



LEGISLATIVE THEATRE IN PRACTICE: INSIGHTS FROM ESTUDANTES POR EMPRÉSTIMO

Mariana Rosa¹, Roberto Falanga² & João Amorim³

Abstract

Democratic backsliding is increasingly addressed through forms of citizen participation and deliberation beyond the ballot box, widely understood as democratic innovations. While these promise to promote the inclusion of underrepresented groups, evidence often lags behind structural inequalities. Legislative Theatre emerges as an arts-based method with the potential to overcome the limitations of standard techniques and to shift the paradigm of theatrical practice for democratic participation. By challenging the conventional passive role of citizens-as-spectators, this method fosters active engagement in the formulation of policy proposals that aspire to bring about real change. In this paper, we discuss the potential of Legislative Theatre, focusing on one specific practice developed in Portugal: *Estudantes por Empréstimo*. Our analysis highlights how underrepresented groups can be effectively engaged in such participatory arts-based methods to have a voice in mainstream decision-making and to critically unpack preconceived ideas of change.*

Palavras-chave: *Legislative Theatre; Democratic Innovations; Arts-based Methods; Portugal.*

* Acknowledgement: This research was conducted within the framework of the INSPIRE: “Intersectional Spaces of Participation: Inclusive, Resilient, Embedded” project, funded by the European Commission under Grant Agreement 101132292.

¹ Lisbon-based designer and master's student in Design for Sustainability at the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Lisbon. Her work focuses on social design, emphasizing the role of designers as catalysts for change through community engagement. Is involved in the INSPIRE project, contributing with her knowledge of design and art-based methods for Lisbon's pilot project as a research grant holder at Instituto de Ciências Sociais da Universidade de Lisboa.

² Assistant Research professor at the Institute of Social Sciences, University of Lisbon. His research focuses on the participation of citizens in decision-making processes beyond the ballot box. Principal Investigator at the host institution and team member of several international and national research projects. He has published extensively in high-ranked international journals on participatory democracy and democratic innovations.

³ Holds a degree in Economics from the University of Porto and is a Master's student in Urban Studies at NOVA-FCSH and ISCTE-IUL. As a research fellow at the Institute of Social Sciences, University of Lisbon, within the scope of the European project INSPIRE, he focuses on creativity and social participation in the construction of more just and inclusive cities.

1. Introduction

Worldwide, the growth of citizen distrust towards political institutions poses significant challenges to democracy (PRC, 2024). Populist and autocratic tendencies have grown with unprecedented magnitude since the eruption of the most recent financial crisis (Rodríguez-Pose et al., 2023), then followed by a global health crisis in 2020, escalating conflicts, and the underpinning climate emergency (Baldwin and Mares, 2023).

From a theoretical perspective, while formal mechanisms are expected to ensure the inclusion of all citizens – particularly those at the margins of mainstream decision-making – scholars express concern about what is increasingly understood as a widespread democratic backsliding (Warren, 2017). Underrepresented groups, in particular, continue to struggle to meaningfully voice and influence political decisions that affect their daily lives (Fricker, 2007). Rasmussen (2017) observes how individuals from marginalised communities often “fall out” of democratic participation, as their lived experiences remain unacknowledged. This creates a “paralysing paradox”, whereby citizens with nominal rights remain excluded from public debate.

Against this backdrop, and in light of the growing disconnect between elected representatives and their constituencies, scholars have defended the implementation of innovative approaches to democratic deficits (Warren, 2017). Democratic innovations, as early outlined by Smith (2009), have promoted new mechanisms for meaningful participation and deliberation beyond the ballot box. Nevertheless, some scholars caution that, despite holding inclusive purposes, such innovations may, at times, reinforce existing power imbalances. As grievances and discontent grow, social cleavages intensify and place meaningful challenges to the engagement of citizens living in different contexts (McKay et al., 2023). Moreover, as Bussu and colleagues (2025) have recently argued, complex bureaucratic procedures and the use of technical jargon can favour the participation of those already privileged in society.

