

Assessing Local Governance Innovations in Morocco in Light of the Participatory Budgeting Experience in Brazil: The Case of “Civil Society” Federations (*Espaces Associatifs*) in Al Haouz Province

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Abstract. This paper examines local governance innovations in Morocco in light of the Participatory Budgeting experience in Brazil. Based on empirical fieldwork (in the case of Morocco), and an extensive literature review (in the case of Brazil), the paper reviews the practical conditions in which attempts at co-governance take place. Co-governance arrangements refer to institutional mechanisms that grant local civil society and citizens’ representatives a voice in local government, be it in the form of simple observer status or as a full partner in Participatory Budgeting exercises as is the case in Porto Alegre. The findings from Morocco are based on projects by the American NGO Catholic Relief Services in two rural communes in the Al Haouz province. These projects encouraged the creation of federations of local village associations that were given a voice in local government, and paved the way for the creation of such federations for the entire province and at various levels of government. It is argued that these federations (‘Espaces Associatifs’) constitute arenas for state control and the politicization of local civil society rather than viable partners for co-governance with local government. However, important governance reforms are underway in Morocco that could benefit from insights gathered from the Porto Alegre experience, and that represent interesting areas for future research.

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1. Introduction

“No, of course we do not have democracy. But pure institutional democratization is not the only important criterion. We have a rich, active civil society which has made Morocco, despite its absolute monarchy, into the most democratic country in the Arab world”. (Moroccan journalist cited in Lagendijk and Wiersma, 2008: 68)

This paper aims to examine recent experiments with innovative local governance arrangements in the case of rural Morocco. It attempts to do so in light of experiences made elsewhere and with regard to Participatory Budgeting (PB) in Brazil in particular.

Morocco is a country widely seen as the front-runner in terms of “democratic transition” in the Middle East North Africa (MENA) region (see quotation above). Indeed, with the accession of King Mohamed VI to the throne in 1999, human rights conditions have improved, a more progressive family code was introduced, and there is now a relatively open discussion of corruption and clientelism (World Bank, 2007). Most importantly, there is – at least at the level of discourse – a move away from the government’s top-down approach to poverty reduction and towards bottom-up and participatory planning and implementation (see Bergh, 2009b).

For example, while the Ministry of the Interior retains important powers of *tutelle* (i.e. tutelage, guardianship or supervision) and control over local governments (*communes*), this is gradually changing; shortly after his accession to the throne in 1999, King Mohammed VI introduced the new concept of authority (*le nouveau concept de l’autorité*). It has been argued that this new concept of authority amounts to a new culture of public service based on the respect for decentralized institutions and local liberties (Harsi and El Yaagoubi, 2006: 191-192). It certainly implies increased administrative and financial autonomy for local authorities.

A new Municipal Charter was issued in October 2002 and entered into force the following year, replacing the Charter of 1976. It extends the responsibilities of the councils, establishes a legal status for the councilors, and awards a special status to the big urban areas. It also, for the first time, contains provisions related to the commune’s role in reducing poverty and exclusion. In fact, it could be argued that this charter considers the communes as a framework for holistic development (El Yaagoubi, 2004: 60). Similarly, the Charter includes, for the first time, the possibility for

communes to create partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The commune council can enter into partnership agreements with local associations, although the Ministry of the Interior’s exercises a *tutelle* on such partnership agreements.

Relationships between government administrations and local civil society organizations are also gradually evolving towards greater cooperation in service provision, helped by the Social Development Agency (*Agence de Développement Sociale* - ADS) created in 2001 which acts as a social fund.

Such was the situation at the time of the field research (in 2004-2006) on local governance projects funded by the American NGO Catholic Relief Services (CRS) in two rural communes in the Al Haouz province.¹ These projects encouraged the creation of federations of local village associations that were given a voice in local government, and paved the way for the creation of such federations for the entire province and at various levels of government. However, based on evidence collected at the time, it will be argued that these federations (*‘Espaces Associatifs’*) constitute arenas for state control and the politicization of local civil society rather than viable partners for co-governance with local government.

Important cautions with regard to the case study and fieldwork findings presented here are that they a) cannot be generalized beyond their actual geographic location and b) are in need of updating; many local governance reforms have been launched in Morocco since the fieldwork was undertaken from late 2004 to early 2006.

