

Questioning the Relationship between Participation and Development

A case study of the Vale do Ribeira, Brazil

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Summary. — Through the analysis of two participatory forums active in the Vale do Ribeira (Brazil)—the Committee for the Management of Water Resources (CGRH) and the Consortium of Food Safety and Local Development (Consad)—this article discusses the argument that “well designed” institutions enable the inclusion of a broader spectrum of actors in political debates, as well as reduce the asymmetries between them thereby facilitating the negotiation and agreement of politically and economically viable projects that would help to encourage development in the region. The two forums were observed in terms of how they dealt with two polemical regional issues: the proposal to build a big dam, a process which has been going on for more than a decade and the definition of a program of sustainable development capable of reconciling environmental conservation and growth in the local economy. The analysis suggests that during the period of research, these forums recreated in the participatory sphere coalitions that were already present in the regional political scene, thereby acting as an extension of the party political game rather than as arenas where new arrangements of actors could agree on alternative projects. From a theoretical perspective, this result raises again the question of the origin and the change of institutions, in that it questions the mechanisms necessary for the creation of institutions explicitly designed to alter the *status quo*.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last ten years, Brazil has witnessed a phenomenal increase in the number of partici-

patory institutions. At the beginning of the decade, there were around 27,000 forums of this type in Brazil's 5507 municipalities (IBGE, 2001). Certainly, one of the reasons for this

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growth has been the demand made by popular groups to participate in decision-making processes and the management of policies, a factor that has been emphasized in the literature on this theme (Dagnino, 2002). Another factor has been the expectation of public managers that such institutions will increase the channels of communication and negotiation between the state and society. In both cases, there is a belief that participation will contribute toward the definition of more just and viable policies, with a significant impact on poverty, inequality, and development. Yet, what are the necessary conditions to enable these forums and councils to carry out these intentions? This is the question that prompted the research whose findings are presented in this paper. The question is theoretically important, in the search for deeper understanding of the conditions under which the relationship between participation and development actually occurs, beyond the normative desire present in this association. It is also politically relevant as it enables discussion of the validity of continuing to invest public time and money in the promotion of these types of experiments.

The research took place in the Vale do Ribeira Paulista, a poor region, made up of 25 municipalities located between two of the richest metropolitan regions in Brazil: São Paulo and Curitiba (see Map 1). 350,000 people live in the area, with a large number of traditional communities, such as indigenous groups, *quilombola* communities (rural Afro-Brazilian communities), *caíçarás* (artisanal fishers and smallholders of mainly indigenous descent), and family farmers, many of whom are organized into associations. The region also contains the largest remaining area of Atlantic rainforest, covering two-thirds of the territory. In these circumstances, there are inevitable tensions between, on the one hand, a demand for revitalizing the economy, based on the necessity of dealing with poverty, and on the other hand, the delicate problems of environmental control, due to the urgent need to preserve the native Atlantic rainforest. This tension is exemplified in two regional debates: the plan to construct the Tijuco Alto dam, which has been in progress for more than a decade; and the definition of a program of sustainable development which would be capable of combining environmental conservation with economic growth. This study focuses on two participatory forums active in the region and analyzes how they have been dealing with these issues. The two cases are

the Committee for the Management of Water Resources (Comitê de Gestão de Recursos Hídricos (CGRH)) and the Consortium of Food Safety and Local Development (Consórcio de Segurança Alimentar e Desenvolvimento Local (Consad)).

The literature on social participation, which will be looked at in more depth below, suggests that forums of this type may, in specific situations, open up space where various actors may take up positions concerning these polemical issues and negotiate alternatives. These situations depend on the institutional design, the degree of organization of civil society, and the involvement of state actors. Nevertheless, if it is true that the presence, for example, of a "good institutional design" facilitates inclusion, dialogue, and negotiation, then it is also true that there still exists great difficulty in identifying what might be considered a "good design," or even the conditions which would lead state actors and politicians responsible for the organization of these forums to choose this "good" design instead of another favoring the reproduction of their own political coalition. This article works between these two perspectives, investigating the institutional conditions capable of fostering inclusion and dialogue, be that of the forums or of the political system. Furthermore, it questions the logic and the values that motivate the actors involved in the creation of these forums, a question that the literature is only beginning to broach. From the resulting observations the initial question will be revisited, since, if it is necessary to recognize which procedures are inclusive and democratic, it is equally important to identify the conditions that lead the actors responsible for the forums to adopt such procedures.

The article is divided into four main parts. Section 1 briefly sets out the theoretical debate concerning the relationship between participation and development and presents the questions and the methodology that guided the research. Section 2 presents a brief history of the Vale do Ribeira to contextualize the debates about sustainable development, briefly describing the local civil society, highlighting the trajectory of two important local organizations: the Movement of those Threatened by the Dam (o Movimento dos Ameaçados por Barragens (MOAB)) and the Family Farmers' Union (o Sindicato dos Agricultores Familiares (Sintravale)), and finally presenting the controversy surrounding the dam. Section 3 deals with the two forums (CGRH and Consad), describing

in detail the involvement of MOAB and Sintravale in them. Section 4 analyzes the role of the forums in dealing with the two polemical issues mentioned above. The conclusion sets out the principal lessons that can be learnt from the experiences in the Vale do Ribeira concerning the relationship between participation and development.

2. RESEARCHING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARTICIPATION AND DEVELOPMENT

The literature that unites supporters of social participation in public policy is based upon two assumptions. The first is that the local population would be encouraged to participate because of a reduction in the costs involved in the process of political mobilization. This reduction would take place because local participatory bodies would be authorized by the public authorities to make substantive decisions about policy, and also because of the expectation that the citizen would participate using his or her own experience of the issues being discussed, therefore enabling resources to be used more efficiently. Problems of asymmetry, which might inhibit the inclusion of actors who have fewer resources, be they communicative, material, or technical, would be successfully dealt with by good institutional engineering (Fung, 2004; Fung & Wright, 2003). The second argument is that by providing the opportunity for the various actors involved to set out more explicitly their demands, these would become clearer and more understandable for the state actors, thereby highlighting local specificities which would encourage changes in the distribution of public funds, the way policies are implemented, and the way regional agreements are reached: which in turn could contribute to the successful implementation of private initiatives, as well as public policies and programs (Abers, 2001; Cunill Grau, 1997; UNDP, 2002; World Bank, 2001). The implicit causal mechanism is that by giving a voice to groups who have traditionally been marginalized and by encouraging participation, negotiation, and cooperation between various social segments, the trust and coordination between them would be increased, which in turn would contribute to the promotion of development projects that coincide with their needs and interests (Avritzer, 2003; Gaventa, 2004).

