Policy ambassadors: human agency in the transnationalization of Brazilian social policies

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ABSTRACT
In the past decade, Brazil became a model for social policies, ‘exporting’ ideas and techniques to tackle issues on social participation, poverty and hunger mostly to Southern countries, but also to the Northern States. International policy diffusion is immersed in a complex web of relations established among a plethora of actors participating in various moments and spaces. How policies become models for exporting? Why Brazil was elected as a showcase for social policies? Which actors were engaged in this process? The literature presents different arguments that focus on international organizations, think-tanks, epistemic communities, private agents, networks and so on to explain how policy models travel from a place to another. In this study, the action of exporting elites and their circulation between various institutions are put under analysis to understand diffusion. We introduce in this article a new concept of ‘Policy Ambassador’, a transnational transfer agent, to explain the diffusion of Brazilian social policy ideas and instruments in the areas of participatory democracy, fight against poverty and hunger eradication.

KEYWORDS
Policy diffusion; development cooperation; social policy; Brazil

Introduction
In the past decade, Brazil became a model for social policies, mostly to Southern countries, but also to the Northern States. After being a policy laboratory with the transition to democracy in the 1980s, Brazil developed innovations on political participation devices, poverty alleviation and fight against hunger. Models such as Participatory Budgeting (PB), which is present in around 7,000 municipalities (Público, 2018), Family Allowance (Programa Bolsa Família – PBF), that was transferred to more than 50 countries¹ and School Feeding Programs (Programa Nacional de Alimentação Escolar – PNAE) and Family Farming instruments, which were widely adopted in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa, made this country a ‘social policy exporter’. How policies became models for exporting? Why was Brazil elected as a showcase for social policies in Southern countries? Which actors were engaged in this process? Who were they? Where they operated and by which means?

International Policy Diffusion is immersed in a complex web of relations established among a plethora of actors participating in various moments and spaces. The literature

¹http://www.brasil.gov.br/cidadania-e-justica/2016/01/modelo-do-bolsa-familia-foi-exportado-para-52-paises, consulted in 15 April 2019.
presents different arguments that focus on international organizations (Pal, 2012), as well as think-tanks (Ladi, 2005; Stone, 2001) to explain how models flow from a place to another. In this study, the action of exporting elites and their circulation between various institutions are put under analysis to understand the process. By focusing the analysis on the role of individuals, the micro-dynamics of diffusion is put into light and helps for a better understanding or the phenomenon. There is a diversified group of transfer-agents participating in the promotion, legitimation, mediation and adoption of policies, who are generally mayors, ministers, academics, International Organizations and NGOs staff, militants, etc. We call these agents ‘policy ambassadors’ (Porto de Oliveira, 2017), a notion that considers the transnational nature of their action.

This purpose of this article is to offer a new concept to analyse the role of elites on policy diffusion movements. The analysis of empirical evidences on Brazilian social policy export constituted the basis for developing this concept. In order to present the ‘policy ambassadors’ notion, this article follows three movements. The first is a theoretical debate and concept formation. The second is a brief overview of how Brazil emerged as a social policy model in the first two decades of 2000s. The third section will take a deep immersion on three individual public figures that represent ‘policy ambassadors’.

Defining ‘policy ambassadors’ and research strategies

Aside from the role of the bureaucrat, there are different categories to analyse individual action on public policymaking. Most of them can be understood as different types of elites that make a difference in the public policy process. The debate about elites in public policy is extensive (Genieys, 2011, p. 19). On the specific domain of public policies, the notion of policy entrepreneur posited by Kingdon (2014, p. 204) describes ‘people willing to invest their resources in return for future policies they favor’. These individuals are central to the agenda-setting process. They push their ideas onto the governmental agenda, work to persuade the public to endorse their proposals and ‘lie in wait’ for the most appropriate moment – a policy window – to include them on the agenda of the day.

Similarly, the concept of ‘broker’ used in the social movement literature indicates those agents that mediate the political and social process, by connecting people or groups previously unknown to each other (Tarrow & McAdam., 2005). Brokers can create linkages and spread their ideas and preferences through their networks. The use of the broker notion is important for studies on transnational social movements, insofar as it refers to agents that intermediate the transmission of ideas and repertoires of collective action from one country to another.

The category of ‘epistemic communities’ focuses more specifically on the role of knowledge elites that make a difference in international policy coordination (Haas, 1992). Epistemic communities are networks of ‘professionals from a variety of disciplines with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to a policy-relevant knowledge within that domain’ (Haas, 1992, p. 3).

When it comes to policy diffusion, Yves Dezalay and Briant Garth developed the idea of practicien savant, that is ‘knowledge practitioners’ working in the ‘international market of the promotion of institutional reforms’ (Dezalay & Garth 2002, p. 32). They are both academics working as ‘symbolic entrepreneurs’ of certain political reforms or professional practitioners working as consultants. Likewise, the ‘policy flexian’ outlined in the Introduction of this Special Issue, is both a high-level international policy broker and self-publicist.
Testing those categories in tandem with our empirical findings revealed that these concepts were insufficient to explain the roles and behaviours of individuals. In our fieldwork, the agents we have found pointed to a different figure operating on the transnationalization of public policies.

