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The **International Journal of Open Governments / Revue Internationale des Gouvernements ouverts (RIGO)** is an academic journal created and edited by Irène Bouhadana and William Gilles at IMODEV, the Institut du monde et du développement pour la bonne gouvernance publique.

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## SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND OPEN GOVERNMENT: DIFFERENT TYPES OF COLLABORATIVE ENGAGEMENT

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**T**his presentation discusses how social accountability and open government approaches can improve the provision of public goods and services through prioritizing constructive engagement. Interventions aim to bridge state and civil society actors and, potentially, to encourage co-production. Nevertheless, these efforts do not come in a one-size fits all model of collaborative engagement.

We present a typology of collaborative engagement associating different forms of engagement to four types of bridges: cable-stayed bridge, movable bridge, step stone bridge and pier. This typology results from a theoretical-empirical exercise on the interaction between context, strategy and organization<sup>1</sup>. Different types of bridges explain the potential and limits of state-society engagement to tackle public policy and governance problems.

We illustrate these types with a series of local social accountability and open governance interventions in Brazilian cities, researched in 2015 and 2016. What the Brazilian experience suggests is that, in the implementation of collaborative open government and social accountability strategies, the actions (as opposed to static plans or structures) serve as bridges between components of the state and elements of the societies to which they belong. The different local political contexts where action happens, shapes and can be shaped by organizational structures and strategies that show different forms of engagement.

### § 1 – ON NEW STATE-SOCIETY BRIDGES AND CONCEPTS

Co-production, social accountability, and open government are distinct but overlapping concepts and correspondent practices (Box 1). Their shared goals (improved policy, services, governance and development outcomes), multi-stakeholder nature, and pillars such as transparency, state-society engagement and accountability mechanisms link them. Many times one helps to operationalize the other.

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<sup>1</sup> In short, the interaction of strategy, context, and organization is a frontier in the literature about effective social accountability and open government intervention, generally, and collaborative interventions, in particular.

These approaches have grown exponentially around the world in the last decades (Grandvoinet, Aslam, and Raha, 2015; Edwards and McGee, 2016). There have been new efforts to extend and increase the capacity of citizens to mobilize and participate to tackle policy problems, and to co-produce services and solutions for collective problems with state officials (Ostrom, 1996; Brandsen and Honingh, 2015; Schommer et al., 2015), and hold them accountable.

*Box 1: Key definitions: Social Accountability, Open Government, coproduction*

*Social accountability:* the extent and capacity of citizens to mobilize and take actions beyond elections to engage, trigger need-based responses, hold accountable the state officials and service providers and/or bring about redress.

*Open government:* though a novel and fuzzy concept, refers to citizens, civil society and governments working together, sharing interests to tackle governance and development challenges. Sustainable transparency, accountability, participation and responsiveness of government to their own citizens, sometimes aided by technology, are key components of this concept.

*Co-production:* a strategy to design and deliver public goods and services through the mutual and continuous engagement of government and citizens (users), who share power, resources and responsibilities, in a hands-on approach

*Sources:* Grandvoinet, Aslam, and Raha, 2015; Edwards and McGee, 2016; OGP, 2015, 2016; Verschuere, Brandsen and Pestoff, 2013; Brudney and England, 1983; Salm, 2014.

Some examples include Moldovan and Filipino civil society groups working with public officials to contribute to improved education outcomes (Vlad et al., 2016a; 2016b; Guertzovich and Rosenzweig, 2013), groups in Ghana and Argentina, monitoring fiscal flows (IBP, 2016). While many of these efforts have grown from organic demands in each country, others have been inspired or imported from abroad or are a mix of both. Either way, social accountability and open government efforts are linked to broader international networks and ideas, and technical and financial resources.

Many stakeholders are supporting social accountability approaches that prioritize collaboration, constructive engagement, and co-production across state and civil society actors. The idea of co-production of information and control is especially relevant: “a mutual and continuous engagement between regular producers of information and control in public administration (government agencies) and users or those interested in information and control (citizens, individually or organized into councils, groups, and associations)” (Schommer et. al, 2015, p. 1377).