Given risks of narrowing the scope of democratic innovations, arts-based methods have been on the surge to offer new avenues for engagement that can potentially transcend the barriers. According to Higuera Carrillo and colleagues (in press), among the many emerging approaches, Legislative Theatre (LT) has attracted the interest of scholars, activists, practitioners, and policymakers alike. Developed during Augusto Boal’s tenure as a city councillor in Rio de Janeiro (1993–1997), this method is notable for linking artistic expression with policy development (Salvador, 2014). This participatory approach builds on Paulo Freire’s principles and Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed, seeking to actively intervene in institutional politics. As Boal (1998) explains, LT can create new spaces for citizen engagement, enabling participants to critically explore structural inequalities and generate policy proposals through artistic processes.

In this paper, we explore the potential of LT to meaningfully engage and empower underrepresented communities to have a voice in policymaking. Specifically, we investigate whether and how LT helps reframe our understanding of structural inequalities that carry negative impact over the community of students. Through an inquiry of *Estudantes por Empréstimo* (Students on Loan) – one of the most robust LT-based projects in Portugal thus far – we centre our empirical analysis by combining document analysis and an in-depth interview with José Soeiro, its lead partner. The project aimed to enable students to collaboratively reflect on their lived

experiences of economic hardship before financial barriers in the higher education system, and translate these reflections into policy-oriented proposals (Soeiro, 2021).

2. Democratic Innovations

According to Smith (2021), our democracies currently find themselves in a *cul-de-sac* due to their inability to move beyond political short-termism. Citizens are increasingly sceptical of democracy's capacity to produce long-term change, regardless of the influence exerted by powerful interest groups. Democratic innovations are, however, seen as holding positive potential in addressing such deficiencies (Smith, 2009; Warren, 2017). By drawing upon the principles of participatory and deliberative democracy, both of which emphasise the need for greater social inclusion in democratic processes, democratic innovations pursue egalitarian and open engagement with the aim of empowering the wider public (O'Flynn, 2019).

Democratic innovations are not immune of shortcomings, especially regarding inclusivity – an especially pressing concern for democracy when it comes to the engagement of underrepresented groups. The scholarly debate on the inclusionary character of democratic innovations is rooted in a broader, long-standing discussion about the legitimacy of citizens in generating (policy-oriented) knowledge. Evidence shows that groups from disadvantaged backgrounds often exhibit low levels of engagement (de Graaf et al., 2015), as do women (Allegretti & Falanga, 2016) and ethnic minorities (Mendelberg & Oleske, 2000). The voices of young people also frequently go unnoticed, particularly in relation to environmental politics (Sloam et al., 2022).

Together, these drawbacks take a toll on the reduction of knowledge and power imbalances that democratic innovations are intended to address (Fung & Wright, 2001) and remind us that all democratic practices do not take place in a vacuum. Considering that structural inequalities can have significant impact over innovations, scholars increasingly advocate for stronger connections with self-advocacy groups (Beauvais & Bächtiger, 2016). Grassroots organizations, civil society groups, and social movements are believed to enhance the impact and legitimacy of such practices (della Porta & Felicetti, 2022). Moreover, educational outcomes are more likely when these practices are meaningfully linked with the self-advocacy of underrepresented communities, thereby helping to mitigate disparities in resources, opportunities, and access (Knobloch, 2022).

Against this background, Chilvers and Kearnes (2020) argue that methodological experimentation is valuable for challenging traditional expert–citizen hierarchies and countering the risk of dominant groups distancing participants from the process.

2.1. Arts-based methods

Arts-based methods have demonstrated effectiveness in fostering inclusion among diverse populations, enhancing participants' wellbeing, and developing their capabilities and confidence (Francis, 2013). When participants lead their own consciousness-raising processes, this can increase democratic engagement and promote social equity. As Freire (1970) conceptualised, a participant-led *conscientization* process strengthens democracy insofar as it enables the incorporation of all affected stakeholders into policy discussions. Nunn (2022, p. 252) offers additional insights into participatory arts-based research, understanding it as a relational approach capable of creating an inclusive sphere of belonging:

This is practical: providing an environment and relations that encourage the ongoing commitment and contribution of community co-researchers; ethical: facilitating the democratisation of the process through ensuring that research is co-produced and benefits co-researchers and their communities.

Therefore, arts-based methods can create spaces where participants collectively develop a shared understanding of systemic inequities and challenge conventional problem definitions. One advantage of these methods is their capacity to address *epistemic injustice* by lending credibility to perspectives that are often overlooked (Fricker, 2007). The collaborative process of creating artistic artefacts can involve all participants in generating social meanings and interpreting lived experiences collectively, thereby producing knowledge that contributes to fostering social equity.

