



RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARLIAMENTS: STUDY ON THE CENTER OF SUPPORT TO THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MINAS GERAIS

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Abstract: The study aims to understand the relationship between the Legislative Assembly of Minas Gerais (ALMG) and the municipal parliaments, through the Center of Support to the City Council (Ceac). In this regard, it analyzes the creation, institutionalization and performance of Ceac, in view of the institutional development of the ALMG and federal relations after the Federal Constitution of 1988. In order to do this, the work carried out qualitative research, exploratory approach with bibliographical research, documentary and case study. The research concludes, in general terms, that Ceac seeks to contribute to the improvement of municipal legislative activities and constitutes an interface for the input of information from local parliaments.

Keywords: Federalism; Legislative; Cooperation; State legislatures; City Council.

1 Introduction

In this article, we discuss changes in the relations between federal entities, with emphasis on the legislative branch. The present study points out that the Federal Constitution of 1988 brought about a significant change in the design of the Brazilian Federation by guaranteeing municipalities the status of federative entities and ensuring “privileged status of political autonomy for decentralized federative entities” (ZIMMERMANN, 2005). However, by expanding the direct competence of municipalities in areas that were once the responsibility of the state or federal government, this decentralization process created a series of challenges, given the substantiated heterogeneity between the entities and the limited institutional capacity of most Brazilian municipalities (VELOSO, 2011; SOUZA, 2005). Thus, the study observes that the low capacity levels of local governments present a challenge to achieving federative balance.

Within this perspective, despite the essential role of municipal councils to facilitate meeting the demands of the local population, due to the greater approximation between parliamentarians and citizens (ILB, 2016), municipal legislature faces institutional obstacles to the fulfillment of its duties. Thus, despite the fact that this discussion is predominately focused on the executive branch, the recent historical federative arrangement also impacted relations in the legislative branch. In effect, the inequalities and reduced institutional capacity of most

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municipalities impact the quality of the functions performed by city councils (SILVA, 2014; RAUPP; PINHO, 2011). As a result, federative cooperation, as had by the executive, has been trending in the legislative through institutional networks that strengthen Brazilian Parliament (RIBEIRO, 2010).

Given this context, the study aims to understand the relationship between the Legislative Assembly of Minas Gerais (ALMG) and municipal parliaments through City Council Support Centers (Ceac). The choice of the Minas Gerais Assembly for the purpose of this study is motivated by its differentiated level of institutional development in relation to the other legislative houses, the institution being a national distinguished reference (ANASTASIA, 2001; ANASTASIA; SANTOS, 2016; QUINTÃO, 2015; DULCI, 2016; FARIA; DULCI, 2005; COSTA, 2005). In this scenario, the role of Ceac is of particular interest due to the performance of its attributes in Minas Gerais legislative houses with a direct public composed of 8,481 councilors (TRE-MG, 2016) and city council servants, as well as in State Parliament. Of note, this governmental body aims to enhance municipal legislative activities while constituting an interface for the input of information for the Legislative Assembly of Minas Gerais (ALMG).

In this scenario, through the institutionalist approach, this study seeks to elucidate the institutional development of ALMG (ANASTASIA, 2001; DULCI, 2016) and its implication in the creation of Ceac. To begin with, when establishing relations with the political environment, ALMG carries out intentional processes that modify its organizational structure, and then the institution shapes the political environment by expanding its influence over the scenario of other organizations. Thus, ALMG's institutional development trajectory, characterized by activities aimed at strengthening legislative capacities, is driven by the conception of environmental influence (PERROW, 1972) and by the perspective of intentional change (CAMPBELL, 2007). Hence, its presented the institutional development process that ALMG has over the last decades and its proximity to municipal officials, especially city councilors. Such approximation becomes even more evident in the process of interiorization of ALMG, which implements various actions within a state, aiming, among others, at strengthening municipal government power (COSTA, 2005; FARIA; DULCI, 2005). In this context, the Assembly expanded its partnership with city councils in implementing its interiorization process and bringing various demands to be processed internally, which has culminated in the creation of an institutional relationship network that encompasses municipal councils (ALMG, 2006).

In summary, as an organ of the legislative branch of Minas Gerais, Ceac is part of the scenario of change in the relations between federal entities and the institutional development trajectory of ALMG. In this context, the central objective of this study is to analyze the creation, institutionalization and operation of Ceac amidst the institutional development process of the Legislative Assembly of Minas Gerais and its federative relations following the Federal Constitution of 1988.

The article is structured in the following order: the first section “Municipal Legislative Branch and Institutional Capacity” outlines the role of municipalities in connection with the constitutional reformulation of the relations between federal entities, as well as points out that limited institutional capacity represents obstacles to the performance of the attributions of the municipal legislature. In sequence, “The Legislative Assembly of Minas Gerais and the Institutional Environment”, expounds on the uniqueness of ALMG's institutional development and its ability to influence the parliamentary environment. The following section, “Case study: City Council Support Centers of ALMG”, discusses the context of creation, the institutionalization process of Ceac and its operation. Lastly, “Final Considerations”.