Various texts question the viability of putting these mechanisms into action, pointing out the asymmetries that shape the relationships between the actors, as well as the excessive power of state actors in the participatory forums. Furthermore, they point out that special interest groups and party political groups can capture these forums. Some studies highlight a sort of "dark side" of these forms of social assembly (Ray, 2000, 2002): in general the selection of projects and the mechanisms for competition between territories, regions, and social groups have the tendency to reinforce the positions of those who already have the best technical and political conditions, and thus are in a better position to obtain the available resources. In Brazil, the work of Veiga (2005) and Abramovay (2005) also present evidence that there is no automatic link between the existence of participatory forums and development. Pritchett and Woolcock (2004) and Manzuri and Rao (2004) go further, arguing that there are intrinsic faults in making this link, since the interests of the actors involved in the forums are not always the same as those who implement the policies and public services discussed by such forums. The authors even suggest that complex ideas such as participation, social capital, and empowerment are being naively applied.

Other authors argue that under specific conditions, it is possible to achieve relevant results in terms of inclusion as well as distribution through participation (Abers, 2001; Coelho & Nobre, 2004; Marquetti, 2003). One of these conditions is the existence of an organized civil society, above all in the form of associations and social movements that meet the social demands concerning the policies under debate in the participatory forums, and also that provide legitimacy to the public initiatives, thereby increasing social support for them. Another condition is the quality of institutional design: the key variable concerns the rules of these spaces and their ability to provide incentives which influence the actions of the actors in such a way that fosters particular desired features of the policy in question, as well as their capacity to alter the balance of forces between the participants favoring the expression of demands by those who have fewer resources. Finally, a third condition involves the commitment and openness of the managers to the organization of and the decisions taken by these forums, which is a crucial element in guaranteeing their functioning and the permeability of the

institutional environment to the demands made by the forums.

This literature, briefly set out above, enables us to construct different assumptions concerning the possible contribution of the participatory institutions in dealing with the two polemical regional issues analyzed in this article. For those who do not believe in this path, these forums will either simply reproduce the asymmetries between the actors without moving beyond them, or will be at the mercy of the executive power, or even be captured by party political groups. Whilst, for those who believe in participation, it will be possible to move toward a negotiated solution and the debates conducted by the CGRH and Consad, the two forums analyzed in this article, will play a role in this process as long as they can establish incentives capable of bringing together and merging the expectations and the investments of the agents involved.

This study engages with this debate, aiming to set out more clearly the institutional conditions for the running of the forums that favor the inclusion and negotiation of alternatives to resolve the polemical regional issues. This line of research is partly grounded in the institutionalist argument that has been developed in the area of participatory democracy.¹ However, during the research process, it became clear that this approach would also need to be complemented by a systematic indication of the motivations, interests, and values that guided the behavior of those who organized the running of the forums. After all, any recommendation about the institutional conditions that might encourage dialogue and negotiation between those who hold differing positions, in this case concerning the dam and sustainable development in the region, would have to take into account the strategic roles that these actors play when defining the institutional conditions that were investigated.

In the following sections, and in the following presentation, we address empirically the validity of certain assumptions underlying different arguments that would derive from these distinct analytical positions. The first two of these arguments derive from the institutionalist position and the third from the literature on participation and development.

The first argument relates the design of the forums to their performance. The assumption being assessed is that the more equitable the distribution of seats between civil society and public officials and the more open and trans-

parent the selection process of the councilors, the more inclusive the forum. Our aim here is to explore the impact of the rules and recruitment procedures of councilors on the inclusiveness of the forums.

The second argument predicts that there will be an increased participation of groups that have less communicative, material, and technical resources as a result of the use of discussion techniques, which aim to promote the ability of expression of these same groups. The assumption we assess here is that the discussion and decision-making processes resulting from the use of such techniques give more clarity to the demands made by less favored groups, and as a result enable such demands to be linked to more general debates and the interests of other social groups.

The third argument is that the greater the inclusiveness of these forums, judged by the profile of the participants and the opportunities for participation, the greater the contribution toward the resolution of the conflict about the Tijuco Alto dam and the debates about regional development. The implicit supposition of this argument—and thus the assumption that we address—is that the more participatory a forum, the greater its capacity to encourage the formulation of viable economical and political proposals.

Research was carried out between January and December 2005, involving three principal phases: (a) analysis of secondary data, a survey with 103 of the 192 councilors of the studied forums, and the carrying out of interviews with their leaderships; (b) accompanying *in loco* the daily routines of the selected social movements, together with interviews with the leaders of both, with a view to understanding how they organized their participation in the forums, and the repercussions that this had on the way they perceived and modified their position with respect to the dam and to sustainable development; and (c) the discussion of results in meetings with the managers and local leaders previously interviewed.

3. THE VALE DO RIBEIRA

Whilst the history of the Vale do Ribeira does not in itself provide the key to its future, it does enable us to understand some of the reasons for its current situation; marked by its poor economic and social indicators, as well as the significance of the social conflict concern-

ing the Tijuco Alto dam and the local support for the rhetoric of sustainable development.

(a) *The rise of the rhetoric of sustainable development*

The period from the colonization of the 16th Century until the beginning of the 20th Century was marked by economic cycles, principally mining and the cultivation of rice, during which the region attained moments of prosperity, to be later interrupted by decline in these activities. The subsequent arrival of Japanese immigrants in the first half of the last century established certain practices that continue through to the present: agriculture with a reasonable degree of mechanization and commercialization, with the native population becoming laborers or withdrawing into subsistence farming. The “traditional communities” in the Vale do Ribeira practice family and rudimentary farming, and are structurally dependent on the Ribeira River and its margins to maintain their subsistence. A large part of the native population are family farmers, but they are faced with problems such as gaining access to larger regional markets since middlemen (“dealers”) end up being the principal agents responsible for buying these family products at very low prices. The combination of these characteristics with poor access and the precarious nature of the transport links contributed to the relative isolation of the region—in comparison to the rest of São Paulo—during the 20th Century.