Most importantly, the King launched the National Initiative for Human Development (known under its French acronym, INDH) in 2005, and it has since received substantial funding from most major donors, including the World Bank. The INDH is designed to improve socio-economic conditions in targeted poor areas (5 million people at a cost of \$1.1 billion from 2006 to 2010). The first phase (2006-2010) targets over 400 rural communities and 250 urban neighborhoods. It is promoting a new

¹ These projects were part of a larger PhD research project on state-society synergies at the local level in Morocco (Bergh, 2008).

participatory local governance mechanism designed to empower local communities and municipalities and improve the inclusiveness, accountability and transparency of decision-making and implementation processes at the local level. To this end, local human development committees have been created in all provinces and in each municipality concerned, composed equally of civil society representatives, elected officials and local government officials (World Bank 2006, World Bank 2007; see also Berriane in this volume).

Other recent reforms with significant implications for local governance and accountability include a new Municipal Charter that came into force in 2009 (amending certain provisions of the Charter of 2002) which further reduces the *tutelle* or supervisory powers of the Ministry of the Interior over municipal affairs, and institutionalizes the formulation of “participatory” Municipal Development Plans (see DGCL, 2008). Moreover, the municipal elections held in June 2009 for the first time included special lists for women candidates.

With regard to the proposed comparison with local governance innovations elsewhere, it is clear that the case studies from rural Morocco presented in this paper are very different from the Participatory Budgeting (PB) initiatives in Porto Alegre and other cities. The latter are large-scale experiments in co-governance or participatory governance (sometimes also referred to as “Empowered Deliberative Democracy”, see Fung and Wright 2003), which have developed over many years, involve huge numbers of participants, and devolve substantial decision-making power to participants.

However, although there are very important differences between Porto Alegre and Moroccan rural communes, the following description of Brazil’s political system could arguably be applied to Morocco as well:

‘Brazil is a society with a long tradition of authoritarian politics. The predominance of an oligarchic, patrimonialist, and bureaucratic model of domination has resulted in a state formation, a political system, and a culture characterized by the political and social marginalization of the popular classes, or their integration by means of populism and clientelism; the restriction of the public sphere and its privatisation by the patrimonialist elites; and the “artificiality” of the democratic game and liberal ideology, resulting in a huge discrepancy between the “legal country” and the “real country”.’ (de Sousa Santos, 1998: 462).

On the other hand, it could also be argued that the socio-economic pre-conditions in Porto Alegre are unique: it is the capital of an industrialized and relatively wealthy state, includes a population of 1.3 million, and has a life expectancy and literacy rates well above national averages (de Sousa Santos 1998, Baiocchi 2001, Koonings 2004). In addition, the long history of left-populism dating back to the 1930s, and the coming to power of the Workers’ Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*, henceforth PT) in Porto Alegre’s City Hall in 1989 are often cited as important factors in the “enabling environment” that can explain the success of PB (de Sousa Santos 1998: 463). Indeed, over the course of the first administration (1989-92), the participatory budget became a central part of the PT’s strategy for re-election (Abers, 2003: 202).

However, Baiocchi (2001: 63) argues that ‘the success of the Porto Alegre experiment stems from its legitimacy-enhancing aspects rather than from “exceptional features” of the city’s history.’ Nevertheless, the importance of a driving political vision behind PB cannot be overstated: the PT leadership held (at least at the beginning) a radical democratic vision of popular control of city government, and of participatory reforms as part of a broader transformative project and social justice (Baiocchi 2001: 65). Indeed, many of the PT leaders had emerged from neighborhood groups that – since the late 1970s – began to challenge the clientelist leaders dominating local associations. They organized coalitions of working-class residents against relocation policies and demanded basic infrastructure with the help of “external agents” such as progressive church activists and local NGOs (Abers 1998: 515; see also Schneider and Goldfrank 2002).

As Avritzer (2000: 9-11) points out, the idea of instituting a participatory budget had its origins within civil society. It was the Union of Residents’ Associations of Porto Alegre (UAMPA) that first advocated the introduction of such a mechanism in the city in 1986; however, the PB’s specific design arose after a period of intense negotiation and participation between the new government and civil society groups.

The PB process itself has been adapted and refined over the years, and evolved into ‘a two-tiered structure of fora where citizens participate as individuals and as representatives of various groups of civil society (neighborhood associations, cultural groups, special interest groups)

throughout a yearly cycle. They deliberate and decide on projects for specific districts and on municipal investment priorities, and then [...] monitor the outcome of these projects' (Baiocchi, 2001: 46).²

It is widely acknowledged that the PB experience is a success in terms of improving municipal finances, efficiency and equity in municipal investments, increasing citizens' participation in municipal affairs (though without achieving complete gender parity), and creating and strengthening networks within civil society (see Baiocchi 2001, Abers 1998, Koonings 2004). Most importantly, the increased legitimacy and accountability of public decisions under PB led to an increase in property taxes and additional scrutiny over municipal funds (Baiocchi 2001: 48, 62; Schneider and Baquero 2006). In the words of Koonings (2004: 90), 'this has eliminated most of the space for conventional neopatrimonial and clientelistic practices in municipal politics.'

