Participation is a well-established subject in the social sciences. Individual participation, non-governmental organizations, interest groups, and social movements have all been important fields of research for years, at least among sociologists and political scientists. Each of these areas has also developed its own methodological traditions and debates, permitting new researchers entering the field to have a clear idea of the choices offered them if they want to study the identities of participants in social movements or the new forms of online participation.

More recently, a different kind of citizen participation has become more widespread: a participation that is non-conventional because it takes place beyond elections and party politics, but which is also institutional because it is organized or at least sustained by local governments or other public institutions. Citizen participation is not understood here primarily as the act of voting or joining a political organization, nor is it conceived as the involvement in social movements or even NGOs. Instead it consists of the involvement in specific and relatively new kinds of public spheres that enable citizens to be associated with the political and administrative decision-making process. To a certain extent, it goes beyond classical representative government, where rulers and public opinion interact only in very fluid ways. These specific participation mechanisms had existed in the past, but have developed more strongly in the last two or three decades. Participatory and deliberative experiments are in fact now part of the normal political and administrative decision-making arena. New devices have been invented, tested and partly routinized, and new professional careers have been created to nurture them. Clearly, participatory or deliberative democratic institutions are not the whole story in contemporary politics and
policy, but they are now part of the story. This is why their concrete outcomes need to be analyzed together with the factors that push in this direction, the kind of actors involved, and the techniques and skills that are mobilized.

Empirical analysis in this framework presents some specific challenges, but also some more common ones. Part of the methodological dilemmas researchers in this field face are in fact quite distinct from those in other participation-related areas. For example, they need to use information produced by public institutions quite a bit more often than others and need to discuss their specific sources of bias. However, many of the methodological challenges are quite common and most of the substantive issues to be discussed also concern researchers of the above-mentioned neighboring fields: all of them need to understand why and when people mobilize or how these activities are related or not with public debate and public policies. This is at the root of the idea of putting together a discussion of methodological issues that allowed mixing this new field of research with other researchers dealing with other participatory subjects.

This issue of the Revista Internacional de Sociología aims at offering a rich—although not exhaustive—panorama of the methodologies that researchers use to study these phenomena. The issue focuses mostly on political sociology and political science research (for example, urban studies, history, or science and technology studies are less widely represented or not at all). This issue is one of the outcomes of a conference organized in November 2011 in Cordoba at the IESA-CSIC (Institute for Advanced Social Studies, National Council for Scientific Research) and can be viewed as the first attempt to address a topic which had not been collectively tackled before.

From the reading of the articles that have been included, five lessons and questions concerning the way in which participation research develops its methodologies can be learned.

(1) The variety of methods that have been used by scholars who have analyzed participatory processes is very impressive. The articles which are included in this issue range from large N to small N quantitative research, from experimental research to surveys and ethnography, from case studies to comparative analysis, from autonomous

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1 An exhaustive panorama should have included other contributions on approaches such as the Deliberative Quality Index (Steiner et al., 2004; Steenbergen et al., 2003, the use of quantitative analysis to scrutinize the participants in participatory processes (Fedozzi, 2007), the role of online participation or the comparison of case studies.

2 Many of these methodological concerns emerged as a result of the development of the MECPALO (Mechanisms of citizen participation in Southern Europe: causes and consequences) project. We acknowledge the financial support from the Ministry of Science and Innovation for the development of this project (CSO 2009-08968) as well as for the organization of the conference. The Regional Government of Andalusia also contributed financially to the conference, which also benefited from the support of the IESA. We also thank Graham Smith, whose concluding comments on the conference have been partially incorporated into this introduction.
activist-research to various other kinds of connections between academics and social or political actors. Some of them make a single exploration of the possibilities and limits of a single methodological approach, but several establish an explicit dialogue between them (Beatriz Mañas or Julien Talpin) or discuss the potentials and limits of their possible combination (Galais and colleagues). Some raise very general epistemological questions (Heloise Nez), while still others focus on the dilemmas of variable operationalization (Bengtsson).

