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# CASE STUDIES & TEACHING CASES

# Breaking down barriers to citizen participation: the case of CGE-GO

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## INTRODUCTION

It is late afternoon in Brazil's capital city, and the sun is setting in the most beautiful sky in the country, the so-called "Sea of Brasilia." Henrique Ziller is enjoying the view. He is a civil servant born in the state of Minas Gerais, a football lover, and a person who believes in citizen participation and gathering people around this cause. Ziller successfully participated in two competitive hiring processes to become a federal civil servant and chose to work in the Federal Court of Accounts (TCU) as an external control auditor. During his career at the agency, he became familiar with civil society initiatives and organizations led by people who, like him, were committed to ensuring the good and regular use of public resources for the benefit of society.

Professionally, Ziller had the opportunity to be the Comptroller General of the Federal District and the Comptroller General of the State of Goiás, where he learned about social accountability and increased his understanding of the benefits of social accountability to strengthen citizenship. Also, Ziller had many experiences as a volunteer in civil society initiatives using his abilities as an auditor. Among them, he joined forces with other activists and established the civil society organization Instituto de Fiscalização e Controle (IFC) (Institute of Inspection and Control).

When working as Comptroller General of the State of Goiás (CGE-GO), he became even more familiar with social accountability by forming a specialized team and creating the position of Sub-Comptroller of Open Government and Citizen Participation. During Ziller's tenure, the open government and citizen participation department worked with government auditing, transparency, and internal control, as well as social accountability and citizen participation, which developed the basis of a citizen participation ecosystem. This ecosystem sought to create and strengthen mechanisms to encourage civic engagement and citizenship by involving and educating people and organizations. This was crucial because the Office of the Comptroller General has a statewide scope and connection with agencies at the local level while also having ties with a federal system of control. Therefore, the activities of Ziller's office had impacts at the municipal level and influenced other Brazilian states and even other countries.

The referred ecosystem consisted of three projects put forward by the team of the open government and citizen participation department: Estudantes de Atitude (Proactive Students), Auditoria Cívica (Civic Auditing), and Embaixadores da Cidadania (Citizenship Ambassadors). These initiatives offered CGE-GO a perspective beyond the institutional one, inserting the agency in a networked action, focusing on the citizen when implementing initiatives.

However, despite the innovative outlook on social accountability and citizens as part of the institution of control, the ecosystem faces numerous challenges. The Comptroller General is worried, his team is apprehensive, and the office faces barriers to acting in the citizen participation ecosystem.

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## The structure of CGE-GO

The Office of the Comptroller General of the State of Goiás (CGE-GO) is the central agency of the executive branch's System of Internal Control, Transparency, Ombudsman, and Correction. It is part of the state government's direct administration, and its operation and responsibilities are established by state laws.

The CGE-GO team works under the direct command of Comptroller General Henrique Ziller and collaborates with the Council on Public Transparency and Combating Corruption. The organizational structure of CGE-GO includes two Sub-Comptrollers, one focused on internal control and correction and another on open government and citizen participation. Additionally, there are six superintendencies responsible for assisting citizens.

The detailed structure of CGE-GO can be found in the institution's strategic plan (Controladoria-Geral do Estado de Goiás, 2021), which was developed between 2020 and 2023, reflecting a new approach to its operation. The activities of CGE-GO involve conducting audits, preventive inspections, and correctional activities aimed at achieving excellence in internal audits, promoting risk management, and strengthening transparency and social accountability.

A deeper understanding of the open government and citizen participation department is required to analyze this case. This department includes a Superintendence of Citizen Participation, which has an Ombudsman area and a Social Accountability area. The Social Accountability area conducts activities to strengthen democracy and citizenship, prevent corruption, and facilitate closer collaboration between society and the government. It allows citizens to monitor state actions and demand good public management. This area is also responsible for informing and educating citizens about their right to participate in public administration actions and their duty to monitor government performance.

The structure developed by the Social Accountability area has been improved over many years through hard work and in the face of numerous challenges. This has led to plans to build an ecosystem of participation.

## The first step

Henrique Ziller was born in Minas Gerais. In Brasília, he entered the public service as an auditor of the Federal Court of Accounts (TCU). To this day, his eyes shine when he remembers the information regarding the TCU's mission, vision, and values, especially the institution's mission that he repeats whenever asked: the mission is to ensure the good and regular use of public resources for the benefit of society. This was the first step of the journey. It was when he felt touched and realized that the institution's mission was his calling.

Excited and convinced of his choice, he went through a competitive hiring process and was employed as TCU's external control auditor. Everything seemed to be going well, but he quickly realized that there were many challenges and a gap between the mission and the actual work. He stayed for a few years reflecting and trying to find answers to this discrepancy. This issue bothered him beyond professional concerns. It was a disturbing context for him as a citizen, considering his values, customs, beliefs, and desires for a better society.

Ziller never saw himself as a separate individual in his various roles as a husband, father, auditor, citizen, football fan, or Bob Dylan fan. Embracing his complexity, he aimed to help others see society through the same lens, understanding its diverse cultural contexts and individual experiences. Ziller not only recognized his own discomfort but also observed the discomfort of those around him, the community, the state, and the country.

