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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the practice of participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, through an interdisciplinary lens that combines the theories of right to the city, environmental justice and deliberative democracy. It examines the democratic and deliberative nature of the participatory process as well its social, environmental and ecological outcomes. While participatory budgeting has been widely studied and internationally recognised, it has rarely been assessed in its ability to bring about urban sustainability. This analysis demonstrates that it is principally the deliberative nature of the participatory process that has allowed it to have a positive impact on the urban environment. In doing so, this article proposes key recommendations to successfully replicate this mechanism in order to face the various environmental and social challenges

of the Anthropocene and contribute towards achieving the sustainable development goals.

Finally, PB has helped move the balance of power away from the economy and the state, and brought it towards civil society and the people. By empowering citizens, the OP has mitigated some of the negative social and environmental externalities of capitalism. Moreover, by controlling the capital budget, citizens gain control over part of the surplus capital generated by urbanisation that they can invest to rebuild and redesign their own city. These are essentially the redistributive principles sought by citizens to reclaim their right to the city (Harvey 2012).

[Participatory budgeting] provides the roadmap for an alternative to authoritarian populism.

[Participatory budgeting] is only a first step towards a more inclusive, sustainable and resilient society. Nonetheless, PB is not only a good first step; it is actually one of the most important ones. Control over 100% the municipal investment budget grants citizens an amount of power that few other participatory mechanisms can provide.