The final part of the last Century marked the start of a distinct phase of development, with a series of government initiatives aimed at breaking the situation of economic stagnation and poverty. This period coincided with the growing importance of environmental issues, which prompted the creation of various conservation units. The public initiatives that have come about since then seem to have contributed toward the containment of deforestation, which had been making significant in-roads into the remaining Atlantic rainforest. However, they have also prompted numerous conflicts with the traditional populations, together with the discourse, espoused mainly by the municipal authorities, that conservationist policies would damage the local economy since they restricted potential industrial development and the expansion of agricultural activities (Resende, 2002). By studying the development of the economy and of the social structures of the

Vale do Ribeira over the last decade, it is possible to see signs of change and a movement toward heterogeneity: the rural exodus no longer seems to be a general trend; farming is no longer the principal activity, ceding space to growth in other areas, especially services; and while different development indices continue to be relatively low, health and education in eight municipalities have improved, there was economic growth in almost all the regions, and forest cover declined in only eight municipalities (Chabaribery, 2004; Favareto & Brancher, 2005). In this scenario, it is possible to say that the image of a poor region, economically stagnant and dependent on agriculture is giving way to one of a region characterized by increasing internal differentiation, the result of various factors, largely unrecognized by the local actors themselves.

It is at this moment in the regions’ trajectory that the rhetoric of sustainable development emerged as an attempt to balance environmental conservation with the expectations of economic development utilizing the potential energy and the biodiversity of the local landscape. Nevertheless, sustainability is perceived in different ways by different groups. Traditional communities discourses on sustainability emphasize the recognition of their rights to the use of the land and the forests. For farmers and their organizations, sustainable development is synonymous with giving priority to “the small” as opposed to big investments, while local government views it as an opportunity to take advantage of the local natural resources, but in a way that requires “the environmental legislation to be more flexible.” For other councils it represents the possibility of receiving large external investment so as to take advantage of tourism or the potential biodiversity. Finally, Federal government projects aim to encourage private investment and profitable exploration of natural resources, such as the recent project to support the production of bio-diesel (see Figure 1).

(b) *Increasing diversity in regional civil society*

These changes also appear in the sphere of civil society. One survey identified 211 active organizations in the region, for the most part business associations, workers unions, environmental organizations, and residents associations.² With respect to owners’ organizations there are some traditional groups, such as the Trade and Industry Associations, the Associations of

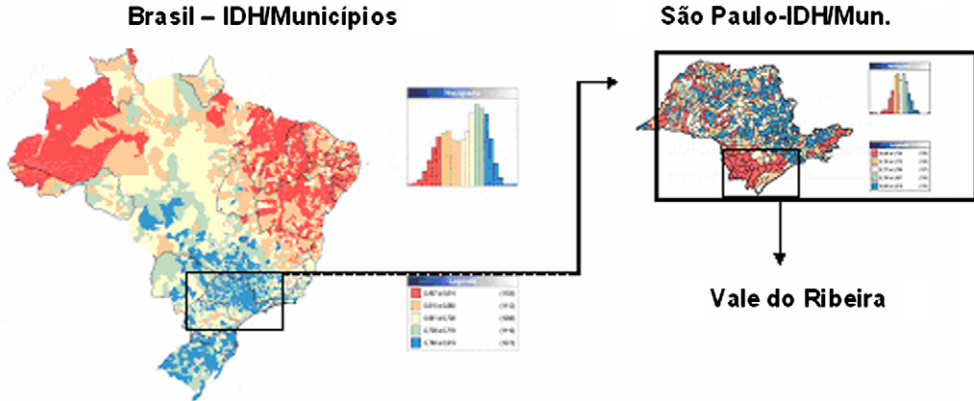


Figure 1. Human development index (HDI) in the Municipalities of Brazil, the State of São Paulo and Vale do Ribeira.

Banana Growers, as well as newer organizations such as the Association of Flower Growers. In turn popular organization has its origins in the 1980s (PNUD, 2005). Various organizations have been formed since then, and many have their roots in residents' associations promoted by left-wing Catholics whose presence was felt through the Pastoral Agents (Pastoral Commission of the Earth). Some of these organizations remained as residents' associations, whilst some evolved to represent more specific interests, for example the Guapiruvu Residents' Association, which today is an important example of an economic organization for traditional groups.

This was also the case for the *quilombola* communities, whose origins can be traced back to the expansion of mining activities in the 18th century, which brought a large number of slaves to the region. The subsequent decline of these activities and escape of slaves gave rise to the formation of various rural communities of Afro-Brazilian people, known in Brazil as *quilombos*. It is estimated that in Vale do Ribeira there are 20 remaining *quilombo* communities. These communities occupy remote areas and are difficult to reach. The creation of Environmental Conservation Areas (UCAs) in ownerless areas (*areas devolutas*) had a direct impact on the *quilombos'* everyday agricultural and political life, in that the majority of their land was transformed into areas of environmental conservation. Between 1959 and 1995, 12 UCAs were created throughout the Valley, with six of them, in particular, superimposed onto the land originally inhabited by the Afro-Brazilian communities of Eldorado and Iporanga.

In order to understand the context in which the mobilization of the rural Afro-Brazilian

communities of the Vale do Ribeira emerged, the legal apparatus established by the 1988 Constitution to attend ethnic claims must be analyzed. The special rights guaranteed by the new constitution for *quilombo* territories—considered collective and non-transferable properties—transformed these territories into an important basis of *quilombola* identity and power. The mobilization against the construction of the dams in the Vale do Ribeira began in the same period. The threat of eviction presented by the possible flooding of their territories served to bring communities together, firstly because it helped mobilize older inhabitants of the Afro-Brazilian communities and secondly because it stimulated the younger members to identify themselves within a common struggle (Carril, 1995, p. 176). Furthermore, under the flags of “sustainable development” and “socio-environmentalism” an important coalition was formed between Afro-Brazilian communities and environmental groups such as the Social Environmental Institute (ISA), the Serrana Institute Environmental Association (ASA), and the Institute for Sustainable Development and Citizenship in the Vale do Ribeira (Idesc) that have each historically positioned themselves against the construction of hydroelectric plants on the Ribeira River.