Yet, little is known about what conditions are necessary for collaboration to emerge and to build new bridges; and about the situations in which confrontation is preferred over, or combined with, collaboration (Kosack and Fung, 2014; for some sector-specific insights Wampler and Touchton 2015; Wampler 2014). There is a knowledge gap about which types are better to contribute to certain outcomes and impacts in particular contexts.

The assumption here is that collaborative social accountability and open government interventions have more chances of being effective when the link between strategy, context, and organization reinforce each other. But, what does this interaction look like in practice? This is where the typology comes in.

## § 2 – TYPOLOGY OF ENGAGEMENT IN SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND OPEN GOVERNMENT

The typology we propose illustrates the different key explicative variables that interact: strategy (e.g. collaborative vs antagonistic; technical, legal, political, shock vs gradual; adaptive or not; blueprint or customized; multipronged vs simple), context (e.g. interests and links between local elite groups and political actors; diversity and independence of civil society organizations, academia and media; capacity of the local bureaucracy; standing of state and national accountability agencies), and organization (e.g. resource mobilization, decision-making procedures, learning, and capacity building processes, number and diversity of membership, technical know-how, leader characteristics) (Guerzovich and Schommer, 2016).

To operationalize these variables, we focus on four interconnected dimensions that link them:<sup>2</sup>

- *First, capacities of the partnership* - the willingness and ability of an organization to act together with others to solve public problems in ways that bolster individual organizations' political and technical capacities.
- *Second, fit the context* - the willingness and ability of an organization (or organizations) to deploy a strategy that harnesses the context by bridging segments of state and society (actors, institutions, norms, and processes).
- *Third, complexity of strategy* - the willingness and ability of an organization (or organizations) to prioritize the cluster of procedures and methods that are most likely to payoff their intended, strategic goals (Poli, Giraudy and Guerzovich, 2010).
- *Fourth, adaptability for learning* - flexibility to incorporate learning to manage the intervention as the glue that helps engagement become resilient over time.

These component factors and its interaction make it possible to identify four types of state-society bridges – detached (pier), restrictive (movable bridge), targeted (step stone bridge) and inclusive (cable-stayed bridge), summarized in Table 1.

*Table 1: Types of State-Society Bridges through Social Accountability and Open Government Interventions*

<sup>2</sup> This selection builds on GUERZOVICH and SCHOMMER (2016)'s analysis of four dimensions and 36 concrete indicators of strategic, constructive social accountability interventions (GUERZOVICH and POLI, 2014b), and the analysis of five cases in Brazilian cities, in the next section. Some characteristics of each type here are similar to those identified by Schommer *et al.* (2015) in different types of accountability and co-production of information and control.

	<i>DETACHE D: PIER</i>	<i>RESTRICTIVE: MOVABLE BRIDGE</i>	<i>STEP STONE BRIDGE</i>	<i>CABLE STAYED BRIDGE</i>
CAPACITIES OF THE PARTNERSHIP: STAKEHOLDERS (WHO ACTS?)	Limited subset of individuals and organizations	Limited subset of individuals and organizations that sporadically coordinate action.	Specially selected set of individuals and organizations coordinate in concrete areas of intervention.	Diverse set of individuals and organizations coordinate and co-produce.
FIT WITH THE CONTEXT: RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CONTEXTS (HOW IS THE ACTION?)	Inexistent or tenuous by design and/or due to closed space.	Strives to engage amidst existing or self-made contextual and organizational obstacles	Reformers explicitly or implicitly acknowledge that each area of intervention has its own technical and political contexts and ways of working, which should inform the type of strategy and organizational development needed to tackle it.	Weaves context relevant politics through organizations and strategy.
COMPLEXITY OF STRATEGY: LINES OF STRATEGIC ACTION (WHAT ARE THE ACTIONS?)	Blueprints imported to local context without attention to incentives and action on the ground.	Blueprints imported to local context, minor adjustments.	Tactics tailored to specific aims and stakeholders, building on contextual and organizational resources.	Range of tactics work with each other to lever on stakeholders to achieve joint goals with diverse contextual and organizational resources.
ADAPTABILITY FOR LEARNING: DYNAMICS OVER TIME (WHEN IS THE ACTION?)	Lever external know-how on an ongoing basis..	Lever external know-how, with locally led course correction.	Lever local experience for focused strategic and organizational improvement.	Lever local experience for strategic and organizational improvement. Joint multi-stakeholder learning - transformative forms of learning by doing.

