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Social participation in the LGBT public policy cycle in Latin America: an exploratory analysis of Brazil, Cuba and Peru

A participação social no ciclo de políticas públicas LGBT na América Latina: uma análise exploratória a partir de Brasil, Cuba e Peru

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Abstract: This article examines how social movements, civil society organizations and academia take part in the stages of the public policy cycle for LGBT people in Latin America, and which tensions this participation generates. The study is qualitative and exploratory, drawing on a literature review, document analysis and a visit to a public facility in São Paulo, including a semi-structured interview. Its framework combines the policy cycle model, the literature on institutional activism and repertoires of state-society interaction, and queer critique, which is used to question what each stage of the cycle normalizes. Three arrangements holding different positions vis-à-vis the state are examined, namely the LGBTI Citizenship Centers of São Paulo, a municipal policy run by civil society organizations; the National Center for Sex Education (CENESEX), a Cuban state agency; and the Center for the Promotion and Defense of Sexual and Reproductive Rights (PROMSEX), a Peruvian non-governmental organization. The cases suggest that social participation runs through every stage of the cycle and is a condition for these policies to exist and endure. Once translated into policy, however, movement demands tend to fit subjects into identity categories and models of citizenship that queer critique calls into question.

Keywords: public policy; social participation; LGBT population; queer theory; Latin America.

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1. Introdução

In a September 2021 interview on the podcast Lança a Braba, Erika Hilton recalled being thrown out of her home at 14 and surviving through sex work during her adolescence. That experience, she explained, taught her that the reality imposed on her body was not natural but constructed (Delgado & Mackus, 2021). Her politics began outside institutions, in grassroots work with travestis[3], trans women, Black people and residents of the urban periphery. In 2020 she received more votes than any other woman running for a city council in Brazil, and in 2022 she was elected to the federal Chamber of Deputies. Looking back on this path, she distinguishes between what she did on the ground and what only becomes possible as state policy[4].

> [I needed] people in the legislative houses who would commit to the policies I was making at the grassroots, so that this could become public policy, because one thing is what I do here in the territory with these travestis, with these Black sisters, with these fags, with these dykes, and another thing is what becomes state policy, what becomes city policy, which I alone cannot embrace, but which, through state policy, allows me to reach that other place. (Delgado & Mackus, 2021)

This passage captures the problem this article addresses. Hilton's trajectory as a Black trans woman condenses experiences shared by people at the intersection of sexual and gender dissidence, race and class. Excluded from the operational logics of the state, they are pushed into positions of non-normality and, ultimately, of non-humanity. LGBT[5] social movements organize in response to this exclusion and seek to occupy institutions. The question is whether, and how, the demands built in these spaces become public policy, and what changes along the way.

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[3] We keep the term travesti in Portuguese. It is a Latin American identity category, widely used in Brazil both as a self-designation and as a political identity claimed by trans and travesti movements, and it does not map neatly onto English categories such as transgender or transsexual. English renderings such as "transvestite" would both distort its meaning and carry pejorative connotations.

[4] Unless otherwise indicated, quotations from sources in Portuguese and Spanish, including interview excerpts, were translated by the authors.

[5] The acronyms LGBT, LGBTI and LGBTQIA+ are used to refer to people who do not conform to the sexual and/or gender norms prevailing in the Latin American context, without establishing a rigid definition, and the acronym adopted by each source or institution cited is preserved.

The regional context makes this question urgent. The Sin Violencia LGBTI network (2019) recorded about 1,300 homicides of LGBTI people in nine countries of the region between January 2014 and June 2019, and identified prejudice as the motive in roughly 30% of cases. Brazil was not included, as its data were reported separately. Brazil has topped the Trans Murder Monitoring project of Transgender Europe (TGEU) every year since its launch in 2008. Between October 2024 and September 2025, the project recorded 281 murders of trans and gender-diverse people worldwide, most of them in Latin America and the Caribbean (TGEU, 2025). These figures coexist with legal progress. In 2020, ILGA World (2020) described the region's formal legal protections as relatively broad. As Serrano-Amaya, Rodríguez Rondón and Daza-Niño (2020, p. 1) observe, two decades of legal reform have been accompanied by persistent violence, discrimination and stigma, particularly against trans people, lesbians, and racialized or impoverished LGBT people.

Faced with this violence, movements largely demand public policy from the state. Classic definitions link public policy to the distribution of gains among groups (Lasswell, 1936) or, more broadly, to whatever governments choose to do or not to do (Dye, 1984). Reviewing this debate, Agum, Riscado and Menezes (2015) define public policy as a field that seeks both to "put government into action" and to analyze that action, proposing changes of course when needed (p. 16).