2.1.1. Applied Theatre as political expression

Performance-based methods, and theatrical approaches in particular, play a significant role among arts-based methods (Higueras Carrillo et al., in press). These methods are considered to offer added value through embodied and sensory experiences, enabling participants to engage via physical expression and emotional connection rather than solely through verbal means (Boal, 1979). Theatre serves as a particularly effective medium for examining the complex social dynamics that arise through participation, and for encouraging dialogue in diverse ways (Prendergast & Saxton, 2016). Among these approaches, Applied Theatre addresses social, educational, and/or community issues (Sextou & Smith, 2017).

As Taylor (2006) notes, Applied Theatre serves as an umbrella term “for finding links and connections for all of us committed to the power of theatre in making a difference in the human lifespan” (p. 93). Applied Theatre is frequently practised outside conventional theatrical settings and engages underrepresented groups, functioning as a tool for both personal development and social transformation. Workshops or interactive performances may be used within Applied Theatre to invite the audience to generate and/or interpret a specific piece, which “may or may not be scripted in the traditional manner” (Prendergast & Saxton, 2016, p. 7).

Applied Theatre has found one of its most distinctive expressions in the Theatre of the Oppressed. Developed by Boal (1979) and influenced by Paulo Freire’s educational philosophy, the Theatre of the Oppressed represents a specific approach focused on addressing social and political oppression through a range of techniques, such as Forum Theatre, in which audience members actively suggest changes to the performance. Boal (1998) coined the term “spect-actors”, combining “spectator” and “actor”, to describe audience members who engage actively in performances rather than observing passively. Spect-actors can take to the stage by “figuratively and literally leaving their seats to make ‘interventions’ to end the oppressions” (Sloane & Wallin, 2013, p. 457). While such interventions can hardly end real-world forms of oppression, they can unlock a first meaningful step in raising awareness for a more inclusive society. In this sort of setting, the “joker” is a specific spect-actor that questions lived experiences, encouraging other spect-actors to reflect on and interact with them (Boal, 1998). This role is of pivotal importance and serves to introduce more complexity to the process (Soeiro, 2021) by, at times, offering needed inputs to a systemic analysis of the issues at hand (Mitchell, 2001).

Applied Theatre can also incorporate Image Theatre, which uses physical freeze-frames to express both abstract emotions and concrete situations related to experiences of oppression. Whilst all of these theatrical methods aim to achieve social objectives, Applied Theatre maintains a broader scope. In contrast, the Theatre of the Oppressed and its derivatives specifically address dynamics of power and resistance, focusing on the experiences of underrepresented communities.

It is worth acknowledging the boundaries within which these approaches operate. Although the Theatre of the Oppressed provides significant instruments for the promotion of awareness and the fostering of community participation, its application is constrained by a particular methodological framework and contextual parameters (Higueras Carrillo et al., in press). As a form of embodied rehearsal for social change, Theatre of the Oppressed and its derivatives (Fig.1) are designed to explore and challenge oppressive dynamics, rather than directly dismantle structural systems of power. In fact, the efficacy of the approach is contingent upon the cultural context, the adept facilitation, and the propensity of the participants to engage in collective reflection and action, according to Boal (1979).

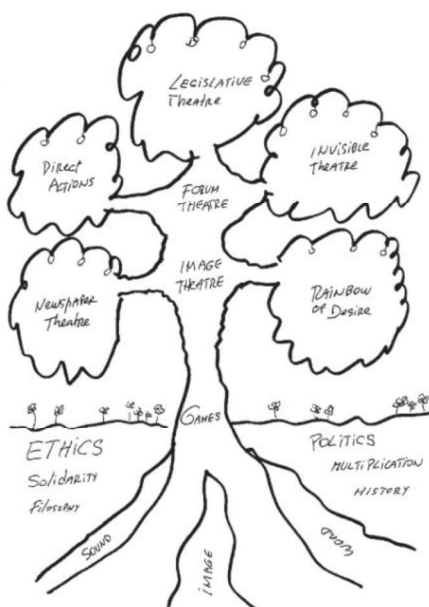


Figure 1 - 'The Tree of the Theatre of the Oppressed' by Augusto Boal (2006).