It is of course impossible to interpret PB in isolation from its historical and sociological context and specificity (in particular, the existence of mass-based social movements, a phenomenon virtually non-existent in Morocco), as well as its temporal dimension. The experience should not be reduced to a few abstract traits composing a model to be applied elsewhere (de Sousa Santos, 1998: 507; see also Baiocchi 2003: 69). The purpose here is certainly not to apply the PB experience as some sort of "gold-standard" in terms of participatory governance, but I believe that it can nevertheless be useful to consider some key factors that contributed to its success and reflect on their potential implications even in a context as different as that of rural Morocco or indeed the MENA region in general.

The structure of the paper is as follows: the next section will present the methodology, followed by a discussion of some key "success" factors in the participatory budgeting experience in Porto Alegre. The bulk of the paper is devoted to presenting the fieldwork findings on local co-governance experiments in the Al Haouz province in Morocco. The final section will conclude by exploring some implications of the experiments in Brazil for the Moroccan (and MENA) context, and areas for future research.

² See Koonings (2004) and Schneider and Baquero (2006) for informative summaries of the annual cycle in the PB process.

2. Methodology

One of the poorest provinces of Morocco, the Al Haouz province (situated South of Marrakech) was chosen as an area with several on-going “participatory” rural development projects as well as the local governance experiments studied here, and as an area generally said to have one of the highest levels of “social capital” and – at least at the time of fieldwork – a dynamic governor.

The findings on the Catholic Relief Services (CRS) projects are based on a critical reading of project documents as well as interviews with key actors. Time constraints did not allow for interviews with representatives of all the associations involved, nor their members/beneficiaries in the two communes concerned. However, in-depth research in two other rural communes in the same province included questions on the *Espaces Associatifs*, using semi-structured interviews, and complemented by an analysis of council meeting minutes, financial data, and other documents related to the functioning of rural communes.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 33 local councilors and 13 commune staff, as well as staff in the Ministry of the Interior at various administrative levels in the province and with local politicians. In addition, I conducted 65 semi-structured interviews with members of 50 village associations. The fieldwork was carried out over 13 months: September 2004 to March 2006. The observations on Porto Alegre are based on an extensive literature review.

3. Participatory Budgeting in Brazil: Some Key Success Factors³

State-society relations can take the form of co-governance (also called “participatory local governance”). Co-governance mechanisms explicitly violate the public-private, or state-society boundary (Ackerman, 2004: 450).

³ It is not possible to give a detailed account of the PB experience here, but see e.g. de Sousa Santos (1998). See also Heller (2001) for an analysis of similar sets of variables in decentralized contexts (Kerala in India and South Africa, along with Porto Alegre).

These approaches are part of a broader notion of democracy than that implied by traditional electoral and deliberative mechanisms.⁴ They promote the capacity building of local civil society and processes that increase the consultation of citizens (including marginalized groups) by local government officials. They thus link civil society to local government decision-making (including policy setting and resource allocation) through processes that increase information-flow (transparency), and ultimately aim to strengthen accountability and local government responsiveness (Helling et al, 2005: 34, 68). A very good example of such co-governance arrangements is the PB process in Brazil.

Based on a review of the literature, it is possible to identify four main “success” factors in the PB experience in Porto Alegre. The first is the role of state agencies. The local deliberative forums (Municipal Council of the Budget) are vested with substantial decision-making power, but they do not function fully autonomously from other local units or from central monitoring units. There are regional agents who act as non-voting facilitators to support the functioning and mobilization of participatory spaces; hence, central agencies offer supervision and support to local units but they respect the latter’s decision-making power (Baiocchi, 2001: 48). Abers (1998: 532) emphasizes ‘the work of [government-employed] community organizers who acted as external agents, visiting immobilized neighborhoods, seeking out new leaders, helping people organize, and disseminating information about what could be gained through collective action.’⁵

Second, the literature emphasizes the importance of developing civic skills on the part of the poor. An explicit part of the PB is a didactic component inspired by the “popular education” methodologies of Paulo Freire and the Ecclesiastic Base Communities, which means that despite the strong inequalities of urban Brazil, the poor and uneducated can generally participate without being dominated by the more educated and wealthy. This is because meeting facilitators ensure that vast segments of participants are able to learn to participate effectively in meetings, acquiring skills in debating and mobilizing resources for collective goals (Baiocchi, 2001: 53). In particular, participants gradually develop the capacity to draw on specific interests to formulate general rules for how resources ought to be distributed (Abers, 1998: 528; Abers, 2003: 206; see also Pellissery and Bergh, 2007).

