

ARTICLE

SELECTION OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN PETRÓPOLIS (RJ): DISPUTES IN THE SCENE AND THE POLITICAL TEXT¹

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ABSTRACT: This text aims to present the reader with the intricacies of the political agenda and text production that engendered the Municipal Education Plan of Petrópolis (RJ), seeking to identify the place of democratic management of public schools in the municipality. Considering the assumption that community participation is an essential condition for the establishment of democratic management, despite the existence of the selection of school principal through the election in the municipality, we identified that the election has the character of consultation with the community and in the partner schools the process is not accomplished. Through document analysis, it was noticed that in the educational field, the democratic processes are fragile and under constant pressure from the Catholic Church. The normative conflict and the lack of clarity between the educational guidelines in the municipality stand out as an obstacle to the establishment of a democratic school, with political formation for the exercise of participatory and decision-making citizenship.

Keywords: democratic management, participation, principal selection, municipal education plan, Petrópolis.

SELEÇÃO DE DIRETORES ESCOLARES EM PETRÓPOLIS (RJ): DISPUTAS NA CENA E NO TEXTO POLÍTICO

RESUMO: O presente texto apresenta a agenda política e da produção de texto que engendrou a aprovação do Plano Municipal de Educação de Petrópolis (RJ), buscando identificar o lugar da gestão democrática da escola pública no município presente no texto político. Considerando o pressuposto de que a participação da comunidade é condição imprescindível para o estabelecimento da gestão democrática, apesar de a seleção de diretor escolar ocorrer por meio da eleição no município, identificou-se que a eleição tem caráter de consulta à comunidade, como também, nas escolas conveniadas o processo não é realizado. Através da análise documental de natureza exploratória, percebeu-se que, nos textos

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políticos do campo educacional municipal, os processos democráticos se encontram fragilizados e sob constante pressões por parte da Igreja Católica. Destaca-se o conflito normativo e a falta de clareza entre as diretrizes educacionais no município como entrave no estabelecimento de uma escola democrática, que tenha formação política para o exercício de uma cidadania participativa decisória.

Palavras-chave: gestão democrática, participação, seleção de diretores, plano municipal de Educação, Petrópolis.

SELECCIÓN DE DIRECTORES DE ESCUELA EN PETRÓPOLIS (RJ): DISPUTAS EN LA ESCENA Y EN EL TEXTO POLÍTICO

RESUMEN: Este texto tiene como objetivo presentar al lector los entresijos de la agenda política y la producción de textos que engendraron el Plan Municipal de Educación de Petrópolis (RJ), buscando identificar el lugar de la gestión democrática de las escuelas públicas del municipio. Considerando el supuesto de que la participación comunitaria es una condición esencial para el establecimiento de la gestión democrática, a pesar de la existencia de selección de directores de escuela a través de la elección en el municipio, identificamos que la elección tiene el carácter de consulta con la comunidad y en las escuelas asociadas el proceso no se cumple. A través del análisis de documentos se percibió que en el campo educativo los procesos democráticos son frágiles y están bajo constante presión de la Iglesia Católica. El conflicto normativo y la falta de claridad entre los lineamientos educativos en el municipio se destacan como un obstáculo para el establecimiento de una escuela democrática, con formación política para el ejercicio de una ciudadanía participativa en la toma de decisiones.

Palabras clave: gestión democrática, participación, selección de directores, plan municipal de educación, Petrópolis.

INTRODUCTION

This article comes from a master's thesis that investigated the context of the political agenda and text production of the Municipal Education Plan of Petrópolis (RJ) (PETRÓPOLIS, 2015), identifying the (re)appropriated meanings concerning the democratic management of schools public institutions and the selection process of principals (ARAUJO, 2019). The texts governing educational policy indicate the developments in the conceptions of democratic management and forms of community participation.

In this text, we start from the theoretical assumption that democratic management permeates at least the dimensions of election, collegiality, and participation, not the only ones but there will be others linked or subordinated to them (LIMA, 2014). We also take as an assumption the idea that the participation of the school community in the process of choosing school principals is characterized as essential in the process of democratic management (AMARAL, 2019).

The political nature can be present in the school space to operate relationships between groups of people who compete for power in the school, as well as through an agreement signed between the actors that make up the school space. As highlighted by Souza, in the second case, there may be a slightly more democratic policy, however, “it is always about power, as politics only exists where there is power in question” (SOUZA, 2009, p. 125).

The National Education Plan (BRASIL, 2014) inaugurates democratic management as a goal, stipulating strategies to achieve it; however, we agree with Lima and Sá (2017), when they state that the

democratic management of public schools is procedural, materializing in the construction and daily action of such a management model in schools. The debate on democratic management in schools is part of the relationship between the legal texts of the policy, which aim to establish guiding principles and the interpretation made by the actors who stage such texts. As there will always be interpretations that dispute the meanings of democratic principles, it is possible to understand democratic management as being in the process of construction. Democratic management is a political phenomenon that articulates actions that are supported through democratic methods, in addition to those that are directed towards the practical exercise of participation in school political life. Therefore, it is crucial to pay attention to an education that trains for this practice, that is, an education that has political training as one of its objectives (LIMA, 2000) since political training allows the understanding of “actions that create and recreate more democratic alternatives in everyday school life with regard, in particular, to the power relations present there” (SOUZA, 2009, p. 126).

The construction of a political text, although it assumes a binary between decoding and recoding, presents the political process related to the actions of understanding and translation, according to Ball, Maguire, and Braun (2016, p. 14), “the elaboration of policies, or better, the performance is much more subtle and, at times, more incipient than the pure binary of decoding and recoding indicates.”