3. Legislative Theatre: Performing political change

LT emerged as a branch of the Theatre of the Oppressed, which involves using theatre as part of the legislative process to achieve political change with members of marginalized communities. These communities are invited to actively participate to ensure that legally recognized rights are not merely theoretical, but implemented in practice (Elliott, 2021). While the original theatrical approach questioned the passive spectatorship imposed on underrepresented groups, LT boldly intercepts the core of institutional politics – a domain where the division between active decision-makers and silent observers is most starkly and

paradoxically manifested (Salvador, 2014). LT therefore challenges the fundamental social hierarchy that arbitrarily distributes the power of speech and thought (Soeiro, 2019).

In addition, LT enables participants to reflect on the different layers that constitute the intricate systems of oppression constraining underrepresented communities (Soeiro, 2019). As the origins of these systems are uncovered, communities rehearse solutions collectively with grassroots and/or institutional partners directly involved in the issue at stake. To achieve this, LT should be regarded as a space of encounter for marginalized communities to critique existing power structures and rewrite the very rules that limit their lives (Bussu et al., 2025).

Although an LT performance is not limited to a strict framework, it can be divided into four distinct phases: (i) Watch; (ii) Act; (iii) Propose; and (iv) Vote (People Powered, 2022). The process begins with a theatrical performance that brings to life the authentic experiences and challenges faced by community members. This initial staging serves as a catalyst for deeper engagement, as audience members are then invited to step onto the stage themselves, becoming active participants who test and explore various approaches to addressing the issues presented. This interactive phase evolves naturally into policy discussions, during which community members collaborate with policymakers to craft proposals for change. The process culminates in a democratic exercise, where participants collectively evaluate and vote on proposals that emerged from the theatrical explorations, ultimately making shared commitments to implement the chosen solutions.

Despite promoting an alternative way of discussing legislation, this method has some limitations that must be acknowledged. A limitation of a forum is the danger of merely reinforcing the opinions held by the group (Mitchell, 2001). According to Soeiro (2019), LT, like any participatory arts-based method, can be reduced to a superficial complement to mainstream decision-making, where, rather than serving as a tool for emancipation, it can be co-opted into the mere regulation of popular participation without redistributing deliberative power. A particular danger arises when LT becomes fixated on form, especially when reduced to simply mimicking institutional behaviours, rather than functioning as a genuine process of community organization (Soeiro, 2019).

4. Methodology and objectives

This paper combines insights retrieved from the scoping review on arts-based methods conducted within the EU project *INSPIRE: “Intersectional Spaces of Participation: Inclusive, Resilient, Embedded”* and the analysis of one case study from Portugal: *Estudantes por Empréstimo*. The scoping review focused on the potential of arts-based approaches to foster more equitable involvement in policy development, specifically addressing the engagement of underrepresented groups. The theoretical foundation draws on intersectional principles, acknowledging that individuals’ experiences cannot be reduced to isolated attributes, and that societal classifications are both culturally constructed and subject to change over time.

The case study was selected for offering a unique opportunity to reflect on the implementation of LT before structural inequalities, and for opening new pathways for voices to be heard in policymaking. The analysis of this case was based on document analysis and one semi-structured interview with one of the leading partners of this LT, José Soeiro. Document analysis relied on the examination of web resources and documents

produced about this specific project, whereas the interview aimed to offer an understanding of how LT was developed from an insider's perspective.

5. *Estudantes por Empréstimo*: an overview of the case study

Estudantes por Empréstimo was a project that aimed to centre on the difficulties lived by university students in accessing scholarships, due to both scarcity of opportunities and bureaucratic barriers (Soeiro, 2021). The idea for this performance emerged from previous experiences with Theatre of the Oppressed, as well as lessons learned on Legislative Theatre. José Soeiro, a militant of the Left Bloc party (*Bloco de Esquerda*) and a Member of the National Parliament, sought innovative ways to bring contentious issues to the public fore, eventually bringing together students from existing movements. As he explained during our interview, theatre allows for political discussion without relying too much on the language of politicians, thereby making our understanding more concrete and engaging.

You see an event like this, and you stop. From the moment you stop, an aesthetic space is installed. From the moment that aesthetic space is installed, you have people's attention, even if it's not for long, and so this also allowed us to install this discussion in the faculty space in some way, and then appeal for people to come with us to the room to continue the discussion.