A superficial observer could find this confusing. We argue something different: this situation is a clear sign that this field of study has reached its maturity. Research on institutional participation may well not be a central concern of political sociology or political science, but it is now a field which attracts many scholars, and one with journals specifically dedicated to the topic (the *Journal of Public Deliberation* in English, *Participations* in French), particular sections in national or international academic conferences, common references beyond the national borders, specific debates and controversies. Yet methodological issues have not been at the forefront, and this is precisely a limitation we would like to overcome in this issue of the Revista Internacional de Sociología.

(2) This issue is a claim against methodological monism and a call for methodological pluralism (Della Porta and Keating 2008). It is a good thing that so many methods are used in research on citizen participation. The simple oppositions such as quantitative vs. qualitative, large vs. small N studies, case studies vs. comparative surveys are meaningless. This field of study is now sufficiently mature to require its scholars to cross the various methodologies and combine their different approaches in order to enlarge upon and deepen their understanding of this innovative form of participation. While this could appear to be a banal claim, in fact this is unfortunately not often the case.

If we place the articles that follow in a broader context, it is clear that methodologies in participation research are not confined within national borders. However, it is also clear that national or regional traditions exist: action research is quite relevant in the United Kingdom, but it is probably more prevalent in Southern Europe; quantitative and experimental traditions exist everywhere but their hegemony is larger in those countries which belong more closely to the Anglo-Saxon tradition. This means that there is much to gain from transnational encounters, but it also means that if we are moving in the direction of methodological pluralism, we need to increase methodological debates beyond national borders at the European and international levels.

Specific challenges also arise from the large presence of research focusing on case studies, or at most the comparison between two or three case studies. Even if extremely enriching within a logic of discovery which dominates any new field of research, case studies clearly face problems of generalization. Different proposals have been made in order to deal with this question while remaining in the frame of qualitative research: the “grounded theory” (Glaser, Strauss, 1967), the “extended case method” (Burawoy, 1998; Eliasoph, Lichterman, 1999), and “thinking by case” (Ragin, Becker, 1991; Passeron, Revel, 2005). However, many studies are less sophisticated and convincing and the
numerous edited volumes or journal issues that aim at comparing these case studies most often put together works that have been conducted with different methodologies and concepts. In addition, the issue of articulating qualitative case studies with comparative quantitative studies is generally not addressed.

While one could agree that the time has come to enter a new period and produce broader comparisons relying on the same concepts and methodologies in order to be more reliable and make in-depth comparisons (Sintomer et al., 2011), these present challenges of their own. First, comparative quantitative studies would help to better understand the specificity of each particular process and especially of those “good practices” that are most often the object of case studies and that differ greatly from ordinary or more modest citizen participation devices (Font, Galais, 2011; Baiocchi, Heller, Silva, 2011). Firstly, however, these studies present the need for reliable sources on a large number of cases, which are rarely available. Additionally, quantitative scholars tend to rely mostly on methods derived from social psychology, testing their theoretical hypothesis through experimental laboratory designs that do not consider the impact of social contexts and the huge difference between an experiment that participants see as a game and a real experience that affects them in a much more complex and deeper way (see Julien Talpin in this issue and Dimitrescu and Blais, 2011). For example, many articles uncritically refer to the “polarization thesis”, which claims that deliberation tends to polarize the opinions of those who participate (Sunstein, 2000), without mentioning that this effect observed in laboratory experiments is rarely observable in most of the empirical case studies on citizen participation. Also, references to the growing academic production of opinion surveys on participation often lack an epistemic reflection on what “public opinion” is or on the limitations of the data produced (see the contributions of Beatriz Mañas and of Åsa Bengtsson in this issue, and Blondiaux, 1998).