2 Methodology

Regarding methodological procedures, the present study can be classified as qualitative, with an exploratory approach through a case study. This qualitative research analyzes CEAC based on the institutional documents of ALMG, while not using information from city councils. Within this perspective, the study developed falls within the scope of exploratory research, as it was conducted with the objective of “providing an overview about a certain fact”, especially when “the chosen theme has never been adequately explored, making it difficult to formulate precise and operable hypotheses” (GIL, 2008, p. 27).

In order to subsidize the data collection, bibliographic and documentary research were used, as well as semi-structured interviews with five permanent employees who, at the time of the study, comprised the technical staff of Ceac, subsequently identified from 1 to 5. These professionals linked to the governmental body occupy higher education positions in the areas of communication – public relations and journalism – and law, with a staff composed of one man and four women. Were interviewed four civil servants with tenure positions as a legislative analysts for public relations; and one with a position as legislative analyst consultant in the field of Administrative and Constitutional Law. Some of the interviewees have been part of Ceac since its founding. The face-to-face meetings took place at the interviewees' workplace, between the months of October and December 2018, and were recorded with the consent of the participants. The transcripts maintained the literality of the interviewees' speech, including the peculiarities that orality implies.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the use of information from statistical sources, legal documents and the ALMG Activity Reports (between 2006 and 2019). Furthermore, institutional information authorized by the Assembly of Minas Gerais was also used, upon request and intermediated by Ceac, such as, for example, the reputation survey of ALMG and the demands to Ceac recorded in the Integration System with Citizens of ALMG.

3 Municipal Legislative Branch and Institutional Capacity

Municipalities are key players in the Federation of Brazil, given that the process of decentralization of the Constitution of '88 reformulated the relations between the federative entities and elevated the municipalities to the status of federated entity (MEIRELLES, 1998). As a result, the new entities are assigned an array of constitutional competencies, despite deep-set heterogeneities and distinct operational capacities. In this sense, Bonavides (2016, p.352) states that the municipal autonomy enacted by the Federal Constitution of '88 is the most considerable advance in protection and scope ever achieved in all the country's constitutional times, which evidences greater valorization of municipalities.

The advent of the Federal Constitution of '88 redefined the attributions of local government, resulting in the expansion of its responsibilities and the emergence of new demands for the municipal structure (VELOSO, 2011). As such, political decentralization expanded municipal competencies, while also resulting in a series of challenges. In this context, it should be noted that “the capacity of local governments to implement policies and to raise their own resources is highly differentiated” (SOUZA, 2005, p.116). Thus, subnational governments are attributed different capacities, due to the enormous financial, technical and management inequalities among entities (SOUZA, 2005). As a result, after the re-democratization process, city councils were also endowed with significantly greater powers and independence compared to the previous period (SILVA, 2014).

In this scenario, despite discussions being focusing mostly on the executive, this newer arrangement also impacted relations in the legislative branch. Thus, the inequalities and the limited institutional capacity of municipalities impact the quality of the functions performed by municipal councils. It should be noted that municipal legislature performs several functions, in addition to representing the population, such as, for example, the drafting of laws, the supervision of the public administration and political-parliamentary activity (RESENDE, 2015). In this sense, the tasks of city councils can be classified into five basic functions: legislative, merely deliberative, supervisory, adjudicative and organizational. However, “there is no watertight separation between functions; when the same action is taken by parliament, we can recognize the work of more than one function in effect” (RIBEIRO, 2012, p.23).

That being said, just as local management is marked by heterogeneity and limited institutional structure in most municipalities, the same occurs in municipal legislatures, with emphasis on their peculiar weaknesses. As a result, the generally deficient institutional capacity of city councils compromises the performance of their functions. Thus, the few studies carried out on municipal legislature point to characteristics related to low capacity to legislate and weak performance in the face of a strong executive (RAUPP; PINHO, 2011). In addition, in the process of integration of powers, the reduced capacity of the municipal council to define the local decision-making process and the “autonomy of the executive in relation to the legislative”

(KERBAUY, 2005) is clearly seen. The exchange of favors is a prominent feature in relations between municipal branches of government since, in the attempt to acquire political resources, councilors practice collaborative and obedient behavior in relation to the executive, thus often transforming the legislature into a “subservient power” (RAUPP; PINHO, 2011, p.125). Silva (2014, p.199) states that “if the legislative branch acts as a stamper of the acts of the executive branch, it is not because of the strength of the latter, but because of its own weakness”.

Within this perspective, some features of the profile of city councils diagnosed by the Brazilian Legislative Institute (2012) have been presented, such as: 89% of municipal legislative houses demand the revision/ updating of the standing rules; only 33% have computerized records of the processing of legislative propositions; 30% do not provide individual offices for parliamentarians; and 76% do not have a legislative library. In addition, 52.3% of municipal parliaments do not regulate access to documents, a clue to the minimal degree of institutionalization of their city councils (RIBEIRO, 2010, p.133). Furthermore, is highlighted that Brazilian city councils have an unequal structure, however, the general picture is of “deficient professional training of the legislature” (SILVA, 2014, p.21). In this scenario, Silva (2014, p.24) also points out that the low-level professional training of municipal legislative houses implies that the working conditions of legislators and advisers is “beyond hearsay”. For example, in most municipalities councilors do not rely on computers to perform their functions. Another relevant aspect is the tenure of the municipal council servants, with 29% effective and 71% commissioned. That is, most of the staff body does not have a permanent bond, a factor that can hinder the institutional learning process (ILB, 2012). In this scenario, it can be said that “municipal legislators are poorly professionalized and lack physical and human infrastructure” (SILVA, 2014, p.199).