Amid this turmoil, Ziller became aware of initiatives and civil society organizations that focused on inspection and social accountability, creating opportunities for citizen participation. The first initiative that caught his attention was "Adopt a Municipality," which involved using auditors' knowledge and experience to train civil society organizations in social accountability, enabling them to oversee local government's accounts and actions. Inspired by the work of the organization Amarribo, Ziller and fellow TCU auditors traveled across Brazil, providing training and fostering dialogue to empower citizens and civil society organizations in monitoring government actions. Although challenging to reconcile with his work at TCU, it was a motivating and rewarding experience.

The possibility of creating spaces for dialogue within local communities and the engagement of fellow auditors was enlightening for Ziller. He realized that beyond the attribution as an auditor, it was crucial to understand the diverse realities throughout Brazil. The country is vast, diverse, and complex, with a society that is not culturally inclined to engage in controversial discussions. Brazilians often say, "There are three things you cannot discuss in this country: politics, football, and religion."

Reflecting on the official control agency's limitations and challenges in fulfilling its mission, Ziller recognized the potential of successful citizen-led initiatives that contribute to the public good. After discussions with organizations and colleagues, Ziller joined other activists and established the Instituto de Fiscalização e Controle (IFC) (Institute of Inspection and Control), a private nonprofit organization that aims to bridge the gap between society and public services. Through IFC, TCU professionals volunteered their expertise to support social accountability initiatives nationwide. One significant collaboration was with Diego, who became Ziller's loyal companion and the executive secretary of IFC. The two met while volunteering for an initiative to pass a bill to change the requirements for people willing to run in Brazilian elections, known as Lei da Ficha Limpa (or Clean Record Act). Both were part of the Movement to Combat Electoral Corruption, Diego as a volunteer and Ziller, also as a volunteer but representing IFC. It was the perfect match. Diego became a member of the IFC, and the activists joined forces, ideas, values, and teams and created a social accountability initiative called "Auditoria Cívica" (Civic Audit).

Auditoria Cívica consisted of establishing partnerships with local civil society organizations and training citizens interested in auditing government activities related to family healthcare. The initiative served more than 90 municipalities, preparing citizens to conduct civic audits, monitor and challenge the local government's actions, and provide reports with recommendations to improve services. In one case, citizens in São José dos Pinhais, Paraná, observed that the local government implemented over 95% of their recommendations. The initiative led to improvements that benefitted the entire population based on a collaboration gathering engaged citizens and local authorities. This result was evidence that the activists were moving in the right direction. Citizens became not only informed spectators but participants in the process.

Despite the positive results, there were numerous challenges and resistance. The IFC team encountered periods of low engagement from civil society and even faced threats while traveling between municipalities. An example of these threats was an anonymous call they received when traveling between two municipalities. The person said they knew the route the team was about to take and warned them to be careful that something bad could happen. The team changed direction and took another route. It was a very defining moment. Part of the team in the car thought about giving up; Ziller was among them, but ultimately, he decided to continue.

Another challenge they identified was that the citizens engaged in the civic audits relied too much on the IFC team. The local groups did not have a culture of participation without relying on someone to coordinate the actions. Thus, the team started to reflect on the next steps concerned with the autonomy of local groups.

The civic audits brought good results, but was it worth it? How could citizens incorporate the initiative and carry out its activities autonomously? The IFC team was concerned, but certain developments helped them to keep motivated in their mission. Henrique Ziller was appointed as the Comptroller General of the Federal District.

Diego was invited to accompany Ziller. It was an opportunity to take the initiatives they were carrying out at the IFC to the government. The civic audits focused on family healthcare continued but soon migrated to education. The methodology remained the same, but this time the interested citizens were students from ten schools in the Federal District.

Now as Comptroller General, Ziller and his team were impressed with the results of the initiative and soon observed significant differences when comparing the dynamics of citizens auditing healthcare services and students auditing their schools. While the first realizes the importance of healthcare, uses the services, and values service quality, the latter has a symbolic relationship with the school. Unlike the first case, where there is a thin sense of belonging, the school community has instruments that unite its actors, elections for management positions, parent-teacher meetings, teachers' councils, and student movements. Notwithstanding, these two living spaces approximate subjective elements of individual experiences


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that facilitate cultural changes. The experience of the initiative Auditoria Cívica was an opportunity for participation that surpassed the institutional boundaries. It started from citizen training and civic engagement and evolved to citizens as active agents in designing and delivering public services.

The shift from IFC working with citizens and focusing on family healthcare and the work within the Office of the Comptroller General of the Federal District to implement civic audits in schools was a first experience that would further develop in another place, in the Office of the Comptroller General of the State of Goiás.

## The CGE-GO: the citizen participation ecosystem

Ziller took office as Comptroller General of the state of Goiás, and Diego accompanied him, occupying the position of Sub-Comptroller of Open Government and Citizen Participation. The team counted on two great women who performed key roles in this story: public servant Lucélia and CGE-GO's Social Accountability Manager, Marjorie.

Ziller put together a diverse and specialized team so that CGE-GO could dedicate significant attention to social accountability. The team gained a robust structure to expand projects in this area and valued the citizen's perspective of public service. The Office of the Comptroller General of Brazilian States is traditionally very technical, and most citizens do not know what an auditor does. Forming a team able to communicate and work with citizens was crucial to go beyond the basic structures of the CGE-GO's controlling activity. It represented an advance toward symbolic relationships that create a sense of belonging and citizen engagement, as experienced before in the civic audits in the field of education.