*Source: Adapted from F. Guertzovich, P. Schommer (2016).*

### § 3 – ILLUSTRATING THE TYPOLOGY WITH CASES FROM FOUR CITIES IN BRAZIL

We illustrate the shape and relevance of the four bridges through Brazilian Social Observatories. Social Observatories are non-partisan and non-profit organizations in which citizens and civil society organizations to transform their right to get angry at corruption into concrete promotion of transparency and better administration of public goods. The cities analyzed (Table 2), in which state-society engagement around social accountability, open government and, at times, co-production, takes place, share a number of national-level commonalities. Still, the fit between organizations, strategies and contexts are different.

*Table 2: How do organizations, strategy, and context fit together in selecting Brazilian cities?*



	Florianópolis	Rondonópolis	Itajaí	Londrina
Population (IBGE, 2010)	421,240	211,718	183,373	506.701
State/Region	Santa Catarina, in Southern Brazil	Mato Grosso, Midwest region of Brazil	Santa Catarina, in Southern Brazil	Paraná, in Southern Brazil
GDP per capita (IBGE, 2013)	R\$ 32,385.04 (US\$10,274.44)	R\$26,064.26 (US\$ 8,269.12)	R\$ 83,082.62 (US\$ 26,358.70)	R\$ 29.634,98 (US\$ 9,401.96)
Human Development Index for 2010 (IBGE, 2010)	0,847 - high	0,755 - high	0,795 - high	0,778 – high
Case	An indefinite (or vague) strategy led by the local Social Observatory since 2009, including access to information and contracting	Confrontational and collaborative strategy led by the local Social Observatory since 2009, including contracting and access to information	Mainly collaborative, sometimes confrontational, strategy led by the local Social Observatory since 2009, including contracting and access to information	Collaborative strategy led by multi-stakeholder platforms since 2009, including access to information, open contracting, service delivery
Type of Engagement (Bridge)	Detached (Pier)	Restrictive (Movable Bridge)	Targeted (Step Stone Bridge)	Inclusive (Cable Stayed Bridge)

*Source: F. Guerzovich, P. Schommer (2016 and publication pending).*

### **A) Florianópolis: A Pier Separates the Efforts in Social and Political Action (Detached City Level Engagement)**

In the case of the Social Observatory of Florianópolis (OSF, for its Portuguese acronym) few public officials and academics brought this methodology into practice, in 2009. Although citizens managed to partner with local officials and recruit a one-off large amount of public financial resources, the effort lacked multiple sources of diverse resources, partnerships, and actions that would suggest engagement with the local political context.

The foundation of OSF was inspired by social accountability initiatives in the cities of Maringá and Itajaí to control and open public contracting in the local government. They imported the organizational and strategic model developed in the first city and then disseminated by the national organization Social Observatory of Brazil (OSB) across the country. This is: they juxtaposed an external methodology to the context of Florianópolis. The OSB's best practice methodology included a series of precise steps to organize social observatories. By implementing a one-size-fits-all model they tried to ensure certain performance standards as well as mitigate any reputational risks to the social observatories' across the country, from the activities in a particular city.

