

Popular participation in democratic management: a case study of the Vila Atlântica Unified Educational Center

A participação popular na gestão democrática: um estudo de caso do Centro Educacional Unificado Vila Atlântica

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Abstract

The Management Councils of Unified Educational Centers (CEUs) are decision-making bodies that require multifocal analysis. Although their legal-institutional configuration outlines a participatory model, previous studies suggest that its effectiveness merits critical examination (Sanches, 2014). This article analyzes the participation of actors involved in the decision-making dynamics of the Management Council of the Vila Atlântica CEU in São Paulo, based on the systematization of documentary and bibliographic sources. The findings reveal a mismatch between the legal-institutional design and its effective implementation. This discrepancy reinforces the argument that, despite incorporating democratic elements, the CEU management model does not constitute an effective space for shared decision-making among the actors involved.

Keywords: Unified Educational Center (CEU); democratic management; public policy management councils.

Resumo

Os Conselhos Gestores dos Centros Educacionais Unificados (CEUs) são instâncias decisórias que demandam análise multifocal. Somos tributários a Sanches (2014) ao afirmar que, a despeito da configuração jurídico-institucional, a efetividade do modelo participativo merece análise crítica e reflexiva. Este manuscrito objetiva analisar a participação dos atores envolvidos no processo decisório do Conselho Gestor do CEU Vila Atlântica da cidade de São Paulo, nosso estudo de caso, a partir da sistematização de fontes documentais e bibliográficas. Os dados coletados demonstram um descompasso entre a configuração jurídico-institucional e sua implementação efetiva. Tal aspecto reforça a argumentação de que o modelo de gestão dos CEUs, embora possuam elementos democráticos, não se configuram como espaços efetivos de partilha do processo decisório entre os atores envolvidos.

Palavras-chave: Centro Educacional Unificado (CEU); Gestão Democrática; Conselhos Gestores de Políticas Públicas.

INTRODUCTION

The Unified Educational Center (CEU) Project is an intersectoral public policy initiative operating in areas of high social vulnerability in the city of São Paulo. Its units combine a robust architectural design with educational, cultural, sports, and leisure facilities. This structure enables the integration of sectoral policies aimed at implementing comprehensive education and popular education (Perez, 2018). In line with these principles, the selection of the locations for the first 21 CEUs, inaugurated by then-mayor Marta Suplicy (PT, Workers' Party), prioritized peripheral urban areas with significant social needs. This decision was grounded in scientific evidence, such as the Social Inclusion/Exclusion Map (2000), and in engagement

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with civil society through the 2001–2002 Participatory Budgeting process (Figliolino, 2014; Vitale, 2004; Gadotti, 2000).

The CEU management model was subject to intense debate between divergent perspectives throughout its formulation and implementation. Authors such as Figliolino (2014) and Sanches (2014) describe political disputes among groups advising Marta Suplicy's administration regarding this management model. They also explain how management is affected by conflicts among bureaucrats within the units (intra-unit) and by changes in implementation strategies outside the units (extra-unit). Silveira and Etulain (2024) argue that these strategic shifts alter the legal-institutional arrangement that shapes the management model, resulting in periods of both reduced and increased openness to popular participation.

The scholarly literature, however, presents a different picture. A substantial body of research demonstrates a consensus regarding the management model of the CEU Project (Cangussú, 2010; Figliolino, 2014; Gadotti, 2000; Oliveira, 2017; Padilha; Silva, 2004; Siqueira, 2017; Souza, 2010). Despite differences in temporal and thematic focus, these studies advocate a configuration in which the Management Council serves as the main deliberative body, the Integration Collegiate ensures intersectoral coordination, and the General Assembly aligns implementation with popular interests.

