

Municipal Education Councils in Portugal and Brazil: territory and local power¹

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Abstract

This article analyzes how academic studies on Municipal Education Councils in Portugal and Brazil draw on the concepts of territory and local power. It is grounded in discussions regarding the educational decentralization, the territorialization of educational policies, and the democratic management, using territory and local power as central analytical categories. Methodologically, a survey of dissertations and theses was conducted in the Portuguese Open Access Scientific Repositories (RCAAP, acronym in Portuguese) and the Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (BDTD, acronym in Portuguese), covering the time period from 2003 to 2024. Twelve studies were selected and analyzed through the stages of annotated, systematized, categorized, and propositional bibliography. The results indicate that, in Portugal, Municipal Education Councils appear primarily as coordination and consultation bodies linked to the territorialization of national policies; in Brazil, they emerge as potentially normative and participatory spaces, although marked by dependence on the local executive branch. We conclude that territory and local power are crucial analytical categories for strengthening the democratization of municipal educational management.

Keywords: Municipal Education Councils. Territory. Local power. Educational decentralization.

Conselhos Municipais de Educação em Portugal e no Brasil: território e poder local

Resumo

O artigo analisa as produções acadêmicas sobre os Conselhos Municipais de Educação (CME), em Portugal e no Brasil, que mobilizam as noções de território e poder local. Fundamenta-se nas discussões sobre descentralização da educação, territorialização das políticas educativas e gestão democrática, tomando território e poder local como categorias analíticas centrais. Metodologicamente, realizou-se um levantamento de teses e dissertações nos Repositórios Científicos de Acesso Aberto de Portugal (RCAAP) e na Biblioteca Digital Brasileira de Teses e Dissertações (BDTD) no recorte temporal de 2003 a 2024. Foram selecionados 12 trabalhos, analisados por meio das etapas de bibliografia anotada, sistematizada, categorizada e propositiva. Os resultados indicam que, em Portugal, os CME aparecem sobretudo como instâncias de coordenação e consulta vinculadas à territorialização de políticas nacionais; no Brasil, emergem como espaços potencialmente normativos e participativos, embora marcados por dependência do Executivo local. Conclui-se que território e poder local são categorias analíticas decisivas para fortalecer a democratização da gestão educacional municipal.

Palavras-chave: Conselhos Municipais de Educação. Território. Poder local. Descentralização da educação.

Consejos Municipales de Educación en Portugal y Brasil: territorio y poder local

Resumen

El artículo analiza las producciones académicas sobre los Consejos Municipales de Educación (CME) en Portugal y Brasil que abordan los conceptos de territorio y poder local. Se basa en los debates sobre la descentralización de la educación, la territorialización de las políticas educativas y la gestión democrática, tomando el territorio y el poder local como categorías analíticas centrales. Metodológicamente, se realizó un levantamiento

de tesis y disertaciones en los Repositorios Científicos de Acceso Abierto de Portugal (RCAAP) y en la Biblioteca Digital Brasileña de Tesis y Disertaciones (BDTD), en el periodo temporal de 2003 a 2024. Se seleccionaron 12 trabajos, analizados mediante las etapas de bibliografía anotada, sistematizada, categorizada y propositiva. Los resultados indican que, en Portugal, los CME aparecen sobre todo como instancias de coordinación y consulta vinculadas a la territorialización de las políticas nacionales; en Brasil, surgen como espacios potencialmente normativos y participativos, aunque marcados por la dependencia del ejecutivo local. Se concluye que el territorio y el poder local son categorías analíticas decisivas para fortalecer la democratización de la gestión educacional municipal.

Palabras clave: Consejos Municipales de Educación. Territorio. Poder local. Descentralización de la educación.

Introduction

This article presents an excerpt from a state of knowledge bibliographic research on Municipal Councils of Education (CME, acronym in Portuguese) in Portugal and Brazil. The problem that guides the study is: what conceptions of territory and local power circulate in the academic production on CME in both countries?