Besides the standardized methodology, the OSF faced a restricted openness of the local government and other stakeholders in the city. A small group of actors leads the action, but their actions didn't fit the context. They had the financial support from a public fund for civil society organizations, but not that of the

private sector. Links with local business associations and traditional CSOs in the city were weak. And they did not try to develop new relations with these actors that they left aside. The observatory was not compelled to lever those resources to adjust its approach to the local context by improving the best practice from outside through new combinations of tactics. The observatory showed limited will to understand and work with the context, and weak political capacity to build coalitions and bridges. They were not flexible, they were not open to inputs or suggestions from others. There was essentially no room for co-production.

In other words, they build a pier; a pier connects with the boats that are able to reach to it. But not everyone on the shore can or wants to reach it. What they built made it very hard or rather impossible to connect with the other shore, with the actors on the other side of the river, equally not willing to navigate or building bridges. The structure and the strategies they set up were not conducive to establishing real bonds with different actors already working on the terrain.

The observatory of Florianópolis prioritized superimposing an accurate external model to the local context, rather than embedding and adjusting it so that it could better fit the context and potentially transform it. Its organizational strategy, together with this contextual misfit, was not conducive to results.

### **B) Rondonópolis: A Movable Bridge with Sporadic Articulations (Restricted City Level Engagement)**

In the case of Rondonópolis, the engagement or articulation between state and society occurs with several obstacles.<sup>3</sup> Some of these obstacles are structural, and others are self-made. Just like a movable bridge, the possibility of engaging with actors on the other side of the river depended on whether the bridge was open or closed. It was the group of business leaders and members of the elite that decided when to open or close the bridge; when to engage with new actors and when to block that possibility of engagement.

The Social Observatory of Rondonópolis (OSR), founded in 2009 by a group of business leaders and people from the city's traditional elite, has the goal of promoting the opening of public procurement in a local socio-political context unfavorable for this (Guertzovich and Dahmer, 2016, and Guertzovich and Schommer, 2016). They borrowed a methodology and opted to focus on public spending, mainly in relation to unfinished infrastructure projects.

The strategy didn't require mobilizing other segments of society to begin with. Quite on the contrary, the group adopted an attitude of excluding actors and relying on the power of the in-

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<sup>3</sup> F. GUERTZOVICH, P. SCHOMMER (publication pending) provides more detailed analysis of the three remaining cases.

group. The OSR was designed to build a limited number and quality of connections with other segments of the state and society.

The movable bridge that was the engagement the observatory was able to build – connecting two shores but only circumstantially – did not provide substantial enough results in terms of social accountability and open government. A mainly confrontational approach “my way or the highway” vis-à-vis a local government with a policy agenda that favored other groups undermined the observatory’s tactical and organizational choices. Since at the beginning, it was the elite the one that held control of the movable bridge, it could decide when to open it and when to close it, depending on their own personal interests, and one could argue, not the interest of the public good. And this is precisely the source of the mistrust they caused in the rest of society and the public interest. To others in the city, the manipulation of the bridge seemed to be advancing private interests.

Since 2012, the OSR has made some new organizational decisions reboot its approach, like hiring a new coordinator and renting its own office, which helped it regain autonomy (both real and perceived). Overall, the OSR tried, learned, developed new capacities, and pivoted towards a new strategy that relied on collaboration with state and national level Supreme Audit Institutions.

This collaboration made it possible to create a tailored multipronged strategy to contribute to solving policy and governance problems the OSR and the Supreme Audit Institutions are learning to co-produce openness and accountability through joint efforts.

This change in approach was not easy. The OSR had been self-generating an undesired obstacle by building a semi inaccessible movable bridge: the perception by officials and stakeholders of the observatory’s motives closed doors for it, even after it changed its approach. Persistence and the articulation of ideas are slowly starting to contribute to new opportunities and results in terms of openness and improvements in the operational context. This new cycle of open government and social accountability learning in Rondonópolis suggests that engagement approaches are not born and fixed into a category in the typology, but strategic learning and action have a key role to play in how engagement unfolds. The initial movable bridge that they built might change into something different, with a different way of connecting two shores, in the future.