Nonetheless, Sanches (2014) observes that although this configuration incorporates democratic elements, its implementation does not result in democratic management. This is due to the top-down power dynamics between the bureaucracy and civil society that unfold within both the Management Council and the Integration Collegiate. In this context, the micro-participation¹ exercised within the Management Council of the Vila Atlântica CEU in São Paulo is examined to provide new empirical evidence for the ongoing discussion on a management model capable of ensuring shared decision-making among the actors involved.

This manuscript is organized into five sections, in addition to this introduction. The first section presents a literature review supported by an analysis of the legal norms governing the democratic management model of the CEUs. The second section describes the methodology adopted and the procedures used for analyzing the results. The third section presents the findings of the case study, which are discussed in the fourth section. Finally, the manuscript concludes with final considerations.

DEMOCRATIC MANAGEMENT FOR INTERSECTORAL IMPLEMENTATION: THE MODEL OF THE UNIFIED EDUCATIONAL CENTERS

The development of a shared political-pedagogical project among the formal and non-formal educational facilities within each CEU requires coordinated action among multiple actors and institutions. Success in this coordination—hereafter referred to as intersectoral implementation—entails the integration of efforts, resources, and competencies across different governmental sectors (extra-unit) and facilities (intra-unit) to promote the comprehensive development of individuals in all their dimensions (Gibertini, 2023; Pestana, 2014). Each CEU unit requires extra-unit coordination with the Municipal Department of Education (SME), the Regional Board of Education (DRE)² of its respective Subprefecture, the Municipal Department of Culture (SMC), the Municipal Department of Sports, Leisure, and Recreation (SEME), and surrounding public services, such as Social Assistance Reference Centers (CRAS), Primary Health Units (UBS), among others (Souza, 2010; Di Agustini, 2019). In addition, internal coordination occurs among facilities with a certain degree of pedagogical and administrative autonomy, including the Early Childhood Education Center (CEI), the Municipal Early Childhood School (EMEI), and the Municipal Elementary School (EMEF) (Gadotti, 2000).

The management model adopted in the CEU Project aligns with the actions that the literature associates with the proposal of intersectoral implementation (Gibertini, 2023). Its legal-institutional configuration is defined by administrative acts traditionally referred to as the

¹ "Micro-participation, or participation in associations, is the voluntary association between two or more individuals in a common activity in which they do not intend solely to derive personal and immediate benefits" (Meister, 1969 apud Bordenave, 1983, p. 24, translated by the authors).

² They correspond to representatives from the Education Coordinatorships, currently referred to as Regional Boards of Education following the enactment of Law No. 14,660 of December 26, 2007.

Standard CEU Regulations. Four such regulations were identified up to 2024, consistently outlining a decentralized management structure with an interdisciplinary composition that, through the arrangement of participatory bodies listed in Chart 1, incorporates popular participation and network governance among the actors and institutions mentioned in the previous paragraph (São Paulo, 2004a, 2005b, 2006, 2016).

Chart 1. Duration of the Participatory Bodies in CEU Management from November 2004 to August 2024.

Legislation	General Assembly and Sectoral Assemblies	Children's Assembly and Youth Assembly	Management Council	Thematic Committees	Integration Collegiate	Association of Parents, Teachers, Staff, Users, and Friends of the CEU (APMSUAC)
1st Standard Regulation	In effect	Not provided for	In effect	In effect	In effect	Not provided for
2nd Standard Regulation	Not provided for	Not provided for	In effect	In effect	In effect	In effect
3rd Standard Regulation	Not provided for	Not provided for	In effect	In effect	In effect	In effect
4th Standard Regulation	In effect	In effect	In effect	In effect	In effect	In effect

Source: Adapted from Sanches (2014, p. 145), based on Decree 45,449/04, Ordinance 7,356/05, Ordinance 4,672/06, and Decree 57,478/16.

The participatory bodies of the CEUs allow for both direct and indirect participation in decision-making processes. This institutional arrangement encompasses municipal councils, assemblies, and a civil society organization (e.g., the APMSUAC³), whose articulation enables participatory planning for the exercise of social oversight of the educational project and the operational management of the units (Bordenave, 1983; Sanches, 2014), that is, intersectoral implementation.