First, Kingdon’s framework and applications of the ‘policy entrepreneur’ idea have been mostly restricted to the national context. The notion of policy entrepreneur presents a picture of self-interested individuals who have sophisticated socio-political skills to move fluidly within the policy scenario and can advocate or ‘sell’ public policies of any kind. Their role appears to be more ephemeral, they are at the right moment and time and act to set an idea on the agenda. In some ways, a cold and calculating category, the entrepreneur metaphor brings together the policy realm and market dynamics for the competition of reform agendas and policy solutions. The notion of ‘policy flexian’ too is a calculating self-interested policy actor that ‘often benefit themselves from the policies they promote, supposedly disinterestedly’ (Stubbs & Wedel, 2015), rather than the ‘social reformers’ discussed here.

Similarly, the idea of broker is too focused on the action of mediation, independently of the attributes of the agent. Brokerage is more characteristic of transfer processes and performance, rather than addressing the values and norms of the actor. Notions of epistemic communities and knowledge practitioners stress the importance of information and experts on policymaking, but leave behind other types of expertise, skills, power and legitimacy retained by actors. These are important notions, however, insufficient to analyse our particular phenomenon.

The individuals promoting Brazilian social policies in the past 30 years are part of an emerging generation of public policy agents. A new category was required in order to interpret their action. This does not mean that the notion developed here is in competition to the categories presented before. We combine, in a particular way, different features that were already posited in the literature, in order to capture the empirical reality under analysis. These elite individuals advancing Brazilian social policies abroad were part of a group – with long experience in one policy area – who were circulating between domestic and international governmental and non-governmental institutions over a constant period of time. Moreover, Brazil was embedded in a particular historical circumstance, which is the rise and achievement of international power and recognition, especially on the social area, as will be discussed in the following section.

The kernel for the idea of policy ambassador was firstly developed to analyse the diffusion of PB from Brazil; at this point using the phrase ‘ambassador of participation’ (Porto de Oliveira, 2017). Policy ambassadors are defined as individuals constantly engaged on the promotion of policies at the local, national and transnational levels. Sometimes they speak different languages and have lived in different parts of the world. Others have a sort of cosmopolitan charisma, capable of charming the most different individuals and cultures. Most important is that sometimes their field of action corresponds to their professional domain and in certain cases, there is an identification of this with their ‘mission in life’, and public identity.

Technically their action and advocacy are one causal force behind policy ideas pushed onto the agenda, which can be in different institutions at either local, national or international. Moreover, they have certain typical attributes, which includes an authority in relation to the policy, the fact that they promote this policy independently of the place,
circumstance or institution they are operating in, and that they are not opportunistic but operate over the long term advocating a policy. In short, they can perform different roles which can be of mediation, entrepreneurship and expertise. They circulate among different institutions promoting a particular policy or a set of similar policies, but they do not necessarily have formal ties to institutions. Their power relies on a set of different sources of authority: political, technical and epistemic as well as charismatic.

Sometimes a specific type of authority is more present in one ‘ambassador’ than another. This means that an ‘ambassador’ promoting housing policies that have a background on urban planning and a position as a professor at the University College London might concentrate more theoretical authority than technical. Another actor working on the same policy area, who holds a position on the direction of UN-Habitat Regional office, for example, might concentrate more on their political authority, even if before she or he had graduated with a Ph.D. or Master’s on urban sociology. As ‘ambassadors’ continuously promote such policies and hold different positions along their career (they can start as researchers, move to NGOs, be appointed to direct international organizations offices and so on) they might concentrate different types of authority along their trajectory. This relates to another aspect of their power, which can increase or decrease depending on the position that they are occupying, for example, being an NGO activist at the beginning of the trajectory, can imply a lower level of influence than if later the same policy ambassador directs a division of specialized agency of the United Nations later. It is important to observe that sometimes ambassadors remain technical operators or consultants for a long period of time and do not assume a position of political authority.

Finally, it is possible to distinguish general ‘policy ambassadors’ for those individuals defending a ‘pack’ of policies (e.g. the New Public Management instruments), sectoral ‘policy ambassadors’ (e.g. health, labour, environment) and specific ‘policy ambassadors’, as those promoting a specific instrument as the solution for public issues.

Literature has been pointing out to these agents (using different names to label them). It is also possible to find other international leaders in Brazilian political history with some similar features as policy ambassadors, such as: Josué de Castro (1908–1973), for the hunger issue; Paulo Freire (1921–1997), for the education issue; Celso Furtado (1920–2004), for economic development; Luis Carlos Bresser-Pereira (1934 –), for the public management reform.

However, the concept of policy ambassador does not need to remain restricted to analyse Brazilian agents or social policies. There are a number of other fields of public policy and governments, that would benefit from the policy ambassadors perspective of analysis, as the supporters of the New Public Management, Pension Reforms, Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and so on. If we take a closer look in the diffusion of Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) or BRT instruments in Latin America, we will be able to see different ‘policy ambassadors’. In the case of CCT, examples are Santiago Levy, with Mexican Oportunidades, Veronica Silva, with Chile Solidario, and Ana Fonseca, with Brazilian PBF (Osorio Gonnet, 2018), all these agents were circulating from local to national governments, and then to different international institutions as the Interamerican Development Bank, the World Bank and United Nations Development Program, to do different types of activities related to social policies. Meanwhile, for BRT, Enrique

\[^2\] Interview, former Ministry of Social Development of Brazil staff, Campinas, Brazil, 2016.
Peñalosa, former mayor of Bogotá, referred to in the article by Diego Ardilla, in this Special Issue, is another example of a charismatic personality, who lived in different countries, served as transport private consultant and lecturer. Al Gore, US vice-President during Clinton administration and author of *An Inconvenient Truth*, who advocates for fighting against climate change, or Muhammad Yunus, Bengali economist and activist for the microcredit (described in the article by Beatriz Cordeiro in this Special Issue) could serve also as examples of policy ambassadors. Policy ambassadors are not necessarily high-level officials, but they can also be those who work in the backstages of transnational public policy-making.