Social participation in these policies may look like a domestic matter, but it concerns International Relations because movements operate transnationally. Faria (2018) traces this to the recognition that the nation-state no longer contains political action on its own. Among other reasons, he points to the cross-border nature of the issues that mobilize collective action, the view of international organizations as allies, the interest in shaping both the international diffusion of policies and international norms, and the role of transnational movements as brokers between marginalized domestic groups and the international system. The Yogyakarta Principles (2007), drafted by human rights experts and organizations, illustrate this circuit. In Brazil, Irineu (2021, p. 575) shows that much of the institutional development of federal LGBT policy depended on partnerships with international agencies. The background

document for the 1st National LGBT Conference, for instance, was prepared by consultants funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). In these circuits, the boundaries between social movements, academia and the state blur. The same people who engage in activism produce the knowledge on which policies are designed and evaluated, and they sometimes go on to implement those policies.

This article therefore asks how social movements, civil society organizations and academia take part in the different stages of the public policy cycle for LGBT people in Latin America, and what tensions this participation generates. Its general objective is to analyze this participation through three institutional arrangements in the region. Its specific objectives are (a) to discuss the policy cycle model in light of the literature on social participation and institutional activism; (b) to examine, through queer critique, the normative limits of translating movement demands into public policy; and (c) to identify, in each case, the stages of the cycle at which non-state actors take part, the repertoires they use and the effects of their participation.

The study is exploratory and qualitative. It draws on a literature review and on the analysis of institutional documents from each case, including reports, strategic plans, management handbooks and official websites. Cases were selected on typological rather than representative grounds. We looked for consolidated arrangements, with a physical headquarters, continuous activity and public recognition, that occupy different positions in relation to the state. The LGBTI Citizenship Centers (Centros de Cidadania LGBTI) of São Paulo are a municipal public policy run by civil society organizations. CENESEX is a state agency that combines academic research with government advisory work under a one-party regime. PROMSEX is a non-governmental organization that produces knowledge about, monitors and advises the state in a country where LGBT policies are weakly institutionalized. This variation allows us to observe how social participation takes shape when the starting point is a policy, the state or civil society. The cases are illustrative and make no claim to represent a politically and socially diverse region. In November 2019, we also visited the Luana Barbosa dos Reis LGBTI Citizenship Center in the northern zone of São Paulo. The visit included a semi-structured interview with the staff member in

charge of the pedagogical component of the Transcidadania program and the observation of one of the program's meetings[6]. This material is used for illustrative purposes, and the interviewee is not identified.

The article proceeds as follows. Section 2 presents the policy cycle, discusses how non-state actors take part at each stage and connects this discussion to queer critique. Section 3 analyzes the three cases and offers a comparative synthesis. Section 4 concludes.

2. The public policy cycle and social participation

The policy cycle model provides the analytical backbone of this article. Secchi (2010) divides it into seven stages (problem identification, agenda setting, formulation of alternatives, decision-making, implementation, evaluation and termination). He acknowledges that the stages rarely follow this order in practice. The model is valuable because it makes a complex process analyzable. We bring two complementary lenses to bear on it. The first is the literature on institutional activism and repertoires of state-society interaction (Abers, 2021; Abers, Serafim, & Tatagiba, 2014), which helps describe how movement actors operate inside and outside the state at each stage. The second is queer critique, discussed in subsection 2.1, which asks what each stage normalizes. This combination mirrors the field itself. Reviewing Brazilian scholarship on LGBT public policy, Sousa Júnior and Mendes (2021, p. 648) identify precisely these two strands, one focused on the stages of the cycle and the other grounded in queer studies, and note that the queer approach "can broaden the possibilities of seeing public policies" (p. 651). Our aim is to bring the two together rather than simply set them side by side. If public policy is ultimately about managing power, queer critique helps reveal how gender and sexuality shape every decision in the cycle.

Abers (2021) defines institutional activism as "collective action on behalf of contentious causes when carried out by actors within institutions" (p. 32). This includes civil servants who use government posts to advance causes developed in social movement networks. In the Brazilian case, Abers et al.

[6] The interview, based on an 18-question guide, was recorded with the interviewee's consent and fully transcribed; the meeting was observed during the same visit.

(2014) identify four routines of state-society interaction, namely protest and direct action, institutionalized participation, the politics of proximity, and occupying positions in the bureaucracy. They show that movements invested in action from within the state, "transforming the state itself into a space of political activism" (p. 331). This vocabulary moves us beyond the general claim that civil society participates. It lets us ask how, at which stage and with what resources it does so.