Thus, given the low professionalization and sharp distinctions regarding the structures of city councils (SILVA, 2014), legislative houses have sought to organize themselves in networks, seeking to circulate information and exchange experiences by way of, for example, municipal council associations and Interlegis (RIBEIRO, 2010, p.204). Within this perspective, Ribeiro (2010, p.204) states that “the federative autonomy of political entities cannot diverge from their isolation,” since the Federation presupposes a tight-knit relationship between its entities. And continues by saying, “this is not a trend only in parliament, but in governments in general, and the executive branch have reached a most advanced level,” just as they have through consortia in a wide range of areas (RIBEIRO, 2010, p.204).

Thus, cooperation integrates the organization between federative entities, as well as in “horizontal (municipality-municipality) and vertical (state-municipality, the Federation-state-municipality) articulations of cooperation become necessary for the viability of the development of different public policies” (IBGE/MUNIC, 2016). Thus, an important trend in the institutional development of legislative houses has been constant interchange and cooperative action among

themselves (INÁCIO; ANASTASIA; SANTOS, 2016).

In this scenario, in order to reduce structural obstacles and heterogeneity in city councils, which is implied in the quality of the parliamentary activities performed, legislators have sought to organize themselves in institutional networks of cooperation. Thus, guided by the trend of federative dialogue and cooperation, the Legislative Assembly of Minas Gerais regards municipal councils “as privileged partners in its interiorization process” (RIBEIRO, 2010, p.204). To follow step in this parliamentary trend, ALMG developed an institutional space for relations with municipal legislators called City Council Support Centers.

4 The Legislative Assembly of Minas Gerais and Institutional Environment

In order to outline the scenario of how Ceac was created – an institutional innovation of ALMG – one should observe the uniqueness of the institutional development of the Legislative House of Minas Gerais (ANASTASIA, 2001; DULCI, 2016), as well as its ability to influence the parliamentary environment in inter-organizational relations. In this sense, guided by the classical institutionalist perspective that “organizations influence the environment in which they exist, and are influenced by it” (PERROW, 1972, p.125), it is evident that the development of the institution reflects how the legislative house relates to its environment, and vice versa.

On principle, within the institutional perspective, political or non-political institutions never operate in a void, since they are inserted or immersed in a web of other institutions and actors that constitute their environment. According to Perrow (1972, p. 78), all organizations have an environment consisting of other organizations, suppliers, competitors, customers or users, new technologies, in addition to the complex political and social environment in which they live. Moreover, “for any organization, the most important segment of the environment is the other organizations” (PERROW, 1972, p.127). The author argues that the relationship of institutions with the environment is permeated by instability and tension, and therefore organizations attempt to mitigate their insecurities and uncertainties. In addition, “many organizations try to stabilize and control these environmental influences, that is, try to cope with environmental changes” (PERROW, 1972, p.78). Perrow (1972) also presents some distinct strategies of institutions that seek to reduce possible threats from the environment, such as, for example, co-optation, reciprocity in competitive environments, the introduction of constant innovations, among others. As a result, when establishing relationships with the environment, whether seeking to minimize threats or expand their influence, organizations carry out processes that modify their organizational structure. Such processes can result in institutional development.

In this context, the concept of “institutional development” employed here “refers to the set of activities aimed at strengthening the capacities of the legislative branch” (UNDP apud MINAS GERAIS, 2009), which can occur from endogenous factors to the House itself or as a result from exogenous factors (ANASTASIA; SANTOS, 2016). In the case of ALMG, the

combination of endogenous and exogenous factors is presented in which “both add and complement each other in different levels of intensity” (QUINTÃO, 2015, p.132). Furthermore, according to Anastasia (2009, p.50), the institutional development process carried out by ALMG was accomplished through the combination of institutional change and institutional innovation. Thus, some practices arising from such institutional development can be classified as institutional changes, such as the Popular Participation Committee, and others as innovations, for example, legislative seminars and technical forums, among others (ANASTASIA, 2009, p.50).

It should be noted that intentional change, considered to be “deliberate effort to reorganize or otherwise modify existing institutions” (CAMPBELL, 2007, p.7) of ALMG occurs in the challenging scenario of informational asymmetry in relation to the executive (MADUREIRA, 2009; DULCI, 2016), a crisis of representativeness (ANASTASIA, 2001), changes in the context of re-democratization and the new demands of society (OLIVEIRA, 2009; DULCI, 2016). Thus, the Assembly of Minas Gerais has a differentiated reading of the political-institutional moment and endeavors to restructure itself, that is, "it chooses" to bring about institutional changes (ANASTASIA, 2001). Thus, for Quintão (2015, p.132), the innovations of the House are the expression of certain board pieces oriented to enact institutional changes and adapt the institution to the demands of the political moment.

In fact, Anastasia (2001) states that ALMG is the engineer behind important distinctive features of other state legislatures, highlighting the complexity of their internal organization resulting from the administrative reform promoted in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as the creation of institutionalized mechanisms of dialogue with society. This institutional modernization of ALMG signifies a "reordering of the work from an information perspective" seen as an important step to strengthen Parliament (SILAME, 2009).