Participation in the Management Council occurs through social management, a participatory managerial process in which decision-making authority is shared among those involved in the action (Tenório; Kronemberger, 2016). Social management enables dialogue among different social actors and provides clarity regarding how they position themselves within a social order—their cultural traditions, the type of society in which they wish to live, how they relate to one another, and how they treat marginalized groups (Habermas, 2007). In this sense, particularly for deliberative citizenship, it is the communicative and procedural conditions that confer legitimizing force to collegial deliberations (Habermas, 2007; Miguel, 2017; Tenório; Kronemberger, 2016).

The CEU Management Council can be characterized as a public policy management council⁴ with deliberative, oversight, and consultative functions (Allebrandt, 2003; Controladoria-Geral da União, 2012). Considering the levels of decision-making importance proposed by Bordenave (1983), the Council's authority appears to encompass the highest levels of importance, with the exception of level 5 and, in certain periods, level 4. These interpretations are based on a content analysis of the legal norms, as summarized in Chart 2.

Parity in the composition of the Management Council underwent a process of centralization that favored representatives of the bureaucracy in the distribution of decision-making power.

³ Association of Parents, Teachers, Staff, Users and Friends of CEU.

⁴ In the original text by Allebrandt (2003, p. 5), the term used is "management council of governmental programs." The terminology was adapted here to ensure consistency with other academic works.

Chart 2. Analysis of the Importance Level of Decisions Made by CEU Management Councils from November 2004 to August 2024.

Decision Importance Level	Description of Decisions	Analysis of Legal Norms
1	Formulation of the institution's doctrine and policy	Provided for in all four regulations, but removed by Law No. 14,662/2008
2	Determination of objectives and strategies	Provided for in all norms
3	Development of plans, programs, and projects	Provided for in all norms
4	Management of resources and operations	Provided for in the first and fourth regulations, as well as in Law No. 14,662/2008
5	Execution of actions	Not provided for in any norm
6	Evaluation of results	Provided for in all norms

Source: Authors' elaboration, 2025.

Three configurations of representation were identified among the segments of municipal public employees, community users, and civil society organizations. The original conception of parity (first regulation) was reflected in a tripartite composition with proportional representation among the segments. This conception was altered in the second and third regulations (second configuration) through the merging of the "community users" and "civil society organizations" categories, resulting in an unequal bipartite composition with a majority of public employees. Only in the third configuration (São Paulo, 2008, 2016) does the bipartite composition restore proportionality between the segments. These analyses are based on a content analysis of the legal norms, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Evolution of Proportional Representation in the CEU Management Council by Segment from November 2004 to August 2024.

Management Council Segments	1st Configuration	2nd Configuration	3rd Configuration
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
Municipal public employees	33.33% (1) (2)	60.00% (3)	50.00%
Community users	33.33%	30.00%	33.33%
Civil society organizations	33.33%	10.00%	16.67%

Source: Authors' elaboration, 2024.

Conventional symbols:

- This segmentation of profiles did not yet exist.

(1) The first regulation provides for "the greatest possible balance" between staff assigned and not assigned to the CEUs, allowing for potential inconsistencies in empirical data.

(2) The first regulation required minimum representation from the Metropolitan Civil Guard (GCM), nearby schools, and the Subprefecture.

(3) In the second and third regulations, public employees not assigned to the CEUs are classified as representatives of civil society. (4) Law No. 14,662/2008 does not define minimum representation among segments, but Decree No. 50,738/2009 regulates them according to the values indicated in the table.

In parallel, the number of council members also reflects this process of concentration within the composition of the Management Council. Since the first standard regulation, this variable has exhibited a downward trend over time. In the first configuration, the number of council members ranged from 39 to 63 (São Paulo (SP), 2004a). In the second configuration, it ranged from 20 to 40 members (São Paulo, 2005b, 2006). In the third configuration, which is currently in effect, the number was set at 30 members (São Paulo, 2008, 2016).