(3) The comparison of methodologies on the research object “citizen participation” also enlightens the way in which social sciences usually work. The positivist view tries to imitate the logic of natural science. In this “Galilean” paradigm, the objective is to establish causal laws, positive incontestable findings, and permanent regularities. This view generally misses the epistemic implications of the probability revolution and especially quantic physics (Hacking, 1990; Gigerenzer et al. 1989). It ignores the results of decades of social studies of science, particularly on the specificity of the complex logic of scientific discovery and its artisanal dimension before the scientific results may be routinized (Latour, Woolgar, 1986; Shapin, Schaffer, 2011). When applied to the research on a contemporary phenomenon such as citizen participation, where experimental routines in laboratories easily become all the more artificial, this “Galilean” paradigm seems particularly problematic. Even more so when research is confronted with the scarcity, the heterogeneity and the limited reliability of data, and the ensuing difficulty of generalizing the findings. This is why most research on citizen participation tends rather to function according to what Carlo Ginzburg (1992) calls the “evidential paradigm”: like hunters, detectives and
psychoanalysts, researchers try to make the best of partial certainties, to interpret existing clues and search for new ones, to put them together, to couple intuition and sequences of controlled tests in order to reconstruct a plausible scenario. A scenario that can hardly produce a positive law, but can nevertheless contribute to our understanding of a quickly developing phenomenon.

As it appears clearly in this issue of the *Revista Internacional de Sociología*, this is no less true for quantitative research than for qualitative research, or for large N studies than for small N studies. In fact, the very existence of different methodologies on the same object, and the contrasted (but also complementary) light they shed on it, is an argument in favor of the "evidential paradigm". The findings produced following one particular method can be considered clues, and the confrontation of these multiple —and often contradictory— clues helps to produce a more robust knowledge, but one could hardly speak of causal laws resulting from these combinations, and even less so when focusing on only one method.

(4) The research field on citizen participation seems particularly interesting to the extent that it "tastes" different from other fields of the social sciences, particularly because many authors implicitly or explicitly have another conception of what objectivity is. Most often, the mainstream social sciences —and this is even truer for political science— assume that objectivity can be reached through the neutrality of the researcher and his or her detached view of the object. This positivist view of objectivity does not take into account that any particular methodology —and any particular theory— interprets its object according to a particular framing, or to put it more radically, constructs its object at the same time as it analyzes it. In fact, this is not specific to the social sciences and a similar argument has been made in the realm of natural science, particularly concerning quantic physics and nanotechnologies (Daston, Galison, 2010). In addition, researchers are not just observers: they are usually involved in the society they analyze or of which they are members; they share at least part of their episteme. The empirical analysis also largely depends on the decisions of actors other than scientists, who co-determine the structures of research and higher education, the research topics towards which the money flows, and often the methodological instruments used. Globally, the impressive development of the modern sciences has been largely due to their pragmatic orientation and to the collaboration of scientists, higher civil servants, the military, market actors and, less often, citizen movements (Pestre, 2013).

Fundamentally, the activity of social scientists is part of the social construction of the reality (Berger, Luckmann, 1967). What they do is included in a larger social and political debate that takes place in the social and political contexts in which they live. This does not mean that their works lack any specificity and that they cannot be objective.

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3 These methodological arguments have something to do with the comprehensive sociology that was proposed by Max Weber (Weber, 2007; Colliot-Thélène, 2001).
It only implies that the objectivity they can achieve has not to be confused with neutrality, detachment, or incontestability. It is something that the German word “Sachlichkeit” expresses well: the objectivity that a social scientist can claim is largely “procedural” and pragmatic. It rests on the coherence of the argumentation, the inclusion of the most significant data, the potential control of the sources by other scholars. Two additional factors also contribute to it. First, having robust and coherent methodologies that explicitly or implicitly address every aspect, from epistemics to operationalization. Second, adopting a reflexive standpoint on each of these aspects and not taking their usefulness for granted also contributes to moving in this direction. This is why it is a problem that critical exchanges on methodology have not been developed sufficiently in participation research, and one of the goals of the present issue of the Revista Internacional de Sociología is precisely to contribute to addressing this problem.