In summary, then, the political mobilization of the Afro-Brazilian communities of Vale do Ribeira and the constitution of the Movement of Dam Affected People (Movimento dos Ameaçados por Barragens, MOAB) occurred through the alignment of three parallel struggles—the struggle for land, the struggle for *quilombo* identity, and the struggle against dams.

This trajectory provided the *quilombolas* with a repertoire of confrontational strategies that, as we shall see in the analysis of the forums, shaped their positioning with respect to the CGRH.

A parallel process resulted in the creation of the workers' unions, such as the Union of Farming Families of the Vale do Ribeira (Sintravale). Sintravale is a union whose origins date back to the mid-1980s, and is connected to conflicts involving the inhabitants of the areas that were converted into national parks and conservation areas. These conflicts were motivated by the traditional populations' lack of title to the land they occupied, which meant that they were simply ignored in the demarcation of these areas. Furthermore, they were prohibited from building houses, felling trees, and removing vegetation. There were several cases of violence involving land racketeers (*grileiros*), settlers, traditional populations, and the forest police. The problems experienced by the inhabitants of these protected areas attracted the attention of various organizations, neighborhood associations, environmental NGOs, unionists connected to the CUT, members of the PT (Workers Party), and groups from the Catholic Church who became involved in supporting the occupants of these areas. This network of alliances came about in part as the result of two changes that took place in the institutional arena of environmental politics and development in rural Brazil in the 1990s. Firstly, there was the growth of the rhetoric of sustainable development, which brought the need to think about how to balance conservation with the social use of natural resources (CEDI, 1991). Secondly, there was the creation of the National Program for Strengthening Family Agriculture (Pronaf), a successful policy aimed at supporting small farmers (Abramovay & Veiga, 1999; Schneider, Mattei, & Casella, 2004).

It was in this context that at the end of the 1990s, Sintravale was officially established. It soon began to voice family farmer demands for credit and business opportunities, as well as to compete with agro-business for resources and policies. It also began establishing links with NGOs, with the aim of formulating projects that could combine income generation with environmental conservation. This historical background helps us to understand Sintravale's willingness, as will be seen in the analysis of the forums, to participate in Con-sad, an institution responsible for the distribution of resources to help family farming.

This brief presentation of the origins and the positions of these social movements makes it possible to better understand how the characteristics of social conflicts coupled with particular forms of State intervention can translate into different forms of activism. In the case of Sintravale, participation in the forums is a prerequisite to gaining access to particular resources and public policies, whilst for MOAB the same is not true. Having highlighted these themes, the following section aims to illustrate how the trajectories of social mobilization in the region mark the controversy surrounding the construction of the dams on the Rio Ribeira.

(c) *The controversy surrounding Tijuco Alto*

The project to build a dam in Tijuco Alto dates back to the 1950s, but it took on its current form in the beginning of the 1980s when the CBA (Brazilian Aluminum Company), a company belonging to one of the largest Brazilian conglomerates, asked the then DNAEE (National Authority for the management of water) for permission to use part of the river basin of the Rio Ribeira to construct a hydroelectric dam. Permission was given in 1989, and preliminary studies of the environmental impact were carried out, as required by law. According to the Water Resources Management Plan, it was to be the first in a series of four dams that, apart from generating electricity, would solve the problem of flooding which blighted the region. A third of these dams would affect land occupied by traditional communities, remnants of *quilombos*. Environmental groups and the threatened communities reacted with a series of protests which changed this decision.

From the 1980s onwards Brazil saw the development of an important national movement of communities affected by the building of dams. They were strongly influenced by left-wing Catholic groups and formed alliances with important international NGOs. At the same time, the democratic transition that followed the military regime inaugurated new legislation and regulatory instruments that facilitated the opposition to and positioning of civil society in relation to these projects. As a result, years later, these movements managed to reverse the previous decision authorizing the construction of the dam. The judges heeded the environmental arguments and opposed the permission alleging that, since the project involved

two states of the Federation, São Paulo and Paraná, it needed to be licensed by a Federal authority. In 2004, the National Institute for the Environment (Ibama) argued that the planning permission was outdated, cancelled the original application, and ordered that a new application be made. Consequently the whole process was started again, and this is the present situation, new reports are being written and new public meetings are to be called to present the proposal for discussion.

The positions concerning the controversy about the Tijuco Alto and the three other dams planned for construction reflect reasonably well the mosaic of the local social organizations and their differences. Politicians responsible for the local councils, the business leaders, and the business associations see the dam as a means to encourage economic growth, thus providing investment, jobs, and flood control. Conversely the *quilombolas*, grassroots religious movements, the Green Party (PB), the Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB), environmental NGOs, as well as many academics, see the project as incompatible with a model of development that values environmental and cultural heritage. It is worth pointing out that whilst various sectors of government, especially mayors and state managers connected to the management of water resources, agree on the construction of the dam, there are other departments within the government, such as SEPIIR (Special Secretary of Policies for the Promotion of Racial Equality) in the Federal Government and the ITESP (The São Paulo Land Institute) in the state of São Paulo that strongly support the *quilombola* communities from the Vale do Ribeira and are radically opposed to the dams. As can be seen in Table 1, this conflict reproduces in an exemplary way the range of possibilities and the system of positions and oppositions that guide the actions of the agents in the region.