⁴ See Tadesse et al (2006: 7) for a useful discussion of how participatory governance can address the limitations of representative democracy.

⁵ See also Baiocchi (2003) for the role of the state in fostering the public sphere.

This points to the importance of establishing a setting in which certain types of speech are not valued above others, and in which learning is broadly accessible (Baiocchi, 2001: 64).

Thirdly, the institutional features of PB mean that it functions more like a “school of deliberative democracy” rather than becoming a vehicle of co-optation or hollowing out of local civil society. It has encouraged the rapid rise of new and various types of associations throughout the city, and the creation of parallel organizations to unresponsive ones.⁶ Popular Councils were created that hold regular regional meetings for representatives of neighborhood associations as well as for independent citizens wishing to discuss a district’s problems; they coordinate activities between neighborhood associations, settle disputes among them, and often act as intermediaries between a single association and municipal government (Baiocchi, 2001: 55-56). And while there are no institutional checks on associations for standards of (internal and procedural) democracy, a recognized but unresponsive association can be gradually “displaced” by a new one whose members have earned the community’s respect through their achievements within PB (Baiocchi, 2001: 61). In short, as Abers (1998: 511) states, ‘innumerable new neighborhood organizations have appeared in response to the [PB] policy, often in areas that were previously dominated by closed, ineffective associations that served as little more than tools of clientelist party politics.’ A related feature of the PB process is that the dynamics of decision-making in the forums not only encourage neighborhood associations to mobilize residents but also to build alliances with other neighbourhoods, and to defend “the needs of the district” rather than the “needs of specific neighborhoods” (Abers, 1998: 524, 525).

A fourth factor identified in the literature is the importance of early demonstration effects. Many participants in PB recount how the demonstration effect of capital improvements in one neighborhood (e.g. highly visible public works such as paved roads that could be completed within a year) brought them into contact with administration officials who then encouraged them to take part in budget assemblies (Abers, 1998: 521; Abers, 2003: 205). Indeed, PB has shown that ‘it is crucial that reforms

⁶ See Avritzer (2000: 19) who disputes Baiocchi’s figures however on the exponential increase in associations after the implementation of PB.

actually deliver goods in a timely fashion to overcome cynicism and to convince persons who have limited amount of time that participation is worthwhile' (Baiocchi, 2001: 61).

While these factors help explain the success of PB, there are of course also shortcomings in this experience. According to critics, the main drawback of PB is the fact that it erodes the legitimate prerogatives of the Municipal Council to approve the municipal budget; under PB, although the proposal of the budget law is forwarded to the legislature for debate and approval, it cannot in practice reject it anymore as it has been legitimated by the large participation of citizens mobilized by PB (de Sousa Santos, 1998: 502; Koonings, 2004: 91).

Despite this and other shortcomings, the PB is generally regarded as a successful example of co-governance between state and society actors. The next section turns to a case study of very limited, yet pioneering, co-governance mechanisms in rural Morocco. The aim is to assess their experience so far and examine to what extent some of the PB "success factors" are present or could explain the shortcomings.

4. Local Governance Innovations in the Al Haouz Province: Local Governance Programs of the Catholic Relief Services

The American NGO, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), introduced local governance experiments in the Al Haouz province that have become well-known even at the national level.⁷ Its approach also influenced the governor's strategy with regard to organizing the numerous village associations in the province, notably the setting up of the *Espaces Associatifs* (see below).

The local governance project has been developed in three stages or interventions.⁸ The first intervention was the "Rural Civil Society and Development Program" (1997-2002), which was co-implemented by USAID (through CRS and the Near East Foundation), UNICEF and the Moroccan Government, in two communes in the province of Al Haouz and in the province of Essaouira. The goals of this project were to foster and

⁷ For newspaper reports, see Berrissoule 2003, 2004, 2005 and M.K. 2004.

⁸ Due to space constraints, only the features directly relating to local government-civil society interactions will be described here.

institutionalize partnerships between rural village associations and other Local Development Agencies and to improve living conditions for poor rural communities. Project activities included management and training for village associations, basic healthcare, education of young girls, access to potable water, and hygiene education.

This project was important in terms of stimulating the emergence of “civil society” in the province as it encouraged the creation of a village association in each village in which it was implemented. It also tried to clarify the concept of civil society and associations, emphasizing the importance of working for collective rather than personal interests.

