





Representation and democratic experimentalism: an approach to municipal candidacies and collective mandates in Belo Horizonte (2016-2022)

Representação e experimentalismo democrático: uma abordagem das candidaturas e mandatos coletivos municipais em Belo Horizonte (2016-2022)

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Abstract: The article aims to map collective candidacies and mandates in Belo Horizonte in the 2016-2022 period. The aim is to characterize them and address their composition and represented segments, agendas and proposals, forms of participation. The approach to the collective and shared mandate experiences is guided by theoretical developments in the field of contemporary democratic theory, especially debates that point to the expansion of social participation and democratic experimentalism, as well as to the broadening and resignification of representation. The conception of collective mandates potentially broadens the bases of legitimacy and political inclusiveness of representation. The methodology, of a qualitative nature, uses mainly surveys and documentary analysis, referring to the first experience of collective mandate initiated in 2017, called Gabinetona, and the six collective candidacies in 2020, which resulted in the reelection of a councilor of Gabinetona and the election of one councilor from ColetivA, which later resigns. The cases analyzed reveal different ways of setting up collective mandates, either by setting up several candidacies that are

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formed jointly or by composing a single mandate made up of a group of candidates. The defence of progressive agendas is a common feature among the initiatives analysed, whose proposals are aimed at marginalized social majorities, including black people, LGBTQIA+, indigenous people and residents of urban occupations. As a result of social experimentation and innovation, especially in the case of Gabinetona, there were institutional experiments and innovations designed to promote social participation during its first term in office. The initiatives are also seen as powerful ways of strengthening links between parliamentarians and social movements, as well as fostering greater social control over legislative action. Exploring the trajectory of these experiences highlights the strengths, weaknesses and challenges of their collective construction and continuity.

Keywords: democracy; collective mandates; extra-parliamentary representation; social participation.

Resumo: O artigo tem por objetivo efetuar uma análise das candidaturas e mandatos coletivos em Belo Horizonte no período 2016-2022. Tem-se em vista caracterizar sua composição e segmentos representados, agendas, propostas e formas de participação. A abordagem dos mandatos coletivos baliza-se por desenvolvimentos teóricos no campo da teoria democrática contemporânea, especialmente os debates que apontam para a ampliação da participação social, experimentalismos e inovações democráticas, bem como para o alargamento e ressignificação da representação, ampliando suas bases de legitimidade e inclusividade política. A metodologia, de caráter qualitativo, recorre a levantamentos e análise documental, referentes à primeira experiência de mandato coletivo iniciada em 2017, denominada Gabinetona, e às seis candidaturas coletivas em 2020, que resultaram na reeleição de uma vereadora da Gabinetona e na eleição de uma da ColetivA, que adiante renuncia. Os casos analisados revelam formas distintas de constituição dos mandatos coletivos, seja pela instituição de candidaturas diversas que são formadas conjuntamente, seja pela composição de um único mandato integrado por um conjunto de candidatos. A defesa de pautas do campo progressista constitui uma característica comum entre as iniciativas analisadas, cujas propostas são direcionadas a maiorias sociais marginalizadas, incluindo pessoas negras, LGBTQIA+, indígenas, moradores de ocupações urbanas. A partir de inovações sociais e, especialmente no caso da Gabinetona, destacam-se experimentalismos e inovações institucionais endereçadas à promoção da participação social ao longo do exercício do seu primeiro mandato. Vislumbra-se, ainda, que além de favorecer maior controle social da atuação legislativa, os mandatos coletivos dotam-se de potentes iniciativas de fortalecimento de vínculos entre parlamentares e movimentos sociais. O exame da trajetória das experiências sinaliza potências, fragilidades e desafios de sua construção coletiva e de sua continuidade.

Palavras-chave: democracia; mandatos coletivos; representação extraparlamentar; participação social.

1. INTRODUÇÃO

Contemporary debates on democracy have highlighted the perception of its multidimensional crisis (Avritzer, 2019; 2021; Andion & Magalhães, 2021; Magalhães, Ornellas & Brasil, 2021). In this context, the limitations of electoral representation concerning political inclusion and the representation of social plurality have been emphasized, raising concerns about the underrepresentation of so-called minorities - groups that are systematically excluded or made vulnerable (Santos & Avritzer, 2002; Almeida, 2018; Secchi et al., 2020). At the same time, scholars and policymakers have identified possibilities for strengthening democracy, particularly by expanding social participation and deliberation, as well as reframing and reconfiguring forms of political representation.

Parallel to theoretical advancements in contemporary democratic theory, new practices of participation, deliberation, and non-electoral representation constitute a field of democratic experimentation and innovation, nurtured by the experiences of civil society, its associative and activist practices, and its interactions with the state and other social actors. As Pogrebinschi (2010, p. 677) points out, from this perspective, experimentalism refers to the innovation and empowerment of ordinary citizens through the institutionalization of democratic practices led by civil society, making it possible to "make democracy both an experiment and an experience".