Secchi (2010) defines the first stage, problem identification, as the perception of a "discrepancy between the status quo and a possible ideal situation" (p. 34). The definition is plainly normative. For violence against LGBT people to count as a public problem, the state must first recognize them as full citizens and reject the way they are treated, including by its own agents. The case of Luana Barbosa dos Reis is a telling example. A Black lesbian woman, she was beaten by military police officers in Ribeirão Preto, in the state of São Paulo, in 2016, after refusing to be searched by men (Warken, 2021). Here the status quo is the normalization of such violence, and recognizing it as a problem depends on other actors pressing public authorities to do so. Historically, that pressure has come from movements. During the HIV/AIDS epidemic, for instance, gay activist groups were among the first to demand a response from the São Paulo state government, which led to the country's first program to control the disease (Cartaxo, 2021, p. 230).

Once identified, a problem must reach the agenda, understood as the set of issues recognized as relevant (Secchi, 2010). Our concern here is the formal agenda, that is, the issues public authorities actually commit to addressing. According to Cobb and Elder (1983), a problem reaches this agenda when multiple actors perceive it as such, when a solution is considered feasible, and when it falls within the remit of government. If we take the last two conditions as met in the case of anti-LGBT violence, the decisive factor becomes the coalition that supports the issue. Social movements lead in building it, mobilizing the media, the private sector and international organizations, which, as noted above, also place the issue on the agenda themselves (Irineu, 2021).

Civil society tends to take part less directly in formulating alternatives and making decisions, unless participatory committees or councils are in place. Even so, it is present through academia, which produces the data that evidence-based policy requires, and through activists who hold positions in the bureaucracy. At the Luana Barbosa dos Reis LGBTI Citizenship Center, the pedagogue we interviewed, who is employed by the civil society organization that runs the facility, told us that "the staff who work here, personally, before being employees, are activists for the cause". He saw the state in similar terms. In his words, "the state only does what the social movement keeps pressuring it to do. [...] The state is an unchanging figure". These statements capture what Abers (2021) calls institutional activism, exercised here in the delivery of a public policy, and what Abers et al. (2014, pp. 333-334) describe as occupying positions, a routine that in turn facilitates the politics of proximity between movements and public managers. In human rights policy, then, movements work both "outside", by pressuring the state, and "inside", by performing public functions.

For the implementation stage, Sabatier (1986) contrasts two models. In top-down implementation, there is a clear hierarchy in which implementers simply carry out decision-makers' instructions. In bottom-up implementation, implementers are central actors who manage and shape the policy, which makes it more adaptable. Because LGBT issues are built from the grassroots by movements, LGBT policies tend to benefit from the second model. Bureaucratic rigidity, however, often resists this arrangement and can derail a policy before it takes hold.

Evaluation assesses a policy's performance and overlaps with the monitoring carried out during implementation. Formal models favor indicators of efficiency in resource allocation. The Centre for Public Impact's (2016) Public Impact Fundamentals framework instead assesses policy success along three dimensions (legitimacy, policy and action), each with three criteria. Under legitimacy, alongside public confidence and political commitment, it lists stakeholder engagement, which it considers "crucial to achieving good outcomes" (p. 11). This criterion matters particularly for LGBT policies, which

aim not only at results but also at engaging society as a whole in confronting prejudice. It is also where movements, universities and non-governmental organizations become visible as actors in the cycle.

Finally, a policy may be maintained, reformulated or terminated. Secchi (2010) identifies three causes of termination. The problem may be solved, the policy may be judged ineffective, or the problem may drop off the formal agenda even though it remains unsolved. The last is the most common, and it is the risk that hangs over LGBT policies in the region. In Brazil, Irineu (2021, p. 570) links the weak institutionalization of federal LGBT policy to the paternalistic relationship between the government and part of the movement. Serrano-Amaya et al. (2020, p. 16) note that important gains never became state policy and remained vulnerable to changes in government. Brazilian studies also point to insufficient budget allocations and poor dialogue between the state and civil society as recurring obstacles (Sousa Júnior & Mendes, 2021, p. 653). Monitoring by movements is thus a condition for the survival of the very policies they fought for.

Academia, however, does more than supply data for formulation and evaluation. It also criticizes state mechanisms, public policy included, as instruments of normalization. The next subsection develops this critique.

2.1. What does public policy normalize? The contribution of queer critique

Within International Relations, scholarship on sexuality distinguishes two strands, with no rigid boundary between them. LGBT studies are empirically oriented. They take the LGBT community as their referent object and seek to expand and secure rights and policies (Murta, 2026). Queer theory, by contrast, is not tied to a fixed referent object and is understood “not as something that is, but as something that does” (Murta, 2023, p. 242). As its use as a verb (to queer) suggests, it seeks to destabilize the gender and sexual norms that organize social, political and economic relations (Richter-Montpetit & Weber, 2017). Our analysis of the policy cycle and of social participation belongs to the first strand. Queer critique serves as a lens that unsettles this very object.