Estudantes por Empréstimo featured, as its main character, Sofia, a student who lost her right to obtain a scholarship despite lacking the means to pay tuition fees. After seeking alternative solutions, she ultimately resorted to taking out a loan and going into debt. By posing the questions “What can she do to continue studying? Is a loan the only possible solution?” (*Projecto Estudantes por Empréstimo*, 2011), participants opened a debate on Sofia's experience, scaling the discussion from students' lived realities to broader personal and collective behaviours, as well as regulatory actions that could potentially change her story.

The group structured the discussion around four key dimensions: What laws do we want to create? How can we make existing laws work for us? How do we shape the balance of power in law? How might we turn our demands into official rights? (Soeiro, 2019, pp. 191-193). The issues addressed by the group were primarily oriented towards mobilising others. There was no intention to be patronising; instead, the aim was to raise questions that the group itself was grappling with. As José noted during our interview, “we already had an answer – that we wanted the creation of more scholarships. So that wasn't the question in the play”. The real question concerned the existence of tuition fees alongside the scarcity of social action grants. In this sense, the multiple functions of Legislative Theatre within this project allowed not only for discussion on the content of laws, but encouraged debate about community engagement, or, as José put it “How do you talk to your colleagues? How do you mobilize at school?”. He further explains:

Several of the scenes were a dialogue between a student who thinks that something needs to be done and the other students who don't believe it, or who don't think so, or who think that what needs to be done are strategies to get by individually, that collective action is a joke, or that it's ineffective, or that it's useless, or that it would be very interesting, but it won't have any results.

The performance toured several higher education institutions, challenging students and participants to propose alternative actions and political measures to address the issues presented (Soeiro, 2021). At the end of each performance, the group transcribed the statements and suggestions of the “spect-actors” onto their blog, which served as a repository for testimonies of concrete cases that could be consulted, as well as “opinion pieces on the reality that the performance portrayed, statistical data, an overview of past sessions and the calendar for the next ones” (Soeiro, 2021, pp. 91-92).

Participants were invited to propose three possible changes in legislation. This allowed them to nurture curiosity and write down suggestions on a paper distributed at the end of the session. In our interview, Soeiro explained that proposals often took the form of ideas for collective action rather than specific legal amendments. Indeed, this kind of “rehearsal” of collective action was common and fostered a collective appreciation of the relevance and legitimacy of people’s contributions.

To transform the spect-actors’ suggestions into legislative initiatives, a Metabolising Cell was assembled with a group of people in charge of analyzing the performance outputs and transforming them into concrete action proposals. According to Boal (1989), such proposals entail drafting legislative bills, decrees, judicial measures, or preparing direct interventions (1998). The project culminated in a performance at the Portuguese Parliament, in 2010, promoted by the Left Bloc party. Students who had participated in previous presentations were invited to attend (*Projecto Estudantes por Empréstimo*, 2011), alongside “directors of social action services, the Minister of Higher Education (who did not attend), and Members of Parliament” (Soeiro, 2019, p. 190).

As a result of this presentation, university students collectively assembled a national petition to gather broader support for the selected proposals. Aside from having served as an engagement strategy, this assembly also functioned as a legitimizing strategy “to ensure that these proposals came from the students themselves and not from José Soeiro or the Left Bloc [...] and as a way to guarantee that the participative process did not extinguish itself in the performative moment of the LT session”, as Soeiro put it in our interview. Ten legislative initiatives were presented, either in the form of draft laws or recommendations to the government. This presentation was followed by a Forum Theatre session centred on discussing the 10 initiatives to be voted on. A final set of three top-priority initiatives was ultimately selected and, according to Soeiro, the entire process was highly engaging.

So, I think that the fact that we made the final decision on the priorities with people who had already been to a Forum Theatre session on the same topic, with the same play, also helps the imagination to be matured by repeated contact with the topic and, in this case, with the problem with the play.

In the months that followed the campaign, the petition’s promoters were summoned to Parliament to present their case before representatives from across the political spectrum (Soeiro, 2019). Despite the legislative hearing and the subsequent bill proposals, not a single legislative measure directly stemming from their initiative passed parliamentary review. However, some recommendations were incorporated into new law and regulations, while others were twisted, with their progressive rationale being changed to a regressive one (Soeiro, 2019). During our interview, Soeiro also highlights a key challenge regarding expectations’

management: “There are multiple temporalities that come into play in a project of this type – the project, institutional politics, grassroots organizing, ... – and these do not always coincide, although they may have moments of overlap”.