Ball and collaborators (2016) point out that the focus of the analysis of educational policies must be on the formation of policy discourse, as well as on the active interpretation of policy in the scope of practice. In the publication of the book *Reforming Education And Changing Schools*, in 1992, the authors present a more refined version of the policy cycle, proposing a continuous cycle formed by three main contexts: the context of influence, the context of text production, and the context of practice. Such contexts, despite being interrelated, do not have a temporal or even sequential dimension, nor do they have linearity. Thus, the policy cycle materializes in different places and arenas, groups of different interests in which, in each of them, there are disputes, debates, and clashes around the construction of policies (MAINARDES, 2006).

Normally, public policy texts tend to begin in the context of influence, in which speeches begin to take the form of policies. In the educational sphere, groups of different representations organize their speeches to influence the purposes of policy. Mainardes (2006) points out that, in this context, the action of social networks inside and outside political parties, in the government, and the legislative process is noticeable. In the context of influence, speeches gain legitimacy and become the basis for policies. Therefore, during the formulation process, speeches are sometimes accepted and receive support, other times they are rejected and become objects of debate due to other discourses that also occupy the arena and influence.

In the case of the municipality that is the locus of this research, the influences on the agenda for regulating the democratic management of education and on the approval of the Municipal Education Plan of Petrópolis were diverse, sometimes due to the text presented in the National Education Plan (BRASIL, 2014) acting as an influence national level, sometimes due to the lack of alignment of the state of Rio de Janeiro with the determinations of the Federal Government, regarding the elaboration of the Plan (regional influence), or even due to the disputes carried out by the Teachers' Union (SEPE/Petrópolis), and the Council Municipal Education (local influence). Until the completion of this article, the state of Rio de Janeiro had not yet approved or adapted its education plan to the PNE, which makes it the only state in the federation in this regrettable situation, with all 92 municipalities that make up the state having approved their education plans. This movement shows the difficulty of federative

articulation between the state and its municipalities in composing an agenda for public education in a dialogical way.

To write this article, we analyzed the contexts of influence and text production that resulted in the approval of the Municipal Education Plan of Petrópolis (RJ), focusing on the debate on democratic management and the principal selection process. With a qualitative approach, the data presented in this text are the result of documentary research of an exploratory nature, carried out in primary sources in documents, legislation, and government websites, and also includes the results of master's research carried out in the municipality where this text is located. The choice of the municipality of Petrópolis is part of a methodological movement by the Group of Studies and Research on Educational Systems (GESED-UFRJ) which, between 2016 and 2022, sought to understand the meanings of democratic management present in the municipal education plans of 92 municipalities that make up the state of Rio de Janeiro. Therefore, the city of Petrópolis, considering the specificities of each federated entity, was chosen as representative of the *Região Serrana* of that state.

The article is organized into four parts, in addition to this introduction. Initially, we bring the debate about democratic management and the selection of school principals. Subsequently, we present the selection policy for principals in the city of Petrópolis, its inclusion in democratic management and, finally, we make some final considerations.

DEMOCRATIC MANAGEMENT AND THE SELECTION OF PRINCIPALS

As defined by Amaral (2021), the debate on democratic management in schools is part of the relationship between legal policy texts, which aim to establish guiding principles for this purpose, and the interpretation of these by the actors who stage such political texts. Ball and collaborators (2016) state that policies are not merely implemented, but reinterpreted, modified, and recontextualized. For the authors, the concept of translation reflects the transformation processes and the different interpretations to which policies are subject. Therefore, the translation of policies involves complex processes of borrowing, appropriation, and adaptation, carried out through networks of actors/participants.

Democratic management is present as a principle in the Federal Constitution of 1988 – CF (BRASIL, 1988) and in the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education No. 9394/1996 – LDB (BRASIL, 1996), but it is the National Education Plan (BRASIL, 2014) which inaugurates the conception of democratic management as a goal, stipulating strategies and deadlines for its achievement, to promote conditions that ensure its implementation following the proposed objective. In this aspect, about the possibility of defining democracy at school, it is necessary to consider the possible interpretations that dispute the foundations of democratic principles, which allows us to understand this process as under construction (BITTENCOURT; CASTRO; AMARAL, 2021).

Democratic management, as an ideal of participation, appears linked to the action of the subjects in the elaboration and monitoring of the Political-Pedagogical Project (PPP), in the movement of participation of school actors in the choice of their representatives in the collegiate bodies and the selection of school principals. Licínio Lima (2014, p. 1070) uses both relationships that consider the participation of school actors, as well as the study of collegiate and representative spaces institutionalized within it, seeking to understand how their designs, of greater or lesser democratic scope, are associated with the specific time and historical context in which its inscription occurs. In this sense, as very well cited by Lima (2000, p. 19), school management is:

a conceptual perspective that focuses on democratically referenced interventions, carried out by educational actors and embodied in (self)government actions; actions that not only reveal themselves as political-administrative decisions taken from organizational contexts and decision-making power structures, but that also interfere in the construction and recreation of these structures and more democratic ways of exercising educational powers in the school system, in the school and the classroom, etc.

The choice of school principals in Brazilian public education is constantly marked according to the current moment and political movement. This choice can be guided by the will of municipal leaders, through party political choices that are sometimes led by the executive and/or legislative powers (AMARAL, 2016). We also need to consider the interference of private initiatives, which could make it more complex for the country to think of a democratic model that serves as a guideline in the process of selecting public school principals.