Queer theory, which gained traction in the 1990s, developed a critique of the norms, practices and subjects produced by regimes of gender and sexuality, and refused to be pinned down to a single defining identity. Butler (2003a) describes the zones where this refusal takes hold.

Indeed, there are intermediate zones – hybrid regions of legitimacy and illegitimacy – that have no clear names and where naming itself enters into a crisis produced by the shifting, sometimes violent, boundaries of legitimating practices that come into uneasy and, at times, conflictual contact with one another. [...] These are non-places in which we find ourselves almost by chance; these are non-places where recognition, including self-recognition, proves precarious or even elusive, despite our best efforts to be a subject recognizable in some way. (p. 229)

Pereira (2012), for his part, describes the queer as

> a verb that traces risky actions and displacements, outlining multiple trajectories of unstable, provisional and split bodies. [...] It is not, therefore, the security of the surgically altered body, finally consonant with its "gender identity", that the queer propagates, but, above all, the instability of bodies that do not conform. (p. 373)

Pereira emphasizes the instability of nonconforming bodies, not the security of a body finally aligned with a gender identity. His formulation echoes Butler's (2003b) notion of performativity. For Butler, gender is not the expression of a prior essence but an effect produced through the repetition of norms, and it is this very repetition that opens room for displacement. Contrary to common assumptions, then, the queer is far from an identity. As Duggan (1994, p. 5) argues, every production of identity generates exclusions that return from the margins to haunt identity-based politics.

This insight underpins the critique of identity politics as a neoliberal tactic for normalizing lives that escape the sexual norm. Duggan (2003) uses the term homonormativity to describe "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (p. 50). Weber (2016) shows how this logic operates in International Relations

through the figure of the "normal homosexual". This rights-bearing figure, associated with the sovereign and developed subject of the Global North, is constructed in opposition to the "perverse homosexual", cast as underdeveloped and undevelopable. The result is conditional inclusion. Only LGBT subjects deemed harmless can live in harmony with the system that oppresses them, trading their freedom for the rainbow flag and legal marriage. Rao (2015) calls the economic dimension of this process homocapitalism. When international financial institutions justify LGBT rights by pointing to the economic cost of homophobia, they tie the inclusion of certain subjects to their capacity to contribute to the economy as a productive force. In this model, inclusion depends on purchasing power, and those who cannot participate on these terms remain at the margins (Murta, 2023).

The state is a central piece of this structure. By placing LGBT issues on its agenda, it implicitly acknowledges that it, too, perpetrates violence against this population. Yet if a public problem is defined as the gap between the status quo and an ideal situation (Secchi, 2010), we must ask whether state action toward marginalized groups seeks, above all, to bring them as close as possible to a constructed normality. Sampaio and Germano (2014) put the question sharply. In their view, the public policies that emerge from the relationship between the LGBT movement and the state "demarcate in their institutionalized discourse which bodies can be assisted by the state and which remain in the zone of abjection" (p. 298). Along the same lines, Serrano-Amaya et al. (2020) argue that the political subject of these policies is "less a pre-existing homogeneous collective actor and more the result of state interventions" (p. 16). They describe Latin American LGBT policies as "regimes of governmentality that control the inclusion of gender and sexual social mobilizations into citizenship and democracy" (p. 17).

Citizenship, a contested concept central to urban policies for marginalized groups in the region, is invoked to give these groups access to the city and awareness of their rights and duties. In doing so, however, it draws them into the operational logic of the state, the same logic that marginalizes them. Irineu (2021) criticizes the "LGBT citizenship" promoted by Brazil's federal

governments as limited by fragile and discontinuous policies (p. 581). She also argues that the "tripod" of a national plan, a council and a managing body cannot by itself secure funding or political commitment against discrimination (p. 580). Duggan (1994), concerned with the gap between the academic language of queer theory and that of public debate, concludes that emancipatory strategies should destabilize heteronormativity rather than naturalize "gay" identities (p. 10). Shifting the focus to the cisheteronormative structure avoids imposing compulsory conformity on nonconforming identities, which is the risk of citizenship-based models. This critique does not mean that every language of citizenship is homonormative. In Ecuador, during the constitutional reforms of the so-called Citizens' Revolution, social movements contested and expanded the meanings of family and citizenship and challenged the liberal notion of equality. They did so within limits, however, as marriage and adoption remained restricted to heterosexual couples (Lind & Keating, 2013).

