about the environment. It includes and expands the universe of debate on the theme (...) thinking about who is included and excluded from the conferences, if the excluded are the socioeconomically excluded, perhaps we would look at the

conferences and say that they're not spaces of inclusion. Although in socioeconomic terms, if we compare it to traditional political representation, there is a difference in terms of income. Now, speaking about the inclusion and exclusion of groups outside of the public debate, maybe we could look at the conference from a perspective of greater inclusiveness, depending on the subject, on the policy area in question. Municipal conferences are creating arenas of discussion that include people who were not in this debate. Although in socioeconomic terms these people are above average of the population. To form new elites is important. This in itself is positive. They also create integrated forums, which is important. Expanding communities that debate certain public policies, I think is a positive issue (INTERVIEWER 10, 2014).

This quotation (which is extended because it's very significant) points to the possibility of thinking about inclusion as a broadening or expansion of the community of debate, in the sense of activating relationships, promoting encounters and channeling diverse actors into the public policy area. The conferences 'bring people who are already more knowledgeable about the theme, who work professionally in the environmental field', says the interviewee. But he adds, 'municipal conferences are creating arenas of discussion that include people who were not in this debate'. They therefore have a 'role of inclusion, not inclusion of those excluded from a socioeconomic perspective, but an expansion of the community involved in the debate'. Another respondent also raised a significant point:

> Imagine the importance, at the national level, of people from municipalities and states meeting, learning things, listening and taking them back to their own cities. In the CONSOCIAL this was quite significant. A delegate from a small municipality takes the discussions about public transparency back there, or about social control. It has a major impact. This expands the community that debates the issue of transparency and control. It is no small thing (INTERVIEWER 11, 2014).

Referring to the National Conference on Transparency and Social Control (Consocial), of which he was a delegate, the interviewee shows the potential of conferences to disseminate themes and to multiply actors involved with a given debate. He says, 'This is no small thing'.

These last words invite us to think about the concept of inclusion in two dimensions: 'inclusion as a state' and 'inclusion as a process'. The idea of 'inclusion as a state' refers to a dimension that is more static, crystallized, of 'what is' in a given time and place: who are the participants in the conferences? As we have seen, research on the socioeconomic and political profile seek to understand, from a snapshot of a given conference, who is participating, who is 'present', at a determined time and place. Comparing various 'snapshots' allows conclusions to be drawn, such as the claim that minority groups remain, to a large extent, excluded from these spaces. Hence the criticisms made when evaluating the effectiveness of conferences with respect to their potential for inclusion.

However, some of our interviewees led us look at the potential process of inclusion in conference spaces in a different way, by considering the expanded sense of inclusion al-

ready registered. Hence we speak of 'inclusion as a process', suggesting the importance of understanding conferences over a longer timeframe, understanding the fruits they produce as they disseminate ideas, causes, values, points of view, which can impact upon and transcend places, perspectives and actors, multiplying voices, demands, claims, actions, for a cause, a purpose. 'Inclusion as a process' goes beyond snapshots, therefore: the consequences of actors and ideas meeting one another cannot be easily measured nor controlled. Ideas, causes, values, points of view, spread, disperse, radiate outwards, overflowing the time and space of the conferences.

Considering that this phenomenon unfolds across scales, with a certain periodicity, the potential of what is produced in the spaces of the conferences to fertilize in other spaces, including through actors who may not even have been present, is highly relevant to the debate about the effectiveness of PIs in terms of their capacity for inclusion. And this has implications even in the way we think of the 'cycle' of conferences: from the municipal scale, to the state level, and then to the national stage. Thinking in dynamic and procedural terms, this cycle does not end at the national stage, since there is a potential for the debate to feed back to the municipalities and states, concomitantly, beyond the timeframe of the conferences and their respective venues. That is to say, we are highlighting the procedural dimension of inclusion: of actors, groups, themes, causes and interests that transcend the space-time dimension of the conferences, and seeking to widen the analytical lens on the effectiveness of these spaces with regard to the inclusion of new characters in the arena of political debate.

As we can see, leaders' perceptions about the potential inclusiveness of conference spaces suggests a broadening definition of inclusion, encompassing at least three distinct meanings: inclusion of traditionally excluded individuals/groups; inclusion of themes/causes/interests in the agendas; and inclusion of new actors through the expansion of the community of debate. And this has helped us to understand, from the perspective of the subjects involved, not only 'who', or 'what' these spaces are including, but 'in whose' or 'what's' name they are speaking.