The strategy for analyzing individual engagement is based on a ten-year research programme that started in 2007 on the case of PB and expanded since 2014 to other policies, as food security and basic income. The empirical background relies on a database of more than 160 interviews conducted in different countries utilizing a ‘transnational political ethnography’ (Porto de Oliveira, 2017). These interviews were used not only to build the ‘policy ambassador’ category but also to trace the Brazilian policy diffusion process from ‘Porto Alegre and Brasília to the rest of the world’. A few specific interviews were used to identify ‘policy ambassadors’ and choose three illustrative characters among them for analysis.

The three individuals operating within different social policy agendas: social participation, fight against poverty and eradicating hunger. There are three types of ‘policy ambassadors’ presented in this article: (i) Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who defended the whole package of Brazilian social policies, (ii) Tarso Genro who engaged in the social participation policy militancy and (iii) José Graziano, who advocated for public food nutrition and family farming instruments. Before presenting their characteristics and action, it is necessary to contextualize the circumstances from where they have emerged.

**Brazilian policies on the international agenda**

By the end of the first decade of 2000s, Brazil was consolidating its role as a rising power, an emerging economy and a place where social policies brought results by improving inequalities and poverty. The Economist was one of the most important means of communicating the Brazilian success (Economist, 2009). In fact, social policies implemented in this decade showed how a combination of public intervention and strategic programs for social assistance was able to start reverting social effects brought by the neoliberal reforms induced by the IMF and the World Bank in the 1980s and 1990s. There was a transition from the so-called ‘Washington consensus’ to the ‘Brazilia Consensus’ (Gutiérrez, 2012).

Social policies implemented in Brazil during the administration of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Lula) from the Workers Party (PT) were not necessarily all conceived at that moment as pure innovations. These were a combination and adaptation of practices already experimented on the local level or an adaptation of preexisting

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3The choice to present these icons of policy ambassadors in this paper is due to the fact that they better illustrate the characteristics and actions of policy ambassadors. More details on different specific ambassadors of participation have already been described elsewhere (Porto de Oliveira, 2017).
programs. Some of them were also the materialization of ideas defended by academics, especially at the University of Campinas. We can trace an important point for the social policy development in Brazil with the Democratic Constitution of 1988, which was an institutional tipping-point, insofar as it set a wide range of reforms including the decentralization process, social participation on public policies and principles of universality for social policies. For local governments, this Constitution was decisive to amplify the power and autonomy of political authorities, opening the floor to urban innovations.

The transition to democracy was also a tipping-point that reorganized political forces and allowed the emergence of new political groups with progressive ideas and projects (previously excluded due to the persecution by the dictatorship government) to run elections and achieve office. This was the case for PT a left-wing party created in 1980, a few years before the transition to democracy. During the 1990s, PT had success getting mayors elected in important cities of Brazil, such as state capitals of São Paulo, Porto Alegre and Belo Horizonte, as well as different cities in the State of São Paulo. It started progressively to acquire more centrality in politics, becoming one of the most important political parties nowadays, especially after the election and re-election of two Presidents, Lula and Dilma Rousseff, the first woman elected for this position.

Along the 1990s, mayors from PT faced complex problems of poverty and scarcity of resources but used the municipal space to implement the party ideas. Through experimentation in public policy to solve social issues in their regions, a set of different practices emerged. Among them was the PB experience in Porto Alegre, adopted later on in Belo Horizonte and Recife. Experiences of cash transfer for social assistance were also experimented with at the local level in Brasilia and Campinas (Oliveira, 2018; Sugiyama, 2012), by administrations of different parties, not only left-wing. The ideas and knowledge of progressive policies that nourished PT were not only coming from the guidance of the party. In fact, policy knowledge was also elaborated in an NGO, the Instituto Cidadania (Citizenship Institute), that after the second term of the former President Lula, became the Lula Institute.

When PT won the elections in 2002 and took office at the national level, this range of innovations was scaled-up and adapted to become federal programs. This scaling-up also occurred to the individuals working with these policies; they were circulated from the local to the national arena to help redesign public policies. At this point, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as the Brazilian Agency for Cooperation, sought to advertise and internationalize its social policies. More than that, specific Ministries and governmental institutions started to create or reinforce international relations divisions. As examples, the Ministry of Social Development was intensely occupied with international relations, in order to transfer programs such as PBF and PNAE and the Ministry of Agrarian Development, was involved on transferring family farming and agricole State purchase programs.