To summarize, it is worth highlighting three themes. Firstly, this is a region with enormous comparative advantages (being situated near to the most dynamic economic center in Brazil and enjoying great natural beauty and biodiversity), which do not transform themselves into competitive advantages. This shifts the problem from the terrain of natural resources to that of the institutions that would be able to make use of them. Secondly, the recent tendency toward economic diversification have resulted in a certain division of interests between traditional agents and those connected to expanding activities (such as the increased va-

lue of the service sector). Thirdly, the polysemic nature of the discourse of sustainable development makes it difficult to translate the idea into a project capable of bringing together a broad coalition between agents and organizations. This prompts us to question how the participatory forums work and to what extent, given the trajectory of civil society actors in the region, it is reasonable to expect that they will enable the creation of broader coalitions that are capable of negotiating issues such as the issue of the dam, or reaching agreements about desirable forms of regional development.

4. THE PARTICIPATORY FORUMS

The Committee for the Management of Water Resources of the Rio Ribeira river basin (CGRH) and the Consortium for Food Safety and Local Development (Consad) are currently the two most important regional participatory forums in the Vale do Ribeira and cover 23 and 25 municipalities, respectively. They discuss local development plans, follow the implementation of the respective public policies with which they are connected and allocate financial resources, varying from US\$65,000 to US\$850,000, to projects that are considered a priority and in line with development and conservation plans. Interviews held with the local leaders left no doubt that these forums play a role in the everyday life of the region. Furthermore, given the intense party political competition that exists in the region—between the PT in control of the Federal Government and three councils in the region, the PSDB which controls the State Government and eight councils in the region, and the PMBD, a traditional party that controls seven local councils—leaders of these different groups lay great importance on securing space in these forums.

(a) Procedures

In order to analyze the capacity of these forums to encourage negotiation and organization between various social groups, it was necessary to find out who in fact participated in the forums. This section presents and discusses the information on this as well as on how rules and procedures are defined in each forum, thereby helping to explain the differences between the two forums.

The first differences can be found in terms of the amount of time they have been constituted

Table 1. *A synthesis of the pros and cons of the Tijuco Alto dam*

Issue	Pro—municipal councilors, State managers, business leaders and associations	Con—Quilombola communities, Sintravale, environmentalist NGOs
Jobs	The construction of the dam would create both direct and indirect employment. This would be particularly important for a region blighted by stagnation and low economic growth	The jobs created would only be temporary (during the construction of the dam). The number of permanent jobs after the dam was built would be very small
Income	The construction of the dam would improve the income of the region, since the jobs, as well as the generation of electricity would involve the payment of considerable sums of royalties and taxes	The taxes and royalties created by the dam would be collected in only a few municipalities. This effect would be even greater if only Tijuco Alto were built, since the municipalities of the Lower Vale would receive nothing
Social and environmental impacts	All the technical details would be carefully observed so as not to cause negative social and environmental impacts: the area to be flooded would be relatively small and this dam would not affect the traditional communities. The company in charge of construction would even support the local organization in their opposition to the other three dams planned (which would affect the traditional populations)	In the State of São Paulo, the Rio Ribeira de Iguape is the only large river that is still not dammed. Furthermore it is an area that is well preserved and the environmental impact of the project is not well known. Areas would be flooded that might cause lead contamination (old mining areas), affecting the balance of the ecosystem. Whilst the traditional communities are not located in the Tijuco Alto area, the whole project would involve the construction of other dams that would directly affect the quilombos
Effect on the flooding of Rio Ribeira de Iguape	The Tijuco Alto dam and the other three dams planned in the original project would improve the management of the flow of the river; thereby reducing the problems of flooding that regularly blights the region	The dam would tend to worsen the problems of flooding, since to generate electricity a high level of flow is needed for a high output. Therefore a greater volume of water would flow from the dam
Hydroelectricity as a source of clean energy	Brazil has a growing demand for electricity, and hydroelectricity is one of the cleanest forms of producing energy	The model of large hydroelectric dams is widely questioned. There are other alternatives available such as the construction of small dams that have a lower social and environmental impact
The costs involved	The Tijuco Alto dam would be built by a private company, thus not involving public money. The investment would be private, whilst the gains would be social (jobs and taxes/ royalties generated)	The dam would produce energy for a private company, the Brazilian Aluminum Company. The private interests of the company should not come above those of the population of the Vale, whose heritage is in the Atlantic rainforest

and the social forces that were behind their constitution. The CGRH was formed in the 1990s as a result of Brazilian legislation dealing with water resources, which called for the formation of such committees in each river basin. Consad was set up more recently during the first months of the Lula Government, in 2003, based upon the Zero Hunger Program, which was intended to be his most important social policy. In the CGRH, civil society occupies one third

of the seats, public officials of the State of São Paulo another third, and members of the 23 municipal authorities of the region the final third. Therefore, two-thirds of the members belong to the public sector. The forum is composed of 14 members representing the State, 14 members representing the local Councils, and 14 representatives of civil society. The Committee is coordinated by a president, vice-president, and an executive secretary. The

president is a representative of the municipal government, the vice-president is a representative of civil society and the executive secretary is a representative of the State government.

In Consad the weighting is inverted. Civil society occupies two-thirds of the seats, the public sector the remaining third. In this forum each of the 25 municipalities elects six representatives (4 from civil society and two from the public sector) and each of the forums' 150 members has an equal standing in debating the issues raised, as well as electing the president of the forum, and the members of the fiscal and thematic commissions.

As a result, there is a more technocratic and governmental form of operation in the CGRH, whilst the Consad system has more a civil society form. This has led to many complaints by the civil society representatives on CGRH, who feel that sometimes the debates are difficult to follow. The more pro-civil society operating style of Consad presents another problem: as a result of the lack of control of the politicians over the decisions of this forum, it tends to be considered less relevant by the municipal authorities as well as principally by the State authorities.

In each case participation is open only to representatives of organizations; an autonomous citizen is not permitted to run for the position of councilor. To deal with the problem of mobilizing councilors spread over 25 municipalities in both rural and urban areas both forums alternate the town where the meetings are organized. Furthermore, they try to guarantee transport and sometimes accommodation for the councilors. In order to guarantee that the selection process of the councilors is publicized, the CGRH and Consad use different strategies. In the CGRH, the councils and state organizations connected to the management of water resources have reserved seats, whereas civil society is informed through a list of organizations that act in the 23 municipalities organized by the executive-secretary of the CGRH. These organizations are informed of the selection process, and it is up to them to mobilize their members and choose their candidates. In the case of Consad the selection process is organized in each of the 25 municipalities. The managers together with the municipal officials organize meetings explaining what Consad and Agenda 21 are, and where the councilors are presented and voted for. In both forums all the seats were occupied, but nor was there a great deal of competition for them. The biggest differences

appear at the time when the posts that direct the forums are chosen.