These relationships were built for cultural changes and originated what they called the citizen participation ecosystem. The first project, the embryo of the ecosystem developed to create and strengthen mechanisms to promote citizen political culture, was called Estudantes de Atitude (Proactive Students) and was carried out in partnership with the Department of Education of the State of Goiás. The project was aimed at a notably young audience, which, although its importance in influencing politics is recognized, needs, at this stage, to strengthen civic engagement as a value. However, it has been systematically moving away from traditional forms of participation policy, especially those involving formal and bureaucratic processes (Pinheiro & Farias, 2021).

The project offered opportunities for teachers and students to present and implement solutions to preserve the school's estate, good use of school resources, transparency, and social control in a gamified way. To expand student participation, the CGE-GO team considered a competition among the state schools, similar to a treasure hunt. The students were very excited and enjoyed the moment of interaction and fun. The project strengthened the sense of belonging among students and the school community, including teachers, administrative staff, parents, and guardians. The treasure hunt with the schools was a way to increase the engagement of the school community and generate a "competition" in which everyone won and learned.

The heart of the project continues to be the so-called Auditorias Cívicas (or civic audits), in which students evaluate the conditions of the school structure using checklist forms prepared by CGE-GO. They are invited to reflect on the challenges faced by their school and, above all, to feel part of the process of solving these problems. Activities are carried out voluntarily, and all resources are raised in the school community, with donations from parents, teachers, local people, and through events.

The results reveal a positive engagement. After receiving the civic audit report, the school has to propose interventions to address the issues pointed out by students. Examples of these issues are the renovation of bathrooms and the construction of educational and sports facilities (libraries, living spaces, sports fields). However, there is room for dialogue and subjectivity when it comes to decisions about intervention. Also, the school may mobilize students and teachers to deal with a specific necessity, focusing on transformative actions to improve the school's reality, demonstrating the power of participation and social accountability.

The team at the CGE-GO was thrilled. Ziller, Diego, Lucélia, and the entire team were excited about how to get things working properly. The project's pilot counted on 328 schools, 36 municipalities, and some places were dedicated to the participation of other institutions linked to the socio-educational system. After this initial phase, another 103 schools, 21 municipalities, and two institutions from the socio-educational system joined the project. Students were excited, monitored their contributions, and the team continued to be surprised, with exciting stories to tell. One of these stories is that of João, who, with his group, fixed the door of the school bathroom. After the repair, he ensured no one broke it again and expressed his feeling of ownership.

Another remarkable story emerged during a meeting of comptrollers, in which CGE-GO invited one of the teachers to share with the audience the experience with the project in her school. It was an emotional moment where the teacher shared the initiative put forward by a group of students led by Pedro. The students decided to invest in maintaining the school gates and mobilized their families and friends to carry out the work. Pedro had always been a difficult student. His class participation was poor, and he did not pay attention in lessons, getting low grades. He changed during the project, especially when he saw his father's enthusiasm for the initiative and helping his son's school. His father had always been absent and violent and had problems with alcohol abuse. The project was an opportunity for Pedro to connect with his father. He also had a radical change in his behavior in the classroom, participating more. This story moved everyone: the CGE-GO team, the teachers, and the family.

The teacher's story during the meeting revealed that the main element of Pedro's initiative was not the issue observed in the audit report – it could have been the classroom board or a table. The central part is not the problem raised in the audit but the process around it, the involvement of the school community, the symbolic relationships, and the exchanges between the actors involved. The students' participation was not about the initiative to solve the identified problem but about how the students solved the issue and who helped them in the process. The CGE-GO team was moved and also learned a lot by accompanying the students and the community; even after the end of a civic audit, the relationship remains and gets stronger.

In this context, the CGE-GO team collected important information. The civic audits generated 5,376 audit reports from 96% of the participating schools. These reports led to projects implemented in 65% of the schools. Among the challenges faced, the CGE-GO team had to adjust the project due to the social distancing measures adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the projects forming the citizen participation ecosystem had to offer their activities online. At this point, more than 400 schools were registered to participate in the second edition of the project Estudantes de Atitude, indicating the consolidation of this project in the ecosystem.

This consolidation was observed not only by the number of schools and students engaged but also by the interest from the school community, particularly from students who saw their colleagues participating in the previous edition of the project and wanted to go through the same experience, carrying out the civic audits and bringing their parents closer to the school. There was a sense of belonging, a responsibility not only for directors and teachers to maintain the project but also for students. Everybody wanted to solve the problems identified in the school – fixing a window or planting a new garden – and had in mind who they should talk to in order to implement solutions.

The CGE-GO team underwent changes as the projects developed – Lucélia went on maternity leave, and Marjorie replaced her but maintained the same motivation and performance. Also, new and complex challenges emerged, and the demand for the initiatives put forward by the CGE-GO increased.

Diego and Ziller, restless, along with the team now led by Marjorie, needed to move forward. Society's demands for civic engagement initiatives increased. In schools, the CGE-GO team, the school community, and the other actors who approached the project Estudantes de Atitude began to question why there were no more initiatives like this and with different audiences. Thus, the team started looking for tools to plan a new project. At the time, with the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent social distancing measures, it was necessary to adjust, and actions had to be online. Diego had the idea of surveying the State Ombudsman's database of users, and soon the team structured the project planning after listening to as many citizens as possible to understand the project's real needs. With more than 2,000 responses obtained,

the results further highlighted the demand for citizen participation initiatives and, this time, the desire for society to be closer to decision-making structures.