Brazil started to foster its social policies at the international level with the arrival of Lula in power. But this was not the first step of Brazilian policies on the international agenda. Porto Alegre with PB was a precursor owing to its early internationalization during the 1990s through the actions of a municipal government. The following section outlines how these two processes took shape from the vantage of ‘policy ambassadors’.
Policy ambassadors in action

‘My first year of term will have the seal of the fight against hunger […] if by the end of my term every Brazilian could eat three times a day, I’ll have accomplished the mission of my life’

Lula

‘The program for a democratic city is to oppose to this apparent ongoing spontaneity, in a way that the city transcends beyond the local’ (Genro, 2000)

Tarso Genro

‘Countries as Niger, explicitly based their programs on the Brazilian experience […] To fight against hunger, every country has to find its own ingredientes, its own menu’.

José Graziano da Silva

Two types of policy ambassador action will be presented in this article. This does not mean that they are the sole elites in the diffusion of Brazilian social policies. In fact, there is a vast community of experts in distinct sectors of social policies, who have worked for the government in different levels, local, national and international, assisting the implementation of policies in Brazil and in many countries. These ‘middle level’ ambassadors will not be explored in this article. The first ‘policy ambassador’ is the more general actor who defends the whole package of Brazilian social policies: former President Lula. In this case, we have an ambassador who is advocating for more general social goals, principles and agendas, as fighting against poverty and eradicating hunger, via the implementation of specific policy instruments, such as those developed in Brazil. The second type of policy ambassador focuses on a specific policy area: exemplified in this article by the figures of Tarso Genro and José Graziano, respectively, working with PB and Food Security and Agriculture policies. Both types of ambassadors defend specific policy instruments to solve public problems in their area of engagement.

A social policy brand called ‘Lula’

The figure of Lula is emblematic when we talk about Brazil. During his term, he represented a new country, a new progressive force and inspired the world with social policies promoting social change that were successfully implemented in Brazil. He is the president that had more missions abroad in the entire Brazilian history. His foreign policy agenda sought affinity with emerging countries – the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) – and engagement with the African region was a priority. This changing pattern on foreign policy – that was traditionally oriented towards the developed countries, especially Europe and the United States – was fertile ground for Brazil to be a leader and voice of these emerging countries and their interests.

4First speech of Lula after being elected, 10 October 2002. Available in https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/folha/brasil/ult96u41735.shtml, consulted on 2 October 2018.

5Interview published in Brasileiros, diffused by Instituto Lula, http://www.institutolula.org/jose-graziano-um-brasileiro-contra-a-9, consulted in 15 June 2017.
This leadership was exerted by Lula, who had an extraordinary charisma, and a simple and powerful discourse. Born in a poor family, he passed part of his life as a metalworker in an industry on the periphery of São Paulo. At the time he was enrolled in the trade union and after the transition to democracy, he ran for President three times, before being elected in 2002 and 2006. In the G-20 conference (London, 2009), Barack Obama says to Lula ‘this is my man right here [Lula], I love this guy […] the most popular politician on earth’. Afterwards, this quote became the title of a Newsweek article. His foreign policy agenda was orientated towards the engagement of Latin America, where Brazil aspired to take a regional leadership role as well as to increase relations with Africa and build a coalition of rising powers with the BRICS members.

Lula was the ambassador of different Brazilian social policies; we can say that he promoted the ‘Brazilian social policy package’. One of our interviewees from the FAO remembered that Lula won the elections with the logo of a plate of food, this was the Zero Hunger Program label. Fighting against poverty and eradicating hunger was not only a proposal of Lula for his term, but it was also described somehow as his ‘mission in life’ in his speeches. His government was characterized by so-called ‘Presidential diplomacy’, that is the direct engagement of the head of government on the international stage (Marcondes & Mawdsley, 2017). As an example, during his government, he had 33 missions to Africa. After leaving office he continued this movement, via the Lula Institute, and had visited until 2014 the African continent 12 more times: Lula ‘left government […] being considered the main Latin American leadership and the main African leadership outside Africa, insofar as he developed a very strong policy of relations between the two continents during his term’.

During his missions, conferences were organized and in his speeches he used to advertise on how Brazil had improved socially after the implementation of programs such as family allowance, for example. As one of the staff of Lula Institute said, they had a brand called ‘Lula’. According to this interviewee, Lula’s missions abroad operated in the following way ‘first by a basic model of conferences, interviews, lectures, seminars’, which were organized by Lula Institute and where Brazilian experiences were presented. As an example, ‘Lula was last year [2013] in Angola doing a big seminar on Bolsa Família, to more than 800 people. Meetings with heads of State, with heads of government to exchange experiences and to talk about Brazilian activities’. He continues stating ‘when he [Lula] travels to Africa, he is received by any head of State, head of government, as if he was still the President of the Republic. He was a very strong reference in the continent and seen by a good part of government as a source of contacts, knowledge and solidarity’.

The role of Lula on branding and spreading worldwide the Brazilian social policy package is important. He is not only a divulgator of experiences but also a figure who gives this package legitimacy. With his influence, charisma and power of speech, he was able to conquer different publics, from the World Bank to the Angolan government. The characteristic of Lula as policy ambassador relies on his political power in office and the practical knowledge and experience he gained from implementing these
policies. An important attribute of this ambassador is that, in spite of leaving office, Lula kept promoting social policies designed during his government. His international social policy militancy did not depend on holding office but was sustained as he circulated from one institution to another.