Along these lines, in the Brazilian context - shaped by the re-democratization process of the 1980s, the strong mobilization of collective actors from civil society, and the promulgation of the 1988 Federal Constitution - experiences in the field of participation have expanded. The creation and proliferation of participatory institutions, such as councils, conferences, and participatory budgeting mechanisms, have driven this expansion (Avritzer, 2009). These experiments have primarily taken place within the executive branch, particularly in local governments during the 1990s and at the federal level in the following decade.

The Legislative Branch has not played a prominent role in this scenario, despite holding public hearings - usually mandated by legal provisions -

alongside other innovative, one-off initiatives aimed at engaging citizens and bringing them closer to parliamentarians to address the limitations of political representation. Quintão and Faria (2018, pp. 82–83) identify participatory arrangements at the subnational level, such as ombudsman offices, digital discussion forums, and initiatives for submitting suggestions or bills. However, while these mechanisms may introduce new voices and topics into Parliament, the authors highlight their limitations, particularly their low potential for inclusion, deliberation, dialogue, and meaningful engagement. Furthermore, they note that many recently formed collectives and social movements, which prioritize horizontality and informality, reject interactions with the legislature - partly because they perceive its institutional arrangements as rigid and unresponsive.

In this context, given the dilemmas of electoral representation, collective mandates represent "a very creative way of building representation", as described by Secchi et al. (2021). These mandates are democratic innovations stemming from a sociocentric proposition and construction, fostering a stronger connection between participation and political representation while also expanding political inclusion. Emerging on the international stage in the 1990s (Subirats, 2011), these experiences gained traction in Brazil during the same decade and have expanded significantly since 2016 (Secchi et al., 2020). The concept of collective mandates lies at the intersection of political representation and participation, broadening their legitimacy and inclusiveness. Thus, the study of these experiences aligns with developments in democratic theory, focusing on expanding representation, enhancing forms of social participation, and addressing social innovations as a foundation for institutional transformation.

This article aims to map the experiences of collective candidacies and mandates in Belo Horizonte between 2016 and 2022. It seeks to analyze how these experiences were constructed, their composition and the social segments they represent, their agendas and proposals, the forms of participation envisioned within the mandates, and, where applicable, their

performance in the municipal legislature. Based on this framework, the article discusses the scope and limitations of these experiences.

It is worth noting that Belo Horizonte stood out in the 1990s as a center of democratic experimentation and institutional innovation in the field of social participation, developing a participatory architecture that persisted into the following decade. However, from 2009 onwards, setbacks in institutionalized participation occurred alongside the emergence of new social movements and collectives, as well as the expansion of various forms of collective action in the city. Civil society introduced new practices and experiments, which gained momentum in the period following the so-called 2013 protests.

Within this broader context of democratic crisis, local mobilizations, and political articulations, the first experiment in collective candidacy emerged in 2016, leading to the city's pioneering collective mandate. The subsequent election witnessed an increase in collective candidacies, the reconfiguration and expansion of *Gabinetona* into other levels of government, and the election of *ColetivA*, which soon disbanded. These developments revealed both the innovative potential and the challenges and dilemmas inherent in these political arrangements.

The methodology employed follows a qualitative, descriptive, and exploratory approach based on secondary sources. The research began with a literature review on collective and shared mandates, focusing on their identification, analysis, and the theoretical frameworks used to examine them. The empirical basis of the study involved documentary research conducted through virtual access.

To map collective candidacies in the 2020 elections, the researcher gathered data from the website of the "*Tribunal Superior Eleitoral*" (TSE) (Superior Electoral Court). A key challenge in identifying such candidacies arises from the fact that, since the Electoral Courts do not officially recognize them, the system registers them as individual candidacies, even though their campaigns operate collectively. Moreover, because the *Divulga Cand* website (TSE, 2020) lacks specific parameters or filters to identify collective candidacies, this mapping may be subject to inaccuracies.

Building on the initial findings, researchers examined the official websites of the candidates and mandates. Additionally, they conducted a keyword-based search in local media outlets (*O Tempo and Estado de Minas* newspapers) from 2016 to 2022 to identify relevant information on the candidates and their mandates.

The specific analysis of the Gabinetona and ColetivA mandates included a review of their social media accounts and institutional pages. In the case of Gabinetona, a vast and detailed collection of materials was accessible through its official website and social media, as well as academic and news articles. However, for ColetivA, the available information from these sources proved insufficient. To address this gap, the researcher conducted a semi-structured interview with one of the councilors from the 2021 mandate.

The researcher analyzed the data using the content analysis method, categorizing the identified aspects according to the study's objectives. These categories include the social foundations and trajectory of the experience, the organizational structure of the mandates, the experimentalism associated with citizen participation, operational challenges, and potential social impacts.

The paper structures into four main sections, in addition to this introduction and the final considerations. The second section presents theoretical contributions on democracy, emphasizing the role of social innovations as a foundation for democratic institutional innovations. The third section focuses on defining and characterizing collective mandates. The final two sections examine, respectively, collective candidacies and mandates in Belo Horizonte between 2016 and 2020, beginning with the pioneering experience of Gabinetona in 2016.