In the Brazilian context, the selection of principals has historically been the subject of much controversy and debate among education specialists (AMARAL, 2016, 2021; DABRACH; ADRIÃO, 2017; PARO, 1992, 2011). In addition to the act of administering, it is an activity that draws the attention of governments because it is an instrument of co-optation for power, however, as stated by Souza (2009, p. 124), the management of public schools must be done observing “legal determinations, through the principle and democratic method. However, there is little clarity about what the translation of one into another means, in concrete action in public schools across the country”.

The school principal can be selected through nomination, in which the choice occurs through a unipersonal action by the head of the Executive Branch or by determination of a member of the legislature, supported by the idea that they are appointing someone to the so-called “positions of trust”² (ARAUJO, 2019). In the direct appointment model, the principal can be removed at any time, leaving his role as school director restricted to the political moment and the convenience of the head of the Executive Branch, weakening the democratic process in the school. It is interesting to think that, in the context of political appointments, there is a conflict around the purpose of public affairs, as it conveys the idea that the school principal should be more trusted by the Head of the Executive Branch than by the school community.

Another provision model has to do with holding a public competition, a process that takes place without a community referendum to do so. This is the reality practiced by the state of São Paulo and its different municipalities. In this model, the successful candidate in the competition is sworn in as school principal and holds a “lifetime” position as school principal. This model of choice, which aims to somehow assess the “technical” competence of the candidate, can be configured as a consequence of the managerial education management model, as Drabach and Adrião (2017) pointed out.

According to Araujo (2019), the school principal can be chosen for the development of his career in the education network, even if there is no formal plan for this. The professional takes specialization courses in school administration/management and, as he is documented to be able to occupy the role of school principal, he can be co-opted by the education network for this purpose.

The choice of the school principal can also occur through community consultation. Candidates must meet certain prior criteria of merit and performance and, subsequently, the community

² Free appointments to positions of trust have been made based on art. 37, item V of the Federal Constitution of 1988, in which the legal text points out that: “functions of trust, exercised exclusively by civil servants occupying permanent positions and commissioned positions, to be filled by career civil servants in the cases, conditions and minimum percentages provided for by law, are intended only for management, leadership and advisory duties”.

is consulted through a vote that can be direct, by triple list, multi-member list, or even by single-person choice and, finally, the chosen one is appointed (ARAUJO, 2019). There is the so-called mixed model, when the school board can be filled through a combination of different existing models, such as a test of technical knowledge combined with consultation with the school community. In this mixed model, according to Amaral (2016), it is common for the school community to participate in some stage of the choice process.

The way school principals reach their role helps us reflect on the speeches that had a voice in the contexts of influence and text production, and the place of speech of those who participated in these decision-making spaces. For Paro (2003), how the school principal is chosen plays a significant role in school life, since the chosen one, in carrying out the role, may be more or less democratic, whether in the acceptance of the community involved with school life, whether in the degree of effectiveness in which it will promote the pursuit of collective objectives, or even in the delimitation of which interests will be represented to achieve such objectives. However, it is necessary to keep in mind that, regardless of the model in which the choice is made, it will never be neutral, since the subjects who make it will be imbued with their particular desires and interests.

In this context, the election, as a process model for providing the role of school director, has been presented as an instrument of greater democratic intensity. According to Lima (2014), the election of school directors and members to form representative spaces where decisions are made (school councils, municipal councils, student unions, among others) is an elementary requirement, being democratically superior and more favorable to a possible combination of direct and representative democracy practices in public schools.

The election, when it comes to choosing between ideas or different political-pedagogical projects for the school, is, from a democratic point of view, a more coherent option, although it is necessary to take into account multiple factors, with greater or lesser democratic intensity, such as the eligibility criteria, the definition of a voter, the electoral processes, the duration of mandates, the powers to be exercised, knowing that the simple election cannot be considered in an atomized way and independent of the degree of participation (LIMA, 2014, p. 1071).

Even if we consider that technical competence can be better assessed through a public examination and that, not infrequently, discretionary political appointments have been a recurrent practice in the choice of school principals in the country, the election has presented as a significant practice in education for democracy (LIMA, 2014).

The election, even if it does not guarantee democracy at school, is a more democratic experience than consultation. After all, being consulted does not effectively guarantee compliance with what was defined by the voters, giving rise to triple lists or other nomination strategies that can maintain patrimonial designs in public networks, and assert the will of the executive power in the face of the will of the community. As Bittencourt, Castro, and Amaral (2021) state the process of choosing a public school director through the election has the possibility of moving the school before the vote, whether in the formation of monitoring committees, in the decision of possible candidates to compose slates, be it even in defining the profile of candidates and voters.

In public consultation, a term inaugurated in the PNE for the process of selecting principals, members of the school community can be heard without necessarily the Executive Branch making the appointment following the desire of those consulted, taking into account the possibility of using the triple list mechanism. The normative conflict that guides discretionary actions in states and municipalities is

present even in the PNE, more precisely in Art. 9 which determines that federated entities “approve specific laws for their education systems, disciplining the democratic management of public education”, and goal 19 which, in its strategy 19.1, aims to prioritize the transfer to federated entities that “have approved **legislation** that regulates the matter in the area of its coverage” (BRASIL, 2014, emphasis added). The normative conflict we are referring to has to do with the use of the terms “specific laws” and “**specific legislation**”, which mislead the reader into thinking that the different terms have the same meaning. In the case of strategy 19.1, considering the priority in the transfer of resources, there is a risk that the instrument will have the opposite effect than expected, as non-compliance with the strategy could result in delays in the transfer of public resources and could harm the teaching networks that, budgetarily, are already precarious.