The time frame from 2003 to 2024 takes as a milestone, in Portugal, Decree-Law No. 7, of January 15, 2003, which regulates the Municipal Councils of Education and the elaboration of the Educational Charter. In Brazil, the same interval of time allows us to observe the consolidation of research produced in the context after the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (Law No. 9.394 of December 20, 1996) and the expansion of municipal education systems.

In the Portuguese case, the recent history of education is permeate by reforms that combine centralizing permanence and decentralization movements. After the Revolution of April 25, 1974, the municipalities gradually assumed responsibilities related to educational investment, social and educational support and, later, to the local planning of the education network.

From 2003, with the Educational Charter and the mandatory constitution of the Municipal Councils of Education, local government began to occupy a more visible place in the coordination of educational policy. Even so, the literature highlights that this decentralization coexists with vertical regulation mechanisms, which limits municipal autonomy and reconfigures the role of councils.

In Brazil, the decentralization of education was intensified with the Federal Constitution of 1988 and with the aforementioned Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDBEN/1996, acronym in Portuguese), which recognized the municipality as an entity of federation with its own responsibilities and opened the possibility of organizing municipal education systems.

In this context, decentralization no longer means only an administrative redistribution and is associated with educational reforms guided by international agendas, management efficiency and expansion of local responsibilities, a phenomenon already questioned by Novaes and Fialho (2010).

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Although Portugal and Brazil have different institutional arrangements, in both cases, the CME are articulated to the debates on decentralization, territoriality of policies and democratization of management. It is at this point that the categories territory and local power become central to the interpretation of the analyzed material.

The data were produced by surveying, selecting and analyzing theses and dissertations available in Open Access Scientific Repository of Portugal (RCAAP, acronym in Portuguese) and Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (BDTD, acronym in Portuguese). The research corpus was organized from the stages of annotated, systematized, categorized and propositional bibliography, according to the methodological tradition of the state of knowledge.

Thus, the objective of the article is to discuss how the selected academic productions conceive territory and local power within the scope of the Municipal Councils of Education, seeking to highlight approximations, tensions and specificities in the two national contexts. The text is organized into three movements: presentation of the methodological path and the corpus of

research, discussion of decentralization policies and analysis of the conceptualizations of territory and local power.

State of knowledge about Municipal Councils of Education: methodological path and constitution of the corpus of research

According to Morosini, Kohls-Santos and Bittencourt (2021), state of knowledge research is understood as a movement of identification, registration, categorization, reflection and synthesis of the scientific production of an area in a given space-time. From this perspective, the focus of the study falls on dissertations and thesis that address the Municipal Councils of Education in articulation with territory and local power.

The search for dissertations and thesis was carried out in the repositories of Portugal and Brazil in different combinations of descriptors and filters, using the time frame from 2003 to 2024. In RCAAP (Portugal), the first exploration took place in May 2024 and combined the term Municipal Councils of Education with title filters, documentary typology and time frame (2003 to 2024).

Subsequently, the search was carried out for the descriptors: Municipal Councils of Education, territory and local power in the fields of title and subject, with no return of results. Then, the search was carried out keeping only the term Municipal Councils of Education, associated with the filters of period and types of production, resulting in 18 works, of which six were master's thesis related to the theme.

Table 1 summarizes this search movement and corresponds to the annotated bibliography stage. In the floating reading of the material, it was found that the expression Municipal Councils of Education appeared explicitly in the titles, while territory and local power appeared more frequently in the abstracts and chapters dedicated to the contextualization of educational decentralization in Portugal.

Table 1– Works selected in the RCAAP (Portugal) database

Nº	Title	Author	Type	University	Year
01	Decentralization of education in the Municipality of Setúbal - The role of the Municipal Council of Education	Bico, Jorge Miguel dos Santos	Master's thesis	Open University	2019
02	The role of municipal education councils in local education policy	Oliveira, Mário Luís Soares de	Master's thesis	Open University	2009
03	The role of municipal education councils in defining local education policies: the case of the municipality of Marinha Grande	Pedrosa, Lígia Maria Moreira	Master's thesis	IC-Online Polytechnic of Leiria	2015
04	Municipal education councils: education policy and public action	Cruz, Clara Freire da	Master's thesis	Lisbon University	2012
05	Municipal Councils of Education: logic and dynamic of action	Marques, Gilmar Torres Lima Pinheiro	Master's thesis	Minho University	2013
06	The Municipal Council of Education and its role in the relations between the Municipality and the School Groups: a case study	Torres, Sara Maria Sousa	Master's thesis	Minho University	2018

Source: prepared by the authors.

