

Chapter 43

The Integration Challenge of Brazil's Public Policy Networks: The Case of Brazilian Health Councils

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ABSTRACT

The research developed in this study is an analysis of the National Health Council and the Subnational Councils, formed by the State Councils and Municipal Health Councils. It is a way of understanding the construction process of public policy networks and its role as the main citizen participatory space institutionalized by law in Brazil. This study presents the results obtained from a survey developed between the years 2006 to 2010, at the University of Brasilia. Its objective is to seek a broadening of citizen participation spaces supported by Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), to form an effective network for constructing sectorial policies in Brazilian healthcare. The current work aims to fill in a gap in studies about improving citizen participation in Brazil, in order to establish new ways for expanding the network formed by the councils and the consequent improvement in the collaborative spaces within the decision making process.

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INTRODUCTION

Democratic Brazil is known for its participative institutions. During the elaboration of the 1988 Federative Constitution of Brazil¹, citizen participation spaces were created in several sector areas, including healthcare, social work and education. They are called Councils of Public Policies.

The research developed and described in this study is an in-depth analysis of one of the oldest Brazilian citizen participation spaces, the National Health Council and the Subnational Councils, formed by the State Councils and Municipal Health Councils. It is a way of understanding the construction process of public policy networks and its role as the main citizen participatory space institutionalized by law in Brazil, in the context of a representative democracy.

This work aimed to fill in a gap in studies about broadening and improving citizen participation in Brazil. The idea is that the study may contribute to establishing new ways for expanding the network formed by the councils and the consequent improvement in the collaborative spaces within the decision making process, stemming from the political network formed by the National Health Council and subnational Councils.

In accordance with the Brazilian Constitution (1988), the councils have legal jurisdiction in which there is an institutionalized space that provides for direct citizen participation, in constructing public policies. In accordance with its statute, the National Health Council was created like a commission, having different social sectors represented. The formation of the councils, in accordance with Federal Law number 8.142/90, paragraph 2° defines that the makeup of such institutions must be composed of different actors, who act in controlling the execution of healthcare policies. Health Councils are to be established by the law's regulations and under the possibility of effective participation of organized civil society, which represents a pole for qualifying citizens

to put into action Social Control in other spheres where the State acts.

The Health Council be it, National, State or Municipal in its constant and deliberative character is a collegial body composed of representatives of the government (managers), service providers (private entities), professionals of the Sistema Único de Saúde or the National Healthcare System (SUS). Its activities take place via the formulation of strategies and in the control of executing healthcare policies in the corresponding institution, including the economic and financial aspects, whose decisions are approved by the head of the legally constituted power in every sphere of government (BRAZIL, 1990).

Based on this, the current study presents the results obtained from a survey developed between the years 2006 to 2010, at the University of Brasilia. Its objective is to seek a broadening of citizen participation spaces supported by Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), to form an effective network in for constructing sectorial policies in Brazilian healthcare.

The use of ICTs in expanding citizen participation spaces is justified by the continental distance that Brazil is endowed with as well as by the inequality of opportunity, access to information, complex government structure, experienced by the country after the Brazilian State was decentralized. We start with the principle that the structuring of government information and its availability must be in agreement with the necessities of the citizen. So, by using ICTs, access to information could be promoted and also the possibility that citizens with little or no familiarity with government processes and structures may also be able to increase their participation (Takahashi, 2000).

In Brazil, the National Councils, organs connected to the federal government, are institutions that allow the most direct connection between the citizen and power, since it is the institution that provides for institutionalized participation through laws and its internal rules. This fact justified choosing the National Health Council and subnational

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