As Mendonça (2001, p. 86) pointed out, “these legal instruments constitute a more complete legislative manifestation of the authorities' understanding of how the constitutional norm applies to the public education system under their jurisdiction”. When “specific legislation” is provided for in the text, the possibilities for the materialization of democratic management in the legal context are diverse since legislation can be composed of a varied set of regulations: laws, resolutions, decrees and ordinances and consequently, present commuting guidelines regarding its democratic intensity.

If we think about the context of education financing, normative conflicts can directly lead to an increase in the privatization process of basic education, more precisely when guidelines are published to enable the free transfer of public resources to private education actors (ARAUJO; ADRIÃO, 2021). An example is the case of the new Fundeb, Law number 14 113 of 2020, which ensured the continuity of the transfer of public resources from the aforementioned fund to private educational institutions that have agreements with the public authorities to offer places in early childhood education (daycare and pre-school), in special education offered after school hours, in education for the rural population, including institutions that offer professional courses such as those in System S (Senac, Sesi, Sesc, Senai and others) (BRASIL, 2020). This context characterizes what Adrião (2018, 2022) called the privatization of basic education in the political dimension of educational provision when there is a public subsidy for the provision of educational provision by a private educational institution. According to the author, the process of privatization of educational provision can also be characterized by the increase in private provision by for-profit schools and by public subsidy in the granting of vouchers (scholarships) as a form of incentive for parental choice (ADRIÃO, 2018, 2022).

Whether in the election or public consultation, democratic management must be thought of as a daily process that takes place through advances and setbacks, oscillating in a kind of pendulum of democracy (AVRITZER, 2019) and the participation of subjects who work and study in schools. The selection of principals is part of this process over periods that vary from 2 to 4 years, on average, that is, it is a temporary participation in a decision-making process that will determine the school's pedagogical and democratic paths.

The period for implementing goal 19 ends in 2024. The Report of the Fourth Cycle of Monitoring of the National Education Plan (RQCM/PNE-*Relatório do Quarto Ciclo de Monitoramento do*

Plano Nacional de Educação)³ published in 2022 by the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP-*Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira*), formulated indicators to monitor all PNE strategies. Indicators 19A, 19B, 19C, 19D, 19E, and 19F of the report refer to democratic management strategies. The report, in its fourth version, brought the results of the formulation of quantitative indicators regarding the achievement of goal 19 during the PNE's decade of validity (BRASIL, 2014), with data referring to 2021. Indicator 19A addresses the percentage of public schools in Brazil that select principals through a qualified selection process and election with the participation of the school community and points to a shrinking of public schools that meet goal 19. Taking into account that the goal is to reach 100% of Brazilian public schools by 2024 with processes that meet the technical criteria of merit and performance, linked to the participation of the school community, by 2022, only 6.0% of Brazilian public schools followed the model of qualified selection process and election with community participation. The RQCM/PNE (INEP, 2022) also reveals that, in 56.3% of public schools, principals access the role through nomination, followed by election, with 19.1%. The national scenario reveals that municipalities are the ones that least selected principals in compliance with the technical criteria of merit and performance and community consultation, with 3.9% of municipal network units. The data demonstrate the relevance of research and studies on the process of selecting principals in Brazil, given the still very strong practice of appointments for the role, whether by the executive or the local legislature.

Regarding the relevance of the selection process of principals in political texts, once again, we highlight Law 14 113/2020 (BRASIL, 2020b) which regulated FUNDEB and defined that the complementation – VAAR – will be distributed to public networks that comply with some conditionalities and show improvement in indicators. One of the conditionalities described in section I, Article 14 of the law refers to the provision of the role of school manager/principal following the technical criteria of merit and performance or based on the choice made with the participation of the school community among approved candidates previously assessed merit and performance. Thus, the law that regulated FUNDEB allocates a portion of the fund to subnational bodies that have aligned themselves with the PNE (BRASIL, 2014) regarding goal 19 and strategy 19.1 of the aforementioned plan. The complementation – VAAR – fulfills the promise of PNE strategy 19.1 (BRASIL, 2014) in prioritizing transfers from the Union to states and municipalities that approved specific legislation that considered technical criteria of merit, performance, or participation in the appointment of public school principals.

THE SELECTION OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF PETRÓPOLIS

The Municipality of Petrópolis, also known as the “imperial city”, had its spatial organization initially formed by sesmarias (free concession of land for cultivation and settlement) which, at a later

³ Report of the Fourth Monitoring Cycle of the National Education Plan. Available at: https://download.inep.gov.br/publicacoes/institucionais/plano_nacional_de_educacao/relatorio_do_quarto_ciclo_de_monitoramento_das_metas_do_plano_nacional_de_educacao.pdf. Acesso em: jan. 2023.

stage, would become farms (ANGELO, 2012), configuring the first organized territorial spaces of Petrópolis, which are currently the neighborhoods of the municipality. It is located in the Metropolitan Region of the state of Rio de Janeiro and has a population of approximately 307,144 inhabitants.

The organization and management of the city's municipal education network is the responsibility of the Municipal Department of Education, which must guarantee Petropolitan citizens the human right to education, considering the provision of socially referenced, public, secular, and, above all, quality education. The Basic Education Development Index (IDEB- *Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica*) of the municipal network, in 2021, was 5.2 in the initial years and 4.6 in the final years, being below the national average in both stages.

Table 1 shows data related to the progression of enrollments in the municipal education network from 2013 to 2020, which demonstrates the municipality's leading role concerning enrollments.