Thus, from the productions found, it was verified which texts were within the scope proposed for the research, we select six productions that constitute a database on the conceptions of territory and local power in the context of the Municipal Councils of Education of Portugal.

The academic productions mapped in the Portuguese context (Bico, 2019; Cruz, 2012; Marques, 2013; Oliveira, 2009; Pedrosa, 2015 and Torres, 2018) reveal tensions among decentralization policies, conceptions of territory and the exercise of local power, in which the CME was created as a space for participation and a mechanism of regulation and control of the central administration over the local.

However, the territory is understood not only as a geographical space, but as a place of negotiation, power and decision built socially and politically (Bico, 2019; Pedrosa, 2015). In this regard, the authors point to the territorialization of educational policies as the necessary articulation between the different decision-making bodies and the approximation of the center to the periphery (Bico, 2019).

With regard to local power, the productions distinguish democratic decentralization and municipalization/administrative non concentration (Bico, 2019; Oliveira, 2009), which reveals, through case studies, the gap between the legislative text and the context of practice.

The search in the BDTD (Brazil), made in July 2024, with the same time frame (2003-2024), initially resulted in 573 works with the descriptor Municipal Councils of Education in all fields. With the refinement of the search for the title, 31 productions were selected (19 thesis and 12 dissertations).

The Brazilian context shows that the figure of the Municipal Councils of Education predates the Federal Constitution of 1988, but gains new centrality with the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (1996), when it starts to integrate, in a more organic way, the structure of the municipal management of education.

The municipalities, in the sphere of the organization of national education, as well as the other entities of the Federation, are organized in education systems, acting in a collaborative regime (Brasil, 1996, art. 8º). The competences assumed by the municipalities, among which is that of "[...] issuing complementary rules for their education system" (Brasil, 1996, art. 11) and that of "[...] authorizing, accrediting and supervising the establishments of its education system" (BRASIL, 1996, art. 11), made it possible for the CME to expand their functions to normative bodies.

In this sense, the volume of dissertations and thesis found in the search, while revealing the movements of creation of municipal education systems, based on Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDBEN/96), portrays the scenario of studies produced in the field of educational policies, especially the Municipal Councils of Education. We chose to analyze the title of each of the scientific productions in order to select the works according to the objectives of the study.

Although the initial volume was significant, the exploratory phase showed that only 66 works were directly related to the Municipal Councils of Education. Of this set, six scientific productions – two dissertations and four thesis – were chosen because they presented greater adherence to the objective of the study.

Table 2 – Works selected in the BDTD (Brasil) database

Nº	Title	Author	Type	University	Year
01	Municipal Councils of Education in Goiás: historicity, movements and possibilities	Alves, Edson Ferreira.	Master's thesis	The Federal University of Goiás	2011
02	The Municipal Council of Education of Sorocaba/SP: democratic management and the search for socially referenced quality	Almenara, Gilsemara Vasques Rodrigues.	Master's thesis	Universidade Federal de São Carlos	2018
03	Education and territorial development: an analysis of the performance of the municipal council of education of Teixeira de Freitas BA.	Carvalho, Cecilia Maria Mourão.	Dissertation	University of the State of Bahia	2019
04	The Municipal Council of Education in Brazil: political practices and public deliberation in Nova Iguaçu.	Oliveira, Otair Fernandes de	Dissertation	State University of Rio de Janeiro	2008
05	The municipal council of education of São José do Rio Preto: participation and citizenship	Silva, Ben-Hur Ulisses da	Master's thesis	São Paulo State University	2010
06	The municipal council of education as a space for participation in educational decisions and the democratization of public management in the municipality of Atibaia-SP	Pereira, Sandra	Master's thesis	Universidade Estadual de Campinas	2013

Source: prepared by the authors.