None of this means abandoning public policy. Sampaio and Germano (2014) recognize the gains secured by identity-based policies. They propose treating the deconstruction of identities as a form of resistance that does not require deconstructing policy itself (pp. 298-299). Our aim, then, is to use queer critique as a lens for interrogation rather than as a normative program. This position engages with the debate on antinormativity as a convention within queer theory itself (Wiegman & Wilson, 2015). It is in this sense that we connect queer critique to the policy cycle. At each stage, it prompts us to ask who is defined as the subject of the problem, which identities make it onto the agenda, what model of citizenship guides implementation, whether success means fitting into the norm or contesting it, and which norms the policy leaves in place. A queer critique formulated from the Global South must also place intersectionality at its center (Crenshaw, 1991), because gender and sexuality operate as normalizing devices that intersect with race and class (Murta, 2026). The trajectories of Erika Hilton and Luana Barbosa dos Reis make this clear. The next section puts these questions to the three cases.

3. Social participation in three Latin American arrangements

According to Serrano-Amaya et al. (2020), LGBT social policies in Latin America "exist in the fluidity and porosity between sectors of the state and between state and civil society" (p. 16). We chose the three cases to explore this porosity from different starting points. Only one of the three institutions is a public policy in the strict sense. The other two are a government agency and a non-governmental organization. We therefore also refer to them as public policy promoters. Shifting the focus from those who authorize policies to those who carry them out offers a more accurate picture of the cycle at work. For each case, we examine the stages at which non-state actors take part, the repertoires they use and the tensions that arise.

3.1. LGBTI Citizenship Centers (Brazil)

São Paulo's LGBTI Citizenship Centers were created in 2015 under the municipal administration of Fernando Haddad. The first unit, in the Arouche area, replaced the former Center for Combating Homophobia and was followed by units in other parts of the city. There are now five centers, also known as LGBTI+ Reference Centers, located downtown (Brunna Valin) and in the western (Claudia Wonder), eastern (Laura Vermont), northern (Luana Barbosa dos Reis) and southern (Edson Neris) zones of the city. Mobile units serve each area (Prefeitura de São Paulo, n.d.). Each center is named after an LGBT person whose story illustrates why such centers are needed. The policy is funded by the municipality with federal support and supervised by the Office for LGBTI Policies of the Municipal Department of Human Rights and Citizenship, but it is run by civil society organizations. At the time of our visit, UNAS Heliópolis managed the southern unit and Instituto Omindaré managed the northern one.

The centers work along two lines. The first is the defense of human rights, through legal, psychological and social assistance for victims of violence and discrimination. The second is the promotion of citizenship, mainly through the Transcidadania program. The program was created in response to evidence that travestis, trans women and trans men are pushed out of one setting after another, from their families and schools to religious communities and the labor market. It offers participants a monthly stipend to complete their schooling and

take part in vocational training and cultural activities at the centers for two years. Social movements have often criticized this period as too short.

During our visit, acolhimento, a notion that combines welcome and care, stood out as a guiding principle. The colorful space, which felt more like a home than a government office, reinforced this orientation. At the Transcidadania meeting we observed, the pedagogue leading it at times simply listened, letting the participants, trans women and travestis, debate freely before returning to the agenda. The scene illustrates the bottom-up implementation discussed in Section 2, in which those who deliver and those who use a policy shape it in everyday practice.

The interview showed that social participation is built into the very design of the centers. According to the pedagogue, their names "are defined together with social movements, and the office for LGBTI public policies welcomes the wishes of these movements". He also pointed to a tension in evaluation. Metrics are necessary "for public policy", but the program's effects range "from knowing that she is not alone in the world to professional and academic possibilities". Some of the policy's results thus escape formal metrics.

The case shows social participation at nearly every stage of the cycle. Problem identification and agenda setting resulted from pressure by movements that found a favorable political moment under the Haddad administration (2013-2016). Implementation was entrusted to civil society organizations, and day-to-day operation relies on professionals who identify as activists, combining the routines of occupying positions and institutionalized participation described by Abers et al. (2014). The centers have now lasted for more than a decade, across municipal administrations with different political orientations. This suggests that the network of actors around them has helped protect the policy from termination. Fragility nonetheless persists. The interviewee argued that the centers should be enshrined in law to guarantee dedicated funding, a point that echoes the diagnosis of weakly institutionalized LGBT policies (Irineu, 2021).