Such institutional innovations are seen to have transformed the profile of the Assembly of Minas, leading to the reconstruction of its public image and placing it at the forefront of Brazilian assemblies (OLIVEIRA, 2009, P.12). Furthermore, in 2009, the second emblematic moment of its institutional trajectory can be seen, in which the Assembly of Minas Gerais rethinks its role in the context of new challenges and progressive parliamentary trends in Brazil and in the world, through the Strategic Direction 2010-2020 (MINAS GERAIS, 2010). Among its objectives, the Strategic Direction lists the commitment to “intensify articulation with the legislative houses” (MINAS GERAIS, 2010), a purpose in line with that of the City Council Support Centers.

In parallel, over the years, the proactive stance of the House can be observed, as well as attempts of interiorization and approximation to municipal parliaments, given that the Assembly also constitutes and influences the environment of other organizations. Such action can be inserted within the current trend of "interinstitutional dialogue" between democratic parliaments, therein favoring the expansion of institutional capacities (INÁCIO; ANASTASIA; SANTOS, 2016).

However, the challenge persists of State Parliament to expand its protagonism in the face of the implications of the Brazilian federative arrangement. According to the Constitution of '88, state legislative competence is almost always exercised "in a complementary and supplementary character," given the concentration of assignments in the sphere the Union and the expansion of municipal competencies (FLEURY, 2009, p.35-36). In effect, the combination of residual state powers and the expansion of executive initiatives in the legislative process redefined the scope of action of state parliaments. In this scenario, Fleury (2009, p.31) states that "instances of dialogue with society constitute one of the most significant and important (and perhaps the most essential) ways found by Minas Gerais Legislature to mitigate the strict limits imposed by a constitutional model." Thus, one should consider the proactive behavior of ALMG inserted in the context of constitutional implications for state legislatures.

However, it is also true that legislative houses are dynamic institutions and, although their constitutional duties are quite complex, many of them are still diversifying their modes of operation (RIBEIRO, 2012, p.9). As in the case of ALMG, which has been developing since the beginning of the 1990s an in-depth set of activities aimed at dialogue with the various segments of Minas Gerais society (FLEURY, 2009, p.32). In this context, trends of change impact Parliament's interactions with society and other powers of government (INÁCIO; ANASTASIA; SANTOS, 2016). In addition, it should be noted that "the institutional development of a legislative house has impacts on its political outputs" (ANASTASIA; SANTOS, 2016, p.18). As such, the institutional development carried out by ALMG over the last decades generates implications in the production of its results.

This broader concept [political outputs] may also include initiatives and activities to disseminate and induce "good practices" for society, government, and other legislative houses, as occurred with the legislative schools, with their activities to support the municipal council and with other institutional innovations developed by ALMG. (ANASTASIA; SANTOS, 2016, p.20).

Within this perspective, the concept of legislative outputs also includes the initiatives and activities carried out by the Legislative Assembly of Minas Gerais in the dissemination and induction of institutional qualification for other parliamentary houses. Ribeiro (2012, p. 9) points out that ALMG has numerous initiatives to assist municipal legislators in this modernization process. Therefore, through this behavior of ALMG the construction of a partnership path with municipal legislators can be seen, conducive to the strengthening of parliament. However, it is relevant to note that the Parliament of Minas Gerais is not extrapolating its functions in assuming such a position, but redefining them, without contending with constitutional order (RIBEIRO, 2012, p.9).

In addition, concerning the web of organizations and actors that the Assembly of Minas connects and operates, the proximity of the relationships that the institution has been building

over the years with municipal agents, especially with city councilors, is duly noted. Such relationship is underscored by technical and political processes, as well as comprised by many endeavors, such as the formation of institutional partnerships, undergoing training events, and also the direct articulation of municipal councilors with deputies, as each parliamentarian must maintain close political contact with its electoral base. Therefore, the municipal councilors of Minas Gerais are important players in the institutional environment of ALMG.

Thereby, institutional data provided by ALMG is presented to retrace the articulation of the municipal councilors with the state legislature. The first concerns the declaration of attendance of public officials at the Assembly, which represents the intense dialogue that municipal officials have been establishing in State Parliament, with 56,548 thousand statements made from 2015 to 2018. However, the number of actual visits is probably higher, as the statements are directly submitted to public officials and issued only upon request (MINAS GERAIS, 2015). The second refers to the reputation study of the Assembly. Such research shows that among the varied public audiences with which the house relates – the general public, public servants, state deputies, municipal representatives and organizations of civil society – its reputation is far greater among municipal representatives, also due to the positive spontaneous association of this specific public in relation to the Assembly and its high predisposition to support it (MINAS GERAIS, 2014).

In addition, it should be noted that, over the years, ALMG has been carrying out campaigns to promote dialogue with different segments within the state, the interiorization program being an underscored example which was initiated in sporadic meetings in an effort to promote greater participation among inland areas of the state (FARIA; DULCI, 2005, p.382). Costa (2005, p.60) notes that “at a certain point in time, it was realized that the mechanisms of participation would be insufficient if they were restricted to the political movement of the state capital”, given the size of the state of Minas Gerais, especially in the challenging context of seeking a more expressive participation of other actors (INÁCIO; ANASTASIA; SANTOS, 2016). Among the modalities of interiorization, an outstanding example is the process of strengthening municipal branch through a series of endeavors aimed at local-level powers (COSTA, 2005, p.63). This modality of interiorization sheds light on the influence the Assembly has on the environment of other institutions.