The productions selected in the BDTD (Alves, 2011; Almenara, 2018; Carvalho, 2019; Oliveira, 2008; Pereira, 2013 and Silva, 2010) show the path of CME in Brazil, highlighting their transition from advisory bodies to

normative instances of education systems after the Federal Constitution of 1988. Conceptually, the studies understand the territory as the space for manifesting the diversity of the population and formulating educational policies aimed at local demands.

The discussions on local power and the distinction between state and government agencies show the lack of autonomy of the CME. In practice, the collegiate bodies end up being a bureaucratic space to legitimize the decisions of the local Executive.

The systematized bibliography consisted of 12 academic works: six located in RCAAP and six, in BDTD. The research corpus allowed us to compare temporalities, analytical approaches and ways of questioning the role of CME within education decentralization policies in Portugal and Brazil.

In Portugal, the selected works are concentrated between 2007 and 2018 and follow the institutional consolidation of the CME and the debates on local regulation, Educational Charter, territorialization and limits of municipal autonomy.

In Brazil, the selected publications are located between 2008 and 2019 and dialogue with themes such as municipalization, democratic management, participation, local regulation and social control. In both contexts, studies show that the performance of CME is redefined according to the cycles of state reform and the political-administrative arrangements of education.

The productions analyzed in both realities demonstrate the distance between the text of the policy and the context of the practice (Ball, 2021). Although the legal frameworks of Brazil (Federal Constitution of 1988) and Portugal (Basic Law of the Educational System) ensure democratic management and decentralization, the data point to a supervised and bureaucratized participation within the CME in the municipal political arena.

The reorganization of the material into analytical categories – categorized bibliography – guided the discussion of two central themes: policies of decentralization of education in Portugal and Brazil and territory and local power in the field of action of the Municipal Councils of Education.

In addition to the central corpus of the research, studies and legal diplomas were mobilized as theoretical and normative support that help to

understand the recent framework of educational decentralization in Portugal, without considering them, however, as part of the main set of dissertations and thesis analyzed.

Policies to decentralize education in Portugal and Brazil

The theme of decentralization is recurrent in scientific works in both Portugal and Brazil, considering that CME are part of this process in the area of education. In both countries, the decentralization of education is constituted from the phenomenon of globalization, which arises with neoliberal ideology and transnational influences.

Understood by Akkari (2011) as a polysemous process of redistribution of power, the decentralization of education is only consolidated when the transfer of skills is accompanied by the due contribution of financial resources (Mota, 2020).

Akkari (2011, p. 9) records that the guidelines provided by international agencies "[...] varies according to the countries and regions of the world, generating new forms of regulation of national educational policies". In this sphere, in the context of Portugal, the decentralization of powers to local authorities began to gain strength in the 1990s, with the country's entry into the European Economic Community (EEC), today the European Union. In Brazil, the context of international influence is no different. The speeches of UNESCO and the World Bank were materialized in educational policies, as well as in other developing countries.

In Portugal, the new form of regulation of the education system has gradually defined different competences for municipalities. In Brazil, with the recognition in the 1988 Federal Constitution of municipalities as entities of the federation, responsibilities have been redefined up to the possibility for them to establish their own educational systems (Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education – Law No. 9,394/96).

In this area, in different scenarios, the Municipal Council of Education "[...] is part of a broader policy of decentralization of education [...]" (Cruz, 2012, p. 5). Cruz's (2012) doctoral dissertation, Municipal education councils:

education policy and public action, states that the creation of the CME in Portugal is the result of a public policy that has been put into practice. By making a political analysis, the author establishes relationships with different assumptions that deal with public action, regulation and knowledge.

In the empirical context, the analysis of 11 CME of the municipalities of the urban community of Lezíria do Tejo indicated the limits and potential of the process of decentralization of education and the relevance of the mobilization of different knowledge produced by the actors who work in each CME.

In the context of practice, the existence of different movements of control of the central administration over the local administration is still perceived. The study by Cruz (2012) records that the Municipal Council of Education has been constituted, since its mandatory creation, as an instrument of regulation.