It is interesting that many of the scholars involved in research on citizen participation do not claim to be neutral: they rather recognize their involvement, considering it a powerful incentive and a useful tool for their scientific activity. Most often, they influence, evaluate or even conceive the devices used by social and political actors. More than in other fields of research, they cooperate with citizens’ movements and with the public administrations developing these processes. In fact, the very development of this academic field is part of a broader movement of democratic innovations, and participation research is at the same time a result of this development and a factor that favors it. That this practical implication strongly conditions the research being developed in this field is an aspect that deserves attention as lessons can be learnt from the successes and failures of the type of mechanisms that researchers address (e.g. how to develop more effective participatory mechanisms).

As Héloïse Nez shows in her article and as the variety of contributions assembled in this issue testify to, different relations are possible between social scientists and the other actors. Several contributors show sympathy towards the most innovative experiments of participation and regularly discuss with their animators. Some directly work in designing participatory devices (Judith Bakker and Bas Denters), or have conducted the research in an association that does so (Héloïse Nez). Finally, others (Miguel Martínez and Elisabeth Lorenzi) even conceive of their research more from the point of view of the activists than of the professional scholars. Each of these positions (that do not exhaust the full range of possible options) has advantages and poses specific challenges, but they all share the recognition of the involvement of the researcher and a non-positivist view of objectivity. One can say that in this respect they are representative of the state of the art in the field of participation research. This is a relevant position in this field and, as such, these articles contribute to representing here the plurality of positions that researchers in this area have.

(5) Finally, we would like to argue that the dynamic research field on citizen participation is confronted with several additional methodological challenges of which we are going to mention four:
(i) Research about participation has devoted most of its efforts to understanding the motives, demographics, biographies or identities of participants. However, a full understanding of why participation is so unequally distributed can only be achieved if we also try to know something about those who do not participate. This same logic can be applied to the new field of institutional participation. How can we combine research on participatory process with research on cases with no participation? Are the methods used in participation research sufficient to grasp the limited extension of participatory democracy? For example, what methods should be used in order to better understand those politicians or civil servants that do not launch participatory processes, or those citizens that do not participate? Observation is much more difficult here, and in-depth interviews may be less relevant than with participants, especially when scarce resources are available for research. Could large N quantitative surveys really be sufficient to fill the gap? In any case, this is only one example that shows that initiating a dialogue with neighboring fields, from social movement research to organizational or public policy analysis, which have also addressed similar challenges, is crucial if we need to make progress using the experience of areas that have a longer history.

(ii) What is the role that historical methods can play in this endeavor? Until now, most of the research on citizen participation has been carried out on contemporary processes. However, even if participatory mechanisms have become more common, they had also been important in the past in some polities (from Athens to Switzerland or small assembly-led communities). In fact, it seems fundamental to take these past examples into account when analyzing the present as much of the logic of these mechanisms is difficult to understand without an effort to know about their origins and the contexts in which they developed. Some historians have worked on participatory or deliberative experiments, but generally without making the link with the questions and findings of scholars who work on the contemporary. Methodologically, it is clearly challenging to combine the results of research on present experiments (using methods that range from opinion polls to ethnography) with those on past examples, which is based on (often scant) available archival materials.

(iii) How can participation research better compare many cases and generalize its findings? At the point of maturity of this field of study, it seems necessary (as we argued earlier on) to go beyond single case studies and work on systematic comparisons and a broader synthesis. However, practices on comparative research are much less developed in this field than they are in history or in anthropology, and we do not have anything comparable to the reflection on connected” or “crossed histories” (Subrahmanyam, 1997; Werner, Zimmermann, 2004). In addition, comparative broad-scale research requires a sum of money and energy that is rarely available for research on this topic. Small N research helps to better understand the relations between several cases, but only if previous case studies are not only reliable, but also (methodologically) coherent with each other. Large N research design such as surveys on actual participation processes
broadens the panorama but has to rely on scarce and often distorted data—and therefore needs to be articulated with qualitative case studies in order to deepen its analysis. Experimentally based research can hardly generalize its findings without testing them outdoors. And very often, scholars are deeply divided concerning the value of such and such a methodology and are reluctant to collaborate with others that do not share their methodological views. Approaches like the one used in the article by Ryan and Smith are an interesting avenue to be explored, even if they may not be applied to every research question.