With these design features in mind, we can now consider the first argument we aimed to address—namely how far a more equitable distribution of seats between civil society and public managers together with a more transparent selection process of councilors led to a greater capacity for inclusion, and what repercussions these rules and procedures had for the capacity of these forums to represent local society? There are at least two ways of answering this question. One consists of comparing the organizations present in the forums and the existing social actors in the region. The other is to contrast the general profile of the members of the forums with the socio-economic characteristics of the population of the Vale do Ribeira.

With respect to the social actors that participate in the forums, these rules have contributed toward re-enforcing the exclusion of both the poorest segments of the local population, such as those who live by subsistence farming in isolated regions, *and* the most dynamic sectors, such as those connected to the service sector. This is because neither group is organized in associations, thereby making their representation impossible. Furthermore, comparison between the two forums showed how the recruitment process is dependent on the managers. Whilst in the CGRH the presence of business associations is guaranteed by invitations formalized by the managers, in Consad they are almost non-existent, due, according to the managers of the latter, to the fact that they were not invited.

In comparison with the profile of the general population, both forums fail to represent the principal characteristics of the local society. In both CGRH and Consad, the participants earn more and have a better education than the average in the region. In both cases, the number of Afro-Brazilian representatives is lower than the proportion of this group in the local population. Likewise, the percentage of women is lower than the regional average. The same survey also showed that in Consad there is somewhat less divergence, which almost certainly is due to the greater weight given to civil society. Whilst a social distance exists between the population and the organizations and active members, it is not as wide as that with governmental organizations and State bureaucracy.

It was clearly observed that the difference in the number of government and civil society representatives contributed toward maintaining a

more popular profile in the case of Consad and a more technocratic one in the case of the CGRH. The system of recruitment was seen to be expensive and heavily dependent on previously established relationships between the managers of the forums and local actors; particularly those from party organizations and civil society, which are already mobilized, a feature that did not help to foster the inclusion of new actors. This can be partly attributed to the complexity and high cost involved in publicizing more widely the selection processes, highlighting the practical difficulties of organizing a recruitment process that follows the prescriptions of inclusiveness present in the literature.

(b) *Participation*

In order to explore the second assumption that this study addressed—namely that groups with less communicative, material, and technical resources will participate more when discussion methods that aim to promote their ability to express themselves are used—we observed specifically the involvement of two social groups that, as pointed out above, represent traditionally marginalized and poor sectors. The two groups were the Union for Family Farm Workers of the Vale do Ribeira (Sintravale), which includes small-scale rubber tappers, palm-heart collectors, and *caçaras*, and the Movement for Those Threatened by the Dam (MOAB), which brings together groups who are against the dam in the region, especially the *quilombo* communities. The aim was to analyze how the participatory dynamic set up by the forums influenced the performance of these organizations and to what extent they enabled their demands to connect with the more general debates and with the interests of other social groups.

The first aspect to be noted refers to the way in which the debates are organized. In the CGRH, there is a clear tendency to give priority to the technical knowledge and speed up the discussions through majority voting. This fact contributed toward a feeling expressed by the members of civil society that the issues dealt with were too technical, making it difficult for them to understand as well as to participate in the discussions, and furthermore making it difficult for them to make applications for funding from Fehidro (the investment fund generated by the forum). In the case of Consad, the immediate issues and concerns of the social

movements were prioritized, and on the whole it aimed to reach decisions by consensus rather than by majority decision.

With respect to the dam, at the present moment the CBA, which is proposing the project, initiated preparation of a new application for planning permission, without having started the phase of public meetings. The last meeting of the CGRH in 2005 pays testament to how the issue is being dealt with in this forum; the presentation of the new report, made by technical staff contracted by the company, was followed by a long sequence of interventions by the councilors, whose tone, on the whole, reaffirmed their position for or against the construction of the dam, with little reference to the technical information presented by the invited specialists. In general, the discussions stressed the political positions involved in the dispute, reaffirming the idea that this space is important for obtaining information and making alliances, but not for negotiating and influencing the definition of policies (Martins, 2005). In this sense, the various actors simply reinforced their positions without opening up space for debate, be that between these actors, or between them and new actors bringing less crystallized positions that could have opened up new spaces and themes for deliberation. In the period during which this study took place discussion of this issue simply did not take place in Consad.

Nonetheless, the question of sustainable development did appear in these forums, above all, in connection with discussion of the projects to be financed by the CGRH and Consad. In this case, it was possible to identify a clearly different perspective between the two forums. The CGRH determined in its first years of operation that it would only allocate funds to State entities concentrating funding on more technical activities, thereby excluding civil society for several years. However, over the last few years environmental organizations have successfully applied pressure to make this rule more flexible, promoting activities related to, for example, environmental education or reforestation by traditional communities. In contrast, from the beginning Consad set out to transfer funds to non-State organizations, especially those connected to the workers' unions.

The fact that Consad provides a space for organizations like Sintravale has direct repercussions for its members' perceptions of the forum. Interviews with the leaders of this Union showed that Consad was seen as an

important space, and participation in this forum was prioritized. It is not merely the rhetoric of the leaders which pay testament to the fact that it is a space where resources and policies can be disputed—the investments allocated by the forum also attest to its importance. During the selection of representatives, Sintravale mobilizes itself to ensure that its leaders and activists are amongst those chosen by the local civil society. The other regional forum, the CGRH does not receive the same attention from the Union. According to its leaders it gives more weight to the public authorities, thereby restricting any scope that workers' organizations have to influence its decisions.