The spaces of autonomy experienced by the municipalities, since Decree-Law No. 7/2003, reveal actions intentionally planned by the central power to implement "[...] in each local space a structure formatted to achieve certain objectives and comply with certain political principles" (Cruz, 2012, p. 257).

However, in addition to the standards produced, there are local spaces for the construction and dissemination of knowledge, participation and discussion of educational policies. These spaces, which are configured within decentralization policies, entitled CME, have acted in the structure of municipal education management in different ways. Looking at the decentralization process in each local space and the role of CME has been a challenge in the academic context of Portugal. The number of scientific publications found in the searches is an example of how much progress is needed regarding the process of discussion and implementation of democratic municipal educational management.

Portugal, in the context of the educational policy of democratization of education, has comings and goings, in which the theme of decentralization needs to be constantly recovered. Each normative act, since the political revolution of April 25, 1974, demonstrates the attempts and the need to deepen decentralization and the exercise of local power.

Oliveira's thesis (2009), which discussed the role of Municipal Councils of Education in local educational policy, highlights the emergence

of understanding their limitations and their potential for action in order to seek other ways. The role of CME in defining local education policies, according to Pedrosa (2015), is reduced, which implies the lack of interest on the part of the councilors of the municipality studied.

Marques (2013, p. 5), when analyzing the logic and dynamic of action of the CME, the attention is drawing to the "[...] incongruities and ambiguities between the normative record and the practices [...]" and highlights that the concepts of "decentralization, autonomy and territorialization have a rhetorical meaning, representing processes of legitimation of political-ideological orientations".

The concerns of the scientific field tension challenge the performance of the Municipal Councils of Education, in Portugal, in relation to their role from the legal framework built in the structure of local education since the obligation of its existence.

In Brazil, with the promulgation of the Federal Constitution of 1988, social rights were recognized, as well as social participation and democratic management. In the area of education, the democratic management of public education (art. 206, item VI, of the Federal Constitution of 1988) demarcates the need to institute mechanisms of social participation, so that it is possible to articulate between political and civil society.

In this sense, decentralization policies produced in Brazil, resulting from the influences of international organizations, enabled municipalities to create their own education systems (Brasil, 1996) as autonomous entities of the federation. This legal framework guaranteed the creation of Municipal Councils of Education, in addition to expanding their functions as normative bodies of this new local structure, based on Law no. 9.394/96.

Thus, with their organization defined in municipal law and with advisory, deliberative, propositional, mobilizing, monitoring and social control, normative and supervisory functions, the CME of Brazil have also promoted a scenario of challenges in the conjuncture of municipal education systems.

Although the bodies have guaranteed their autonomy and their functions defined by the normative acts, the context of the practice presents tensions and weaknesses with regard to the exercise of local power based on the specificities of the territory. Alves (2011, p. 39), in the study related to

the CME of Goiás, points out that, from the 1990s, "[...] the councils began to be incorporated into the government apparatus as bureaucratic instruments of centralization of actions in favor of the surveillance of the state machine [...]".

By recovering the historicity of the institutionalization processes of the councils, Alves (2011) distinguishes decentralization and non-concentration as movements that produce distinct effects on local power: while the former can expand the decision-making capacity of territorial actors, the latter tends to preserve the control of the center over the administrative periphery.

According to the author, the movements observed in the context of practice exhibit a distortion of the assumptions of the 1988 Federal Constitution, considering the nearly decade-long period of activity until the enactment of the Basic Law of the Educational System, "[...] which sought to remedy the educational desires to meet the demands, the rationalization of resources and the centralization of public policies" (Alves, 2011, p. 40).

In the study by Almenara (2018, p. 7), when analyzing the main mechanisms and strategies that guide the induction of democratic management from the organization and functioning of the CME of Sorocaba/SP, the need for decentralization of the state administration is related to the advancement of the autonomy of the municipalities. However, in the perception of the board members, "the body presents a marked dependence on the municipal executive, with regard to structural issues such as: its own budget, its actions, physical structure for its operation and direction of agendas in relevant educational matters".

