

Reinhard Mohn Prize Awarded to Brazilian Citizen Participation Project

Chancellor Angela Merkel gives presentation speech

The Brazilian city of Recife has been awarded the Bertelsmann Stiftung's Reinhard Mohn Prize -- the first time the prize has been given. The city's mayor João da Costa Bezerra Filho accepted the €150,000 award today from Liz Mohn, vice-chair of the Bertelsmann Stiftung Executive Board. German Chancellor Angela Merkel gave the presentation speech, addressing an audience of 550 during the award ceremony held at Gütersloh's municipal theater. Home to 1.7 million people, the Brazilian metropolis was chosen to receive the prize for its exemplary Participatory Budget program, which allows the public to play an extensive role in determining how city funds are spent.

"With its citizen participation program, the city of Recife shows how wide-ranging collaboration and partnership can be used to reduce the distance between policymakers and the public," said Dr. Gunter Thielen, CEO and chairman of the Bertelsmann Stiftung. "The program complements the city's representative democracy by allowing citizens to play a direct role in decision-making processes, together with city administrators. It's a very good example of how the public can get involved in government, an idea often advocated by Reinhard Mohn."

Since 2001, its citizens have been extensively involved in shaping Recife's development. More than 100,000 adults and young people participate every year in forums and on the Internet, making suggestions for urban development projects and monitoring them as they are implemented. They also set priorities in a number of policymaking areas. The participatory processes therefore allow the city to be present "on the ground" and to share responsibility with the public. To do so, it has built a comprehensive network of paid workers and volunteers, which ensures people are involved throughout the year in making and implementing decisions.

Located on Brazil's northeastern coast, Recife is the capital of the state of Pernambuco. Expansive beaches with ornate buildings stand opposite the city's slums, which are home to more than 50 percent of the population - a contrast often found in Brazil. The cornerstone for deliberative governance was laid in Brazil in the 1990s when 20 years of military dictatorship came to an end and democracy was introduced, thereby providing Recife with a chance to reorient

itself politically. For the public, however, the change was seen as a chance to improve quality of life, something that was difficult to achieve with the limited public funds at the city's disposal. As a result, in 1993 Recife began trying to get the public more involved in decision-making processes - and thereby increase awareness of the problems the city was facing while further developing its democratic processes. The first comprehensive, long-term approach to citizen participation only appeared in 2001, however, when the Orcamento Participativo (Participatory Budget) was introduced.

In order to award the 2011 Reinhard Mohn Prize, which focused on the topic "Vitalizing democracy through participation", the Bertelsmann Stiftung carried out a global search to identify government organizations that have been successful in including the public in political decision-making processes. A total of 123 institutions and communities applied. Of the seven finalists, Recife's Participatory Budget program received the most votes during the online voting.

About the Bertelsmann Stiftung:

The Bertelsmann Stiftung is dedicated to serving the common good. It executes projects in its four core areas of education, business and social affairs, health, and international relations, and strives to promote peaceful coexistence among the world's diverse cultures. Through the example of its civic engagement, it wants to encourage others to support their own communities as well. Founded in 1977 as a registered charity, the Bertelsmann Stiftung is majority shareholder of Bertelsmann AG. Structured as a private operating foundation, it is politically non-partisan and works independently of Bertelsmann AG. The Bertelsmann Stiftung currently employs 316 people and has a budget of approximately €60 million.

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