Thus, the interiorization process of ALMG (COSTA, 2005) should be considered in conjunction with the institutional development trajectory of the House over the last decades. Thus, the initiative of the Assembly of Minas to bring information to municipal parliaments and disseminate institutional qualification is based on the broad concept of political outputs (ANASTASIA; SANTOS, 2016). In addition, the supervening changes provided greater inter-institutional dialogue and information gains for ALMG.

In effect, the environment influenced the changes of the Assembly of Minas, just as it, as an institution, constitutes the environment of other organizations. At the outset, it seemed that the

challenges in the institutional environment of the Assembly resulted in the House's attempt to "react", thus resulting in the change intended. Subsequently, as the institutional capacity of ALMG reaches new heights, its process of stabilization and expansion of its influence on the environment continues through increasing its proximity to municipal legislators and carrying out its interiorization project. In this way, the institution was not just responding to "outside" threats but began developing intentional strategies to expand its influence. In this scenario, due to the institutional change of the Legislative Assembly of Minas, its partnership with municipal legislative city councils expanded as well, especially due to the interiorization project that led to processing demands for the Legislative Assembly of Minas, culminating in the creation of the City Council Support Centers (MINAS GERAIS, 2006). Thus, the creation of the Ceac is part of the institutional development trajectory of the Legislative Assembly of Minas Gerais.

5 Case Study: ALMG's City Council Support Centers

The City Council Support Centers established by Resolution No. 2,381 of 2006, with the purpose of operating as an "institutional space to promote relations" (MINAS GERAIS, 2006, art.1º), aims to facilitate the relationships between the Assembly of Minas with municipal legislative city councils, as well as promote the exchange of ideas and greater integration between legislative houses (ALMG, 2019). This state government body is founded in the context of the interiorization process of ALMG, whereby expanding partnership with the municipal legislative chambers, particularly through training courses for public officials in the interior of the state. This process led to a series of processing demands made for ALMG, which resulted in the creation of an institutional space of relationship with the municipal legislative houses (ALMG, 2006).

The Assembly had been building this relationship of proximity and partnership with municipal legislatures for many years, for instance, by exchanging information and experiences on the Standing Rules, how committees should operate, among other matters of interest to parliaments (MINAS GERAIS, 2016a). According to one interviewee, "Before Ceac had been created, there was already a huge demand from the seventy-seven different offices of the House [...] so there was already a lot of demand before Ceac was created, like, they would ask how a bill is created, among other things." (Interviewee 5).

In this context, the creation of the body stems from the attempt to meet frequent demands of municipal councilors and city council servants and different sectors of the Legislative Assembly, such as doubts regarding legislation and legislative procedure (ALMG, 2006). Thus, "Ceac arose because of the preexisting need of the City Councils to seek assistance from the Assembly. [...] Ceac met that need and took on the role of coordinator." (Interviewee 4). Thus, Ceac seeks to meet such demands and facilitate the logistics of information within ALMG, while also seeking to consolidate the partnership between state legislatures and increase interchange (ALMG, 2006). On the other hand, the initiative seeks to provide the State Legislative Assembly

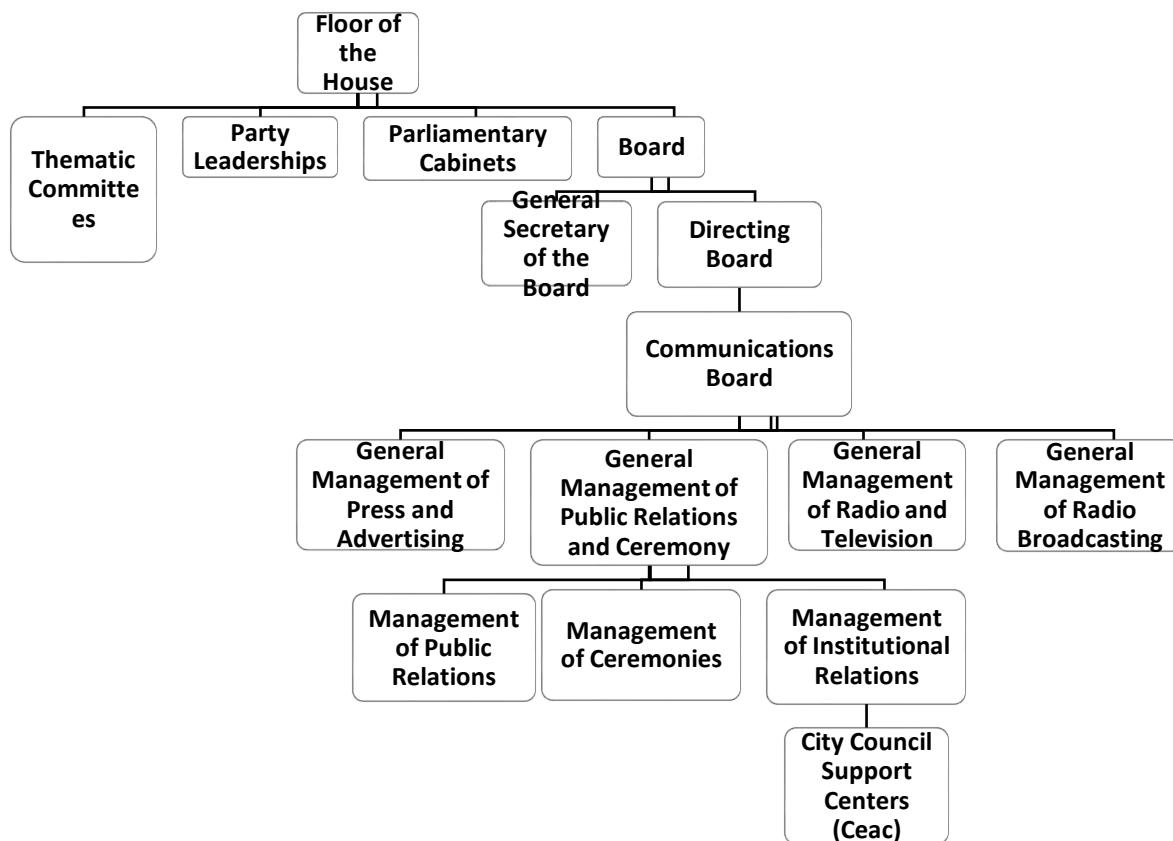
with insider knowledge on municipal legislative chambers. Its other aim is to form a network that strengthens the legislative branch of Minas Gerais (MINAS GERAIS, 2016A).