**Ambassadors of participation and hunger eradication**

The idea of specialised ambassadors recognises their role promoting a sectorial policy or set of policy instruments for a long period. We find different policy ambassadors during the diffusion of PB or Food Security and Family Farming programs in two emblematic figures: Tarso Genro and José Graziano da Silva.

Tarso Genro is from the South of Brazil; he started his career as a lawyer, specializing in labour issues and afterwards turned into politics. During the dictatorship in Brazil, he was arrested twice, before going exile in Uruguay. When he came back to the country, he made his filiation to PT. After the Democratic Constitution, he was elected vice-mayor for the municipality of Porto Alegre. At this time Olívio Dutra was in office, the first mayor of PT to rule Porto Alegre and the founding father of PB. After the end of Dutra’s term, Genro was elected mayor and took office from 1993–1996, and later on in 2001, for a short term, as he left the office to run elections for State Governor, albeit without success. Finally, in 2010, Genro won the elections for Governor of the State of Rio Grande do Sul. Genro has not only a political career, but he is also an author of different books and articles in the press about political issues and participatory democracy, with worldwide recognition.

José Graziano da Silva has a different trajectory. He was born in Urbana (Illinois, USA) and has also Brazilian and Italian citizenship. In contrast to Genro, his trajectory is more focused on academia. Graduating in agronomy, with a Master on Rural Economy and Sociology from the University of São Paulo, he received his PhD in Economics from the University of Campinas, where he became a professor in 1978. As an academic he advised more than ten Master’s students and 26 PhD thesis, creating an important set of disciples. Graziano published mostly on agrarian issues and rural development in Brazil. His political career was jump-started when he was invited to write the platform for agricultural issues for Lula’s political campaign in 2001. He was on the leadership of the team that formulated the ‘Zero Hunger Program’, at the Instituto Cidadania (mentioned before). After Lula’s election, this turned out to be one of the most important social policies of the government. It was to be implemented via the Extraordinary Ministry of Food Security and Fight Against Hunger (MESA), where Graziano became the Minister in 2003. Subsequently, MESA was closed down – due to internal political struggles inside the government (Leite, da Silva, & Peres, 2014) – and a new official Ministry came to light – the Ministry of Social Development and Fight Against Hunger. After the fall of the MESA, Graziano was appointed special advisor of Lula and later on named from 2006 to 2011 regional representative for the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), Specialized Agency of the United Nations, Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, working in the Headquarters of Santiago.

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11 [http://www.sul21.com.br/jornal/a-politica-faz-parte-da-vida-de-tarso-genro-desde-a-adolescencia/](http://www.sul21.com.br/jornal/a-politica-faz-parte-da-vida-de-tarso-genro-desde-a-adolescencia/).
12 [https://noticias.uol.com.br/ultimas-noticias/efe/2011/06/26/responsavel-pelo-fome-zero-assume-direcao-da-fao.jhtm; http://buscatextual.cnpq.br/buscatextual/visualizacv.do?id=K4787162A5](http://buscatextual.cnpq.br/buscatextual/visualizacv.do?id=K4787162A5), consulted in 2 October 2018.
Chile. Finally, in 2011 he was elected Director of FAO and re-elected in 2015, with 92 votes against 88 of his opponent, the Spanish ex-chancellor Miguel Ángel Moratinos. In 2015 he was the only candidate and received 177 of 182 votes.

**Radical democracy**

The idea of social participation defended by Genro throughout the 1990s is a proposal for radical democracy and the means to achieve it is via PB, exemplified by Porto Alegre. Radicalizing democracy is to create mechanisms, for democracy to ‘correspond to the interests of the vast majority of population and create new institutions […] that allows that decisions about the future are always shared decisions’ (Genro & de Souza, 1997, p. 18). This idea criticized electoral democracy, as inadequate and proposed a deeper system of the democratic process. That is, participatory institutions through which voters could express their preferences directly and take part in public policy production. This political project proposes a collaborative management between government and citizens, in order to align political interests with the majority of the population.

Citizen Participation was already on the agenda of PT in their ‘manifesto’ the book ‘Modo Petista de Governar’ (The PT Way of Governing) published in 1992 (Bittar, 1992), which covered the idea of the popular sovereignty and the engagement with social movements. More specifically, the book tells us that ‘the PT way of governing seeks the permanent participation of citizens, especially throughout its collective movements, as a decisive path towards the construction of an effective democratic society, of social welfare and free men’ (Bittar, 1992). However, the ideal proposed by this book was of the implementation of ‘popular councils’, that is spaces where citizens could participate directly on the management of public policies (Bittar, 1992). The ‘Modo Petista de Governar’ was conceived in the 1990s and had as reference municipal governments. If participation and the idea of popular councils were present, PB as a policy was a more complex solution than that, which expressed even cleavages between regional tendencies of PT.13

The book ‘Orçamento participativo: A experiência de Porto Alegre’ (Participatory Budgeting: The experience of Porto Alegre) published in 1997, by Genro and de Souza (1997), who was coordinator of the Planning Cabinet during his administration and another ‘Ambassador of PB’, has been translated to many different languages and achieved worldwide circulation. It had particular success in France, where members of the transnational network Democratize Radically Democracy translated and published it through the Leopold Meyer Foundation in 1998 (Porto de Oliveira, 2017). This is one of the most important political books about PB; it describes the way PB works technically and how to operationalize the political ideals embedded in the concept of radical democracy. The book was even used by the World Bank, with a translation that distilled its ‘ideological’ content and shared the technical orientations in development cooperation projects for implementing PB.14 In short, this piece represents the intellectual legitimacy, combined with a technical authority of Genro on the domain of participatory democracy.