(v) How do we cross the methods without falling into inconsistent results? In this issue, Carolina Galais and her co-authors show that it is not so simple to combine various quantitative methods, such as web mining and data survey, which seem to be not so far away from each other if compared with qualitative methods. But can a broader synthesis of quantitative and qualitative research findings be made without a deep epistemological reflection on the implications of each method? Even if, as della Porta and Keating (2008) argue, epistemology and the choice of methods do not easily align (quantitative analysis could be produced by less than positivist scholars, and ethnography could be instead conceived in positivist terms), a triangulation of different methods can still be problematic. For example, how could the ethnographic research conducted in the style proposed by Julien Talpin in his article really be articulated with the work of experimentally based research? Can the criticisms raised by Talpin be considered a call for caution methodological pluralism and the triangulation of techniques or does it point to the idea that the starting ground on which each of these traditions is built is so different that this combination is hardly plausible?

This Revista Internacional de Sociología issue does not answer all these questions, but it at least tries to underline their importance and makes a call to address them more systematically.

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Joan Font is a senior researcher at the IESA/CSIC working on citizen participation in public policies. He was the research director at the major public survey institution (CIS) in 2004-2008. He has been a senior lecturer at the Political Science department of UAB (Barcelona) and a visiting scholar at the EUI (Florence) and UCD (Dublin).

Donatella Della Porta is professor of sociology in the Department of Political and Social Sciences at the European University Institute. Among her recent publications are: Meeting democracy (Cambridge university press, 2013); Clandestine Political violence (Cambridge University press 2013); Can democracy be Saved (Polity 2013), Mobilizing on the Extreme Right (Oxford University Press 2012); Social Movements and Europeanization, Oxford University Press, 2009; (ed.) Another Europe, Routledge, 2009; (ed.) Democracy in Social Movements, Palgrave, 2009; Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences (with Michael Keating), Cambridge University Press; (with Gianni Piazza), Voices from the Valley; Voices from the Streat Berghan, 2008; The Global Justice Movement, Paradigm, 2007.

Yves Sintomer is professor of political science at Paris 8 University, Senior fellow at the Institut Universitaire de France, and associate researcher at Neuchâtel University and Marc Bloch Centre (Humboldt University Berlin/CNRS). He received a PhD of political and social sciences (European University Institute, Florence) and has a Habilitation to direct research (Paris 5 University). He has studied and taught in Harvard, Frankfurt/Main, Complutense-Madrid, Lausanne (Switzerland), UCL (Belgian), Universidad del Pais Vasco, Catania (Italy). He has been deputy-director of the Marc Bloch Center (Berlin). Last publication (2011): Petite histoire de l’expérimentation démocratique. Tirage au sort et politique d’Athènes à nos jours. Paris: La Découverte.

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INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH ON PUBLIC OPINION AND PARTICIPATIVE DEVICES
From polls to public debate

INVESTIGACIÓN INSTITUCIONAL DE LA OPINIÓN PÚBLICA Y DISPOSITIVOS PARTICIPATIVOS
De la encuesta al debate público

Beatriz Mañas
bmanas@poli.uned.es
Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED). Spain

ABSTRACT
Considering that the methods and techniques implemented in social research entail a certain definition of the concepts studied, it seems relevant to reflect on the possibilities of devices other than polls when studying “public opinion” as a sociological concept. Two arguments for such approach can be highlighted: the qualitative and discursive nature of public opinion, and polls’ difficulties for being collectively perceived as a reliable and interesting way to express points of view about public matters. The French CNDP (Commission Nationale du Débat Public) is conceived for encouraging national, regional or local debates about political decisions which involve an important governmental investment. Taking into account that deliberative polling has probably been the most systematized among numerous research devices which have tried to implement the premises of deliberative/participative democracy, we will explore the possibilities of a different and wider representation of “public opinion” from the analysis of the dynamics generated by the institutional device of Public Debate.