In this first development program, the communes hardly participated. In fact, the commune councilors did not support the associations’ projects and sometimes even put obstacles in their way. It became clear that the appearance of associations as new local actors created rivalries and conflicts of legitimacy between them and the communes. This was a healthy development in the cases where villagers who were not involved in the program put pressure on their communes to provide them with similar projects (Barkalil and Embarek, 1999: 74). Nevertheless, since many inhabitants had negative attitudes towards the commune, it was not possible to stimulate the creation of associations and at the same time require them to enter into partnerships with the commune. As time went by though, each actor acquired a better understanding of the other’s functions and remit. The project team then became concerned with achieving development impact on a larger-scale and decided that the village was no longer the appropriate unit of intervention (interviews and UNICEF 2004).

This change of direction was reflected in the second intervention, which was limited to two rural communes in the Al Haouz province under the “Good Governance and Public-Private Partnership” project. It lasted from April 2003 to June 2004 and was co-implemented with the Moroccan Government, Cordaid, Manos Unidas and USAID, with additional funding from CRS. The overarching goal of the project was to contribute to the strengthening of local capacity in good governance and public-private partnerships in order to achieve sustainable development. This goal was divided further into two objectives. The first objective was to reinforce the relationships between village associations and local government. The second

objective was to improve the living conditions of poor and marginalized populations.

Project activities included identifying projects for village associations and reinforcing partnerships between village associations and communes. For this latter purpose, two unions of associations were established in October 2003, one in each of the two communes. The members of these unions were primarily those associations that had been created under the previous “Rural Civil Society and Development Program.”

In addition to the unions, coordination units were set up in both communes as interfaces with the associative sector. In Commune A, this unit was set up in December 2003 and composed of three trained people to coordinate the activities of the commune and the associations, to give technical assistance for project implementation, and to ensure the association’s inputs into the decision on allocating the commune budget surplus. While in Commune B the setup was the same, the 2005 evaluation noted that the unit did not have any real autonomy since it was under the supervision of the *caïd* (the local representative of the Ministry of the Interior) and the commune councilors (Bouja, 2005).

The third intervention in the two communes was the “Democratic Participation and Effective Local Government” project (from July 2004 to June 2005), which sought to build on the experiences of the previous two projects. While also implemented by CRS, the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) housed in the U.S. State Department covered its recurrent expenditures, and the Moroccan Social Development Agency (ADS) was expected to provide funding for income-generation projects. This project did not continue for a second year (i.e. July 2005- July 2006) due to CRS’s decision to stop its entire Morocco program. The project aimed to achieve three strategic objectives based on the principles of “good governance” as they were defined for this project, i.e. participation, performance and partnership. The envisaged results included an increase in the number of village associations that were members of the unions, and a sustained increase in the number of interactions between the unions of associations and the rural communes.

The membership numbers in the unions of associations are indeed impressive. At the time of the fieldwork, the union in Commune A had 48 members that included all the village associations in the commune. Every association member proposed one representative for the union committee

elections. In Commune A, there were 15 committee members, while the union in Commune B had 13 associations as members represented by seven committee members. These membership figures exceeded the project objective of 50 member associations in the two communes at the end of two years. The role of the unions was to follow up on projects and replicate successful ones, to train members of the village associations in participatory project formulation, to resolve conflicts within the associations, and make sure they held regular Annual General Meetings.

As for achieving increased interactions between the unions and the commune, the evaluation (Bouja, 2005: 14) noted that in Commune A, there were regular contacts between the commune and the unions, while in Commune B this was not so. The participation of the unions in the decisions of the commune council was also much higher in Commune A than in Commune B, with the first one having joint meetings up to twice a month and the latter not having any joint official meetings at all. This can partly be explained by the fact that the union committee in Commune A included three members of the commune council's political majority (i.e. councilors who were at the same time presidents of associations) while in Commune B, the president of the union was a council member in the political opposition. However, both councils had changed their internal statutes to allow for the participation of the village associations (represented by the unions) as observers in council meetings. In Commune A, the union representatives were consulted on the budget surplus allocation while in Commune B this provision remained on paper only (Bouja, 2005 and interviews).⁹

It was further envisaged that the unions of associations and the communes would jointly contribute funds to address the needs of the community, but at the time of the fieldwork this had not yet been done. The reasons for this could be found in bureaucratic and legal obstacles, and in the more deep-seated fact that the associations were in many cases created in order to make up for the lack of the commune's involvement, and were not ready to cooperate with them unless they could work on profitable, well-

⁹ It seems that in Morocco the idea of giving observer status to associations on local councils was first voiced in UNDP Maroc (1999: 9).

defined projects. It is also likely that the associations were afraid of being politically manipulated by the councilors (Filali Meknassi and Bouja 2003).