Table 1 – Quantity of enrollments in the municipality of Petrópolis (RJ) per year and administrative dependency from 2013 to 2020

| Administrative Dependency | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
|----------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Federal | 86 | 51 | 44 | 62 | 86 | 105 | 111 | 113 |
| State | 12,918 | 11,751 | 13,421 | 11,797 | 11,981 | 12,202 | 11,672 | 11,659 |
| Municipal | 39,331 | 39,177 | 38,539 | 37,925 | 37,454 | 36,872 | 36,739 | 36,876 |
| Private non-profit partnership | 3,130 | 3,222 | 3,383 | 3,495 | 3,556 | 3,440 | 3,310 | 3,166 |
| Private partner for profit | 1,289 | 1,226 | 2,412 | 778 | 800 | 639 | 623 | 630 |
| Private, non-profit organization | 1,333 | 838 | 854 | 562 | 492 | 383 | 448 | 470 |
| Private for-profit organization | 14,302 | 15,095 | 13,611 | 15,324 | 15,599 | 15,373 | 15,134 | 15,046 |
| Total | 72,389 | 71,360 | 72.264 | 69.943 | 69,968 | 69,014 | 68,037 | 67,960 |

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from the School Census (INEP, 2020)

Table 1 was based on data from the school census, available by INEP, and considers the historical series from 2013 (the year of enactment of Law 7121 which provides for the democratic management of municipal education) to 2020 (the last year with data available on the INEP platform). The city of Petrópolis has a significant number of students, taking into account all administrative facilities. Above all, what draws attention is the number of enrollments present in private institutions that have an agreement with the municipal public authorities, which, together, total 3796 enrollments. Even though in the historical series the number is decreasing, there are 3166 enrollments in private non-profit institutions and 630 enrollments in private for-profit institutions, which allows us to observe the existence of a privatization process in the dimension of educational provision in the municipality, which, in the case of the city of Petrópolis, is implemented through public subsidy to the private education initiative.

We believe there is an aggravating factor in this process, when we see that public resources are transferred to private institutions that, declaredly, have a profit-making purpose, which could lead to

business intensification in the dispute with the public sector for increasing the number of vacancies available, inserting education into the privatizing and mercantile logic, in which what matters is obtaining greater financial revenue (ADRIÃO, 2018, 2022). The signing of agreements in the municipality of Petrópolis with private educational institutions appears to be a consequence of capitalist modernity, which intends to reaffirm the State's condition of inefficiency in ensuring the provision of social rights, such as education, starting to invoke the civil society and the institutions organized by it to take an active part to balance deficits due to lack of investment in social policies (AFONSO, 2010).

Even though the lenses of this research are not focused on the privatization process in which the municipal education network of Petrópolis is inserted, to give greater materiality to the aforementioned process, Table 2 shows the consolidation of data referring to the signing of an agreement of Educational Collaboration between the municipality of Petrópolis and some private educational institutions in the city for a period of 12 months, from July 1, 2019, to June 31, 2020.

Table 2 – Consolidation of the values of the Educational Collaboration agreement per institution over 12 months – nominal amount at the time

| Institution | Amount in R\$ |
|--|----------------------|
| Ação Social Anglicana do Rio de Janeiro - Colégio Anglicano de Araras | 2,190,000.00 |
| Associação de Apoio a Creche Escola Castelo São Manoel | 388,800.00 |
| Entidade Mantenedora do Liceu São Sosé de Itaipava | 1,296,000.00 |
| Instituto Metodista de Petrópolis - Centro Comunitário Alto Independência | 194,400.00 |
| Mitra - Paróquia Correias - CEI Nossa Senhora da Glória | 596,160.00 |
| Mitra - Paróquia de St. Antônio e St. Agostinho de Nogueira | 469,800.00 |
| Mitra - Paróquia São Judas Tadeu da Mosela - CEI São Judas Tadeu da Mosela | 408,240.00 |
| Casa São José das Oblatas de Nazaré | 291,600.00 |
| Associação Recrear - assrecrear | 421,200.00 |
| Associação Espaço Educativo São Charbel | 307,800.00 |
| Associação Creche São Francisco de Assis | 162,000.00 |
| Centro Educacional Comunidade São Jorge | 283,200.00 |
| Associação Congresso de St. Catarina - Creche São José do Itamarati | 518,400.00 |
| Associação de Educação São Vicente de Paulo - Colégio Padre Correa | 2,688,000.00 |
| Total | 10,215,600.00 |

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from the D. O. of Petrópolis (2019)

The data in Table 2 allows us to have a greater understanding of the volume of public resources from the Municipal Education Fund that were transferred to private educational institutions over 12 months (07/2019 to 06/2020). According to information published in the Official Gazette (D.O.- *Diário Oficial*) on September 4, 2019, the municipality (PETRÓPOLIS, 2019), a collaboration agreement was

signed to establish an educational partnership to meet the demand for vacancies in early childhood and elementary education. It draws attention to the fact that most of the partner institutions mentioned in the D.O. are related to the city's Catholic Church.

The amount collected indicates that Associação de Educação São Vicente de Paulo - Colégio Padre Correa and Ação Social Anglicana do Rio de Janeiro - Colégio Anglicano de Araras were the institutions that received the most resources from the municipal fund, R\$ 2,190 00.00 and R\$2,688,000.00 respectively. The institutions that received the least resources were: Associação Creche São Francisco de Assis (R\$ 162,000.00) and Instituto Metodista de Petrópolis - Centro Comunitário Alto Independência (R\$ 194,400.00). Added together the amounts transferred from the Municipal Education Fund to private educational institutions total R\$ 10,215,000.00.