KEYWORDS
Deliberation; Deliberative polls; Participation; Polls; Public Debate; Public Opinion.

RESUMEN
Sosteniendo la hipótesis de que los métodos y técnicas utilizadas para el estudio de los conceptos de interés sociológico tienen cierta influencia en la definición de los mismos, este artículo plantea una reflexión sobre las posibilidades e implicaciones de dispositivos diferentes a las encuestas para la investigación de la opinión pública. La aproximación a este enfoque se realizará desde dos argumentaciones: por un lado, sosteniendo la naturaleza cualitativa y discursiva de la opinión pública y, por otro, mostrando la dificultad de los sondeos para ser percibidos colectivamente como un medio confiable e interesante para expresar y registrar puntos de vista sobre los asuntos públicos. La CNDP (Comisión Nacional de Debate Público) es una institución pública francesa creada para animar debates nacionales, regionales o locales sobre grandes operaciones públicas. Teniendo en cuenta que la encuesta deliberativa ha sido probablemente el dispositivo que, con mayor grado de sistematización, ha intentado implementar las premisas de la democracia deliberativa/participativa, este artículo explorará las posibilidades de una forma más amplia de concebir la “opinión pública”, desde el análisis de las dinámicas generadas por el dispositivo institucional del Debate Público.

PALABRAS CLAVE
Debate Público; Deliberación; Encuestas; Encuestas Deliberativas; Opinión Pública; Participación.
INTRODUCTION

Ever since “public opinion” as a political concept became an object of study, it seems that the only theoretical consensus that has been reached about it is its elusive and multidimensional meaning; a meaning which has been difficult to abstract beyond concrete social and historical contexts. However, there is no doubt that public opinion has survived as one of the most important concepts of political debate today.

Despite this unstable conceptual history, our current social representation of “public opinion” seems to be rather crystallized and linked to “polls”, so that it is difficult to imagine any published information about “opinion” which is not presented as “data” coming from sources corresponding to polls or surveys. It seems, then, that any definition of the concept “public opinion” includes the method normally put into practice to study it. The development of a vast critical tradition focused on the problematic relation between “measurement” and “public opinion”, as well as the thorough examination of technical and methodological problems involved in “objectively” measuring those topics which naturally imply a component of subjectivity, have not prevented the process of public opinion research from being widely understood as a sort of sequence in which “data” are “gathered” by “opinion polls” and “spread” by “mass media”. Other methodologies are, in general, unknown to the non-expert public, and considered subordinate or “experimental” by technicians who work daily in public opinion research, under the assumption that the empirical material these methods produce does not lead to a “scientific” study of public opinion. However, this generalized consideration has not been an obstacle for the growing interest in, and development of, other ways of regarding and studying citizens’ points of view towards public issues. At the same time, these devices have also been implemented by those institutions (e.g. CIS)\(^1\) which currently carry out public opinion research using statistical polls.

A discursive conception of “public opinion” —as the articulation of shared senses about a certain topic, emerging from social positions and which circulate socially— need, not only to call into question the link existing between “opinion” and what is generally considered its privileged device, but also to reflect about methodologies other than polls which also imply the study of “latent” entities (such as opinions, attitudes, social representations, evaluations, interests, decisions, ideologies), hardly equivalent to gathered “objective data”. Social research methods, trying to give an explicit account of latent contents, underlie a certain “representation” of reality, and therefore, of the social concepts they study (Mañas 2008: 161). And if this representation is systematically operated—above all if that operation comes from governmental institutions—, it then has political consequences. We consider, with Lascoumes and Le Gales (2007: 4) that technical devi-