A significant part (86.69%) of research participants expressed interest in training with certification, wanted to learn more about the structures of public services and become part of decision-making. This result led to a combination between the CGE-GO's intention to approach a different target public and the will of citizens who already benefitted from other services provided by the CGE-GO but had never engaged in participatory initiatives and did not see themselves as actors who could approach, dialogue, learn, and teach. Therefore, the project Estudantes de Atitude was a first step toward approximating the institution and citizens and paved the way for the project Embaixadores da Cidadania (Citizenship Ambassadors), which expanded the ecosystem by strengthening and expanding participation.

The project Embaixadores da Cidadania started based on a partnership with the Federal University of Goiás (UFG) as an extension activity of the Faculty of Administration, Accounting, and Economic Sciences (FACE/UFG). It aims to train citizens in citizenship and social participation issues, connecting citizens with their community and offering access to decision-making spaces. The target public was different from the public of the project Estudantes de Atitude. The project looked at individuals that were about to finish or had just finished high school. They were citizens interested in the project's proposal but also wanted certified training, as shown in a survey conducted during the project. The activities were divided into two stages: a theoretical stage, where participants received instructions and carried out training activities to assimilate the content, and a practical stage, where they designed a proposal to solve a problem identified in their communities, the so-called "social impact challenge." An evaluation committee of UFG professors and CGE-GO employees analyzed the proposals. All participants who completed the two stages received a certificate of participation from the UFG, and the 10 participants with the best-evaluated challenges were awarded cash prizes.

These two stages were carried out online and provided a rich experience exchange among participants, the CGE-GO, the university, and the community. The social impact challenge allowed managers and teams from different areas to get closer to state and local governments, civil society organizations, and other governance arrangements in the public sphere. Participants could perceive the complexity of the numerous social problems and reflect on their role as agents capable of acting on these problems and taking on responsibilities, acting complementarily to public agencies.

The Embaixadores da Cidadania encouraged the emergence of innovative practices, with initiatives such as cultural gardens, creating infrastructure to increase accessibility, and teaching opportunities for single mothers, offering certificates for participants. In addition, the team counted on the support of volunteers that mentored and evaluated the projects the "ambassadors" created. The necessity to adjust to operating online due to the COVID-19 pandemic allowed expanding the initiative to people in other places, benefitting citizens from 22 Brazilian states and the Federal District, as well as from Portuguese-speaking countries, such as Cape Verde, Timor-Leste, Guinea-Bissau, and Angola. Therefore, the project became a vibrant space for cultural exchange and dialogue.

Not even the time zone interfered with the exchange among participants. It was not rare to see participants speaking in a low voice during online calls scheduled at odd hours to accommodate those living in other time zones. Despite the locations and contexts being different, participants shared the desire to explore the space that had been conquered. The challenge of creating a social impact initiative after the training sessions was stimulating for the ambassadors. For most of them, exercising political education and engaging in the public space as an activist was a novelty.

At this point, the team identified gaps between the two ecosystem projects, which could lead to lower participation and engagement. It was necessary to establish a transition between the project Estudantes de Atitude and the Embaixadores da Cidadania, since the former focused on citizenship experience and practice based on activities in schools and the second explored theoretical knowledge and the elaboration of more robust endeavors.

For this connection process between the two programs, the team created a third one, the Agentes da Cidadania (Citizenship Agents). Similar to Embaixadores da Cidadania, the new proposal had leaner training and free training, was 100% virtual, and was exclusive to citizens residing in the state of Goiás aged 16 or over. The idea came from looking at the public that had not

yet participated in any of the projects but also reflected, in the long term, the possibility of the students participating in the Estudantes de Atitude having a new space to renew their work.

There are many differences between students in the first and intermediary years of elementary and high school and those who are finishing or have recently finished high school. Designing projects for these two target publics requires attention to these differences, approximating the individuals of different profiles to the public service, helping them to know and access the institutions and spaces of power and decision-making. Thus, the project Agentes da Cidadania focused on democracy and citizen participation to bring citizens closer to the government, developing social action and citizenship through knowledge of the tools available in the public sector, such as systems ombudsman and transparency portals.

The participants' experiences were unique. Although social media has facilitated communication between citizens and government agencies, knowing the official communication channels was crucial for Julia, for example. Julia participated in the project Agentes da Cidadania. During a Sunday lunch with the family, her mother mentioned seeing asbestos tiles and debris in the river near their farm in the countryside of Goiás. Her mother knew it was a toxic substance, but she was unable to remove the debris by herself. Dumping this material is an environmental crime, but she never thought to report it. When her mother shared this situation over lunch, Julia remembered her training and helped her mother to report the case to the state Ombudsman, attaching photos. In a few days, they received feedback from the authorities. The tiles and debris were removed from the river, and even though the perpetrators could not be identified, the family celebrated having helped clean the river and learned together.