Throughout its implementation, the Management Council has adopted a single method for selecting its members. The process occurs through direct elections coordinated by a mixed committee. This committee is composed of CEU bureaucrats—politically appointed by their Regional Board of Education (DRE)—and representatives from the segments that make up the Management Council (São Paulo, 2004a, 2005b, 2006, 2016).

For most of its implementation, the organizational structure of the Management Council consisted of a plenary body, an executive secretariat, a presidency, and thematic committees (São Paulo, 2004a, 2005b, 2006). Beginning with the fourth regulation, an executive committee was introduced, adding the position of vice president and incorporating both the executive secretariat and the presidency (São Paulo, 2016), similar to a board of officers (Tenório; Kronemberger, 2016). The selection of the president and vice president occurs through a plenary vote, for which any council member is eligible, while an implicit procedure assigns the role of executive secretary to a CEU bureaucrat (São Paulo, 2004a, 2005b, 2006, 2008, 2016).

The thematic committees align with the generalizations proposed by Tenório and Kronemberger (2016), functioning as a complementary body to the organizational structure of the Management Council and the General Assemblies, with consultative and mobilizing roles (Controladoria-Geral da União, 2012). Their authority initially encompassed all six levels of importance established by Bordenave (São Paulo, 2004a, art. 53), but it was progressively reduced over time. In the second regulation, their authority became limited solely to the third level of importance (São Paulo, 2005b, art. 32; São Paulo, 2006, art. 32), while the fourth regulation restricted their authority to any issue not addressed by the other participatory bodies (São Paulo, 2016, art. 33). Their composition was more restrictive during the second and third regulations (São Paulo, 2005b, art. 32; São Paulo, 2006, art. 32), but the current regulation reinstates the initial conception of allowing an unlimited number of members (São Paulo, 2004a, art. 52; São Paulo, 2016, art. 67). It is noteworthy that there is no explicit regulation regarding the selection method or organizational structure of this body (São Paulo, 2004a, 2005b, 2006, 2016). Its actual functioning is also not explicitly regulated, except with respect to the types of actions it may undertake—namely, submitting suggestions and proposals to the other bodies of CEU democratic management (São Paulo, 2004a, 2005b, 2006, 2016).

The internal functioning of the Management Council is not clearly defined by the administrative and legislative acts that regulate it. Fundamental elements of council dynamics—essential in municipal councils—are not explicitly mentioned (Tenório; Kronemberger, 2016). Quorum verification, discussion, and decision-making on agenda items are only implicitly addressed in the regulations. There is no explicit or implicit reference to approving the minutes of the previous meeting (São Paulo, 2004a, 2005b, 2006, 2008, 2016). The explicit recognition of any citizen's right to participate and speak in meetings—without voting rights—appears only from 2008 onward (São Paulo, 2008, art. 4; São Paulo, 2016, art. 36). These interpretations derive from a content analysis of the legal norms.

The consolidation of democratic management in the CEUs depends on the formation of a public policy⁵ community in which reform-minded professionals articulate alliances with grassroots, union, and beneficiary leaders. In practice, the interpretation of explicit and implicit institutional rules by state actors shapes the functioning of the participatory bodies. This interpretation is influenced, among other factors, by the political-ideological preferences of public officials in leadership positions, resulting in "obstacles" or "shortcuts" to participation (Côrtes, 2007; Tenório; Kronemberger, 2016).

Souza (2010) identifies events that corroborate the existence of such a community in certain CEU units. However, the initiative to transfer the management of cultural, sports, and leisure facilities to the private sector appears to hinder the formation of this public policy community and to limit the exercise of social oversight over the effective implementation of the units (Silveira; Etulain, 2024).