Oliveira (2008, p. 93) recalls, in the study carried out to analyze the political role of the CME in the context of the democratization of education policy in the municipality of Nova Iguaçu, that the implementation of the CME is not only a Brazilian reality, from the 1990s, but that the way in which the process of transferring responsibilities to the municipalities occurred contradicted "[...] the spirit of decentralization embedded in the federative framework of the country, post-1988".

The author, when referring to the issue, states that "[...] the policy of decentralization via induced municipalization [...]" (Oliveira, 2008, p. 93) was adopted in the field of practice, since the municipalities ended up assuming

responsibilities beyond those provided for constitutionally, such as the maintenance of adult literacy programs and the provision of school transport.

Silva (2010) rescued the phases of the decentralization process in Brazil and emphasized that they can be understood

[...] in its political sense as part of the process of democratization, insofar as it [characterized] the expansion of the democratic participation of society in the destinies of education. Non-concentration appeared as a related process, by guaranteeing administrative, decision-making and action autonomy to local bodies (Silva, 2010, p. 54).

In the wake of this debate, Pereira (2013) problematizes the coexistence between democratizing discourses and neoliberal rationalities, showing how participation, citizenship and municipalization can be re-signified within the reforms of the State.

In the field of State reforms, both in Portugal and in Brazil, decentralization is the result of a global trend. In the case of Brazil, decentralization policies in the area of education are part of the guidelines of international organizations arising from cooperation agreements involving developing countries.

In different scenarios, the discourses around decentralization and autonomy are linked to a market logic and an attempt to build a local educational policy in the context of practice. Municipal Councils of Education are potential spaces for dialogue, social participation and the construction of a new policy of democratization.

To this end, it is necessary to understand the limitations and potential of CME, as well as the specificities of the territory and the effective exercise of local power so that municipal educational management is democratic.

Territory and local power in the field of action of the Municipal Councils of Education

The global movements related to educational reforms insert the debate on the transformations of the role of the State, in which the circulation of different concepts expands in national educational policies. Coming from guidelines at

the international level, the concepts demarcate the discourses and practice of educational systems in different ways.

In Portugal, the centrality of the term territory is intensified with the new regulation of the education system, insofar as the transfer of competences to municipalities shifts the focus from the central administration to the local space as a place of coordination, mediation and mobilization.

In the study on the Municipal Council of Education of Setúbal, Bico (2019) points out that Portuguese decentralization was strongly conditioned by guidelines, legislation and financing from supranational bodies. This scenario helps to explain why the territory appears, in the literature, as a geographical base and political-administrative scale for the production of educational policies.

In view of the paths of the decentralization process, the educational reforms and the current regulatory framework that demarcates the transfer of competences to the municipalities, there is a need to discuss the terms territory and local power in the conceptual scope.

The study by Pedrosa (2015) situates the concept of municipality, emphasizing that

[...] the municipality is the place where the action takes place, it is the place of multiplicity, of difference, and of unpredictability, it is where the means and available resources are mobilized, and where constraints, insufficiencies, and potentialities emerge, which arise in association with the doing of things [...] (Pedrosa, 2015, p. 13).

In this bias, thinking about education in the municipality is to direct the look to a specific place, full of history, knowledge, practices, desires and needs. This place, in the light of the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic of 1976, is recognized in the context of the democratic organization of the State and has assumed, over the years, competences that demarcate the implementation of decentralization policies.

In the logic of local development and social participation, in Portugal and Brazil, CME are important mechanisms in the scope of educational management and public policies. Despite this, they have different characteristics,

as they constitute a context in which different actors come together to discuss education at the territory level.