Thus, the citizen participation ecosystem is built based on the projects Estudantes de Atitude, Agentes da Cidadania, and Embaixadores da Cidadania. They support the ecosystem in a way that the Estudantes de Atitude fosters citizenship and citizen participation in public schools of the state of Goiás; the Agentes da Cidadania offers an opportunity for citizens to learn the concepts of participation, political education, and social control; and finally, the Embaixadores da Cidadania bring citizens closer to their community and decision-making spaces.

Despite the initiative being institutionally well-established, there is always room for improvement based on feedback and knowledge sharing among the actors in the ecosystem over every step of the projects. Thus, the perspective of cultural adherence to democratic values in public action stands out, which comes from transparency and the possibility of exercising social accountability in a conscious and engaged way. Citizens learn that the complexity of social problems in a democratic society requires solutions that count on both the state with its institutional roles and citizens' attitude and engagement.

Therefore, the Office of the Comptroller General is not only a control agency but a key actor in an ecosystem. It fosters a collaboration network within the state and reaches society as a whole, allowing for different levels of interaction and producing results that motivate citizens and public servants.

**Box 1**
**Indicators of results of the citizen participation ecosystem**

| Purpose of the initiative | Results |
|---|---|
| Schools served by the project Estudantes de Atitude (year 1) | 103 |
| Students served by the project Estudantes de Atitude (year 1) | 5.376 |
| Teachers assisted by the project Estudantes de Atitude (year 1) | 269 |
| Schools awarded by the project Estudantes de Atitude (year 1) | 10 |
| School participation rate in the civic audit stage of the project Estudantes de Atitude (year 1) | 96% |
| Intervention project implementation rate resulting from audit reports on the project Estudantes de Atitude (year 1) | 65% |
| Applications received by the project Embaixadores da Cidadania (year 2) | 1.285 |

*(Continue)*

| Purpose of the initiative | Results |
|---|---|
| Vacancies made available by the project Embaixadores da Cidadania (year 2) | 611 |
| Social impact challenges received at the project Embaixadores da Cidadania (year 2) | 163 |
| Social impact challenges awarded by the project Embaixadores da Cidadania (year 2) | 10 |
| Citizens trained in the project Embaixadores da Cidadania (year 2) | 183 |
| Podcasts produced for dissemination of knowledge at the project Embaixadores da Cidadania (year 2) | 15 |
| Applications received by the project Agentes da Cidadania (year 3) | 3.052 |
| Vacancies made available by the project Agentes da Cidadania (year 3) | 2.074 |
| Participation in the activity of the General Ombudsman of the State of Goiás in the project Agentes da Cidadania | 816 |
| Municipalities in Goiás with citizens trained in the project Agentes da Cidadania (year 3) | 111 |
| Citizens trained in the project Agentes da Cidadania | 550 |

Source: Controladoria-Geral do Estado de Goiás (2020).

When seeing the numbers, the team gets emotional. Ziller and Diego remember the challenges at the beginning of their trajectories. At that time, they did not find much support, there were threats to their safety, and it seemed pointless to persist. Today, they are responsible for projects that have directly served more than 8,000 people, not counting the indirect beneficiaries of initiatives the citizens created based on what they have learned from the projects.

Based on this trajectory, the team gathers to address new issues. The scenario: Diego seemed worried, holding a pen as if ready to take notes. Marjorie looked distressed. Lucélia, who had just returned to work after maternity leave, also looked distressed, along with the entire team. Comptroller General Henrique Ziller commented: “We created a ‘triad’ that we call the citizen participation ecosystem, but how can we stimulate and guarantee its expansion and full operation? How can we bring the citizen closer to spaces of participation using what we have learned from the symbolic relationships between students and the school? What would be the next steps for the citizen to feel part of the spaces of participation and exercise citizenship? How can we mitigate risks and empower the ecosystem to grow autonomously?”

## TEACHING NOTES

### *Breaking down barriers to citizen participation: the case of CGE-GO*

*Abstract*

In Brazil, the General Controllership of the State of Goiás (CGE-GO) created an Ecosystem of Citizen Participation, encompassing projects that encourage citizen participation and social accountability. However, the CGE-GO team is struggling to encourage and ensure the ecosystem's expansion and full functioning. Henrique Ziller, Diego, Lucélia, Marjorie and the entire team's goal is that the projects are not entirely dependent on the institution, and become part of civil society. Thus, they need strategies to mitigate risks to keep the Citizen Participation Ecosystem alive.

**Keywords:** Citizen Participation Ecosystem. CGE-GO. Political Culture. Political Education.

### *Rompendo as barreiras à participação cidadã: o caso da CGE-GO*

*Resumo*

A Controladoria-Geral do Estado de Goiás (CGE-GO) criou um Ecossistema de Participação Cidadã, a tríade composta por projetos que incentivam a participação cidadã e o controle social. Mas a equipe da CGE-GO está com dificuldades para estimular e garantir a ampliação e pleno funcionamento deste ecossistema. Henrique Ziller, Diego, Lucélia, Marjorie e toda a equipe precisam buscar estratégias para que a tríade de projetos não seja somente dependente da instituição, mas parte da sociedade civil. Para isso, precisam de estratégias para mitigar os riscos a fim de manter vivo o Ecossistema de Participação Cidadã.