2. DEMOCRACY, EXPERIMENTALISM AND DEMOCRATIC INNOVATION

In recent decades, scholars and analysts have repeatedly highlighted the limitations of the liberal democracy model, which relies strictly on electoral representation, along with diagnoses of a crisis in contemporary democracies. Furthermore, in the previous century, especially in its second half, theoretical developments in the field of democratic theory aimed at broadening and

deepening democracy - from its conceptions to its practices - gained prominence.

In this context, various approaches to the crisis of democracy have emerged, both specific to the Brazilian case and more broadly (Avritzer, 2019, 2021). These analyses point to a decline in indicators related to democratic quality and a decrease in satisfaction with the democratic system itself (Warren, 2008; Magalhães et al., 2021). They also highlight a crisis regarding traditional forms of political representation, evident in the decline in electoral participation and the growing distrust directed at political representatives and democratic institutions (RAPS, 2019).

Furthermore, in the previous century, especially in its second half, scholars highlighted theoretical developments in the field of democratic theory aimed at broadening and deepening democracy - from its conceptions to its practices. The connections between social and institutional innovations, with experimentalism as the key, appear in some perspectives that share a broader understanding of democracy, taking place in diverse spaces and, in an inclusive way, incorporating the various civil society actors who present themselves as protagonists from their experiences and initiatives.

In this field, we highlight the perspective of participatory democracy, based on Pateman (1992; 2012), which gives centrality to participation in decision-making in all spheres of society and evokes an institutional system open to the possibilities of experimentation. Warren (2021) sees democratic innovations as a response to democratic deficits, involving the pluralization and deconcentration of spaces for participation and representation. By understanding democracy as a historical grammar for organizing society and state-society relations, Santos and Avritzer (2002) envision possibilities for reconfiguring these grammars based on practices and experimentation, especially in the field of participation.

According to Habermas (1997), the concept of deliberation, with its communicative and argumentative foundations, emerges as a core element of democracy. It emphasizes the importance of public deliberation networks and the formation of informal public opinion, while considering their potential

influence on the institutional system. Among the key features of the deliberative model, Avritzer (2000) highlights the state's concession of decision-making space to facilitate greater public participation, as well as the institutional innovations stemming from social innovations and experimentalism. In other words, the creation of new ways to institutionalize participation - grounded in the plurality, diversity, and inclusion of social groups - becomes a central focus. In this regard, Santos and Avritzer (2002, p. 589) define innovation as the expanded involvement of various social actors in decision-making processes, which includes "the inclusion of issues previously ignored by the political system, the redefinition of identities and ties, and increased participation, particularly at the local level".

Within the deliberative framework, emphasizing social innovations as a foundation for institutional innovations, Estub and Escobar (2017, p. 25) highlight a plural universe of democratic innovations. These innovations, as they describe them, are processes aimed at "reimagining or deepening the role of citizens in governance", pointing to the formation of mini-publics and participatory governance models, among other pathways for innovation.

The pragmatist strand, which has its roots in Dewey (1927), evolves into perspectives that frame democracy as a process of construction, embedded in lived experiences and daily life, through continuous experimentation (Fung & Wright, 2001; Dryzek, 2004; Fung, 2007; 2012). Drawing on contemporary pragmatism, Andion and Magalhães (2021, p. 535) emphasize processes centered on public inquiry and experimentation with societal problems. In this view, lived problem situations inspire inquiries, discussions, and experiments aimed at resolving challenges from inclusive and democratic perspectives. These processes also involve the formation of new publics and the creation of new agendas, ultimately laying the groundwork for the democratic state's strengthening and reconfiguration.

According to Cefaï (2017), it is important to note that individuals, through their daily experiences within their groups and communities, begin to act collectively as they develop the ability to "feel in common", thus problematizing various issues. In this process, other individuals, collective actors,

organizations, and institutions converge to create public arenas where they discuss and critically examine issues. These discussions lead to propositions, alternative actions, and experimentalism.

Through the various perspectives presented, which share a common commitment to strengthening democracy, we emphasize the central role of social actors who come together, mobilize, and organize, building common agendas and experimenting with social innovation processes. These processes, in turn, foster institutional innovations aimed at promoting inclusion and enhancing participation in decision-making.

From this perspective, the formation of collective mandates serves as both social innovations and democratic experiments that drive institutional innovations within the legislative sphere, expanding political representation through social participation. According to Secchi et al. (2020), these democratic innovations are characterized by the inclusion and sharing of political power between society and state actors, addressing the relationship between representatives and the represented, among other elements related to the institutional framework. The authors argue that collective candidacies represent an innovation "in terms of seeking solutions to the dilemmas of political representation, especially regarding the limited access to power for systematically excluded groups, such as Black people and women, due to disparities in resources and political and cultural capital". Furthermore, within the framework of social participation, they highlight that collective mandates bring representatives and the represented closer together, extending representation beyond the electoral process and enhancing the responsiveness of public policies, as these mandates become subjects of public debate and incorporate contributions from civil society (Secchi et al., 2020, p. 23).