PB is a municipal policy for citizen participation in budgeting and spending. There are mechanisms of direct citizen participation via assemblies and representation through

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13 Interview, former mayor of Porto Alegre, Porto Alegre, Brazil, 2011.
14 Interview, World Bank Institute Staff, Chicago, United States, 2013.
councils. In this process, citizens can influence directly public policies and deliberate on the priorities in terms of infrastructure that they want to be implemented in their neighbourhoods and in the city as a whole. A voting process occurs in different stages and city levels (neighbourhood assemblies and centralized councils). First effects of PB in Porto Alegre were that social policies, such as basic infrastructures (health bases, schools for children, street pavement, basic sanitation) started to be decentralized, moving from the city centre and rich areas to the periphery, where most parts of population lived and where there was the most need for public investment. This process triggered a reversal of priorities on public policymaking, from the middle class and rich populations towards the poorest, producing a social justice effect.

**Zero hunger**

Hunger and poverty issues have been at the core of Brazilian social problems. Different proposals dealt with this issue, in the governmental level, think tanks and civil society. Among them, the idea of poverty as primarily a hunger and poor nutrition issue was defended as a problem that should be solved via direct government intervention by providing regular feeding and promoting food of quality for individuals. The rise of the hunger issue is connected to Brazilian agricultural transformation and industrialization leading to monocrops in the countryside. It created a challenging situation for family-based agriculture and promoted a rural exodus towards urban centres.

The intellectual legitimacy of José Graziano as an ‘ambassador of fight against hunger’ is different from Genro’s role for participatory policies. The position of Graziano as a professor and author of books reinforced his intellectual authority. He also held a position at the Instituto Cidadania, where he led the discussions on food security issues.

The idea of Zero Hunger was also being prepared within discussions inside PT and with social movements. Lula as well was engaged on the elaboration of a National Food Security program, to present to the national government (Takagi, 2006, p. 38) from 1992 to 1994. These ideas were struggling for institutionalization and gained shape before the elections of 2002, during preceding moments of the political campaign and on the production of the government plan for Lula. At this time Graziano endorses these ideas as the coordinator of the food security agenda, which was later on implemented as a policy.

The Zero Hunger Program (Programa Fome Zero – PFZ) relies on the idea that hunger is a political issue. In order to address this social problem, it that turns fights poverty via agricultural instruments and feeding strategies. The idea to create a ‘virtuous cycle’ to foster food security and family farming was the heart of the proposal. It was implemented in the national government in 2003 and became a milestone for Lula administration. This program was structured considering a set of existing national policies for the area, combined to new ones. Actions of PFZ had two major fronts of action. The first was to aid low-income population to access food, via conditional cash transfers, school feeding programs and food subsides for workers. The second front was towards family agriculture, via the public acquisition of products from them. The government would be responsible for school feeding, via products acquired directly from the nearest family agriculture. With these actions, the government was both stimulating nutrition and food security, as well as the subsistence of small producers, instead of using big chains of food distribution, as supermarkets.
Policy circulation and political authority

When he arrived in the office at the municipality of Porto Alegre, Genro did not regard his mission only to improve PB in the city. He also made PB part of the international relations for the municipality. Porto Alegre was a pioneer in the Brazilian context as a city engaged in paradiplomacy. It was during Genro term that the first institution for the city international relations was created, an office in the city for international fundraising for urban policymaking. Later, this office became the Secretary of International Relations.

Genro also brought to the municipality different contacts that he had made during his political career. His network was wide and included not only politicians, or mayors from other cities, but also intellectuals, journalists and activists. One of our interviewee states that it ‘was always the international media, with some newspapers as Le Monde Diplomatique and Bernard Cassen, Ignacio Ramonet, who in 1998 had already started to publish [about PB] in France’ and he continues saying that ‘Bernard Cassen has visited [Porto Alegre] many times and he intensified his visits after the [World Social] Forum’ and that ‘Tarso had especially a lot of relationship with those people’, including ‘Boaventura de Souza Santos, for example, [who] was a big disseminator and enthusiast of PB’ and ‘with Italian intellectuals’.15 Another interviewee confirmed that ‘Tarso had a big relationship with international intellectuals […] Then from this moment on PB had a big visibility […] there was a desperate search internationally for experiences that appeared to be working as a progressive alternative to globalization’16

The actions for the municipality during his administration used a lot of creativity. Its important to recall that during the 1990s PT was not the party that it became after winning the national elections. It was, in fact, the opposition party and it used its power with municipal governments to contest national power. Leading transnational networks of municipalities were fundamental to this purpose. Genro approached the international municipal movement of progressive mayors. One strategy of political opposition was to create the Mercocities network in the Southern Cone (Porto de Oliveira, 2017). The underlying motivation for this project was to advocate the voice of local authorities in the process of regional integration, called Mercosur, that had started during the early 1990s with the countries of the Southern Cone (Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay. A political issue was also connected insofar as Presidents of these countries at this time had strong neoliberal agendas. The mayors that united throughout Mercocities were progressive and shared a common view that local authorities should participate in the important international decision. They also understood that neoliberal policies that were being adopted at that time were responsible for increasing poverty and inequality on cities and mayors would be at the sharp end of in resolving the effects of international decisions. Moreover, a political project relying on the dialogue with civil society and promoting citizen participation was at the heart of some administrations that engaged with the Mercocidades network, such as in Montevideo (Uruguay) and Rosario (Argentina).