In addition, the activities developed by Ceac seek to contribute to the integration between legislative houses and also strive to meet demands, while sharing information to assist legislative work on the municipal level. Thus, one interviewee points out that "[...] There are 853 municipalities. They do not have the support they need, which the Assembly can provide, [...] we have capable technical staff in the Assembly that can assist city councils with their deficiencies." (Interviewee 1). In this sense, another interviewee comments, "Our perspective from the outset was to try not to assume a hierarchical position in relation to the city councils, as if we were the knowledgeable ones and they were not, so we sought from the beginning to work with the idea of a network, an exchange of knowledge" (Interviewee 2).

As for institutionalization, City Council Support Centers have a permanent structure, and "the work is constant, continuous, persistent" (Interviewee 2). For this purpose, Ceac has its own facility in the Assembly, shared procedures, as well as a team formed by communication, public relations, journalism, and legal professionals (MINAS GERAIS, 2006). Currently, the technical staff of servers directly linked to Ceac is composed of four civil servants tendered with the careers of public relations legislative analyst and one legislative analyst consultant in the area of Administrative and Constitutional Law.

Another important step towards the institutionalization of Ceac was defining its duties, just as ALMG has a set of relations with municipal officials, most of which are eminently political – dealing with representation and support. Ceac sought not to compete with the political activities of the House, positioning itself as a governmental body of a technical nature. That is, the duties of the Ceac are disconnected from any political-partisan nature. Furthermore, it should be noted that the institutional insertion of Ceac guides its purpose, as expressed in the following comment "[...] I think it is important to mention also that in the structure of the Assembly, it [Ceac] is part of the Communication Board. It's not an educational organization, nor is it for consulting; it is a government body focused on relations." (Interviewee 4). According to Figure 1, Ceac is part of the Managing Body of Public and Ceremonial Relations, linked to the Institutional Communication Board, which is responsible, among other duties, for managing actions directed towards "the promotion of the activities of the legislative branch, the formation of public opinion, the construction and monitoring of the institutional image thereof and the establishment of permanent channels of dialogue" (MINAS GERAIS, 2015).

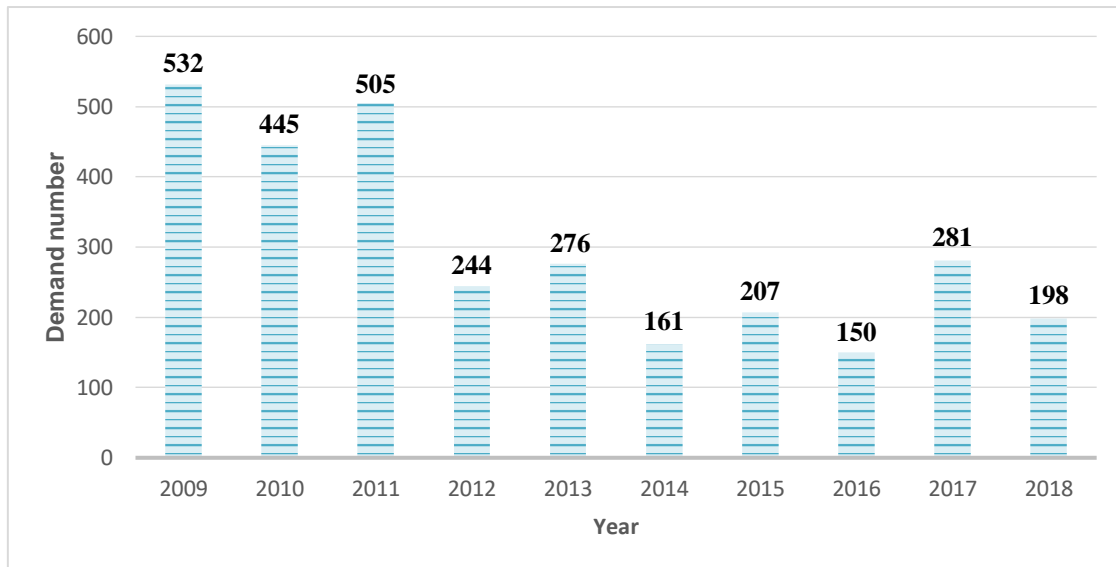
Figure 1–Organizational Chart



Source: own elaboration with data obtained from ALMG (2019).