3. COLLECTIVE MANDATES AND POLITICAL INCLUSION: THE COMBINATION OF REPRESENTATION AND PARTICIPATION

The concept of representation as a form of political inclusion has been revisited, especially since the seminal work of Pitkin (1997; 2006), which has been further discussed by various authors (Avritzer, 2007; Urbinati, 2006;

Dryzek & Niemeyer, 2008; Urbinati & Warren, 2008; Miguel, 2011; Almeida, D., 2018). This includes addressing non-electoral and informal forms of representation that take place within civil society itself and in participatory institutions (Warren, 2002; Gurza Lavalle et al., 2006).

Pitkin (2006, p. 20) associates the modern perspective of representation with the idea of "making present". In this view, political representation is the "activity of reviving the voices, opinions, and perspectives of citizens. [...] In other words, political representation occurs when political actors speak, advocate, symbolize, and act on behalf of others in the political arena" (Raps, 2019, p. 9). Pitkin (1967; 2006) identifies two models of political representation: fiduciary and delegated representation. Contemporary democracies commonly adopt the former, relying on the principles of trust from the represented and the autonomy of the representative. The latter assumes that the representative exercises the will of the represented, in which case "the citizen retains control over the actions and decisions of the representative, making the representative a mere spokesperson" (Raps, 2019, p. 9).

Scholars and analysts have identified the under-representation of vulnerable and socially excluded groups, as well as the lack of similarity between representatives and those represented, as problems alongside other limits of electoral representation. According to Miguel (2011), political representation requires the recognition of common interests and identity between groups of actors and their respective political representatives. Thus, improving representation mechanisms with a focus on promoting the inclusion of different social groups, in conjunction with social participation, means making democratic precepts effective in a counter-elitist way, embracing more voices.

The experiences of collective and shared mandates are marked by a plurality of characteristics and arrangements, as Silva et al. (2021, p.177) note, pointing to "a diffuse experimentalism, trial and error, successes and failures in the various formats already adopted for collective or shared mandates". In the period 1994-2020, authors in Brazil counted 423 candidacies and 54 collective

and shared mandates⁵. Secchi et al. (2020) indicate the expansion of these experiences since 2016, despite the lack of formal regulation in the legal system and recognition by the Superior Electoral Court⁶.

Almeida (2024) highlights the connection between collective and shared mandates and the reconfiguration of the model of social activism that began with the 2013 protests in Brazil. These protests gave rise to a new model of interaction between political parties and social movements, characterized by a variety of formats that foster alliances between political actors from different movements and organizations, with the goal of influencing the political system. In this sense, Almeida (2023) argues that such proposals could help to reconnect society and political institutions.

Characterized by their partial alignment with the delegated representation model, collective mandates are gaining prominence due to their potential for greater inclusion of the most vulnerable social groups in the institutionalized political sphere, within the Legislative Branch. They also offer a greater role for the represented in the decision-making and policy formulation processes. According to Secchi (2023, p. 4), this model has the potential to "reinvigorate representative democracy through the permanent responsibility of elected politicians", thus granting it greater legitimacy in the face of the crisis of representative democracy by including under-represented groups in the decision-making process.

However, the need to break with the mechanisms and structures of social exclusion that persist in contemporary societies represents an additional justification for the propositions that underpin collective mandates, insofar as they are a means of facilitating the inclusion of social groups in formal arenas of political deliberation.

⁵ According to Silva et al. (2021), based on RAPS (2019), the first collective mandate in the country took place in 1994. From 1994 to 2010, there were eight candidacies and mandates, while in the 2018-2020 period there were 341 candidacies and 28 mandates.

⁶ Parliamentary initiatives have taken place, notably Constitutional Amendment Proposal 397/2017, presented by Federal Deputy Renata Abreu (Podemos). Its summary states: "Adds a paragraph to Article 14 of the Federal Constitution to allow collective mandates within the Legislative Branch". According to Xerez (2019, p. 59), the initiative would help "fill the existing regulatory gap regarding collective mandates in the Brazilian legal system".

Silva (2019, p. 40) states that in collective and shared mandates the "basic assumption for their operation is the division of decision-making power". In this sense, the formulation of collective and shared mandates imposes a reduction in the discretion of the elected parliamentarian, to the extent that they act not only according to their conceptions and according to interests, but above all in line with the deliberations of their co-parliamentarians, who act in the decision-making and policy formulation processes.

In Brazil, collective and shared mandates have recently been addressed (Raps, 2019; Secchi et al., 2020; Silva et al., 2021; Almeida, 2024), highlighting that they vary in terms of when they are created (pre- or post-election), as well as whether they are an initiative of several political parties or not, among other aspects.

Based on a study by the Political Action Network for Sustainability (Raps, 2019), Silva et al. (2021, p.184) differentiate between shared and collective mandates. Groups of people, who generally have previously established relationships and/or ideological alignment, form collective mandates (Raps, 2019). Previous ties promote a kind of "sense of belonging and responsibility" that is greater than that established among parliamentarians with shared mandates, as well as making it possible to build consensus for decision-making (Silva et al., 2021). Shared mandates, on the other hand, derive from the initiative of the elected candidate, who proposes to share decision-making power. Silva et al., 2021 (p. 184) point to the "plural characteristic from the ideological point of view and the belonging of its members, formed by large groups (more than 100 councilors)" and to decision-making, usually by voting, with the support of information technology⁷.

