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Wellman Hill Recipient
Instituto Atuação: Summer 2019

During this past summer, I had the incredible opportunity to intern at Instituto Atuação, a small Brazilian Think + Do Tank with the purpose of improving democratic culture in Brazil. Located in Curitiba, Brazil also known as “the model city,” their goal as an institution was to explore the underlying factors that inhibit a thriving democracy in Brazil, and in the world in general. Currently their scope is more narrow, focusing directly on democratic culture in Curitiba. Their program, Cidade Modelo, gathers together local community leaders to discuss different factors inhibiting democracy, such as why they may not trust a stranger, how their education system could be improved, and what they want to see from their government officials. These roundtable discussions help pinpoint what parts of Brazilian culture need growth in order to improve the level of democracy in Curitiba and Brazil in general. Additionally, they employed their own Local Democracy Index, where they interviewed thousands of citizens of Curitiba in order to gauge civic engagement, participation, and trust in government.

My work as an intern included developing research design proposals regarding different facets of democratic culture. For example, my first research design proposal examined the relationship between economic inequality and political participation, and the second one explored the relationship between social interaction and social cohesion in public spaces. It was really interesting work, as it delved into topics that I had never really researched before, and it also helped give me the framework for how to set up and create a research design proposal. My experience there helped prepare me for my work as a graduate student in Political Science, and gave me better insight in how to quantitatively measure different aspects of political culture, such as cohesion, solidarity, and more. It also taught me that it is really hard to measure these things! Throughout my time at Atuação, I was welcomed so warmly and felt like such a great part of the small organization’s community. I met so many wonderful people, had the chance to explore Brazil, and really immersed myself into contemporary Brazilian political issues. Overall, it was a great summer and a great experience, and wouldn’t have been possible without the Wellman Hill.