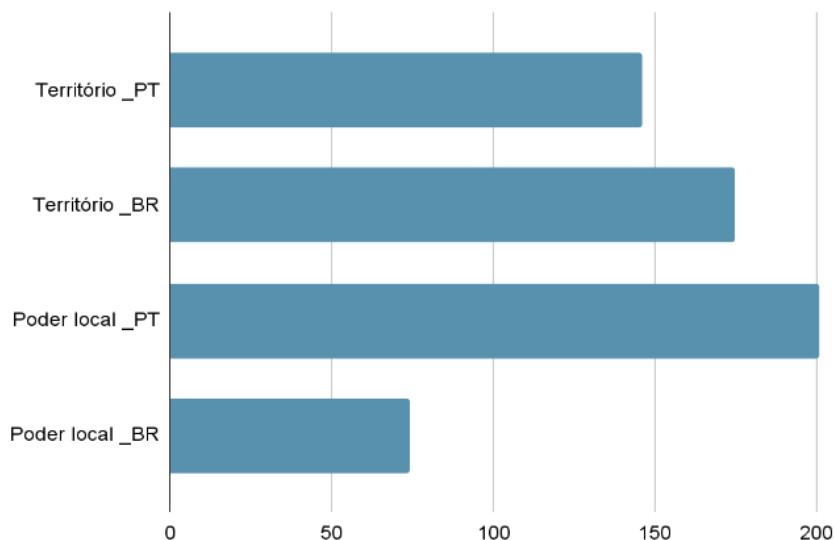
In this sense, while in Portugal the CME have an advisory and support role in decision-making, in Brazil, the functions are broader, focused on standardization and supervision, which determine different levels of decentralization in the education system. However, even with well-defined responsibilities, the exercise of local power in the context of practice becomes challenging in the countries in question.

The scientific productions demonstrate the different levels of autonomy and responsibility of the Municipal Councils of Education and emphasize the emergency of looking at the local. This emergency refers to the need to direct public actions to the territory where people live so that local power can be exercised to respond to the demands and needs of the population in the area of education.

Graph 1 shows that the terms territory and local power do not appear with the same proportion in the analyzed academic productions. In the Brazilian case, territory is more frequent, but, in general, it is associated with geographic space and regional inequalities, without equivalent conceptual deepening. In Portugal, although the quantitative recurrence is lower, the debate tends to be more conceptual and linked to the territorialization of educational policies.

Cruz (2012, p. 44) understands the territory as a space for meeting, learning and production of territorialized knowledge. Such understanding extends the reading of the municipality beyond its administrative dimension and reinforces its condition as an arena for formulation, dispute and mediation of public education policies.

Graph 1 – Frequency of the term territory and local power in the scientific productions of Portugal and Brazil



Source: prepared by the authors.

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This place, by assuming different competences and responsibilities of the central power, becomes, in the educational area, a space in which the exercise of local power is configured for the formulation of public policies according to the specificities of a given reality.

In the productions, the frequency of the term local power is higher in Portugal, and the concepts are related to the new political reality from the 1974 Revolution. Marques (2013, p. 17) records the development of the "[...] concept of local with the idea of a model of participatory democracy, foreseeing a greater involvement of people in decisions and in the construction of their own future".

In Brazil, the frequency of the term local power is timider. But, at the conceptual level, it represents a space of greater proximity to the citizen, in the light of participatory democracy. Pereira (2013), who discusses the CME as a space for participation in educational decisions and the democratization of public management in the municipality of Atibaia-SP, indicates that local

power unfolds both in the sphere of decentralization of competences and in the promotion of social participation as a foundation of democratic management.

In this sense, since municipalities are centered on a perspective of exercising autonomy, it is relevant to understand the meaning of local power and look at this local as a space that enhances participation and the construction of educational policies that need to involve different decision-making processes.

Municipal Councils of Education assume a fundamental role in educational management processes in the context of efforts to legitimize the local and community participation and in decisions related to the territory. Almenara (2018, p. 31) points out that "[...] local power is more comprehensive than local government, in order to interfere in public policies, as it enters the local government".

In this movement, in which, from 1990, the place begins to gain space in different contexts, it is clear that the Brazilian municipal autonomy in the area of education is configured with the creation of education systems. Carvalho (2019) understands that:

This is a great innovation, considering the autonomy of the municipality to organize, according to local needs, a network of schools maintained and administered by the municipal power, a managing body, the Municipal Department of Education and a normative and supervisory body – the Municipal Council of Education (Carvalho, 2019, p. 61).