### **C) Itajaí: A Step Stone Bridge that Articulates State and Civil Society Actors in a Selective Way (Targeted Engagement)**

In Itajaí, open government and social accountability strategies link state and society gradually, but in a targeted way. In Itajaí, a group of leaders of diverse traditional local business associations and

unions, and retired public officials created the Social Observatory of Itajaí (OSI), in 2009. Though inspired by the original experience of Maringá and the methodology widespread by the Social Observatory of Brazil, what we see is that this group of actors built a different type of bridge, better suited to fit with the context: a step stone bridge. This is a much more carefully crafted bridge in which each stone needs to fit exactly with the surface of the water and the particular conditions of its environment - of its context. Learning by practice is a key foundation of the construction.

Its leadership adapted the standard practice to its context. At the launch of the initiative, the city was in a state of calamity caused by major flooding. The state could bypass standard processes and the elites were concerned about irregularities in the reconstruction process (large funds available; no regular control mechanisms). Standard social accountability tactics copied from outside town could not have worked. Instead, they took these as a guide to kick off the project, but they focused on experimentation and learning – what partners they could count on, what to prioritize, how to qualify their technical work, how to combine confrontational and collaboration approaches, depending the public policy area and the actors involved. Overall, this organizational approach, strategy and fit with the context contributed to building islands and this way creating areas within the state and civil society permeable to this new form of delivering results.

These step stones – each one of them combining to build a bridge – aim at some segments within the state and the civil society. The notion of directing the collaboration to and prioritizing the links with some of the stakeholder is consistent with the idea about the fact that several of the changes lead by civil society members had as a result a critical group of actors strategically committed to each other. These types of changes not always require a broad mobilization (Granovetter, 1978).

By 2013, the OSI developed and tested a new strategy of engagement with the political group in City Hall, although initially the Observatory only managed to collaborate with few public officials and had had difficulty to access information from the city government. The OSI used formal and informal mechanisms to get it. After many difficulties and formal denials, the OSI presented itself (and was recognized) as the Mayor's ally, though a vigilant ally. A critical juncture, however, was the enforcement of the National Information Action Statute (LAI) in 2012.

Since then, the answers to OSI's requests are faster and more frequent. Critical to this success is the development of a win-win relationship with the Prosecutor's office that had the mandate and ability to respond to or to enforce investigation and prosecution. According to the OSI, "Our role is social oversight. The Prosecutor Office's role is institutional, constitutional. They have to fulfill that role and we can help them do so. In reality, we help them because they help us" (Schommer et. al, 2015). The complementary roles, expertise, and collaborative work led to a

co-production relationship. This was crucial to increase the observatory's results and credibility in the eyes of public administration. The partnership also increased civil society's capacity to implement social accountability efforts and, ultimately, improve results, including the implementation of the access-to-information legislation.

This process and others have informed the OSI's learning about the potential payoff of acting to tend more bridges to different segments of state and society and also specializing and building islands of new forms of governance and service delivery moving forward. A step stone bridge that is effective enough to allow different actors to use it, in the concrete context in which they are; to have access and engage. The OSI combines a standardized approach to monitor bids with specific strategies developed to deal with certain challenges. This bridge worked and was able to deliver results – it effectively connected actors between themselves, allowing positive engagements, without the need of mobilizing a great number of actors. The results, though, sometimes contribute to additional mobilization.

#### **D) Londrina: A Cable Stayed Bridge Supported by the Inclusion of Multiple Actors (Inclusive Engagement)**

Finally, the actors involved in the case of Londrina were able to weave together context-relevant state and society politics for open government and social accountability through strategies and organizational structures. It is a bridge with a large number of cables, which at the same time strengthen the structure of the bridge in itself. Here, the development and actions of the Observatory of Public Management of Londrina (OGPL, for its Portuguese acronym) relates to how bridges were gradually built and/or strengthened by the business-led effort to establish a Forum to develop the city<sup>4</sup> and the multi-stakeholder City Council of Transparency and Social Control. With a similar start to Itajai's, in Londrina the group managed to create engagement in many areas and with several stakeholders overtime. Co-production was implemented in several ways and at different levels of institutionalization. In other words, they created bridges across existing and new islands for action and learning.