With regard to the work of Ceac relating to meeting the demands of municipal legislature, such work has been done since the creation of the governmental body in 2006. However, only after the implementation of the Citizens Interaction Service (SIC) in 2009 was it possible to recover and systematize the data, with 2,999 requests recorded between 2009 and 2018 (Chart 1). The demands submitted by municipal councilors or civil servants of the legislative houses to Ceac include matters related to the legislative process; the structure and work of the Legislative Assembly; and the exercise of the functions of the legislative branch (MINAS GERAIS, 2006, art.4º, § 1º).

Chart 1 - Total demands 2009-2018



Source: own elaboration (2019).

The graph above shows that the years 2009 and 2016 presented a varied rate of demands per year; respectfully, 532 and 150 requests were recorded from municipal parliaments to Ceac. In addition, there is an evident dispersion in the first three years of SIC, with an average of 494 annual demands, in relation to the total period. This deviation could be explained by the high percentages found in the categories “registry data” and “online newsletter” in the mid-term, considering that it was this body that had initiated registration of municipal legislative houses. Also pertinent is the apparent consistency in the volume of demands sent between 2012 and 2018, with an oscillation between 281 and 150 annual registrations, as well as an average of 216 requests per year. However, there is a variation in the number of demands in the aforementioned period due to changes in the legislatures (four-year terms of office). In the interval between 2012 and 2018 (Chart 1) the highest percentages of requests were recorded in 2013 (276) and 2017 (281), both in the first year of their four-year terms.

In addition, the demands registered in SIC regarding City Council Support Centers are also categorized. Thus, classification is categorized into the following groups: constitutional; organization and operation of legislative chambers; legislative process; training; public officials; technical visits; registry data; online newsletter; other types; and unregistered. 2,999 requests were submitted in the period analyzed. However, Table 1 disregards the categories “registration data” and “online newsletter”, as these types include registration and updating of data and are concentrated in the first years of the system, while also excluding “other types” and “unregistered”, due to unsubstantiated variation and unavailability of the information that can be classified in these categories. In this approach, Table 1 summarizes the theme of 1,706 demands, which represent approximately 57% of the total. Thus, demands are presented by type:

constitutional; organization and operation of the chambers; legislative process; training; public officials and technical visits – between 2009 and 2018.

Table 1– demands according to type 2009-2018

Type of demands	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
Organization/function	61	75	74	27	45	18	38	16	54	13	421
Legislative procedure	59	52	28	15	21	17	22	14	22	23	273
Public official	62	31	12	18	7	8	4	5	1	5	153
Formal training	62	18	24	37	44	13	12	22	39	17	288
Constitutional	58	44	72	54	34	35	36	36	53	39	461
Technical visit	27	4	17	4	3	5	15	9	14	12	110
Total	329	224	227	155	154	96	127	102	183	109	1706

Source: Own elaboration (2019)

The data in Table 1 show that, among the demands received by the City Councils Support Center, the main issues addressed are enquiries about constitutional issues and the organization and operation of the city councils. In addition, art. 4º, § 2º of Resolution No. 2.381, of November 21, 2006, determines that “demands concerning specific concrete situations will be answered hypothetically by Ceac”. As such, the answers provided by Ceac present parameters of interpretation for the cases at hand. However, they cannot offer counsel on concrete situations of the municipal chambers, due to legal and constitutional restrictions. Notably, the Assembly does not have legal scope to issue a technical opinion or provide legal counsel to municipal legislators.

Finally, it should be noted that all the demands issued by the chambers are registered in SIC and the responses are prepared by Ceac, which contributes directly to the diffusion of knowledge in Minas Gerais legislature. However, when Ceac is not capable of issuing a response, the procedure for internal facilitation of information is carried out in the Assembly, as reported by an interviewee:

[...] in this role of facilitator, a councilor or civil servant does not need to know where to send demands. Even though we can't always answer everything, but we have an internal logistics system of information within the House. Sometimes the information requested is in the committees, other times it is in the personnel area [...] (Interviewee 2)

Furthermore, in line with the purpose of contributing to the education, updating, and training of municipal servants and political officials, the School of Legislature and the City Council Support Center work jointly to provide training resources, such as courses, lectures, and the Encounters with Politics program (ALMG, 2019). Regarding the partnership of Ceac with the School of Legislature, Ceac is specifically required to support the promotion of activities, as its role is to analyze demands and mobilize the target audience (ALMG, 2006). Such are the

initiatives that contribute to municipal technical training.