In Portugal, the movement in relation to the autonomy of the municipality occurs in the school context. The educational system, according to the Basic Law of the Educational System (Law No. 46/86), covers an "organized set of structures and diversified actions" (Portugal, 1986, art. 1), in which the Ministry of Education is responsible for coordinating educational policy.

In this logic, the administrative structure related to education in the local context enables the autonomy of schools in the pedagogical scope, school hours, management of non-teaching staff and curriculum management, with local management responsible for investment, equipment and maintenance of buildings, school meals and management of non-teaching staff.

The CME end up integrating the local structure to comply with the democratic principles provided for in the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic of 1976 and in the Basic Law of the Educational System (1986), but they do not exercise, as in Brazil, functions that enable the autonomy of the municipality with regard to educational management.

Although the local power model is related to social participation and local autonomy, the path taken in Portugal demarcates a context focused on an "instrumental autonomy" (Torres, 2018, p. 123), since the municipality's performance is characterized in the management of resources in the educational field.

The author reinforces that the CME, from an empirical perspective, has sought to exercise its role, opening the space for debate and moving towards the "[...] definition of a structured and complementary educational network that meets educational needs" (Torres, 2018, p. 124).

Local power, if understood as a "[...] space capable of better promoting social development due to the proximity between rulers and governed [...]" (Oliveira, 2008, p. 71), can contribute significantly to the process of democratization of municipal educational management. To this end, it is necessary to exercise practices consistent with the principles of democratic management in the light of the conceptualizations of territory and local power.

In the view of Cury (2007), democratic management is a collective exercise of autonomy and participation, basic principles for the democratization of public policies.

In this dimension, the CME are bodies that enhance the exercise of citizenship, autonomy, social participation and the construction of educational policies that are closer to the daily lives of the population. However, the action of the CME in the context of practice causes tensions, challenges and experiences that need to enter the debate of the field of municipal educational policies and management, since the concepts of territory and local power are redefined as transnational influences are materialized in national policies and in the context of practice.

Final considerations

The analysis of the selected dissertations and thesis showed that the Municipal Councils of Education occupy a strategic place, although stressed, in the processes of decentralization of education in Portugal and Brazil. In both contexts, the literature records the CME democratic potentials, but also shows institutional, normative and political limits so that they become effective spaces for deliberation and construction of territorially situated educational policies.

In both countries, the territory is redefined as a space for negotiation and decision-making, although social practice is marked by subordination, making the CME a merely formal and advisory body.

In the Portuguese case, the configuration of CME stands out as instances of coordination and consultation that favor the territorialization of national policies, without fully breaking with the centralized logic of the educational system. In the Brazilian case, the formal scope of attributions stand out – advisory, normative, deliberative and supervisory – and the persistence of dependency bonds in relation to the municipal Executive.

20 The state of knowledge allowed, therefore, to identify an important analytical convergence, which constitutes the assumption that decentralization does not, by itself, produce democratization. Its effects depend on the way power is redistributed, the institutional resources available, the capacity for participation and the incidence of local actors.

Another relevant result is the differentiated place given to the categories territory and local power. The territory appears as a key to understanding specificities, inequalities and possibilities of educational action in the municipal space; local power, in turn, refers to the quality of the relations between the State, civil society and collegiate decision-making bodies.

By bringing together and comparing productions from the two countries, the study shows that the democratization of municipal educational management requires more than a favorable legal design. It requires councils with political and technical autonomy, material operating conditions, circulation of information, plurality of representation and the ability to focus on the formulation, monitoring and evaluation of educational policies.

In this sense, understanding the territory as a space for construction, learning, dialogue and participation contributes to shifting the analysis of CME from a merely bureaucratic perspective to a political, relational and democratic perspective, committed to the concrete needs of the populations.

Finally, it is concluded that territory and local power are essential categories to analyze the performance of the Municipal Councils of Education and to think about future agendas of research and intervention. Strengthening these instances means expanding the possibilities of citizenship, social control and production of educational policies sensitive to local realities.

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