⁵ Public policy communities are networks of actors organized around a specific policy area, who mutually recognize one another and share a common language and value system (Coelho; Pires; Secchi, 2019). These communities form part of the political process within the public policy network, in which relationships are established among specialists, interest groups, and the government—or specific governmental sectors (Côrtes, 2007).

Table 2. Survey of Documents Consulted Regarding the Vila Atlântica CEU from November 2004 to August 2024.

Documents from the Management Council of the Vila Atlântica CEU	1st Period	2nd Period	3rd Period	4th Period
Meeting minutes	-	10	10	13
Electoral process minutes	-	1	2	0
Attendance lists for meetings	-	6	3	10

Source: Authors' elaboration, 2024.

Conventional symbols:

- Period with no meetings of the Management Council of the Vila Atlântica CEU.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative approach to conduct a case study (Meirinhos; Osório, 2010). This methodological choice is justified by the complex context of the CEU Project units, where the articulated provision of multiple public services intersects with a broad set of variables within which micro-participation is embedded (Meirinhos; Osório, 2010). For this reason, the Vila Atlântica CEU – Professor João Soares Filho, located in the city of São Paulo, was selected as the object of analysis. The criteria employed for case selection were: (i) the longest period of operation; (ii) receptiveness of the management team to the methodological procedures; and (iii) accessibility to the research team. It is worth noting that an attempt was made to include the Campo Limpo CEU – Cardeal Dom Agnelo Rossi in the study; however, the criteria were not met.

The operationalization of the case study was conducted through documentary research grounded in content analysis (Godoy, 1995). The objective of this procedure was to analyze the micro-participation of the actors involved in the participatory dynamics of the Management Council of the Vila Atlântica CEU. This research technique comprised three subprocesses, as defined by Godoy (1995): pre-analysis, material exploration, and treatment of results. These subprocesses resulted in the systematization of the tables and figures presented in this article, which were prepared using Google Sheets for the coding, classification, and categorization of the information observed in the analyzed documents. The documents examined⁶ include normative acts, administrative acts, and records produced by the Management Council of the Vila Atlântica CEU, as summarized in Table 2.

It is important to note that the documentary research faced methodological limitations. During the on-site visit to the unit for consultation of official documents, a large volume of physical records with low levels of organization in their storage was identified. For this reason, the analysis was limited to periods in which there was a certain degree of consistency in the legal-institutional configuration of the CEU management model. As a result, four periods⁷ were established, with a minimum of ten meeting minutes consulted for each period. Tables 3, 4 and 5 do not present information for the first period due to the absence of meetings of the Management Council of the Vila Atlântica CEU during that time, as described in Table 2.

The subprocesses of the content analysis were guided by the theoretical framework developed for the study of municipal public policy councils. This decision is supported by the understanding that the Management Council and the Integration Collegiate of the Vila Atlântica CEU can be classified as municipal councils. Accordingly, a multifocal approach (Almeida; Cayres; Tatagiba, 2015) was applied to analyze both the legal-institutional configuration of the Management Council and the micro-participation exercised by the actors involved in the unit's democratic management. A synthesis of the descriptive questions for each analytical dimension is presented in Chart 3.

⁶ All consulted documents are available in CEU Vila Atlântica – Professor João Soares Filho. Our solicitation of access was sent through City of São Paulo's Electronic System of Information for Citizens (e-SIC), under protocol number 077068, opened in 10/10/2023.

⁷ The four periods considered are: i) Period without Standard CEU Regulation (feb/2003-nov/2004); ii) First Standard CEU Regulation (nov/2004-dec/2005); iii) Second Standard CEU Regulation (dec/2005-dec/2006) and Third Standard CEU Regulation (dec/2006-nov/2016); iv) Fourth Standard CEU Regulation (nov/2016-present).

Table 3. Relative Frequency of Operational Steps in Meetings of the Management Council of the Vila Atlântica CEU by Period, November 2004 to August 2024.