This mechanism of transferring public resources as a way of subsidizing private educational institutions has already been analyzed in different cities in Brazil. In the municipality of Hortolândia in SP, Domiciano (2011) identified a privatizing mercantile logic that took place through the daycare grant program, in which private educational institutions were paid to meet the entire municipal demand for early childhood education. Also, research developed by Adrião (2009) analyzed the strategies used by municipalities in São Paulo to meet the demand for early childhood education and identified a continuous movement towards institutionalizing the policy of signing agreements between municipalities and private institutions. Table 3 shows the number of school establishments in the municipality of Petrópolis by administrative dependency, in which the progression of data helps us to have an overview of the municipality's protagonism in terms of educational provision.

Table 3 – Number of school establishments in the city of Petrópolis (RJ) per year and administrative dependency from 2013 to 2020

| Administrative Dependency | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
|----------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Federal | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| State | 14 | 14 | 14 | 13 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 |
| Municipal | 163 | 164 | 165 | 164 | 167 | 165 | 165 | 168 |
| Private non-profit | 13 | 13 | 14 | 14 | 14 | 14 | 14 | 14 |
| Private for-profit | 3 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Private, non-profit organization | 5 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Private for-profit organization | 77 | 81 | 80 | 85 | 85 | 84 | 83 | 85 |
| Total | 276 | 280 | 282 | 282 | 284 | 279 | 278 | 283 |

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from the School Census (INEP, 2020)

Table 3 helps us to have an overview of the number of school establishments in the city. It is interesting to note that, in the historical series, the federal network remained with just one unit, the state network decreased from 14 to 12 units, the municipal network increased from 163 to 168, the private non-profit network increased by one unit, the private network with profit units decreased from 3 to one unit, non-profit private units also decreased from 5 to 2 units and, in the opposite direction, private units increased from 77 to 85 units. The Table data allows us to identify the relevance of the municipal education network in terms of guaranteeing the human right to educational provision, even though in 7

years more private for-profit schools were created (8) than public municipal schools (5).

The municipal law that established the election process for school principals approved in 2013 before the sanction of the PNE (BRASIL, 2014), sets out criteria that outline a profile that the candidate needs to bring 15 days before the election. Since the municipal law was approved before the PNE, the municipality did not consider the technical criteria of merit and performance provided for in goal 19 of the Plan, since, when the municipal law was enacted, the PNE (BRASIL, 2014) had not yet been approved.

The first criterion presented by the municipality of Petrópolis (RJ) is the requirement that the candidate when registering, present their “management program and professional curriculum to the management committee” (PETRÓPOLIS, 2013). Amaral (2021), in research on the selection processes of principals in the municipalities of the state of Rio de Janeiro, observed that the evaluation of candidates' performance was anchored in three dimensions: profile, management training offered by the education network, and presentation of a management plan. According to the author, profile assessment can occur through resume analysis, which takes into account different aspects such as academic trajectory, experience in other leadership/management roles, and participation or not in unions. Different trajectories may come closer to, or further away from, the profile desired by those who will coordinate the process.

Considering the election as an essential dimension to the exercise of democracy at school, the presentation of a management plan before exercising the role of school director is an issue that contributes to a low democratic intensity during the process since this plan is not the fruit of collective work with the school community, therefore it does not contain its desires and demands.

Amaral (2016) highlights that the delivery of a professional resume is perhaps the criterion with the highest level of subjectivity. This is because the candidate's profile may move away from or closer to the profile desired by those who will coordinate this stage of the process. The analysis of the candidate's profile is closely related to the type of school principal desired by the education network, and it will be this choice that will determine the type of professional that the school will have in its direction, and what their profile and identity are. In other words, the analysis of the candidate's profile is subject to the discretionary act of the actors involved in this selection process.

In the municipality of Petrópolis, the second criterion determines that the candidate must have a “graduate degree in Pedagogy or a postgraduate degree in School Administration/Management” (PETRÓPOLIS, 2013). In this sense, the municipal law dialogues with national legislation that sets out the guidelines for the Pedagogy course, which, from 2006 onwards, stopped granting qualifications, starting to train generalist professionals. The next three criteria identified by municipal law are related to the exercise of teaching, determining that the candidate must have at least five years of public teaching and three years of them must have class management, counting on active enrollment in a school not may be away for more than a year, and belong to the Municipal Public Teaching. These elements were also observed by Amaral (2021) in his research that considers the merit of candidates and the requirements for the role: management training as well as teaching experience. The author states that some merit and performance criteria, currently used, are aligned with national regulations for selecting directors with appropriate training for the role. However, it is worth reflecting on other, more fluid criteria, such as curriculum analysis and interviews, to ask what their contributions are to democracy at school.

POLITICS ON THE SCENE IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF PETRÓPOLIS: DISPUTES AND CONFLICTS

Municipal Law 7121 of November 19, 2013, which “establishes the election procedure for Principal of the Municipal Early Childhood Education Center and Principal of the Municipal/Municipalized School, and provides other measures” (PETRÓPOLIS, 2013) determined the guidelines that should guide the provision of the role of school principals in the municipality. When analyzing the legal text of the aforementioned law, we found points that deserve to be stressed, as, in our opinion, they put the democratic character at risk, as we can see in art. 2 of the aforementioned law:

The election established by this law will have an indicative and consultative nature, so that the **head of the Municipal Executive Branch will not be bound by its results**, as well as other appointments for the positions of Principal of Children's Centers and Principal of Municipal/Municipalized schools, and **may freely appoint and dismiss their occupants**, following the terms recommended by art. 37, II of the Constitution of the Republic, since the prerequisites for the positions have been met (emphasis added) (PETRÓPOLIS, 2013, emphasis added).