With reference to the interiorization of the activities of Ceac, also of noteworthy mention are the itinerant exhibitions that aim to promote discussions on issues inherent to the legislative branch, as well as relevant topics of public interest (MINAS GERAIS, 2016B). In this activity, Ceac lends exhibitions in itinerant format and Citizenship Education content to municipalities in the interior of Minas Gerais at the request of municipal chambers, with the goal of political education of citizens and their approximation to the legislature. The material made available for exhibition provides an opportunity for legislative houses to increasingly promote dialogue and interaction with the population.

In addition, to encourage interchange between the legislative houses of Minas Gerais, Ceac publishes a weekly online newsletter, entitled *Boletim Ceac*, with the objective of to share information and stories of the legislative branch (MINAS GERAIS, 2006, art.2º, II). To this end, the online newsletter provides information collected and selected by Ceac on the *websites* of the Assembly, city councils, courts and other bodies. Thus, Ceac Bulletin disseminates news pertinent to the parliamentary mandate, training courses, jurisprudence relevant to municipal legislature, events promoted by the Assembly of Minas and city councils, among others (ALMG, 2019). In addition, Ceac Bulletin provides a template for the municipal chambers of the state to publish positive actions in the form of democratic innovations, with the aim to propagate such endeavors. However, the point is made that "we do not expect something absolutely new, unprecedented, but innovative in the context of each city council" (ALMG, 2019).

We realize that the newsletter serves as a reference for other chambers [...]. They become aware of what is happening in terms of democratic innovation in other chambers. That serves as a stimulus. It's all a growing process. (Interviewee 4)

Ceac also has a web page hosted on the *website* of the State Legislative Assembly (ALMG, 2019) where several resources are available, such as: systematized and updated information from the legislative houses; federal and state legislation pertinent to municipal chambers; jurisprudence databases with judiciary decisions related to city councils; among others. The services provided on the Ceac *website* help to promote information for municipal legislative houses, as a source of guidance and consultation.

Ceac is therefore a space of the Assembly of Minas designed for approximation and creating connection between the institution and municipal legislatures. It is a technical governmental body that achieves the strategic objective of ALMG, particularly by seeking to strengthen the networks of interaction between parliaments and intensify the relationship between state legislature and city councils, as "partners in the process of interiorization of the actions of the State Legislative Assembly" (MINAS GERAIS, 2010A).

6 Conclusion

This study aimed to analyze the relationship between ALMG and municipal parliaments through the City Council Support Center. The research shows that federative cooperation, as it happens in the executive, has been a trend in the legislature as well, through institutional networks that strengthen Brazilian Parliament. Conversely, the research presents how the Assembly of Minas Gerais dealt with a set of threats in its institutional environment, which resulted in the House's attempt to “react”. And, subsequently, as ALMG becomes an actor with high institutional capacity, its process of stabilization and expansion of its influence on the political-social environment becomes clear. Thus, it is apparent how the environment impacted and shaped the Legislative Assembly of Minas Gerais, which reacted to minimize threats and subsequently expand its influence on the environment.

Therefore, we assert that the creation of Ceac stems from the modification of the relationship between the federative entities and the institutional development of ALMG by strengthening its legislative capacities and bringing its actions closer to municipal parliaments, namely through the interiorization project, which brought specific demands for processing in the legislative house. Subsequently, the Assembly chose to institutionalize such practices with the creation of Ceac and the resulting partnership has strengthened over the years. In other words, the creation of Ceac was a response to pressures from the environment, as well as an institutional choice made by the Assembly of Minas, which consequently created a network of parliamentary cooperation. Therefore, this study concludes that Ceac is an institutional innovation that stems from the process of institutional change undertaken by the Legislative Assembly of Minas Gerais that subsequently led the House to constitute and influence the environment of other organizations.

Regarding the institutionalization of Ceac, the study revealed that the definition of its duties was an essential step for the governmental body, as Ceac sought not to compete with the political activities of the State Legislative House, but positioned itself as a body of technical vocation and permanent structure. Furthermore, Ceac is linked to the Institutional Communication Board of ALMG, and its purpose is guided by institutional insertion. As such, Ceac is a relations-focused governmental body.

As for its functionality, the activities of Ceac are conducted with the aim to enhance relations between ALMG and municipal legislatures. Thus, Ceac collaborates to advance municipal legislative activities, for instance, by clarifying doubts forwarded by city councils, as well as by endorsing training and education programs for citizens, such as Encounters with Politics and itinerant exhibitions. Furthermore, Ceac opens channels of contact between the parliaments of Minas Gerais, such as through promoting the Ceac Bulletin newsletter. In addition to being an information input interface for the State Legislative Assembly, their work can be seen, for example, in the systematized and updated data of the legislatures of Minas Gerais on the Ceac

website.

Lastly, Ceac is a governmental body that seeks to contribute to the advancement of municipal legislative activities and is constituted as an interface for the input of information from local parliaments, thus providing information gains. In addition, Ceac integrates the overall strategy of the State Legislative Assembly through its endeavor to bring the institution closer to the municipal legislative houses.

In short, this study aims to contribute to the field of knowledge of the legislative branch, namely the relations of cooperation between federative entities in the parliamentary sphere. Moreover, the lack of studies on the legislature, particularly at the municipal level, is recognized as a detriment to its relevance in the democratic regime. In this context, this study promotes the conducting of new research and points to the relevance of evaluating Ceac from the perspective of city councils.

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