The union in Commune A was much more dynamic than that in Commune B. In Commune A, the coordinators had organized three training sessions for 40 participants on the administrative and financial management of associations. The trainings had a positive impact on the communes' workload as many problems were from then on dealt with at the village level rather than brought directly to the commune, and the population was better able to distinguish between the domains of the commune president and those of the *caïd* (the representative of the Ministry of the Interior).

The fact that the commune-association partnership seemed to work much better in Commune A than in Commune B could also be explained by the difference in the communes' fiscal and leadership capacities. At the time of the fieldwork, various sources told me that the president of Commune B (who was in his 70s) had not really bought into the principles of "good governance" as he considered this co-governance experiment as a zero-sum game, and therefore clung on to power at all costs. He was also presiding over a very small and poor commune (the budget surplus that could be used for capital expenditures amounted to 243,000 DH in 2004, i.e. 44 DH, or about 4 Euros, for each of the total 5,500 inhabitants).

On the other hand, the president of the commune council in Commune A (in his mid-fifties) was much more enterprising in raising revenues. He was also benefiting from the closer proximity of the commune's territory to Marrakech and the subsequently substantial tourism investments there. The president had pushed for the creation of an industrial zone, and there were plans to build factories which would stimulate local employment creation. Similarly, the president was behind the elaboration of an Integrated Development Plan for the commune based on global market opportunities for quality olives and pottery. For the pottery ovens, he helped to raise external funds (from UNDP) to buy gas ovens, which replaced the heavily polluting older ovens. Some of this investment was reflected in the commune's revenues: the budget surplus amounted to 1.24 million DH in 2004 for a population of 21,400, i.e. 58 DH, or about 6 Euros, per inhabitant. The president also seemed to believe in the importance of electoral accountability, suggesting that he purposefully chose to make the Development Plan's duration coincide with the council's term in office so that 'the population can hold the council members accountable on the eve of the next elections.'

With regard to the wider population, they might not necessarily have attended any training, but participated in the project through income-generation activities and literacy courses. A fundamental question in terms of local governance is whether the projects contributed to the population’s awareness of, and engagement in, local government and associations, thus improving their accountability. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, it was not possible to investigate this question further at the time of the fieldwork. However, based on my findings on the capacity of 50 village associations in two other communes in the Al Haouz province, I would argue that it is unlikely that many people were able to understand and engage in the quite complex arrangements that have been set up between the unions of associations and the commune. Nevertheless, the fact that the unions obtained the status of observer in council meetings and were consulted on council budget decisions was a significant step towards co-governance.

5. The Creation of the *Espaces Associatifs* in the Al Haouz Province

The *Espaces Associatifs* (EAs) in Al Haouz province are federations of local village associations at various levels of governance. They are modeled on the unions of associations that were set up by the CRS projects. The main push came from the provincial governor who wanted to extend the CRS experience to all 39 communes in the province. It is also likely that royal instructions promoting the “new concept of authority” and emphasizing the governor’s role as “relational facilitator” played a role (Abbadi 2001: 16). However, in the Al Haouz province, the governor proceeded in a rather top-down fashion, asking for federations of associations to be created first at the levels of the province (in 2002) and the four *cercles*¹⁰ that make up the province, and only later at the commune level (in 2004). It appears that Al Haouz was only the second province in Morocco to establish such federations (following the example of the province of Figuig in the East, and preceding more recent unions in Agadir and the North).

¹⁰ In Morocco, provinces are divided into *cercles* (headed by a *chef de cercle*, also called a *super-caïd*) and these in turn into *caïdats*, grouping several communes. Both are purely administrative subdivisions for the purpose of facilitating organization and control by the Ministry of the Interior.

Officially, these structures were set up to improve the coordination of the associations' activities among themselves, and with the communes and the provincial authorities. As the head of the coordination and cooperation department at the province explained, 'the province has 1200 associations that need to be structured because we cannot deal with them individually.' The EAs should also serve as supervisory (*encadrement*) and accompanying structures for the associations in order to strengthen their capacities and competences in the area of local development. In return for technical expertise and initial funding, the associations would have to transfer 25 percent of their revenues from income-generation projects to the *Espace Associatifs* at the commune level (Hajjaj, 2004 and Ichennarn, 2004: 16-17).

The provincial authorities established a rather complicated pyramidal system of (indirect) representation at the three levels of EAs (province, *cercle*, and commune). However, the interviews revealed that not many association members at the local level knew about their representatives in the EAs at higher levels.