**Palavras-chave:** Ecossistema de participação cidadã. CGE-GO. Cultura política. Educação política.

### *Derribando barreras a la participación ciudadana: el caso de CGE-GO*

*Resumen*

La Contraloría General del Estado de Goiás (CGE-GO) creó un Ecosistema de Participación Ciudadana, la tríada compuesta por proyectos que incentivan la participación ciudadana y el control social. Pero el equipo de CGE-GO está luchando para alentar y garantizar la expansión y el pleno funcionamiento de este ecosistema. Henrique Ziller, Diego, Lucélia, Marjorie y todo el equipo necesitan buscar estrategias para que la tríada de proyectos no sea solo dependiente de la institución, sino parte de la sociedad civil. Para ello, necesitan estrategias de mitigación de riesgos para mantener vivo el Ecosistema de Participación Ciudadana.

**Palabras clave**: Ecosistema de Participación Ciudadana. CGE-GO. Cultura política. Educación Política.

## EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES

This case was built to collaborate with the discussion about the involvement and engagement of civil society with the decision-making processes and formulation of public policies in a Brazilian state, based on the case analyzed by the Office of the Comptroller General of the State of Goiás (CGE-GO ). In addition, it seeks to show students in the area of applied social sciences the different forms of citizen participation in processes beyond the formulation-implementation binomial, making them co-producers and owners of implemented policies.

The story of the teaching case provides reflection and discussion about certain contents related to citizen participation and the challenges of Brazilian democracy, including:

1) Political culture and democracy;

2) Citizen participation and political education.

## DATA SOURCE

This teaching case is a true story inspired by the experiences of the Office of the Comptroller General of the State of Goiás in the context of public administration and its relationship with the construction of public policies involving civil society. The case is based on the analysis of documents provided by the organization and interviews conducted using both virtual platforms and in-person methods. The names of some characters in the case, such as Henrique Ziller, Diego, Lucélia, and Marjorie, as well as the organizations Amarribo and IFC, reflect real individuals and entities. However, other characters, such as João, Mariana, Pedro, and Julia, are fictional. It is important to note that the research cited in the case, which utilized data from the state Ombudsman, was conducted prior to the enactment of the Data Protection Law (Lei nº 13.709, de 14 de agosto de 2018).

## ANALYSIS PROPOSAL

This case analyzes theoretical concepts related to political culture, democracy, and participation. Kuschnir and Carneiro (1999) define political culture as a set of attitudes, beliefs, and emotions that give meaning to the political process and shape the behavior of its participants. In this case, the participants include students, teachers, family members, and others involved directly or indirectly with the projects discussed, such as CGE-GO employees who plan, execute, give meaning, and are part of this political process within the citizen participation ecosystem.

Peschard (2019) explains that political culture encompasses not only the institutions and organizations of politics but also how the population shares and internalizes values and beliefs related to their political life. Thus, participation is considered a fundamental value that is voluntarily and consciously embraced, implying a citizen's commitment to democratic values.

In the Latin American context, where consolidating democracies poses challenges for many countries, several researchers have studied the relationship between political culture and democracy. Authors such as Botelho, Okado, and Bonifácio (2020) and Rivera (2018) highlight the low level of trust in democratic institutions among the population in the region. This lack of trust can lead to a predisposition for authoritarian and populist solutions, as corroborated by indexes and surveys such as Latin American Public Opinion, Latino-barômetro, and Varieties of Democracy. Classic authors like Gabriel Almond, Sidney Verba, and Ronald Inglehart point out that advancements in trust levels can be achieved through new forms of political participation beyond traditional means, strengthening civil society and fostering a more democratic political culture.

It is important to note that Brazil faces challenges in establishing democratic values, despite going through a process of "re-democratization." The country's democracy relies not only on institutions but also on the state's capacity to act democratically. However, from a political culture perspective, democracy must go beyond institutionalization; citizens

must understand democracy and its functioning mechanisms, including the role of institutions. Almond and Verba (1963) emphasize the importance of citizens' shared democratic values and their perception of democratic institutions beyond electoral behavior.

For the CGE-GO, the participation of school managers, teachers, and students aims to promote democratic action. It is related to Moisés' (2008) concept of political culture, which encompasses a variety of attitudes, beliefs, and political values – such as national pride, respect for the law, political participation and interest, tolerance, interpersonal and institutional trust – that influence people's involvement in public life. The behavior of individuals is influenced by their engagement with the projects and participation with the CGE-GO team, as the ecosystem shapes people's involvement in public life through the attitudes and values fostered by a sense of belonging. When shifting the focus of the projects from family healthcare to education, the projects gain the symbolic relationship between the school community and the public sphere, demonstrating the potential for participation, social accountability, and the cultivation of interpersonal and institutional trust.

Creating a favorable political environment and fostering the will of the actors allows citizens to share power with public servants through "substantive decision-making" and the development of activities in the community (Roberts, 2004). Therefore, the concept of participation presented here aligns with Almond and Verba's (1963) understanding, where participation is one of the elements constituting civic culture and is accompanied by the internalization of democratic values that guide civic action. As summarized by Rocha, Schommer, Debetir, and Pinheiro (2019), citizens feel motivated to engage when they understand that they are part of the process, leading to subsequent actions such as civic engagement in community-related activities, which can contribute to the stability of democracies.