Interviews with representatives of MOAB suggest that, whilst the organization participates in the CGRH, it does not recognize it as a strategic and legitimate forum where it can negotiate issues with respect to the Tijuco Alto dam. The Committee is seen purely as a way to obtain information about the issue and a place where the movement can present itself, together with the environmentalists that develop projects in the region, as a united front against the construction of the dam. Participation takes place not to discuss and negotiate ways of contemplating all the parties involved in the conflict, but to make clear their radical opposition to the project. Instead of having faith in these forums, the movement has opted to form other spaces, like, the Forum of Entities Against the Dam, which brings together various organizations opposed to the dam. The special status of *quilombo* communities does not give the movement any greater faith in their ability to use these forums as vehicles for influencing projects or public investment.

While both groups use these fora to seek alliances and obtain information, their experience of participation is quite different: Consad provides a space for the negotiation of projects and policies for Sintravale, whilst the CGRH is an arena for dispute and contestation for the *quilombolas*. This difference should be understood as an extension of both the participatory dynamic installed in each of the forums and the trajectories of these movements. That MOAB participates more by disputing than negotiating constitutes a reaction to the CGRH's strategy of guaranteeing their formal representation without making any effort to promote methods that would favor more participatory and inclusive processes of negotiation and decision-making; it also reflects the extent to which MOAB is making use of a rep-

ertoire of confrontational strategies that were acquired through their struggles for land, for the recognition of their ethnic identity and against the building of the dams.

In the case of Consad, which has the strong support of Sintravale and where the marginalized sectors actively participate, no effort is made to provide a space for positions supported by business associations in the region, as was mentioned previously; these groups are simply not represented in this forum. It could also be interpreted that this position is a result of the trajectory of Sintravale which, interested in guaranteeing its associates the resources distributed by these forums, developed strategies to limit the access of other groups, be they more organized or more marginalized.

This scenario reinforces the institutionalist hypothesis that the dynamics of discussion and decision making to a large extent determine who participates and how. It also illustrates that there is a long way to go in the use of participatory techniques—given that they are used in only an incipient form by Consad and are totally absent in the CGRH—before it will be possible to test in a consistent and systematic way the second assumption set out in this article. Furthermore, and equally importantly, this scenario suggests that to understand the real dynamics of these forums and their capacity to succeed it is vital to bear in mind the styles of activism and negotiation that characterized both civil society and state actors even prior to their involvement in these forums.

5. PARTICIPATION, DAMS, AND DEVELOPMENT

In this section we discuss the argument, present in the literature on participative democracy, that claims that broader social inclusion in policy processes will lead to the elaboration of proposals that are economically and politically more viable. From this perspective, the third assumption presented in Section 1 would suggest that the more inclusive the forum, the greater its ability to set in motion solutions to the two polemical regional issues around which the local debate is currently polarized; the construction of the Tijuco Alto dam and the implementation of the rhetoric of sustainable development.

In the case of sustainable development, it was noted that, whilst the notion is present in both forums, there is still very little agreement as to

the way in which to translate the idea into a concrete framework for defining projects and allocating resources. There are also divisions that have frustrated the drawing up of the Sustainable Territorial Development Plan. This was meant to be finished by the end of 2006 as a means of orienting Consad's activities and carry forward the Agenda 21 process in the region. However, as this is an initiative of a forum that linked to Federal Government policy and thus to the PT political party, it has not received support from the State Government (linked to the PSDB party), limiting from the outset the range of actors and resources that this Plan could mobilize and articulate in a coherent fashion. Yet such Federal-State coordination is vital for the successful implementation of a regional project, since the recognition of land titles, which is one of the principal obstacles to investment in the region, is a function of a State body, the Land Institute of São Paulo (Itesp), while funding for investment in family farming comes from a Federal Government program, Pronaf. Furthermore, the recognition of *quilombo* land is a Federal function, whilst the management of conservation areas, where some of them are situated, on the whole, is a State responsibility.

The results of the survey undertaken to establish the position of the members of the forums with respect to the dam illustrate a further important point. Whilst in the CGRH four in every 10 members support the dam, in Consad this figure was only two in every ten. There is no clear relationship between the level of education and income of the interviewees and their position with respect to the dam. The variable with the strongest connection to their position in relation to the issue is their link to, or sympathy or support for the left-wing parties: the supporters of the PV (Green Party) or the PT (Labor Party) tended to be against the dam.

These positions seem to have been influenced very little by the forums. Indeed, on the rare occasions in which the issue was discussed, as in the meeting of the CGRH when the new Tijuco dam project was presented, discussion involved open and sometimes hostile confrontation between the participants. This scenario seems to have little in common with the theoretical descriptions of deliberative democracy, in which debates are organized according to the procedures which ensure that arguments both for and against particular decisions are heard, and that participants, once given the chance to reflect upon these arguments,

are able to make their own decision (Dryzek, 2001).

Both cases also suggest that the forums only made a modest contribution to the negotiation of alternatives between those who supported short-term projects, capable of favoring the less favored segments of the region, and those arguing for medium and long-term investment in infrastructure to guarantee the continuation of initiatives aimed at promoting economic growth. In Consad the social movements prioritized alternative initiatives rather than grand projects, seeking to balance development with the conservation of natural resources, whilst the specialists in the CGRH tended to promote investments in infrastructure projects.

If negotiation *within* these forums is constrained, there is also limited coordination *between* them. Not only is there no institutional dialogue, there is also open dispute between the different levels of government. Furthermore, the rules that define the parameters for distributing grants and evaluating results themselves hinder any pooling of knowledge or any contact between different State agencies and sectors of society.

Bearing these elements in mind, let us revisit at the third assumption that links the inclusiveness of these forums with their ability to find solutions to the conflict surrounding the dam and debates about regional development. From this perspective, the CGRH's approach, emphasizing the importance of medium and long-term investments, whilst compatible with its more "technical" vision linked to the bureaucracy responsible for the management of the water resources, is very different from that supported by Consad which emphasizes the importance of investing in short-term projects, a strategy compatible with the vision of the social movements which call for a rapid improvement in the living conditions of the poorest segments.