It must be considered that, from an objective and strictly procedural standpoint, challenges may arise in parliamentary work, as candidacy registration occurs on a personalized level, centered around who will represent the collective, following the same pattern as traditional candidacies. In the

⁷ In Belo Horizonte, Councillor Gabriel Azevedo (PHS) - elected in 2016, re-elected in 2020 - is an example of a shared mandate in the municipality, through an app that allows his constituents to vote on the projects on the agenda in the City Council, guiding his position in plenary. In his first term, more than 1,700 citizens (Silva et al., 2021) used the app.

parliamentary routine, the elected individual is also the one who must fulfill the obligations to the legislative body, meaning that collective action often takes place behind the scenes, in offices, through shared decisions, and in proposals that actively engage with the population through listening and dialogue.

What follows are the experiences of collective mandates in Belo Horizonte during the 2016-2020 period, as well as collective candidacies in the same municipality, identified in the 2020 elections. These experiences involve collective competition through multiple candidacies, as well as the formation of a group of candidates running for the same mandate.

4. THE PIONEERING EXPERIENCE OF MUITAS TO GABINETONA

Starting with the 2016 municipal elections, the so-called Gabinetona (a type of cabinet) became a pioneering experience of collective mandate in Belo Horizonte. It stands out for its continuity in subsequent electoral contests and its expansion to other spheres of government.

The "movement", in the words of the participants (Brasil et al., 2021), shaped the collective mandate experience that began in 2017, "Many for the City We Want". An environment driven by activism, the emergence of new collective actors, and various mobilizations in the city since the beginning of the decade fueled this movement. The June 2013 protests intersected with and amplified these mobilizations (Brasil et al., 2020).

In this context, Muitas brought together activists and collectives involved in mobilizations and movements. They participated in open thematic meetings in public spaces, called "Programmatic Explosions", where they discussed issues related to the city and developed proposals. Later, the team introduced an open virtual platform to facilitate the inclusion of additional proposals.

In this sense, one can invoke Cefaï's (2017) notion of the public arena when analyzing the approach of the Muitas. This is evident in the diversity of actors involved - activists from marginalized, excluded, and/or vulnerable groups, the majority of whom are women, with a strong presence of Black people, LGBTQIA+ individuals, Indigenous people, residents of urban

occupations, as well as a "quilombola" leader and a person with disabilities - and in their practices.

Drawing from their daily experiences, the Muitas problematize the city, questioning its deficits in inclusivity and the underrepresentation of minorities in the Legislative. Based on these lived experiences, the group developed alternative proposals, leading to the self-defined project of the "occupation of institutional politics" (Gabinetona, 2020) within the Legislative. This process fostered experiments and new forms of practicing democracy, from the formation of the public and candidacies to the establishment of open, collective, and participatory mandates.

Experimentalism is evident in the Muitas movement, particularly in its innovative campaign featuring 12 candidates for city council under the slogan "Vote for one, vote for all". The campaign aimed to occupy institutional politics within the municipal legislature through research and dialogues with left-wing parties. The Muitas group defined their collective candidacy under the "*Partido Socialismo e Liberdade*" (PSOL) (Socialism and Liberty Party), successfully electing Áurea Carolina (the most voted candidate in the municipality) and Cida Falabella in 2016. The collective mandate now encompasses both offices and carries the name Gabinetona, incorporating other candidates who wish to participate in co-governance. The two councilwoman who formed the initial structure of the Gabinetona, although holding separate mandates, based their parliamentary activity on the collective articulation of agendas and the development of projects through participatory and collaborative processes, including the involvement of co-parliamentarians. The Gabinetona experience thus features candidacies for different mandates, exercised collectively and including the figure of a co-parliamentarian. The collective mandate aligns with the goal of increasing the inclusion of diverse social groups in formal political arenas, shaping a public arena rooted in the Muitas movement. This approach expands representation while fostering social participation and deliberative practices. The team's diversity shapes the projects its parliamentarians present, addressing various social issues while staying connected to the causes and

struggles that guide movements engaged in alternative spaces for participation and deliberation.

Under the motto "*#OutraPolíticaÉPossível*" (*#AnotherPoliticsIsPossible*) the Gabineteona was characterized by experimentalism, employing participatory, alternative arrangements and projects guided by these practices. An analysis of the collective mandate's own databases reveals support for bills, as well as the development of diverse projects aimed at fostering greater civil society participation, debate, and social oversight of parliamentary action (Gabineteona, 2020). Participation spaces are central to the exercise of the collective mandate, grounded in the principles that guide the actions of parliamentarians and those involved, emphasizing debate, active listening, and shared decision-making. In this regard, initiatives such as regularly held conversation circles serve as spaces for community engagement, resistance, and the exchange of experiences, while also fostering networks for dialogue and listening. Additionally, information related to parliamentary functions, as well as topics to be discussed in a participatory manner by the community, is disseminated through various communication channels, including institutional websites, messaging platforms, and open offices. Figure 1 provides a general summary of the experiences and experimental initiatives implemented by the Gabineteona during its first term.