The concept of political culture seeks to encompass subjective dimensions that explain individuals' political behavior within the political system (Baptista, 2015). Therefore, when analyzing the testimonies of students in this case, it is possible to identify the positive impact of their engagement in audit activities, indicating motivating elements such as João's realization that monitoring the bathroom door was also his responsibility. This perception of the problem and active participation in finding a solution influenced his political attitude.

Examining the structure proposed by CGE-GO in its strategic planning, which incorporates social accountability and participation into its institutional objectives, reveals characteristics of two basic types of political culture for analysis: the culture of subjection and the culture of participation (Kuschnir & Carneiro, 1999). The former is based on the perception that the institution and its directors are solely focused on the executive and administrative structures, responding to individual and collective demands solely through the government, which can create a gap between the government and civil society. However, the case demonstrates that the culture of participation was prioritized, organizing systems in which perceptions, emotions, and values related to the political process are more evenly distributed in civil society, based on experiences with organizations like IFC and citizens within the Citizen Participation Ecosystem. This demonstrates a clear intention to avoid passive citizen involvement (subjection) and instead prioritize participation as a value learned as part of each actor's civic process, whether within the institution or society.

Therefore, the concept of political culture is not based solely on institutional characteristics or prevailing social conditions but on individual attitudes observed empirically in different democratic political systems (Kuschnir & Carneiro, 1999). From the analysis of these experiences presented in the case, influenced by guidelines of political culture, it is possible to identify the formation of attitudes of democratic adherence when an active relationship is established among the actors involved in the process, including conception, immersion, learning, and interaction within the developing ecosystem. This fosters civic values, participatory learning processes, and defined roles. The actors' satisfaction is noticeable, and trust between citizens, civil society, and government institutions within this ecosystem is strengthened.

When analyzing the Citizen Participation Ecosystem within a context where participation is just one element among others, along with civic engagement, we delve into the individual, the symbolic, and subjective relationships that permeate social accountability, co-production, and participation mechanisms, be they formal or informal. Baquero (2008) elucidates that the degree of citizen involvement in politics is a fundamental element for the quality of democracy. In contemporary democracy,

active citizenship is required, wherein individuals engage in the political arena through discussions, deliberations, referendums, or plebiscites, employing both formal and informal mechanisms. It is thus established that without popular involvement in the process of democratic construction, democracy loses its legitimacy, remaining merely a formal construct.

In addition to the theoretical concepts of political culture, the theory of democracy, as discussed throughout history, emphasizes the importance of both participation and education/information (Dantas, 2017). Humberto Dantas addresses participation through Teixeira's (1997) framework, which considers citizen participation as involving two contradictory elements of political dynamics: "doing or taking part" by individuals, groups, and organizations expressing their interests, identities, and values, which can be situated in the particular realm but foster heterogeneity, diversity, and plurality; and the element of citizenship, emphasizing the civic sense that seeks universality, generality, equality of rights, responsibilities, and duties. Thus, participation can take both formal and informal forms, highlighting the need to prepare citizens to utilize these tools through political education (Dantas, 2015).

The concept of political education, as understood here, aligns with the perspective presented by Baquero and Baquero (2007), who conceive it as a much broader element than mere civic preparation initiated within the schooling process. According to the authors, political education is ingrained in the fundamental guidelines acquired through relationships with parents, family members, and the community. The civic actions demonstrated by parents are transmitted to the next generation, and adult behavior tends to reflect consistency with what was learned during childhood and adolescence. Therefore, employing this concept in the case aims to bridge theoretical discussions with the practical experiences of actors, institutions, and subjective elements, focusing on their interactions, behaviors, and collective actions.

Hence, in this case, we can observe the dual commitment described by Dantas (2015), which is reflected in the choices made by political actors. They perceive the mission through the lens of the engaged citizen and strive for continuity as they bring about changes in the cultural logic, fostering closer collaboration between government, civil society organizations, and citizens. Additionally, they prioritize civic education to prepare individuals to actively participate, engage in dialogue, and collectively develop policies. This commitment emphasizes the importance of fostering a collaborative relationship between actors in order to promote a more inclusive and participatory democratic process.

Baquero's concept (2008) highlights another crucial element: the quality of democracy as determined by the level of citizen engagement in politics. Consequently, the Citizen Participation Ecosystem is recognized as an active citizenship component encompassing the public sphere, including public authorities, citizens, school communities, civil society organizations, and universities. Through joint efforts facilitated by formal and informal mechanisms, this ecosystem ensures that conventional institutions of political mediation are not compromised. By involving civil society in the process of democratic construction, legitimacy is fostered. This is achievable by moving away from a strategy of subjugation, in which citizen participation is merely reactive. Instead, by empowering individuals through their education and encouraging their active involvement, both citizens and institutions are strengthened. The institution's social and political role becomes better understood by society, and the limits of its actions are more clearly defined.

It is crucial to acknowledge Bobbio's (1986) observation that "political education is the unfulfilled promise of democracy." Marinho and Dantas (2019) further reflect on the significant efforts made by public administration to fulfill this promise. This can be observed in the experience of the Citizen Participation Ecosystem, which encompasses various elements of citizenship. It not only facilitates social accountability but also promotes citizen political culture through dynamic and interactive methodologies. The support of universities plays a vital role in ensuring that this exercise is conducted consciously. These concerted efforts aim to consolidate democratic guarantees and address the challenge posed by the gap between the promise of political education and its realization within democratic societies.