It can be argued that both forums open up channels of communication between managers and civil society, and as such help make explicit the divisions that exist around both dams and sustainable development strategies. However, this merely took place within pre-existing coalitions each with already well defined positions with respect to these issues. Furthermore those responsible for the organization of the forums appeared to have little interest in encouraging inclusion and debate between different parties. This dynamic reveals much more about the efforts that organizers of each of the forums go to in order to maintain the space for their own

positions in regional politics, than it does about any attempt to open up space for the inclusion of conflicting perspectives. The dynamic of these forums responds less to any normative ideal of inclusiveness and more to what Amable and Palombarini (2005) recognized as an intrinsic characteristic of institutions: rather than being spaces where interests can be aligned, they are the expression of particular configurations of interests.

6. FINAL REMARKS

This article has discussed the presumed relationship between participation, inclusion, and development under conditions of social mobilization around the relationships between environment, territory, and economy. One branch of the literature on participation suggests that in the presence of a mobilized civil society, of managers committed to the project of social participation, and a “well-designed” institutions, it would be possible to find forums capable of encouraging coordination between agents, thereby facilitating the resolution of the conflict over the Tijuco Alto dam, as well as the formulation of a project of sustainable development for the region. Conversely, another branch suggests that this contribution would practically be nil; either the forums would tend toward the recreation of already existing asymmetries, thereby limiting the possibilities of negotiation between the actors, would be at the mercy of decisions made by State actors, or would be captured by political parties or special interest groups.

The situation in the Vale do Ribeira brings together various factors that the literature suggests ought to favor the emergence of effective participatory governance institutions. There is an active process of social mobilization in the region, managers are committed to the organization of the forums, and there is a reasonable amount of variation in the designs being used (which ought to help learning and adaptation). The research set out in this article illustrates the importance of the rules that organize the processes of inclusion and discussion in two very different forums: the CGRH and Consad. However, as previously seen, these rules have functioned in a very different way to that anticipated by authors such as Fung and Avritzer, who would predict that such rules ought lead to the construction of a new and broad coalition between different actors. In the cases stud-

ied here, these rules appear to have served more to reproduce the coalitions that support the organizers of these forums. It is interesting to note that, had the research concentrated solely on the CGRH there would have been a tendency to conclude that these forums achieve little more than legitimizing the decisions made by the executive body. Alternatively, if it had concentrated only on Consad and the central role played by the PT and Sintravale in this forum, then the tendency would have been to endorse the idea of capture by political parties. The comparison has allowed us to come to a different conclusion, that forum dynamics can be understood as a replication of the party political game in the participatory sphere.

To a certain extent this is a predictable result when we take into account that it is the State actors and politicians that have the incentive to fight for space in the participatory sphere and the resources to organize these forums. Yet this same result also suggests that the participatory sphere is more heterogeneous than is supposed by much of the literature, which tends to focus on only one or another actor, for example, the progressive coalitions or the corporate interest groups, as their principal artifact. Our research shows that the nature of this sphere is to a large part determined by the efforts of politicians and managers connected to different coalitions to guarantee that these participatory spaces will facilitate their own political reproduction. This suggests that future studies of such participatory governance mechanisms must consider three points in order that their analyzes are less idealized and normative than has been the case to date.

The first concerns the relationships between design, inclusiveness, and the democratization of the political process, since the latter may not occur in the ways suggested by the literature. This is because these participatory forums, rather than being spaces for the convergence of different interests, may themselves be an expression of specific coalitions.

The second point is that participatory governance processes actually conceive the role of marginalized actors as one of co-producers of public policies and co-generators of innovative development alternatives, principally at a local level. Beyond any normative judgment as to whether this is desirable or not, this possibility presents an analytical challenge which has not been explored in depth by the literature; that is to understand the conditions under which actors that are traditionally mobilized to criticize

and make demands move toward—if that is what happens—dialogue and cooperation.

The third point concerns the relationship between “democratic-ness” and “effectiveness.” The democratization of the political process, a desirable feature in itself, is not a sufficient criterion to guarantee its efficacy. After all, participation can be increased without the political process becoming more effective. For example, poor economic growth can be the result of counterproductive economic policies, which accurately reflect popular choices. In this sense, we are working with two notions of the quality of democratic processes: one in terms of degrees of democratization and the other in terms of the efficacy of decisions that ensue from these processes. If it is the case—and surely it is—that the popular majority can be as mistaken about policy options as can insulated technocrats—then a perfect responsiveness of the government to popular decisions could lead to disastrous policies. In short, there is an inevitable tension between democracy and effectiveness that needs to be considered with care (Plattner, 2004).

Our efforts here were to understand analytically under what conditions the association between participation and development occurs in a concrete situation and the theoretical implications thereof. Inversely, we could now think in terms of what the normative implications for those involved in such a kind of experience are: social movements, policymakers, advocacy groups, and expert advisory groups. First, it would be necessary to find ways to avoid the risks of the capturing of the forums or other participatory instruments by more organized and influential groups. This could be achieved by publicizing the activities more, or even by searching for ways to involve the less organized.

Second, it would be fundamental to try to diminish the asymmetry between the more and the less influential, by adopting, for example, methodologies oriented to that end. Third, it is also necessary to overcome the fragmentation between institutions, participatory spaces, or policies, enhancing convergence and complementarity. Lastly, it is important to adopt these measures in a way that may generate more learning about participatory and development linkages.

Altogether, these findings point to the fact that the rules of the game, expressed in formal institutions, can only be understood as part of the social context within which they are embedded. Just as there are rules of the game as highlighted in the institutionalist assumptions, there is also a game of rules. The dynamic of the participatory sphere is the result of these two dimensions: of its laws and its own internal dynamic, and its relationship with other spheres of the social world. Knowledge of each of these two dimensions—that internal to the participatory sphere and that which inheres in its relationship with other spheres—is still in its early stages. A great deal of research, especially in terms of comparative analysis, will need to be carried out in order to evaluate with more confidence the conditions under which it is possible to hope for a successful association between participation and development. This will require approaches that build links between apparently competing approaches in the literature, some of which are more optimistic and normative, others of which are more pessimist. Only on the basis of such work will it be possible to preserve the principles underlying the political discourse of participatory democracy and overcome the naivety that often surrounds it.

NOTES

1. For more details see www.rimisp.org.
2. These figures result from the merging of lists of organisations provided by different sources interviewed during the field work (Coelho et al., 2007).

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