The text diminishes the democratic intensity that could have been given to the electoral process, more precisely if it had assumed a deliberative character, ensuring the desire of the members of the school community expressed through their participation in the election process. As highlighted in the excerpt taken from the law, the legal text places the head of the executive branch as not attached, that is, not subject to the results. Moreover, it makes his desire superior to the expression of choice by the school community through the vote cast in an urn. In this aspect, municipal legislation fluctuates in its understanding of school management, since, as it is a role occupied by-election with a determined mandate, there is an expectation of compliance with the results of the polls. However, when referring to the Federal Constitution, the legislator understands school management as a commissioned position and that, for this purpose, the discretion of appointment belongs to the head of the executive, whose discretionary power may be applied, when convenient.

Another point worth highlighting is found in Art. 3, in which the law determines who are the individuals who can take part in this electoral process:

Art. 3 - The election aims to collect the opinion of:
 I – Public servants effectively working at the educational institution;
 II – Students enrolled in the School Unit, from the 6th grade onwards, or who, regardless of the year they are studying at least 12 (twelve) years;
 III – One responsible person, per student enrolled, in the Early Childhood Education Centers and/or 1st segment of Elementary Education;
 IV – Students enrolled in the Youth and Adult Education classes of the Municipal Education Network, regardless of the stage in which they are studying (PETRÓPOLIS, 2013).

The idea of an election merely as a collection of opinion is closer to a consultation with the community, reducing democratic intensity through respect for the community's decisions, since the municipal manager's discretion overrides that of the school community. Within the democratic context, it is expected that the election process will have its results respected. If we also consider that the ideas expressed by the school community may or may not be confirmed in the appointment by the executive, we realize the text intends to preserve the power prerogatives of the head of the executive.

In this context, the use of the term “opinion collection” opens up many possibilities for

interpreting the legal text, making it a writeable text (BALL, 1994; MAINARDES, 2006), by allowing greater discretionary breadth of municipal executive power and reducing participation community in the democratic process. It may even result in the appointment of principals in the Petrópolis Municipal Education Network, which undermines the prospect of testimony at school for the development of democracy, opening a vacuum for clientelistic, authoritarian practices and the politics of favoritism.

Regarding the tension between elections and opinion consultation/gathering, some issues need to be monitored within the public education network, to the election: who votes; if the vote is parity; how the slate forming processes will be constructed; the campaign; voting; the counting of votes; etc. (AMARAL, 2016). In the case of a public consultation, it is also necessary to inquire whether a triple list will be formed for the appointment of the executive of one of the candidates present on the list. After all, if it is a consultation, the executive may or may not nominate the first name on the list and, even so, he will be respecting the community's decision. Taking into account the use of the scale of democracy perspective (AMARAL, 2018) in the analysis of people's participation, whether in decisions regarding political texts or decisions at school, the greater the possibility of participation by community members, whether internal or external to the school, the closer their position will be on this scale of high democratic intensity. We believe that consulting/gathering community opinion in the process of choosing school principals is less democratic than elections.

During the research, our attention was drawn to the fact that, in partner schools, the process of choosing school principals adopted by the municipality presented other scenarios. According to goal 19 of the Petrópolis Municipal Education Plan (PETRÓPOLIS, 2017), which deals with democratic management, “part of the principals of the Municipal Education Network are chosen through the direct election with the participation of the school community”, a concept supported by the municipal Law 7121/2013 (PETRÓPOLIS, 2013). According to the PME, in the year the law was implemented, 100 units of the Municipal Education Network went through school elections. The units that do not have an election belong to the group of schools agreed between the City Hall and private educational institutions, demonstrating different actions in the implementation of the policy for schools within the same network, without, however, specifying how this process occurs in this group of schools. As Araujo (2019) identified, there was a period in the municipality when, the city hall of Mitra Diocesana alone had just over 30 affiliated schools and, in these schools, the school principals were chosen by the Mitra administration, linked to the Catholic Church. In addition to the process of privatizing educational provision, this aspect brings into play a public-private conflict that threatens the secular nature of municipal education. Blancarte (2008) defines secularism as a process that is the result of history and reflection by a State in which the democratic government was free from religious preferences. Silva et al. (2014, p. 26) argue that when the subject under debate is religion, one of the great challenges of Brazilian public schools is to remain neutral “as it is a locus hotly contested by religious institutions, often strengthened through agreements with political powers at both the federal, state and municipal levels”. According to the authors,

A strong sense of patrimonialism predominates in Brazilian public schools, which contributes to reducing freedom of belief, excluding minorities, the practice of proselytism, encouraging religious intolerance, generating embarrassment, and, mainly, draining public resources for private interests, promoting what Bobbio (1987) classified it as the privatization (SILVA et al., 2014, p. 26).

The agreement signed between the Brazilian government and the *Santa Sé* – Catholic Church-Brazilian State relationship –, promulgated in 2010, which deals with the Legal Statute of the Catholic Church in Brazil, mentions, in article 11, the provision of “Catholic and other religious confessions”, ratifying the prediction of a confessional offering (BRASIL, 2010). Additionally, the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC- *Base Nacional Comum Curricular*), promulgated in 2017, established religious education as an area of knowledge, delimiting learning objects and skills for the nine years of elementary school, an unprecedented feat in Brazilian education.

