Innovation policy trends in Latin America: citizen's leadership

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UPDATE

Cyclists uphold their bikes in a protest in favour of the environment in Sao Paolo, Brazil. (AP Photo/Nelson Antoine)

With this new post we continue the series of texts on the ecosystem of political innovation in Latin America , published jointly with DemocraciaAbierta. The series will be presenting more details and examples of cases of each of the four trends identified in Update's inventory of policy innovation, which we have classified under the following headings: "Citizen's Leadership"; "Aesthetic Identity"; "Citizens in Focus"; and "Transparency 360".

In this text we will feature Citizen's Leadership trends and practices, which are characterized by citizen's greater involvement and responsibility in public affairs and by the awareness of the possibilities for political commitment and collective action that citizens - especially in the 21st century - have.

Each of the four trends is embodied in practices of different nature, which have been grouped and organized into micro-trends. Citizen's Leadership trend is described through the following micro-trends: "Activists' Push", "Micro-policy" and "P2P Training".

Activists' Push

The pressure from activists is widespread through various political practices in Latin America and across the world. Protests and social movements, in more or less traditional formats, are merging with new models, tools and innovative formats; and with networked performances, prioritizing the horizontality and the multiplicity of leaderships.

These performances can be identified in initiatives such as:

- The high school movement in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Protesting against the closure of schools and forced changes of class, arbitrarily determined by the state government, students of public schools in the state of Sao Paulo organized themselves in a fully horizontal, independent and autonomous way, and occupied their schools. Using mobile applications for fast communication, and with a strong presence in social media and the support of mobilization platforms like My Sampa, the movement occupied several schools, in a coordinated and innovative way. They took care of environment; they focused in the kitchen and in promoting public classes, sports, debates and cultural

activities. After a few months, the state government reversed its decision.

- YaSunidos. It is a nonpartisan social movement, independent and self-managed. It was born out of the confluence of different mobilized social groups to stop projects of oil extraction in the Yasuni Amazon reserve, in Ecuador, and to participate in the fight against the current development model.

Other examples of pressure from activists include Mexican demonstrations to denounce the mass disappearance of forty-three young students from the Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers' College, in the state of Guerrero. Or, the #tomaelbypass, a citizen's mobilization against high impact roadwork and controversial urban mobility policies in Lima, Peru.

Micro-policy

The second micro-trend that embodies the Citizen's Leadership trend is Micro-policy: specific actions that change the "do it yourself" by the "let's do it together" organized spontaneously by local groups, neighbours and citizens who want to participate in a collective activity in the territory.

In Peru, the Occupy Your Street (https://ocupatucalle.org/) initiative helps to recover or to improve public spaces: with the help of volunteers, it engages in a process to recover the right to public space and works with the idea of the right to the city. It promotes park drives, mini-parks, bike paths, the temporary closure of streets, or the widening sidewalks and the encouragement of bicycle public services. As it does in Peru, this movement is thriving in other Latin American countries.

In Brazil, the Urban Acupuncture initiative carries out "emotional mappings" (diagnoses that pick up local stories and strengthen the identity of the urban community), promotes urban transformations (transformation processes of public spaces) and actions called *Ocupativações* (activities that promote a collective awareness, creativity and attention to the city, stimulating interaction and strengthening links between people).

Another instance is a Micro-policy organization named Techo (Ceiling). Born in Chile, it has currently achieved a Latin American scope: it is present in 19 countries in the region, and is dedicated to the construction of emergency housing and social empowerment programs through the participation of young volunteers.

P2P Training

The latest micro-trend that expresses the Citizen's Leadership has been called P2P Training. Following the "peer to peer" rationale (direct relationships, without intermediaries), different projects and organizations have come up dedicated to providing training for actors belonging to the innovation ecosystem itself. They play a role in peer to peer training to strengthen citizen action, both in terms of respect for the chosen issues, and for the tools and technologies available.

We highlight some P2P Training initiatives in different Latin American countries as follows:

In Bolivia, the Barrio Las Heroinas' (heroines neighbourhood) platform runs a network of activism with a gender perspective and, beyond offering news, it offers workshops on topics such as "media activism" with a gender perspective, and teach the use of information technology and communication for social activism, always keeping a gender perspective.

In Brazil, the School of Activism is an independent group, bent in 2012 with the mission to strengthen activism in Brazil through learning processes in non-violent action's strategies and techniques, campaigns, communication, mobilization, creative actions and information security, all aimed at the defence of democracy, human rights and sustainability.

We have also identified initiatives whose scope is continental, covering all of Latin America: the Gob24 / 7 is a

platform for collaborative construction of an "Open Government Toolkit" organized by topics and public services, or HacksLabs, a platform launched in 2014 to boost new data journalism companies, offering investment guidance and technical support to projects that engage with transparent data, based on data journalism and citizen participation.

The innovation landscape shows thus a vibrant Latin American scene, with deeply engaged initiatives and with a great development potential. For more information about the mapping of policy innovation in Latin America, you can access Update and follow its Twitter. Tweets publish content on practices and mapped organizations, with a particular focus on our current joint series with DemocraciaAbierta on Democracy and Policy Experimentation for the 21st century.