Queer critique, however, brings out tensions built into the design itself. The policy's very name announces its model of citizenship, which seeks to bring

LGBT people into the operational logic of the city and the state. For the interviewee, citizens are those who have "full awareness of their rights and duties", and "it is not enough to have them, I have to access them". This is a legitimate aim, but it presupposes belonging to an already given whole. By tying the stipend to schooling and job training within a fixed period, Transcidadania makes employability the horizon of inclusion. This resembles the homocapitalism described by Rao (2015) and Murta (2023), and it defines which trajectories count as successful. Serrano-Amaya et al. (2020, p. 8) note that policies for trans women in sex work in the region often offer little more than training in stereotyped trades, reproducing the very subordination they seek to address. Transcidadania stands apart by prioritizing schooling, but it does not escape the question raised by Sampaio and Germano (2014) about whom a policy assists and whom it leaves out. The centers' answer to this tension seems to lie less in their formal design than in the everyday practice of acolhimento, which allows users themselves to contest what the policy means.

3.2. CENESEX (Cuba)

The National Center for Sex Education (Centro Nacional de Educación Sexual, CENESEX) was officially founded in 1989, but its origins go back to 1977 and the creation of the National Sex Education Working Group (Grupo Nacional de Trabajo de Educación Sexual, GNTES). What began as a basic sex education initiative became, despite many obstacles, a regional leader in LGBT rights (Kirk, 2011).

The first of these obstacles lay in the foundations of the revolutionary state, built on the image of the ideal revolutionary as masculine, virile and heterosexual. In mid-twentieth-century Cuba, homosexuality was associated with capitalist decadence and seen as incompatible with the values of the nation under construction (Kirk, 2011). Change came through the Federation of Cuban Women (Federación de Mujeres Cubanas, FMC). Founded in 1960 and chaired by Vilma Espín, the FMC became one of the country's leading institutions for gender equality, with a status comparable to that of a ministry. The achievements of revolutionary women in this field opened space for a debate on sexuality that led to the creation of the GNTES and, later, of CENESEX,

directed by Mariela Castro Espín, the daughter of Vilma Espín and Raúl Castro (Kirk, 2011).

In 1979, at the FMC's request and with the approval of the Ministry of Public Health (MINSAP), the GNTES began coordinating a working group on the diagnosis and treatment of transsexual people, an area that would shape CENESEX's future work. Its responsibilities now include proposing, advising on and coordinating Cuba's policy on sex education and sexual health, leading the National Commission for Comprehensive Care for Transsexual People, conducting research and graduate training in the field, and advising MINSAP and other central government bodies (Centro Nacional de Educación Sexual [CENESEX], 2012). The center has influenced the policies of several ministries. In 1996, together with the Ministry of Education and the United Nations, it introduced sexuality education at every level of the national school system. On the legislative front, it advocated changes to the Family Code and other legal instruments to expand LGBT rights (Castro Espín, 2014). This agenda reached a new milestone in September 2022, when a referendum approved the new Families Code (Código de las Familias), which recognizes same-sex marriage and adoption, with 66.87% of the vote (Pérez, 2022).

CENESEX also coordinates civil society networks, including the Youth Network for Health and Sexual Rights, TransCuba, the Network of Lesbian and Bisexual Women, Humanidad por la Diversidad and the Network of Jurists for Sexual Rights. It also maintains cooperation agreements with other countries, such as Chile, on policies for trans people (CENESEX, 2012).

The Cuban case approaches social participation from the opposite direction to the Brazilian one, as it is the state that creates and organizes the channels of participation. CENESEX operates at every stage of the cycle. It identifies problems through research, places them on the agenda, formulates and advises on policies, and evaluates them, combining state and academic functions in the process. The networks linked to it amount to a form of institutionalized participation, in the terms of Abers et al. (2014), in which state actors play a central role in creating and steering the process. This arrangement gives policies capacity and scale. Under a one-party regime that restricts the

autonomous organization of civil society, however, it also tends to confine participation within limits set by the state.

Queer critique adds another layer. Trans people first entered Cuban policy through medical diagnosis and treatment. This shows how the subjects of these policies are partly produced by state interventions, which define them as "pathologized individuals and collectives requiring state correction and normalization" (Serrano-Amaya et al., 2020, p. 16). CENESEX gradually broadened its agenda from health to civil rights, which shows that this framing can shift. Yet the tension between state recognition and the instability of bodies that, as Pereira (2012) reminds us, do not conform remains. By redefining the family in broad terms, the new Families Code comes close to the Ecuadorian experience discussed in subsection 2.1, in which the language of citizenship itself was contested. In Cuba, however, this contest was led by the state.