The city of Porto Alegre, under Genro administration, used the meetings of the Mercocities network as an opportunity to circulate PB. As our interviewee puts it ‘our first external leave was when Tarso made a proposal with a municipality in Paraguay, of

15Interview, former mayor of Porto Alegre, Porto Alegre, Brazil, 2011.
16Interview, Cidade NGO staff, Porto Alegre, Brazil, 2011.
Assunción, for us to organize a network of the Mercocities. That is, even if the capital is Brasília, […] Porto Alegre has much more affinity with Montevideu and Buenos Aires’. Due to its geographical position, Porto Alegre had an old cultural and historical relationship with cities in the Southern Cone. The interviewer continues arguing that ‘for the Argentins and Uruguayans, Porto Alegre was more the Brazilian capital of Mercocities […] it was there [in the Mercocities] that started a very important exchange. It was the first time that we started to take it outside Brazil, with Cordoba, with Rosario’ both in Argentina.\(^{17}\)

The relationship with Latin American countries within the Mercocities network opened the space for extending relations with other municipalities, and at this time with European cities ruled by progressive mayors, such as Barcelona in Spain and Saint-Denis in France. Our interviewee states that ‘for those meetings in the Mercosur, this started to extend contacts outside America and we started to have a relation as well with France’. These connections are attributed to ‘Tarso at the municipality [who] organized a movement to bring universities, entrepreneurs, trade unions to Europe to visit the technopolls in France’. These experiences, ‘at the end of Tarso term, from 1993 to 1996 in France also created relations with some local governments of the Left. Among them Saint-Denis […] as well as Barcelona in Catalunia’.\(^{18}\)

From that moment onwards, Porto Alegre began to receive different delegations from elsewhere in the world that increased progressively, especially after the World Social Forum. In the words of our interviewee ‘the contacts of Tarso, the contacts of Raul [Pont] […] potentialized greatly this thing, received much attention, gather host many delegations of intellectutals, researchers, social movements, vanguards, representations of left parties from Latin America’ interested in PB during the 1990s.\(^{19}\) The World Social Forum (WSF) was definitely the moment when the visits searching for PB lessons exploded. One of the reasons for convening WSF in Porto Alegre was the fact that a radical experience of democracy was ongoing there. In short, the political authority and connections of Tarso were fundamental to foster the internationalization of PB. This ‘ambassador’ would take PB to each arena wherever he was invited.

In a similar fashion, Graziano defends the idea of zero hunger and the eradication of famine via programs of food security, basic income and public acquisition of family farming products. Graziano was the coordinator of the PFZ during Lula Administration, where he was in charge of implementing the program. However, after the closure of his Ministry MESA, Graziano became regional representant of FAO in Latin America, in 2016. From this base, his role was fundamental in pushing Brazilian programs and ideas on the international agenda and especially to tackle the question of global hunger as a political issue.\(^{20}\) In fact, before his term, the FAO was an organization orientated towards technical aspects of agriculture, more focused on farming techniques and technologies, for example.\(^{21}\) Graziano led an important reform at FAO, which brought into the agenda the political dimension of food and agriculture.

\(^{17}\)Interview, former mayor of Porto Alegre, Porto Alegre, Brazil, 2011.

\(^{18}\)Interview, former mayor of Porto Alegre, Porto Alegre, Brazil, 2011.

\(^{19}\)Interview, former International Relations Secretary of Porto Alegre, Porto Alegre, Brazil, 2011.

\(^{20}\)Interview, FAO Office for Latin America staff, Santiago, Chile, 2018.

\(^{21}\)Interview, FAO Office for Latin America staff, Santiago, Chile, 2018.
His circulation from academia to the political arena, and then to the international organizations (Unicamp, Ministry, FAO) shows that he promoted reform ideas independently of the institution he was based in. In an interview at FAO, it is possible to notice that how his experience and ideas took part of the international organization ‘One of the things this new administration has brought about, the administration of Professor Graziano […], I think that by taking advantage of his experience […] was that you need a series of public public policies to succeed on ending hunger’. The interviewee stressed that this is a ‘message that him [Graziano] repeats exhaustively, that every opportunity he has, he […] reminds people that it is possible, that this is not a dream, that this must be done’ and that he (Graziano) ‘states frequently that we can be the generation zero hunger’. Another interesting quote from this interviewee is that ‘one of the areas that this work is being developed, and that has an enourmous interest of countries wanting to emulate successful Brazil experiences is linking the Food Purchase Program directly to school feeding’.22