Another valuable outcome was the learning process about what people could do and how to effectively address problems. Raising awareness was not enough; preconceived ideas often shifted through the performance. The process did not begin with fixed solutions but with broader questions on what kind of society participants aspired to create. This was made possible, in part, because there was already an active group of students engaged with the issues explored on stage and these sessions happened in the context of bigger, national, students’ movements that mobilized for political action. In our interview, José emphasized that this was a major strength, as the group was already highly politically engaged.

That's why I think the Legislative Theatre also made a lot of sense for us, because the Forum Theatre was often at an impasse. [...] The dramaturgy of the Forum Theatre encourages individual solutions and this transformation of structural problems into inter-individual conflicts. This is very interesting because it is a dramatic structure, but this is a trap from the point of view of dramaturgy. And we're very stimulated by it, because we're very used to the dramatic structure in theatre, the conflict between two people, but from a political point of view it sets us many traps, because it often doesn't allow us to dig into the solutions that could be more transformative.

A central rationale for the employment of LT and, simultaneously, a transformative outcome of this practice is, thus, the redefinition of what legitimate political action and discourse mean. A key question of *Estudantes por Empréstimo* was to understand how young people could transform the practices and language of the parliament, rather than focusing on how they could be socialized into the norms of formal politics. This question, tied to concerns about power dynamics within participatory processes, resulted in a project that, through LT, challenged the symbolic and procedural authority that tends to cast young people merely as passive recipients of the political system.

Like all participatory techniques, Legislative Theatre is also pierced by the contradictions of the processes in which it is mobilized – it can be done so in a ‘domesticating’ or a transformative manner. What can make a difference? First, who initiates the process, where does it come from. [...] It also depends on who holds the power within the process.

6. Discussion and Conclusions: Can Legislative Theatre help reimagine the democratic participation of underrepresented groups?

Estudantes por Empréstimo illustrates how the creation of a collective space by and for university students can bring often unheard voices into decision-making processes. We believe that this case provides a valuable example of how people, and underrepresented groups in particular, can take ownership of their lives through democratic innovations. While this point is relevant due to the growing disaffection between institutions and constituencies (Smith, 2021), it is particularly meaningful when we pursue more just and inclusive decision-making settings (O’Flynn, 2019). In fact, evidence highlights numerous bottlenecks faced by underrepresented groups, which ultimately limit the transformative potential of democratic innovations in altering power relations

(Fung & Wright, 2001). Against such trends, grassroots initiatives such as the one analysed in this paper, align with scholarly calls to place self-advocacy at the centre of participatory processes (della Porta & Felicetti, 2022; Knobloch, 2022).

Our case study contributes to further develop our understanding of the potential that arts-based methodologies can bring to democratic processes, particularly amplifying perspectives that are often excluded from mainstream discourses and decision-making processes. The LT examined in this paper increased collective awareness and self-organization around contentious political issues without resorting to paternalism. Dilemmas grounded in real-life questions confronted participants with multiple options, making LT a highly complex and dynamic stage that reduces the risk of co-opted or predetermined responses. The project not only helped raise awareness, as it shifted preconceived ideas by literally giving stage to creative problem-solving. It is worth saying that a distinctive characteristic of this LT was the presence of a politically engaged group, which most probably fuelled ambitions for collective action. While the strategic approach adopted to bring LT proposals into Parliament had some - albeit diminute - legislative impact, it enabled the reassessment of pre-existing assumptions about problems and solutions in a legislative context.

Therefore, *Estudantes por Empréstimo* did enable new forms of empathy and collaboration among students about issues that directly affected them. In this regard, the LT process did not only demonstrate to be inclusive, but allowed individuals to analyse their problems, consider alternatives, and mobilize together to build collective action (Mitchell, 2001). By fostering the inclusionary ethos of a consciousness-raising process (Freire, 1970), this LT not only supported goals of personal wellbeing and collective mobilization, but also contributed to the democratization of both knowledge production (Fricker, 2007) and decision-making processes (Nunn, 2022).