Figure 1: Experimentalism and democratic innovations in the Gabinetona

Innovative initiatives	Brief description
Balances abertos do mandato	Mandate assessments open to the city, held every six months in public spaces, to report on actions and decisions, in addition to engaging in dialogue with citizens (Gabinetona, 2019d).
Rolê na Gabinetona	Visits by young people enrolled in socio-educational institutions to the City Council organized by Gabinetona.
Emenda com agente	Instruments for consulting the population regarding the application of resources from parliamentary funds.
Cê Fraga	Public call to map social and cultural initiatives in the municipality. Based on the mapping carried out, some selected initiatives received funds from a fund composed of donations from part of the parliamentarians' salaries.
Gfortes	Thematic and/or territorial groups focused on debate and dialogue with the mandate, political articulation and specialized collaboration with the mandate.
Lab PORs	Popular Law Labs are workshops for the analysis and collaborative construction of Bills
Mapa de Lutas	Interactive online map with records of locations and actions carried out by the mandate in the various regions of Belo Horizonte, providing greater contact with social movements and actors.
Café com Cida	Meetings between councilwoman Cida Falabella and women living in the northwest region of the city.

Source: Own elaboration based on Gabinetona (2020) and Brasil et al. (2020).

Brasil et al. (2021) examined democratic innovations in the Gabinetona, highlighting experimentalism in participatory processes for mobilizing actors and developing proposals. The authors argue that, through participatory and inclusive practices, the collective mandate contributed to the democratization and revitalization of political representation in the Municipal Legislature.

The set of practices and experiences associated with this collective mandate offers insight into how this innovative representation model fostered experimentalism in participation and social inclusion in the formulation of projects, enabling advancements in institutional politics.

It is worth highlighting the expansion of the Gabinetona since the 2018 elections when its parliamentarians began occupying all three spheres of the Legislative Branch. This shift made the exercise of mandates more complex; however, the initiative has maintained its core principles and practices.

Under the motto of "inventiveness" (Áurea, 2022), the second phase of the Gabinetona saw the development of proposals aimed at strengthening broad popular participation, particularly among social majorities historically excluded from institutionalized political arenas. This phase led to the adoption of "social technologies", involving tools that promote the active participation of the electorate in the decision-making process.

The evolution of the original Gabinetona project highlights the potential of collective mandates to break down barriers to access within institutionalized political spaces. Moreover, once these barriers are overcome, innovative approaches to politics prove to be applicable across all spheres of the Legislature, despite potential challenges.

5. CANDIDATURES AND COLLECTIVE MANDATES IN THE 2020 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN BELO HORIZONTE

In addition to the experience of Gabinetona - discussed in the previous section - which elected two female councilors in 2016 (out of 12 candidates) and one in 2020 (out of seven candidates), the 2020 municipal elections in Belo Horizonte saw an expansion of collective candidacies. In this context, five other candidates ran for the position of councilor from the perspective of collective mandates, with Sônia Lansky from ColetivA standing out as the only one elected; however, she later resigned from her mandate. Figure 2 summarizes these candidates, their bases, and their agendas.

The first round of municipal elections took place on November 15, 2020, in an atypical scenario due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which necessitated measures to prevent and combat the spread of the disease. In this context, amid discussions about postponing or canceling the elections and their implications, the Superior Electoral Court decided to adjust the electoral calendar through Constitutional Amendment 107/2020. This change affected the dynamics of the electoral process, particularly campaigning, due to the necessary social distancing measures.

Figure 2: Collective candidacies 2020 in Belo Horizonte

Candidacy	Party	Who are they?	Agendas
Coletivo Nós por Nós	PSOL - Party of Socialism and Freedom	"Collective formed by educators, artists, progressive evangelicals, from Aglomerado da Serra, considered the largest favela in Minas Gerais [...]" which presents itself as a diverse candidacy (Nós por nós, 2020).	The Collective came together "so that people from favelas have representation on the BH City Council and can fight for improvements and changes for these territories in Belo Horizonte" (Nós por nós, 2020). The agenda related to Education, Mobility, Art and Culture and Urban Policies, indicating the prioritization of these public policies in favela territories, agglomerations and areas of the city with a low Municipal Human Development Index.
Mulheres Negras Sim.	PSOL - Party of Socialism and Freedom	"Feminist and Anti-racist Candidacy" by Lauana Nara and Tainá Rosa (Black Women Yes, 2020)	Proposal to "blacken" the Belo Horizonte City Council, based on their peripheral experiences and trajectories in social struggles and to challenge the under-representation of black women in spaces of power and decision-making, which reflects directly on public policies, the territorial division of resources and the perspective of city building (Black Women Yes, 2020). Proposals linked to Culture in the Quebradas, Democratic Education, Cities for All, with a view to including the city's black population.
Plural na Rede	UP - Popular Unity	The slate headed by Felipe Gibram, with 3 co-candidates, presents itself as "evangelicals who fight for the religious freedom of all peoples and human rights, especially for women, blacks and LGBTs (Plural na Rede, 2020).	Proposals for "housing policies that guarantee the right to housing; security policies that promote a culture of peace; health policies that ensure comprehensive care; education policies with higher quality and emancipatory capacity [...] and Education and Culture; Popular and Solidarity Economy; Sport and Leisure as tools for social transformation" (Plural na Rede, 2020)
Bancada Antifabh Luanna Ramalho	PCdoB - Communist Party of Brazil	It presents itself as a "collective youth candidacy" (Bancada Antifascista, 2020)	Belo Horizonte City Council's democratization agenda