This sturdy bridge was built in an unlikely terrain. The stigma of corruption that marked the city encouraged different elites in the city to advance a series of initiatives to change the course of history - precisely a context in which we wouldn't expect an inclusive and collaborative effort to fight corruption. These elites could have built a pier or a movable bridge, putting their own interests at the heart of their actions instead those of the public. But they included efforts to put in practice and implement a

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<sup>4</sup> To find out more about the forum *Desenvolve Londrina*, access: <http://www.forumdesenvovelondrina.org/>.

development strategy, as well as transparency and accountability initiatives. These efforts, which started as targeted efforts (similar to Itajaí), became more inclusive of diverse segments of the local society. Pro-openness stakeholders implemented tailored tactics to lever diverse capacities and relationships in society to prepare monitoring plans to different sectorial contexts and types of services. The state itself became more flexible and open to more contributions from society, although not in a linear and homogenous way (Guertzovich and Schommer to be published).

A specific case the OGPL tackled was the contract to purchase school meals, affected by inefficiency and corruption. The OGPL targeted many but not all stakeholders in the complex network of sectoral, contracting, and accountability systems. It used a politically and technically informed approach to engage the Department of Education, responsible for the terms of reference for bidding, and for monitoring the implementation of contracts. To do this, it needed to develop links across the city beyond the original elite to gather information at the school level and then take it up the policy-making decision chain. They were strategically performed alliances and bonds, which added to the strength of the cable-stayed bridge. The OGPL tried to use a constructive engagement strategy with these stakeholders and benefit from their capacities. Even if relationships were initially confrontational, they evolved gradually as the OGPL engaged different stakeholders over time with target tactics. They adapted their approaches with each alliance and engagement with a new actor. The work of the OGPL was valued. The co-production is clear in the design of the contracts of school lunch provision, and in the implementation/delivering of the school lunches, for example.

Through a range of actions like this the OGPL built a strong structure, with strong and resistant materials – alliances with key actors, and adapted strategies. This bridge is further strengthened by the participation of a great number of actors in accountability processes, and what we see as a much more inclusive model of accountability. Of course, building this type of cable-stayed bridge requires time, and is a process in itself, continuous and never finished or guaranteed. It involves the development of a collective intelligence, small steps toward setting up a strong bridge for the long term.

The organization structure of the OGPL also evolved through cycles of trial, reflection, and adaptation, and the change in strategy. Now, the organization has a more diverse board and group of volunteers than ever before and, it is accountable to a broad group of constituents and partners.

The case of Londrina is an example of elite based dynamics featuring the development of civic capacities that grew from practice and strategy of pro-openness elites.

## § 4 – LESSONS: SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND OPEN GOVERNMENT ENGAGEMENT

So, what can we learn from the Brazilian experience? The key observation is that, in the implementation of collaborative open government and social accountability strategies, the actions (rather than static plans or structures) are true (and diverse) bridges between the state and civil society actors involved. Different types of bridges help understand the potential and limits of state-society engagement when dealing with public policy and governance problems. Also, context is key: the different political contexts shape and, over time, can be shaped by the organizational structure and strategy that make up different forms of engagement.

The engagement approaches of each of the cases are not born and fixed into a type. Still, progress is neither automatic nor guaranteed, and strategies can revert in less promising directions. Strategic learning can play an important role in helping reformers (in these cases those in the social observatories) shift course in a positive direction. What makes state-society collaboration work appears to be context, strategy and organization fitting after cycles of experimentation and learning, rather than single moments of engagement?

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