On top of this "elected" structure, the provincial authorities established the "state" structure made of up "coordinators". Thus, in each commune a civil servant had been designated to "coordinate" the associations. The commune coordinator is in turn supervised by coordinators at the *caïdat* and *cercle*. These are civil servants at the Ministry of the Interior who are collecting information on every association because it is their responsibility to register every new association. The coordinator at the province level is the director of the "Cooperation and Coordination Unit" (and also head of the Social Affairs Department at the province), who reports directly to the governor. The existence of this parallel structure points to a strong element of state control in the EAs. It seems that an unofficial purpose of the EAs is to provide a framework for the Ministry of the Interior to better monitor and control the associations' activities, e.g. through the setting up of a database that is partly shared with the intelligence services.

The role of the "coordinators" of the EAs is thus quite different from that of the government-employed community organizers and meeting facilitators in the Participatory Budgeting experience whose main function is to mobilize the communities to engage in collective action and to teach them vital skills in debating and participating effectively in meetings (and standing up to local elites) in order to mobilize resources.

Indeed, I found that the positions in the EAs were monopolized by a small political elite: in at least two cases, the coordinators of the EA at the *caïdat/cercle* were also the presidents of the EAs in the communes. The presidents of the EAs in two *cercles* were president and treasurer of the EA at the province level. They also both held positions as commune councilors. Another president of a commune EA also presided over his own association and was a civil servant at one of the *cercles*. Similarly, the coordinator of the provincial EA was director of the Social Affairs Department of the province, and at the same time the head of the Cooperation and Coordination Unit there in charge of maintaining the database on all the associations in the province and of organizing trainings. He was also the president of a charity association for the civil servants in the province and a leader in an association in a commune.

Of course, the issue of the boundaries between “political” and “civil” societies can never be fully resolved anywhere: de Sousa Santos (1998: 505) mentions that in Porto Alegre, ‘the PB is contributing to expand both the political class and the circulation within it: two former PB councilors are now deputies of the Câmara [Legislature; Municipal Council], and other former PB councilors hold positions in the executive.’ However, in the Al Haouz province, the relatively small number of leaders monopolizing key positions in both the political and civil society spheres is arguably cause for concern, also given that elections to EA positions do not seem to have been transparent or open to a wide field of potential new leaders.

There is no space here to give details of the EA’s development projects (e.g. upgrading primary school buildings and literacy programs). Suffice it to say that the main role of the EA at the province level is to forward requests from local associations to the provincial assembly. Once the provincial assembly approves the request, the funds are transferred directly to the associations, but the provincial EA has the right to audit its books and supervise the projects. The EAs at the level of the *cercle* seemed to be mostly used for channeling funds from the province EA to the commune EAs; the latter did not seem to have any independent funds. In other words, many of the EAs in the province seem to have merely administrative functions, and are thus not directly involved in implementing development projects; hence, there are only a few early demonstration

effects, a factor that was considered important in explaining the success of the Participatory Budgeting experience.

Most importantly, I found several instances of political instrumentalization of the EAs. An EA coordinator at a *caïdat* suggested that the commune president used his position as president of the EA to further his political interests by giving (financial) help to the presidents of associations who were also his political allies and not to others.

Similarly, according to a commune EA committee member, '[The EA] hasn't done anything so far. The EA doesn't serve any purpose. The associations in Morocco don't come from the people, they are imposed by the government, and that's the problem. With the EA of the associations it is the same thing; it's not the associations that have made a meeting to federate but it's the governor who decided that the associations should have this EA. [*Why does the governor promote the EAs?*] In my opinion it's because instead of talking to ten presidents he only has to talk to one. For example in [name of commune] there are many associations and instead of inviting 20 associations he only invites [the president of the EA] who will tell [the other associations] what to do.'

Not surprisingly, the complicated structures and funding mechanisms led to rumors of corruption and accusations of political interference. The Vice President of the EA in one commune concluded that 'the EA is only an obstacle and encourages corruption; one should work directly with inhabitants so they know what each association will do. [...] There is a lot of paperwork; the EA is an excuse to interfere in their [the associations'] business.'

In short, it can be doubted whether these structures operate effectively since they were imposed from above, and did not grow out of a local need or willingness to cooperate. Indeed, the EAs are unlikely to be able to build on a spontaneous willingness by the associations to federate themselves. The vast majority of the local associations in my research sample focus their activities narrowly on one village. They do not have many natural incentives to cooperate due to the political conflicts and competition for funds. It is therefore not surprising that the system of EAs does not seem to have encouraged the cooperation among associations significantly. The president of the EA at a *cercle* was only able to cite one such example. The current situation is thus very different from the Participatory Budgeting experience, where –thanks to the dynamics in the Popular Councils and

forums – ineffective and politicized associations were replaced by responsive and (more or less) accountable ones, and alliances were created to defend the needs of the district as a whole, rather than single villages or neighborhoods.