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ColetivA	PT - Workers' Party	Feminist, LGBTQIA+, Antiracist, Antimanicomial, Antifascist." "the result of the dream of many people to build a democratically shared mandate, forming a broad political movement [...] bringing the experience of political activism to the Belo Horizonte City Council" (ColetivA, 2020)	"Our fight is for the SUS and in defense of the right to life, the right to a city of Good Living" Agendas relating to public health policies, with a focus on women, black people and LGBTQIA+; Proposals to combat violence against women; municipal basic income; Enegrecer Belo Horizonte; BH do Bem Viver and LGBTQIA+ rights.
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Fonte: TRE (2020) and Collective Candidacies websites.

The identified experiences reveal different ways of structuring collective mandates, either through the joint formation of multiple candidacies, as seen in the pioneering experience of the Gabinetona, or through the composition of a single mandate shared by a group of candidates. The profile of these candidates indicates that they are linked to left-wing parties; women, and 60% of them by Black individuals lead 80%. It can therefore be considered that these candidacies represent alternatives found by historically excluded groups to increase their representation and influence in public policies, with the goal of "occupying politics". Also noteworthy are their agendas and proposals, which, although diverse, share a democratizing and inclusive perspective, addressing issues related to everyday life, inequalities, and vulnerabilities.

It is worth extending the analysis to the case of ColetivA, considering the election and subsequent resignation of the incumbent, which highlights the potential challenges faced by collective mandates. From its inception, ColetivA emerged from the union of activists who rallied around a platform specifically focused on defending the "Sistema Único de Saúde" (SUS) (Unified Health System) and advocating for health-related agendas. In addition to the candidate's long and significant career in the health sector, the choice of the mandate's central motto - reflecting the activism of its members - was likely influenced by the context imposed by the Covid-19 health crisis. This culminated in a collective candidacy that also confronted the negationism

present in public debate. The decision to adopt a collective candidacy was driven by the aim of rethinking more democratic and horizontal political practices, inclusive of women, Black people, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and young people. In this sense, we can also draw on Cefaï's (2017) perspective of the public arena, which is shaped by the various actors who come together, their practices and experiences, the problematization of issues, and the experimentation involved in constructing proposals and alternatives.

Despite the innovative spirit of collective mandates, which involves the collaborative construction of a political platform, electoral legislation has not kept pace with such initiatives. It does not even allow the group's name - representing those who would theoretically hold the mandate - to appear on the ballot or in campaign advertising. Consequently, it is essential to designate one member of the group as the official mandate holder.

In the experience in question, once Sônia Lanski was elected, the ColetivA co-parliamentarians organized themselves to ensure that the group could operate both within institutional spaces, such as the Chamber of Councilors, and in local territories, continuing to build the movement. However, the lack of formal and institutional recognition of the collective model led to obstacles, including limitations on the participation of mandate members in plenary sessions. In the context of remote meetings - imposed by the pandemic - only formal mandate holders could be present. This restriction posed a significant challenge to the collective exercise of the mandate and created tensions, as only one parliamentarian had access to the meetings.

Faced with this context, the collective mandate restructured its working approach, allowing the councilors to operate "outside" the Chamber through team meetings and working groups dedicated to discussing issues and formulating proposals in collaboration with the mandate holder. An effort was also made to strengthen the participatory nature of the mandate by creating a Political Council composed of those who originally conceived the ColetivA.

The press speculated about challenges in the practical implementation of the collective mandate. In response, the ColetivA councilors issued a joint statement acknowledging a "first major impasse" while reaffirming their

commitment to democratic construction through working groups, militants, and activists (Gomes, 2021), shifting their focus to the extra-institutional sphere. Although strategies were developed to overcome the difficulties encountered, the resignation of the official mandate holder - decided individually - ultimately compromised the continuity of the collective mandate.

The efforts to prevent the resignation of the incumbent, along with the proposal for other members of the group to act extra-institutionally with the support of the Workers' Party (PT), were ultimately insufficient, despite the public commitment to collectively building a project aimed at transforming society and politics. In this regard, the interviewed co-parliamentarian emphasizes that ColetivA should be a movement actively engaging in the political contest over the city. This perspective also justifies its articulation with other collective mandate experiences to advocate for the regulation of this format within institutional politics at the National Congress.