Having said that, we acknowledge some main limitations to our work. First, while the case study illuminates the positive outcomes from the application of arts-based methods applied in democratic innovations, our findings should not be generalized. On the one hand, *Estudantes por Empréstimo* relied on and was developed through a specific set of contextual conditions, which all concurred to make it one of the most robust examples of LT in Portugal thus far. On the other hand, our understanding would benefit from the analysis of a wider set of cases and, therefore, the adoption of a comparative design with a focus on Portugal, or even a large-N study with an international scope. In addition, our findings should not be generalized because, whereas they offer an in-depth examination of the practices from the point of view of the lead partner, we did not engender other participants. While this may be considered a main limitation of our work, we believe that Soeiro's point of view legitimately and critically brings the perspective of someone in charge of the organization. Hopefully, future research will complement these findings with more inputs from other participants, as well as LTs in Portugal and abroad.

In sum, we trust our findings to spark new discussion around whether and how arts-based methods can help challenge structural inequalities and systemic injustice by engaging underrepresented voices in society. Applied Theatre performances, and, by extension Legislative Theatre, "holds within it the possibility of the beginning of new stories" (Prendergast & Saxton, 2016, p. 31). More in general, and inspired by Taylor (2006), Applied Theatre should be mobilized more extensively to uncover much-needed connections between those striving to address (epistemic) injustices and new forms of power.

References

- Allegretti, G., & Falanga, R. (2016). Women in budgeting: A critical assessment of participatory budgeting experiences. In C. Ng (Ed.), *Gender responsive and participatory budgeting* (pp. 33–53). Springer.
- Baldwin, K., & Mares, I. (2023). Risk and demand for social protection in an era of populism. *Political Science Research and Methods*, 11(3), 537-554.
- Beauvais, E., & Bächtiger, A. (2016). Taking the goals of deliberation seriously: A differentiated view on equality and equity in deliberative designs and processes. *Journal of Public Deliberation*, 12(2). <https://doi.org/10.16997/jdd.254>.
- Boal, A. (1979). *Theatre of the oppressed*. Pluto Press.
- Boal, A. (1998). *Legislative theatre: Using performance to make politics*. Routledge.
- Boal, A. (2006). *The aesthetics of the oppressed*. Routledge.
- Bussu, S., Rubin, K., Carroll, N., & Eve, Z. (2025). It's a Mindset Revolution! Co-creating inclusive spaces of participation on youth mental health. *Action Research*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/14767503251320616>.
- Chilvers, J., & Kearnes, M. (2020). Remaking participation in science and democracy. *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, 45(3), 347–380. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0162243919850885>.
- Dalton, R. J. (2008). Citizenship norms and the expansion of political participation. *Political Studies*, 56(1), 76–98. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2007.00718.x>.
- de Graaf, L., van Hulst, M., & Michels, A. (2015). Enhancing participation in disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods. *Local Government Studies*, 41(1), 44–62. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2014.908771>.
- della Porta, D., & Felicetti, A. (2022). Innovating democracy against democratic stress in Europe: Social movements and democratic experiments. *Representation*, 58(1), 67–84. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344893.2019.1624600>.
- Elliott, M. (2021). Young people as legislators: Legislative theatre and youth parliament. *Applied Theatre Research*, 9(1), 73–86. https://doi.org/10.1386/atr_00049_1.
- Francis, D. (2013). "You know the homophobic stuff is not in me, like us, it's out there": Using participatory theatre to challenge heterosexism and heteronormativity in a South African school. *Perspectives in Education*, 31(3), 66–75. https://scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0256-01002013000400011.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th Anniversary ed.). Continuum.
- Fricker, M. (2007). *Epistemic injustice: Power and the ethics of knowing*. Oxford University Press.
- Fung, A., & Wright, E. O. (2001). Deepening democracy: Innovations in empowered participatory governance. *Politics & Society*, 29(1), 5–41. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329201029001002>.
- Higuera Carrillo, S., Eseonu, D., Wojciechowska, M., Bussu, S., Arya, D., Amorim, J., Rosa, M., & Falanga, R. (in press). Arts-based and creative approaches for inclusive participation: A scoping review. *European INSPIRE Project*.
- Knobloch, K. R. (2022). Listening to the public: An inductive analysis of the good citizen in a deliberative system. *Journal of Deliberative Democracy*, 18(1). <https://doi.org/10.16997/10.16997/jdd.955>.
- McKay, L., Jennings, W., & Stoker, G. (2023). Understanding the geography of discontent: Perceptions of government's biases against left-behind places. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 31(6), 1719–1748.
- Mendelberg, T., & Oleske, J. (2000). Race and public deliberation. *Political Communication*, 17(2), 169–191. <https://doi.org/10.1080/105846000198468>.
- Mitchell, T. (2001). Notes from inside: Forum Theater in maximum security. *Theater*, 31(1), 55–61. In M. Prendergast & J. Saxton (Eds.), *Applied theatre: International case studies and challenges for practice* (2nd ed.). Intellect. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv36xvzsb>.