Final considerations

Engaging with the literature on PIs and focused on public policy conferences, this article has sought to present the different meanings of inclusion and representation evoked by prominent participants in different policy areas at conferences. In their articulation of participation and representation, conferences are also spaces of political debate that allow approaches occurring exclusively under the register of participation to be problematized around the question of inclusion. This raises the importance of also analyzing these spaces as a site of representation (non-electoral or extra-parliamentary), insofar as through various mechanisms they occupy the role of representation for different groups and/or individuals of civil society and identify and define the priorities to be taken into account by the

government in different public policy areas.

Thus, by articulating these two dimensions – participation and representation – conferences, like councils and other PIs, can be seen as events that fertilize the field of studies on political representation, either by discussing the pluralization of extra-parliamentary political representation occurring in different spaces and with different dynamics, or by discussing the limits, especially of inclusion, found in the system of electoral representation. We locate this research within this broader scenario, engaging with these two theoretical fronts that, in spite of their different approaches, deal with the question of political representation in close connection with that of inclusion. However, rather than analyzing the rules, or evaluating the effectiveness of conferences' capacity for inclusion and practices of representation, our aim was to identify how actors themselves define the legitimacy of representation exercised at conferences and how this definition relates to judgments about who is included and excluded from these spaces.

Our findings contribute at least two key elements to debates about participation, representation and inclusion. On the one hand, they allowed us to identify a broadening of the concept of inclusion, and, on the other, they made it possible to explore the tensions intrinsic to the demands of 'representation as presence'.

Regarding inclusion, our findings point to the importance of thinking about the concept in two dimensions, 'inclusion as a state' and 'inclusion as a process'. In the discourses of our respondents, we identify a broadening of meanings they attach to inclusion: it is not enough to think of inclusion as the 'presence of individuals' with socioeconomic profiles that tend to be absent from traditional representative institutions (inclusion as a state). It is also necessary to consider the procedural effects of inclusion: of themes, interests and causes, and, fundamentally, the inclusion of new individuals and groups in the arena of debate in a given public policy area. These effects go beyond the space/time limits of the conference itself. Thus, if we find negative evaluations about the capacity for inclusion of certain groups and sectors (workers, service users, etc), we can also see that conferences have, according to the assessments of these actors, allowed the themes and causes of traditionally under-represented groups – especially in the case of conferences aimed at specific audiences – to be included in the political agenda, as well as activating new networks of social articulation.

These meanings of inclusion are important elements for understanding the perceptions that delegates who participate at the state and national stages of the conferences have of conference representativeness. In light of this, we have identified at least three meanings of representation, namely, responsive representation (the representative is legitimate insofar as s/he follows the deliberations of the conference); advocacy representation (the representative is legitimate when s/he defends particular causes, especially of those entities/groups who are considered legitimate in the field); and representation as presence (the representative is legitimate because s/he belongs to the same group as the

represented). In the first meaning, the emphasis is on the representative's ability to express/promote the deliberations and decisions produced by those present or included in the conference. In the second, the role of the representative is, above all, to promote the causes of groups that are linked to the theme (and not necessarily present at the conference) within a broader public agenda. Finally, in the third, the representative's group membership is decisive in determining his or her capacity to defend certain causes, meaning that here we find a stronger association between political inclusion and the requirement of effective presence. Through specific contexts, these three meanings of representation can be mobilized by different subjects in ways that are more or less articulated, conflictual and tense. Depending on the disputes in question, they may appear to be either reasonably complementary or mutually exclusive in judgments about the legitimacy of representation. Between these extremes, there are numerous ways in which they can be combined to form the underlying expectations of political inclusion surrounding the conferences.

Indeed, we suggest here that the meanings attributed to representation and inclusion open up new ways of considering an issue that has been central to literature: the effectiveness of participatory institutions in promoting inclusion and democratic representation. Regarding the question of inclusion, when considering our interviewees' perceptions and depending on the policy area in question, conferences have been more effective than much of the literature suggests, if we take into account the meanings of representatives, which extend the definition of political inclusion beyond the definition of political inclusion without neglecting the importance of the presence and active participation of traditionally excluded groups.

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