The trajectory of ColetivA highlights key aspects of collective political engagement, including the mobilization of activists around a shared agenda, the formation of a collective candidacy, and, ultimately, the specific challenges of exercising an electoral mandate characterized by innovation and the collective construction of proposals, projects, and political decisions.

Unlike Gabinetona, the members of ColetivA, including its co-parliamentarians, were distinguished by their prior engagement in party politics. The research conducted and the short period during which they served on the City Council did not allow for a clear assessment of whether and how their participation influenced legislative proposals and municipal policies.

However, the brevity of the ColetivA mandate - lasting only three months - has raised questions about the viability of collective mandates, particularly considering hypotheses suggesting a lack of unity among participants and disagreements over institutional rules (O Tempo, 2021), which have been cited as factors in the incumbent councilor's decision to resign.

Regardless of the validity of these assumptions, the experience of ColetivA underscores the fragilities and challenges of sustaining the innovative character of collective mandates. As previously mentioned, electoral

procedures still require candidacies to be registered individually, as in traditional elections. Likewise, in parliamentary practice, the formally elected individual is the one responsible for fulfilling legislative duties, while collective action is primarily carried out within offices and participatory spaces.

Such aspects show how imperative it is, for the success and prevalence of the assumptions that underpin the proposals of the collective mandates, that there is an effective connection between the members of the group, so that the co-parliamentarians can effectively carry out the collectively constructed proposal. The presence or absence of such a connection between the co-parliamentarians - the result of a gradual process of bringing social actors together to build agendas and proposals and their own collective identity - can perhaps be pointed out as a distinguishing feature between the experiences of the collective mandates analyzed - *Gabinetona* and *ColetivA*. However, it should also be noted that the first experience originates from action fundamentally in the field of civil society, while the second is also conceived in the field of institutional politics, given the previous work of the participants in the party sphere.

6. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Democracy presupposes the constitution of publics and public arenas, which discuss and problematize issues from everyday life and experiences, engendering democratic proposals and experiments that can lead to institutional innovations. It also presupposes the broadening of civil society participation in institutional spaces designed for this purpose, making it possible for society to influence decision-making.

Considering the relative contemporary discredit with democratic institutions, collective mandates have challenged traditional representation, proposing a cooperative and participatory model of parliamentary action, in which groups with little visibility and their agendas can compete in party politics and present themselves as an alternative for broadening and strengthening representation.

Meanwhile, in the context of Belo Horizonte, public arenas have been set up to discuss the limits of representation, as well as issues relating to the city, notably in the Muitas experience, which has formed the backbone of the Gabinetona since 2016. The bet on innovative ways of doing politics in the City Council is marked by democratic experimentalism, which to some extent renews the space of the Municipal Legislature. In the next election, in 2020, other arenas will be set up with new actors, problems, agendas and proposals. In this scenario, another collective mandate experiment - Coletiva - was successful in the electoral contest, given the election of the candidate. Nonetheless, the experiment was short-lived, with the resignation of the incumbent, which meant the loss of the formal mandate, thus exposing the weaknesses of this type of informal arrangement.

These experiences have a long way to go before they can have greater backing or legal certainty to undertake campaigns and electoral mandates. In 2021, a Resolution of the Superior Electoral Court authorized the name of the collective to be the one that appears in the voting option on electronic ballot boxes, which to some extent facilitates the search for and identification of initiatives but maintains the registration of candidacies on an individual basis. On the other hand, there is controversy over this type of arrangement, considering that in 2023, the proposed electoral mini reform, which was not voted on, prohibited collective candidacies.

Collective candidacies and mandates have become an increasingly popular subject of study and, in this sense; there is a fertile field for analysis from different perspectives and theoretical matrices, as well as the possibilities of comparing cases. The experiences of collective mandates have created a wide-ranging research agenda (Secchi et al., 2020).

This article aims to contribute to these debates, within the limits of its scope and objectives, by looking at experiences with a focus on Belo Horizonte in the 2018-2022 period. This effort made it possible to point out the diversity of proposals, including those of an innovative nature, originating from civil society and generated in public arenas, as well as to identify the potential and weaknesses of collective mandates, which evoke further possibilities for

deepening. Considering the elections following the period examined, this opens the possibility of a longitudinal approach to the progress or setbacks of this type of experience in the municipality.

Furthermore, the study reveals a number of issues that could be tackled, such as the connection between these candidates and the respective public arenas that are being reconfigured; (1) the relationship between the mandates and the political parties and the legislature itself; (2) the relationship between the mandates and social collectives and movements and their networks; (3) the various experiments and innovative practices of participation and deliberation within the mandates; (4) the performance of the mandates from the perspective of influencing public policies and presenting bills that translate into inclusive and democratic public policies.

However, the collective challenges of these mandates are not trivial, as they involve constructing and sharing meanings and collective agendas based on the experiences and experiments of their members, as well as practices of social participation and deliberation, with a view to forging new inclusive and democratic grammars.

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