The patrimonial management model, in which Brazil is historically inserted, is based on the use and appropriation of public property, the State apparatus and, in some moments, even the State, by groups that seek to enforce their private interests to the detriment of collective well-being, taking advantage of exchanges and concessions made with public authorities (ARAUJO, 2019). In this aspect, Souza (2016) highlights the complexity of the religious field that allows us to observe the unprecedented protagonism of religious groups around the world, including in Brazil, and how disputes and contradictions internal to these groups generate consequences in the development of educational policies which, ultimately, cause interference even when putting them on stage.

The denial of the right to democratic experience to members who belong to partner school communities has increasingly been characterized by a management model, which seeks to grant state organizations a “pejorative conception of bureaucracy”, in which the inefficiency of democratic processes concerning the choice of principals can only be met by the adherence of private institutions as an “institutional archetype and rational organization, with innovative and efficient management” (LIMA, 2018, p. 18). The context of Petrópolis allows us to infer that an environment is created in which the idea is established that the community may not be able to choose the school principal and that, to this end, the efficient choice of a principal is only possible when made by a private and confessional entity, in this case by Mitra Diocesana, about partner schools.

Araujo (2019) identified that schools are linked to the social doctrine of the Catholic Church and that it is part of the Church's mission to carry out the religious formation of its students through an integrated curriculum. Therefore, to be a principal in these schools it is expected that the chosen one to perform the role must have religious training following the doctrines and customs preached by the Catholic Church.

There is also the idea that families, when enrolling their children in these schools, do so knowing that they will have to live with religious practices and rituals common to Catholicism, which goes against the constitutional principle of the State's secularism and goes back to the beginnings of Brazil as a colony and even calls into question the inviolability of freedom of conscience and belief. This nebulous relationship between municipal public power and the Catholic Church has been an obstacle in the implementation of the democratization of the public municipal education network.

By positioning as an ally of the educational function in the municipality, the Catholic Church uses public resources to meet its private purposes and “catechize” students who attend partner schools (ARAUJO, 2019). With a speech that points to the failure of the government structure to meet its educational demands and in a context of scarcity of resources, the Church has been an alternative in solving the problem of vacancies in the municipality. As Fischmann (2009, p. 10) states, “By guaranteeing the public sphere as a space for everyone, the secular State guarantees democracy and the possibility of diversity, which is expressed in different ways of living private life”. The public school is one of the fundamental spaces from which the debate on the secularity of the State unfolds.

Given this scenario, we corroborate Cunha and Oliva (2014), that the safeguard of a secular State is preempted by the need for the State to bring clarity to its controversies and to proclaim the correct discernment of what a secular State is. This is different from the idea disseminated by the discourse that “the State is secular, but the population is religious”, which, in practice, is nothing more than an excuse to maintain the status quo of a State protected by private religious interests. This is not about presenting a ready-made model of a secular State, as Cunha and Oliva (2014) clearly elucidate, secularism is a historical construction, and therefore, unfinished, a path that is made as one walks and a key element of modern democracies. If secularism advances, democracy, formally, also advances.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Brazilian educational field is marked by disputes between agents from the political and religious fields. This issue can be observed in the municipality of Petrópolis, based on the analysis of its legal documents that deal with the process of selecting school principals. We observed a normative conflict in which the legislation of the Municipal Education Plan and the provision of the role of school principal do not dialogue and, more than that, the municipality is in the context of influence and drafting of text under strong pressure from the Catholic Church, which, through representation, is in several important spaces for political debates and decisions, especially those that concern the educational field. As highlighted by Cunha (2007), it is possible to note, in the Petrópolis scenario, the decisive importance of religious entities in which the loss of autonomy is revealed to be that of the political field to the benefit of the religious field. According to the author (2006), in the political field, the Catholic Church remains an important element of pressure on the National Congress and state Legislative Assemblies, as well as on federal, state, and municipal governments, exerting direct influence over them.

Araujo (2019) indicates that the text presented in the document that celebrates the agreement with Mitra guarantees the Catholic institution differentiated treatment in the exercise of educational activities, especially concerning proselytizing activities that are Catholic customs within educational environments, such as making confessions and prayers. This allows us to conclude that, in the municipality, the secular State is in constant fragility. Public money, invested in public-private partnerships, in addition to configuring the process of privatizing educational provision and financing the activities of private educational institutions, has been useful in proselytizing students and establishing a weakened democracy, by ignoring regulations and legal provisions for school principals in the municipality, reinforcing patrimonial practices.

Considering the limitations that this text presents, we highlight that the data obtained through the research carried out indicate the need for more in-depth studies, which make it possible to understand more clearly the issues that encompass the relationships between public and private actors operating in the political educational scene in the municipality of Petrópolis, such as: when did the celebrations of the agreements begin? Is there lobbying by the institutions affiliated with the municipal public authorities? How does the invitation to enter into an educational cooperation agreement work? Were all candidates chosen through the electoral process appointed as school principals? How has the school community participated in the school principal selection process?

We conclude this text seeking to highlight private threats to public schools and plural and socially referenced democratic management. The practice of democratic politics requires that the school

community, user and recipient of educational policy, participate in educational and decision-making processes. As Amaral and Castro (2020) state, the school, characterized as a traditional institution, has its obligation based on a public agenda. It would be up to society, which has its legal order inscribed in a democracy, to think about political education at school so that people can exercise the power to decide and expand experiences, in which democracy can be exercised.

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Author 1 - Project coordinator, active participation in data collection and analysis, writing, and review of the final writing.

Author 2 - Project advisor, active participation in data collection and analysis, writing, and review of the final writing.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest with this article.