3.3. PROMSEX (Peru)

The Center for the Promotion and Defense of Sexual and Reproductive Rights (Centro de Promoción y Defensa de los Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos, PROMSEX) is a feminist Peruvian non-governmental organization founded in 2005. It works to expand sexual and reproductive rights, particularly in public health (International Women's Health Coalition [IWHC], 2013). One of its areas of advocacy is extending legal abortion, currently allowed in Peru only when the pregnant person's life or health is at risk, to cases of sexual violence. Unlike feminist organizations with a cisheteronormative focus, PROMSEX is a member of ILGA. It designs and supports policies for women who have relationships with women, trans women, travestis and trans men, including on public health issues such as period poverty.

The organization works in seven official areas, one of which is sexual diversity (sexual orientation and gender identity). In this area it has published more than 60 documents designed to inform political actors as they create and amend policies and laws for Peru's LGBTI population. Its 2020-2024 strategic plan set out to "interpret the gender perspective broadly, overcoming the

binarism that still characterizes the 'sex-gender' system, promoting the full recognition of LGBTI people" (PROMSEX, 2019, p. 26). To this end, the organization strengthens networks and movements, produces and disseminates knowledge, monitors the Peruvian state at all levels, drafts legislation, and partners with public authorities to improve existing policies and design new ones. Its management handbook explicitly commits it to supporting "the different bodies of the state in fulfilling their responsibilities in the recognition and full exercise of human rights" (PROMSEX, 2016, p. 4).

PROMSEX takes part mainly in three stages of the cycle. It contributes to problem identification by producing knowledge, to agenda setting through advocacy before the legislative and executive branches, and to evaluation through monitoring. In this case, the boundary between civil society organization and academia all but disappears, as the NGO functions as a knowledge-producing center that feeds the cycle. Combining the politics of proximity with institutionalized participation (Abers et al., 2014), the organization performs functions that the state fails to perform or performs inadequately. This strengthens the legitimacy and technical capacity of public authorities, but it also shifts responsibilities that should be public onto non-state actors.

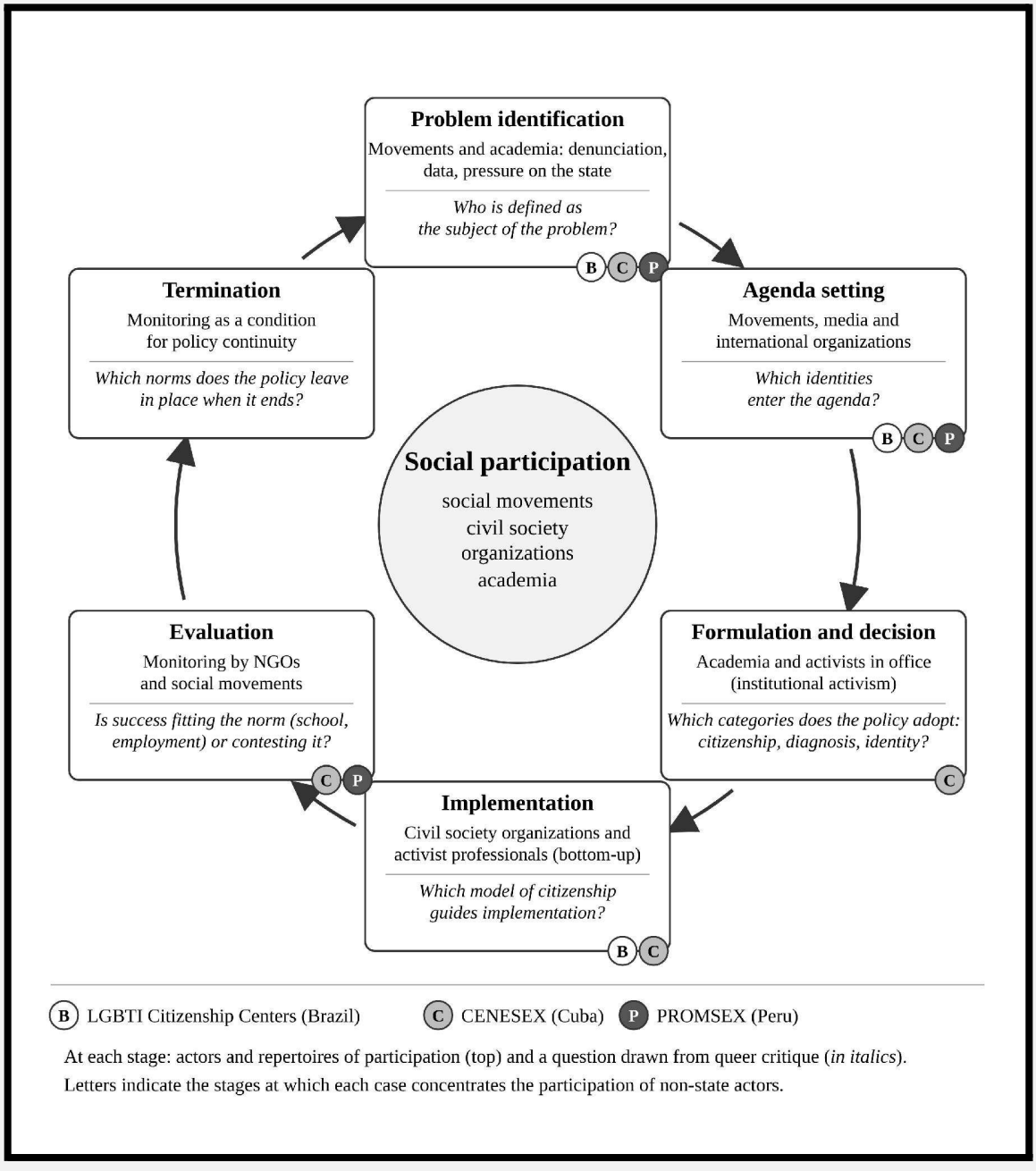
PROMSEX's aim of overcoming the binarism of the sex-gender system brings it close to queer critique and to the strategy of destabilizing heteronormativity rather than naturalizing identities (Duggan, 1994). The tension lies in translation. To influence laws and policies, the organization must work with the legal and identity categories that the state recognizes. The case thus raises the question posed by Sampaio and Germano (2014, p. 299) of whether negotiation with the state is possible without appealing to a sexual identity, the very kind of discourse that queer critique calls into question.