Beresford and Croft (1993), in their work on developing a methodology for actively involving citizens in public services, highlight two crucial elements for establishing a continuous environment of participation: empowering participants and providing ongoing support for their involvement. With this in mind, the triad of projects has been constructed to address the challenge of empowering citizens and ensuring their continued engagement with the citizen participation ecosystem. As the team developed the Civic Audit initiatives, they recognized that the choice of the area of activity was paramount. The projects required a sense of belonging and a symbolic relationship that could be found within the school community and schools

themselves. Acknowledging the importance of keeping students engaged and motivated, the team responsible for social accountability management realized that the project Estudantes de Atitude needed continuity. This led to the development of the project Embaixadores da Cidadania, ensuring a sustained commitment to active citizenship.

Taking into account the concepts discussed earlier and drawing from the experience presented in the case, many authors identify political education as a crucial factor in the consolidation of democracy. This line of research is based on the notion that practicing citizenship requires individuals to be adequately prepared. As Marshall (1967) emphasizes, education plays a central role in the concept of citizenship, aiming to transform individuals into informed and conscientious citizens. By providing knowledge about the natural, physical, and social world, as well as political decision-making, the state equips individuals to become potential agents of social transformation (Marinho & Dantas, 2019).

## CASE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### 1. Based on the concept of political culture, how do you analyze the symbolic relationship between the student and the school in the project Estudantes de Atitude? What are the differences when comparing with the IFC's Civic Audit project focused on family healthcare?

**Answer:** The notion of political culture refers to the set of attitudes, beliefs, and feelings that give rise and meaning to a political process, highlighting the rules and assumptions on which the behavior of its actors is based. When analyzing the two projects, the main difference lies in the sense of belonging that was developed. Students have a strong attachment to their schools; it is a significant part of their daily lives, and they form interpersonal bonds and relationships that influence their behavior. In contrast, in the project related to health, this sense of closeness is not observed to the same extent. There is a distance because the process is not experienced with the same familiarity. Therefore, when examining the project in schools, it becomes evident how students have become fully involved in their actions, and the sense of accountability is natural to them when they complete such activities. On the other hand, there was a lack of commitment to participation in the family healthcare project without the presence of the institutional team.

### 2. Based on the concept of political education, how do you evaluate the results of the project Estudantes de Atitude? What elements in the project can be identified as engagement for exercising citizenship?

**Answer:** The key elements here are primarily focused on fostering a sense of belonging that enables the exercise of citizenship to transition from being an "obligation" to becoming a cultural behavior. In this regard, the school plays a crucial role as it provides a space where the processes of political subjectivation come to fruition. Within this context, children and adolescents are consistently confronted with situations that expose them to different opinions, habits, and values. Through negotiations and tensions arising from social coexistence, the practices implemented in the projects instill values and symbolic cultural elements that transform the dynamics of participation. As a result, children and young people become naturally engaged in the process, viewing themselves as political actors due to their sense of belonging.

### 3. Based on the concept of political education, how do you evaluate the results of the program Citizenship Agents? What elements in the project can be identified as engagement for exercising citizenship?

**Answer:** The Citizenship Agents project serves as a transitional program for young individuals who were previously involved in the project Estudantes de Atitude but had been disconnected from the citizen participation ecosystem for a certain period. Recognizing the importance of sustaining engagement and facilitating progress, CGE-GO introduced the project Embaixadores da Cidadania, which provides essential training on the theoretical aspects of the citizenship system. In essence, this project is significant in guiding students through their transition into active citizenship. It aims to equip them with the necessary knowledge and understanding to effectively participate as responsible citizens.

### 4. Based on the concept of political education, how do you evaluate the results of the project Embaixadores da Cidadania? What elements in the project can be identified as engagement for exercising citizenship?

**Answer:** The project Embaixadores da Cidadania aims to bring citizens closer to their community and decision-making spaces. The project is dedicated to fostering a closer connection between citizens and their community as well as decision-making arenas. As participants progress from the project Estudantes de Atitude, they develop strong bonds and a sense of belonging within their school environment. The project Agentes da Cidadania then provides these students with a foundational understanding of the theoretical aspects of citizenship, enabling them to perceive themselves as active participants in the political system. Finally, the project Embaixadores da Cidadania, equips these individuals to tackle societal challenges with a significant social impact. This progression represents a cultural transformation facilitated by political education within the citizen participation ecosystem.

## SUGGESTED TEACHING PLAN

This teaching case can be used in a 90-minute session. It is recommended to conduct the session with students who already have some familiarity with topics related to political culture, democracy, citizen participation, and political education.

The case should be provided to students in advance so they can read and study it before the classroom debate, allowing them to familiarize themselves with the subject matter.

It is suggested that the first 40 minutes of the teaching session be used to discuss the case in small groups (three or four students). On this occasion, students must seek to clarify any doubts about the case, share opinions about the narrated story, and answer the questions suggested for the case (or other questions that the professor believes relevant).

Next, a debate should occur with the whole class, and, with the professor's guidance, the opinions and responses of the previously formed groups should be confronted.

In order to better establish the theme explored, at the end of the session, the professor should conduct a summary retrospective of the theoretical content explored and its application in the case, also solving any unanswered questions.

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