Operational Steps	2nd Period	3rd Period	4th Period
Quorum verification	70.00%	50.00%	69.23%
Reading of previous meeting minutes	30.00%	0.00%	7.69%
Correction and/or approval of previous meeting minutes	0.00%	10.00%	0.00%
Discussion	90.00%	90.00%	69.23%
Voting and deliberation	80.00%	80.00%	69.23%
Reports/Announcements	90.00%	90.00%	100.00%

Source: Authors' elaboration, 2024.

Table 4. Average Number of Council Members Present in Meetings of the Management Council of the Vila Atlântica CEU by Segment, November 2004 to August 2024.

Management Council Segments	2nd Period	3rd Period	4th Period
Municipal public employees	5.00	6.67	9.90
Community users	4.33	6.00	2.10
Civil society organizations	2.83	1.00	4.10

Source: Authors' elaboration, 2024.

Table 5. Relative Frequency of Meetings Containing Agenda Items by Decision Level of the Management Council of the Vila Atlântica CEU, February 2004 to August 2024.

Decision Importance Level	2nd Period	3rd Period	4th Period
Level 1 – Formulation of the institution's doctrine and policy	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%
Level 2 – Determination of objectives and strategies	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%
Level 3 – Development of plans, programs, and projects	40,00%	0,00%	7,69%
Level 4 – Management of resources and operations	100,00%	70,00%	92,31%
Level 5 – Execution of actions	80,00%	70,00%	38,46%
Level 6 - Evaluation of results	50,00%	40,00%	7,69%

Source: Authors' elaboration, 2024.

Chart 3. Analytical Dimensions of the Documentary Research.

Analytical Dimensions	Descriptive Questions
Internal Operating Dynamics	What are the powers of the collegiate body? What is the composition of the collegiate body? What is the method for selecting council members? What is the organizational structure of the collegiate body? How does the collegiate body operate in practice?
Analysis of the Profile and Performance of Specific Actors Within the Council	Does civil society participate effectively in these spaces? Does micro-participation generate deliberative effectiveness on the part of public authorities?

Source: Adapted from Tenório and Kronemberger (2016), 2024.

It is necessary to highlight some of the methodological limitations identified during the documentary research. The first limitation concerns the communicational nature of participation (Bordenave, 1983), as the meeting minutes constitute a product of this process

rather than the participation itself. The second limitation relates to the political-ideological bias of the individual responsible for recording the minutes, a task performed exclusively by members of the CEU bureaucracy, who determine which elements are deemed pertinent for inclusion. The third limitation concerns the selection of the documentation analyzed, meaning that relevant information may not have been consulted or taken into account. The fourth limitation pertains to the exclusive use of the attendance lists attached to the meeting minutes, as referenced in Table 2, for the preparation of Table 4.

In addition, bibliographic research was conducted and consolidated into a narrative synthesis literature review (Grant; Booth, 2009). The scientific works consulted engage with discussions on mechanisms of participation in the implementation of municipal policies, the conditions that enable the effectiveness of their deliberations, and the analytical approaches used to examine participation in municipal councils. For this purpose, the Google Scholar and Acervus Unicamp repositories were consulted.

RESULTS OF THE CASE STUDY OF THE MANAGEMENT COUNCIL OF THE VILA ATLÂNTICA CEU

During the administration of José Serra (PSDB), direct and recurrent interventions in the management of the Vila Atlântica CEU were observed through the dismissal of CEU bureaucrats, the most contentious of which involved the position of CEU Manager. The first case concerned the dismissal of the unit's inaugural Manager (São Paulo, 2005a). In this context, a transitional management team was established, led by the coordinators of the Cultural Action Center and the Sports Action Center, until the Mayor appointed a successor. Representatives of the local community questioned the decision in more than one meeting, demanding an electoral process to fill the position as stipulated in the regulation then in force (São Paulo, 2004a, art. 107), a demand that was not met. In the same year, council members debated the subsequent dismissal of those responsible for the transitional management "solely for political reasons" and expressed their appreciation for the professionals' work (São Paulo, 2005c).