In order to end hunger, Graziano’s reform agenda was to produce public policies designed to deal systematically this issue. His position at FAO was important to foster this idea globally. Another interviewee highlighted Graziano ‘as one of the idealizers for the Zero Hunger Program, as an old companion to Lula’s struggle for office, in his government position, as the secretary general of FAO […] he had the majority of the voters and set the issue of food insecurity in Africa at the axis of his action […] and he is going to be elected with the vote of the Africans’. This interviewee also states that when it comes to the diffusion of food security programs, the FAO was fundamental.23

It is important to notice that the influence of Graziano varies according to his position along his trajectory. In Brazil, he was able to set his ideas on the agenda of the national government. During his term in the FAO regional office a project called ‘Hunger-Free Latin America and Caribbean Initiative’ was carried out. The globalization of Brazilian ideas reached another stature with his appointment as Director. Paraphrasing the words of an interviewee, the access to individuals changes because when sit at the regional office coordination you talk often with Ministers and sometimes with the head of States; meanwhile, when you sit at the direction of the organization, you talk often to the head of States and sometimes to Ministers.24 The rise of Graziano was important to contribute to the diffusion of Brazilian ideas, as well as to promote the circulation of experts from Brazil, who have worked with food security, family farming and other agricultural policies.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this article was to present the notion of policy ambassadors as a key analytical tool to understand and explain policy diffusion processes. The observers of transnational public policy will often find evidence of the agency of such type of actresses and actors. In fact, there are a plethora of individuals working intensively and for a long time with the promotion of a policy instrument or a political project (or

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22 Interview, FAO Headquarters, Rome, Italy, 2015.
23 Interview, Lula Institute staff, São Paulo, Brazil, 2015.
24 Interview, FAO Office for Latin America staff, Santiago, Chile, 2018.
both), changing hats, accordingly to positions and institutions of work. These agents can be academics who later perform as politicians, international organizational staff or consultants (though not necessarily in this order). The concept of policy ambassador can be applied to different policy sectors (environmental, social, macro-economic, education, etc.), as well as for governments (both in the South and North, national and subnational), non-governmental and intergovernmental institutions.

In the empirical case presented in this article, the micro-analysis was conducted through the observation of individual career trajectories of three different illustrative figures of an emerging category of policy agent that became evident with the rise of Brazil as a new international power. These ‘policy ambassadors’ were constantly engaged in promoting a particular policy over their professional and political careers. It becomes apparent that they circulate in different institutions and use their intellectual, technical and political authority to push policies to which they are wedded onto different local, national and international agendas. The analysis of these individuals as not mere ‘carriers’ or disseminators but as ‘policy ambassadors’ is important for a more complete understanding of policy diffusion phenomena, including which ideas are circulating, how they are being legitimized and why some institutions embody them.

If this article focuses on individual agency, this does not mean that it is the only force operating on policy diffusion processes. Such phenomenon is much more complex. In the case of Brazil, social policy diffusion was led through different channels including traditional diplomatic strategies, sectorial policy diplomacy and paradiplomacy. In the case of family farming, for example, an important amount of funding was invested in triangular cooperation between the Brazilian government, with the Ministry of Agrarian Development, the FAO and different countries in Latin America. Another important feature that was important to the diffusion of Brazilian social policies was the construction of a reputation around them. The results obtained with PBF and Agriculture and Food Security programs to overcome poverty and hunger were important to legitimate Brazil as a model. For example, in 2014 Brazil was pulled out of the Hunger Map. Moreover, the endorsement by international organizations – as FAO and the World Bank – and international leaders as the former General Secretary of United Nations Ban Ki-moon, who launched the Zero Hunger Challenge in Brazil in the Rio Summit in 2012, contributed to the internationalization process. In the words of Ban Ki-moon

> Sustainable development is simply not possible in a world where nearly one billion people are hungry every day. Ending hunger is [...] is essential for our collective future.

> Our host country – Brazil – is an inspiration. Brazil’s ‘Fome’ programme is proof that societies can beat back hunger using local food from family farmers and community kitchens [...].

> I am very proud that one of the leaders of that effort – José Graziano da Silva – is now Director-General of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization.25

This endorsement was fundamental to include the issue of hunger as it is in the Sustainable Development Goals. In a complex combination of agents, institutions and

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25https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2012-06-21/remarks-launch-zero-hunger-challenge, consulted on 30 October 2018.
mechanisms, individuals play an important role. What would have happened if Tarso
Genro did not win the elections in Porto Alegre, and Graziano at FAO (he won in 2011
with 3 votes of difference) and Lula for the Presidency of Brazil?

After the last Presidential election in Brazil in October 2018 won by an extreme right
candidate, the international community is now looking this country with caution. The
new President is designing an ultra-liberal government, promoting radical rupture with
the previous administrations. Among the top priorities in the government’s agenda is
Pension reform. On the one hand, these changes might represent a fall of Brazil as
a social policy model. On the other one hand, the new directions of the foreign policy
agenda of the country are turning to OECD nations, strengthening ties, in particular,
with the United States. This movement will have impact on the engagement of Brazil
as a sort of leader of Southern States interests in the international system. The future of
social policies in Brazil is not only uncertain, but also the international community
might be looking for another example to address public policy solutions for hunger and
poverty in the world. At this moment, it is hard to predict which country will fulfil this
role and which policy ambassadors might emerge.

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