- Nunn, C. (2022). The participatory arts-based research project as an exceptional sphere of belonging. *Qualitative Research*, 22(2), 251–268. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794120980971>.
- O'Flynn, I. (2019). Democratic innovations and theories of democracy. In S. Elstub & O. Escobar (Eds.), *Handbook of democratic innovation and governance* (pp. 32-44). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- People Powered. (2022). Legislative theatre. <https://www.peoplepowered.org/legislative-theater>.
- Prendergast, M., & Saxton, J. (Eds.). (2016). *Applied theatre: International case studies and challenges for practice* (2nd ed.). Intellect. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv36xvzsb>.
- PRC - Pew Research Center. (2024). Representative democracy remains a popular ideal, but people around the world are critical of how it's working. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2024/02/28/representative-democracy-remains-a-popular-ideal-but-people-around-the-world-are-critical-of-how-its-working/>.
- Projecto Estudiantes por Empréstimo. (2011). *Estudantesporemprestimo's Blog*. <https://estudantesporemprestimo.wordpress.com/o-projecto-anterior/>.
- Rasmussen, B. (2017). Applied theatre in times of terror: Accepting aesthetic diversity and going beyond dilemma. *Applied Theatre Research*, 5(3), 169–182. https://doi.org/10.1386/atr.5.3.169_1.
- Rodríguez-Pose, A., Dijkstra, L., & Poelman, H. (2023). The geography of EU discontent and the regional development trap. *Working Papers. A Series of Short Papers on Regional Research and Indicators Produced by the Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, European Commission*. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/whats-new/newsroom/06-12-2023-geography-of-discontent-regional-development-traps-lead-to-less-support-for-european-integration-and-values_en.
- Salvador, E. (2014). Legislative theatre: Art for community conflict resolution—From desires to laws. *Journal of Conflictology*, 5(1), 3-12. <https://doi.org/10.7238/joc.v5i1.1444>.
- Sextou, P., & Smith, C. (2017). Drama is for life! Recreational drama activities for the elderly in the UK. *Text Matters: A Journal of Literature, Theory and Culture*, 7, 273–290. <https://doi.org/10.1515/textmat-2017-0015>.
- Sloam, J., Pickard, S., & Henn, M. (2022). Young people and environmental activism: The transformation of democratic politics. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 25(6), 683–691. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2022.2056678>.
- Sloane, J. A., & Wallin, D. (2013). Theatre of the commons: A theatrical inquiry into the democratic engagement of former refugee families in Canadian public high school communities. *Educational Research*, 55(4), 454–472. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2013.844944>.
- Smith, G. (2009). *Democratic innovations: Designing institutions for citizen participation*. Cambridge University Press.
- Smith, G. (2021). *Can democracy safeguard the future?* Polity Press.
- Soeiro, J. (2019). Legislative theatre: Can theatre reinvent politics? In K. Schutzman & C. Cohen-Cruz (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to Theatre of the Oppressed* (pp. 187-194). Routledge.
- Soeiro, J. (2021). O Teatro não chega? Uma reflexão sobre arte, inclusão e transformação política. In *Arte Inclusiva? Quem inclui quem?* CEAA/ESAP-CESAP. <http://hdl.handle.net/10400.26/38308>.
- Taylor, P. (2006). Applied theatre/drama: An e-debate in 2004: Viewpoints. *RIDE: Research in Drama and Education*, 11(1), 90–95. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569780500437960>.
- Warren, M. E. (2017). A problem-based approach to democratic theory. *American Political Science Review*, 111(1), 39–53. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055416000605>.

[Índice](#)