The documentary analysis shows that, in effective implementation, the method for selecting council members was not always carried out through an electoral process. During the second period, the CEU Manager appointed by the administration of José Serra requested, in her first meeting with the collegiate body, that "the absentees be contacted and invited to rejoin the group, and, if that were not possible, that other people be invited to participate in this Council" (São Paulo, 2005d, pp. 1-2).

However, the analysis of the three accessed election minutes indicates alignment with the regulations in force, although only the first election of the Management Council of the Vila Atlântica CEU had its composition formally detailed in the Municipal Official Gazette (São Paulo, 2004b), evidencing a decline in transparency over time.

During the analysis of the meeting minutes, the organizational structure showed significant contrasts with the regulations in force. The case study revealed the presence of the vice-presidency in all periods considered. An active role of the CEU Manager in conducting the meetings was also identified, particularly in instances where the president and/or vice president were absent. In addition, the recurrent use of thematic committees as a legitimate decision-making body was observed across all periods, most often associated with deliberations corresponding to level 5 in the hierarchy of decision importance.

As for its practical operation, the council demonstrated satisfactory performance when analyzed in light of the literature on municipal councils. Steps such as the issuance of reports, discussion of agenda items, and deliberations were omitted only in meetings in which no matters were submitted by council members. However, the meeting minutes were undervalued, with limited instances in which they were made available to council members or read during the sessions, resulting in a low frequency of revisions and approvals of the resulting records. In addition, quorum verification was not carried out in all meetings, as required by the regulations. When it did occur, verification was performed either through a written record of those present at the beginning of the minutes or through signatures on

the attendance list at the end of the meeting. The data were synthesized through a content analysis of the meeting minutes, presented in Table 3.

Although the second and third periods were characterized by unequal parity among the segments, with a majority representation of municipal public employees, the analysis of attendance frequency reveals an opposite scenario. In these periods, on average, the number of council members present at the meetings considered shows a majority from civil society. In contrast, during the fourth period—when proportional parity among segments was reestablished—attendance was predominantly composed of public employees. The data were synthesized in Table 4 based on the analysis of the attendance lists referenced in Table 2.

Although the regulations allowed for higher levels of decision-making importance (Bordenave, 1983), the case study presented deliberations only up to level 3. Throughout all periods considered, no decisions corresponding to levels 1 and 2 were identified—levels that refer, for example, to the formulation of the CEU Educational Project. Even at level 3, decision-making showed limitations, with the atypical value observed in the second period resulting from an active engagement of civil society participants. In addition, decisions at levels 4 and 5—primarily related to the Integration Collegiate—occurred frequently across all periods analyzed. The data were synthesized in Table 5 based on the content analysis of the meeting minutes referenced in Table 2.

The documentary analysis for the third and fourth periods reinforces the dynamics highlighted by Sanches (2014). In moments of active participation by civil society representatives—when proposing and discussing agenda items corresponding to higher levels of decision-making importance—CEU bureaucratic representatives argued that these matters should be referred to the Integration Collegiate for further discussion. Unfortunately, the methodological limitations of this study did not allow for the monitoring of these agenda items within the Integration Collegiate.

The assemblies of the Vila Atlântica CEU were not explicitly mentioned in any of the meeting minutes consulted, which suggests the possible non-operation of this participatory space.

It was observed that, during the third period, community associations expanded their organizational capacity. According to the council members, the local associations joined together in solidarity within the federation *União Federativa das Associações Comunitárias da Zona Noroeste*, which was restructured in an effort to integrate them and strengthen the representation of community needs.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The case study demonstrates a misalignment between the legislation governing the democratic management of the CEUs and its effective implementation. This misalignment is consistent with the observations of Sanches (2014), as well as with the implementation science literature (Lotta, 2019). The data revealed greater discrepancies in four of the five elements of the internal operational dynamics established by Tenório and Kronemberger (2016), although a significant and continuous effort to maintain the regulatory composition was observed.