3.4. Comparative synthesis

Figure 1 brings together the stages of the cycle, the actors and repertoires of participation, the questions raised by queer critique and the cases analyzed. The three cases show that no public policy relies on state means alone. The Citizenship Centers are run by civil society organizations and staffed

by professionals who see themselves as activists. CENESEX is a state agency with an academic base that organizes civil society networks. PROMSEX is an NGO that produces knowledge about, monitors and advises the state. In terms of the cycle, participation is concentrated in implementation in the Brazilian case, spread across all stages under state coordination in the Cuban case, and concentrated in problem identification, agenda setting and evaluation in the Peruvian case. In terms of repertoires, the dominant patterns are, respectively, occupying positions combined with institutionalized participation, institutionalized participation under state direction, and the politics of proximity combined with knowledge production. All three cases also share a common tension. Translating demands into policy requires categories, such as citizenship, diagnosis or legal identity, that make subjects legible to the state and, in doing so, determine who is included.

Figure 01: Public policy cycle, social participation and queer critique in the cases analyzed



Note: Prepared by the authors based on Secchi (2010) and the analysis of the cases. The stages of formulation of alternatives and decision-making were grouped together.

4. Concluding remarks

This article asked how social movements, civil society organizations and academia take part in the LGBT public policy cycle in Latin America and what tensions this participation generates. The analysis suggests three answers.

First, social participation runs through every stage of the cycle and is a condition for these policies to exist and endure. The state tends to preserve a status quo that presents itself as neutral, and it is social participation that moves it, reaching into legislatures, the civil service and policies themselves. In this sense, a successful public policy is one that brings in as many social groups as possible. It is defined less by the fact that the state carries it out than by its public interest. Viewing the state not as the actor that governs and transforms but as the authority that lends legitimacy, resources and structures to collective projects gives a more accurate picture of what a policy aims to achieve.

Second, participation takes different forms depending on where each arrangement stands in relation to the state, and repertoires of interaction help describe these forms. Social movements are not cohesive actors either. They are made up of subgroups, including academia, which sustains their struggles by producing the data, theories and hypotheses that every policy needs before it can exist. All three cases illustrate this, through the activist professionals of the Citizenship Centers, the researchers of CENESEX and the technical work of PROMSEX. Bureaucracies are as porous as any other system, and the people in them often play two or three roles at once. Public policy is where this overlap becomes visible. To fulfill its social function, it must move across many different spaces.

Third, this movement is not neutral. When the cycle translates demands into policy, it relies on categories that make subjects legible to the state, and in doing so it defines who is included and on what terms. Queer critique does not diminish the achievements discussed here. It reminds us, however, that they do not exhaust the struggle for rights, which need not always start from the models the state offers (Sampaio & Germano, 2014, p. 299). In Latin America, where violence against LGBT people coexists with legal progress, these contradictions are especially visible. This may help explain both the strength of the region's movements and the commitments that, amid these tensions, create and sustain public policies.

Finally, the study has limitations. The cases do not fully capture the diversity of the region, and the fieldwork consists of an exploratory visit with a semi-structured interview. Future research could deepen the analysis of the

Brazilian case through systematic interviews and extend the comparison to other Latin American countries, examining how the circulation of experiences across the region shapes the design of these policies.

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