This may be related to the fact that most of the 39 communes in the Al Haouz province did not benefit from the same capacity-building efforts as Commune A and Commune B that were part of the CRS projects. Several interviewees qualified the EAs as “empty shells”. At best, they could facilitate communication between the government administration and the associations concerning projects and access to outside funds.

Given these findings, it is possible to argue that the EAs should be seen as additional structures and opportunities for co-optation and rent-seeking. They are reinforcing the political instrumentalization of “civil society” rather than reducing it, and added a layer of state control. Such interventionist, or top-down, approaches to organizing “civil society” illustrate the very fine line between reinforcing authoritarian state control over society as well as clientelistic networks, and encouraging co-governance between actors in state and society.

Conclusion

This case study from the Al Haouz province illustrates the challenges for interventions that attempt to improve local governance arrangements by setting up new structures and processes. In a context where there are no clear boundaries between members of “political” and “civil” societies, there is very limited scope for honest and regular information exchange and responsibility-sharing arrangements. While establishing co-governance mechanisms is hard in most contexts, it is even more difficult when government administrations (such as the provincial authorities) do not systematically encourage civil society at the local level as a means to hold local governments to account (as was the case with external agents deployed in the Participatory Budgeting experience in Porto Alegre).

The evidence presented here points to the interplay of two distinct priorities of the Moroccan state. On the one hand, there is a high priority

placed on maintaining order and stability at the local level. On the other hand, the government has encouraged citizens and communities to take more responsibility for narrowing the development gap (Denoeux and Payne 2003: 56). I would argue that the first priority negatively affects the second; in the interest of stability, the government has allowed the local councilors to use the associations to keep or accede to political and financial power, and has arguably even created new structures to co-opt them at the expense of the associations' "developmental" capacities. In many cases, the EAs seem to have reinforced the power of local elites that very often combine elected office with positions on the associations' committees.

In other words, while co-governance mechanisms do violate the public-private, or state-society boundary, they should do so in an explicit and transparent way to reach the desired outcomes in terms of state-society accountability. Participatory governance experiments need to strike the difficult balance between maintaining a degree of state autonomy vis-à-vis society on the one hand, and the state's embeddedness in society on the other hand. As Schneider and Baquero (2006: 8) put it, 'Too much autonomy and states become exclusionary, illegitimate, and potentially authoritarian. Too much embeddedness and the state becomes a captured instrument of narrow interests.' Based on the case study presented here, I would argue that the balance has tilted too much to the side of embeddedness, thereby undermining the autonomy of civil society and its capacity to oversee and control the actions of local governments.¹¹

However, I would like to end on an optimistic note. As emphasized earlier, there are very interesting reforms in the area of local governance underway in Morocco, some of which can be said to (implicitly) apply some lessons from the PB experience. For example, the Ministry of the Interior has concluded agreements with the Social Development Agency (ADS) to train Local Development Agents that will accompany and build the capacity of municipal actors in the new participatory planning process that has become mandatory with the 2009 Municipal Charter. Moreover, there are plans to establish a Municipal Information System (*Système d'Information Communal* – SIC) to rationalize the planning process, which would presumably also make it more transparent and easier for citizens to monitor project implementation and hold local governments to account. In addition,

¹¹ See also de Sousa Santos (1998: 496ff.) for a discussion of the concept of autonomy in the PB context.

new laws on local taxation, local finances, and amendments on the decrees concerning public procurement and municipal assets are currently being drafted and voted on in Parliament. They aim at increasing the communes’ fiscal autonomy and local revenues. As we have seen in the CRS case study communes, differences in their financial bases may also explain differences in outcomes of local governance innovations. Increasing the communes’ financial assets may thus increase the stakes and mobilization of local communities to demand public accountability and co-decision making, as happened in the Participatory Budgeting experience.

Based on insights from participatory governance experiments elsewhere, such as in Porto Alegre, future research on Morocco could fruitfully examine how Local Development Agents are being trained, how they facilitate the emergence of new local leadership, and how they organize meetings between various local actors. Another question is whether and how these agents help to establish spaces for “civic learning” that can neutralize the fact that the population in rural areas in Morocco suffers from disproportionately high illiteracy and poverty rates, and prevent elite capture of such spaces. Another major area of research would centre on the INDH and examine the “demonstration effects” of its “participatory” projects, as well as how its implementation and governance arrangements have conceptualized the notion of state-society accountability, and how this is perceived by local actors themselves (see Bergh 2009a).

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