The empirical analysis enabled a different understanding of the regulations concerning the selection method for council members. Although the electoral processes considered were carried out in accordance with the regulations, vacancies were filled through two different mechanisms, depending on the segment. For municipal public employees, vacancies were filled through appointment by the CEU Manager. In the case of civil society representatives, vacancies were filled through an expressed “interest in participating.” These findings diverge from the regulations governing participatory dynamics, as no references were found to the filling of Management Council vacancies through Sectoral Assemblies (São Paulo, 2004a, art. 31, §1; São Paulo, 2016, art. 33).

The case presents indications of the absence of a public policy community capable of enabling civil society participation at higher levels of decision-making importance. The existence of two deliberative bodies—one of which does not include civil society representatives—provided the bureaucracy with a mechanism for distancing the population from deliberations. The analyzed data show events that reinforce Sanches's (2014) description of the separation of

agenda items among the participatory bodies. Thus, high-importance agenda items brought by civil society representatives to the Management Council were forwarded to the Integration Collegiate, and it was observed that decisions made by the Integration Collegiate were later presented merely as informational reports to the Management Council. In this regard, reinstating electoral processes for selecting the CEU Manager and school principals would contribute to the formation of such a community (Sanches, 2014).

The decision-making dynamics of the Vila Atlântica CEU influence intersectoral implementation, although the Management Council played a limited role in this process. Despite evidence of important coordination between council members and actors external to the unit, such coordination was not related to comprehensive education. The same can be said about the articulation among facilities within the unit. In this regard, the data in Table 5 should be interpreted critically. These results contribute to Sanches's (2014) thesis concerning the central role of the Integration Collegiate in intersectoral implementation, which supports the suggestion of expanding its membership to include individuals from pedagogical teams and from civil society.

Active involvement by the CEU Manager is understandable, but it requires caution from the other represented segments in order to prevent overlap with the responsibilities of the executive board. This behavior appears to be grounded in the legal responsibilities associated with managing the unit.

The thematic committees demonstrate a mobilizing potential that may be effectively utilized by civil society segments. These bodies allow for the direct engagement of non-elected residents with the agenda items discussed by the Management Council. In addition, the data show a recurring pattern of their creation and operation.

Considering the concerns raised in the literature on municipal councils, the current legal-institutional configuration of the CEU Project represents a management model with significant advantages. Beyond critiques of its effective implementation, the assemblies, thematic committees, and youth council provide mechanisms that bring council members closer to their representative bases, helping to overcome the problems identified by Allebrandt (2003) and by Tenório and Kronemberger (2016).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This article presented a set of empirical data on the decision-making dynamics of the Management Council of the Vila Atlântica CEU. These findings contrast with the scientific consensus on the management model of the CEU Project, revealing a discrepancy between effective implementation and the legal-institutional configurations, consistent with the observations of Sanches (2014). Particular emphasis was given to the limited role of the Management Council in the process of intersectoral implementation and to the indications that a policy community capable of fostering civil society participation at higher levels of decision-making has not been established.

The documentary research also offered indications regarding other participatory bodies within the democratic management of the Vila Atlântica CEU. None of the documents consulted made reference to any of the assemblies, suggesting their possible inoperability. Cases were identified in which high-importance agenda items brought by civil society representatives were forwarded to the Integration Collegiate, in a dynamic similar to that described by Sanches (2014). Furthermore, the thematic committees were found to recurrently assume a mobilizing role associated with the execution of actions (level 5).

Overall, the study reinforces the argument presented by Sanches (2014). Democratic elements are present within the decision-making dynamics of the Management Council of the Vila Atlântica CEU; however, its effective implementation shows indications that democratic management has not been fully realized.

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MJLS: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Investigation, Formal analysis, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. OG: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Project administration, Validation, Visualization, Writing – review & editing. RAT: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Validation, Visualization, Writing – review & editing.

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