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\(^1\) Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (Sociological Research Center) is a Spanish governmental institution whose aim is to do research on social issues and public opinion in Spain
ces put in practice by public policy “are not tools with perfect axiological neutrality, equally available: on the contrary, they are bearers of values, fueled by one interpretations of the social”. From this perspective, the symbolic efficiency of “official” or “institutional” practices is relevant to offering a “proven” vision of reality. We are therefore interested in reflecting upon the devices which have been institutionalised by the public policy in order to gather and share citizens’ points of view and opinions, given their apparent role in the creation of their “official representation”. The study of the different dynamics generated by these devices offers wide-ranging possibilities for reflecting on the concepts which “make them visible” from the institutions and, therefore, on their political implications. In this sense, the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS) in Spain and the Comission Nationale du Débat Public (CNDP) in France represent fairly specific cases: activities carried out by both institutions are based on legislation currently in force and of an official nature, as opposed to any other country in our environment. Despite their various aims and theoretical assumptions, one aspect is especially interesting to our analysis: both of them implement processes which imply the use of mechanisms to ensure citizens’ opinions and points of view “come to light”. Our attention will be focused on the systematic production of opinion polls at CIS, the exercising of methodological reflexivity which this institution implemented upon carrying out the study “Social perception of surveys”, and the observation of emergent deliberative/participative dynamics in Public Debate sessions presided over by the CNDP, while understanding that these reflect a more complicated concept of public opinion and reality than that linked to polls.

THE CONCEPTION OF “PUBLIC” DERIVING FROM PUBLIC OPINION POLLS

Possibilities for implementing participative methods in which perceptions, visions or opinions held by individuals are able to be effectively incorporated into the decision-making process (far from being just mass media published “data”) definitely involve an “active” conception of “public”. And if this is the group supposed to hold opinion, it is relevant to take a close look at the concept of “public”, which has historically gone through different considerations, in most cases not coincident with that of “public” emerging from opinion polls. Even if there are several factors that can explain this process, it is interesting to reflect on the way the “channels” used to give visibility and describe social concepts have a certain capacity to shape their social representation.\(^2\)

When the bourgeois concept of “public opinion” appeared in the 18th Century, the Enlightened elites, in the belief they were the only group in the population able to display enough sense and judgment to decide public issues, considered themselves as the

\(^2\) Understanding “social representation” closely to Moscovici’s conception: the collective elaboration of a social object by the community for the purpose of behaving and communicating (Moscovici 1983)
sole representatives of “real public opinion” (Mañas 2005: 90). The press and French salons in which debates took place became the privileged and “legitimate” places where public opinion, and therefore, criticism of the political regime, could be expressed. As the masses were completely excluded from this “public” and their elitist forms of expression, we can conclude there was a hierarchical consideration of opinions: the masses are supposed to hold just popular, vulgar and ordinary opinions (Farge 1992), very different from those which emerge from deliberative processes inherent to what was considered at that time “the real public opinion” represented by the Enlightened bourgeoisie (Champagne 1990: 45-46). We see that, initially, public opinion was born as a deliberative process among those who are considered reasonable enough to control governmental excesses.

However, once the revolutionary bourgeoisie goals were achieved, the politically non-recognized popular opinion gradually found more direct ways of expression. During the 19th century, the emergence of street demonstrations as a way of collective popular action, the establishment of universal (masculine) suffrage, and the emergence of a widely available popular national press are circumstances that would lead to bourgeoisie resistance, fearful of one group, “the masses” who are quantitatively stronger than the elites. From the beginning of the 20th century, those demonstrations started being instrumentalised by political parties and trade unions: the revolutionary pressure would enlarge the old select group of “intellectuals” who were the only ones with the right to represent public opinion, welcoming, from that moment, a wider part of the population: “the citizens”. Popular opinion was finally incorporated into public opinion by changing its source of legitimacy: from reason to quantity, to the number of individuals who subscribe to it (Blondiaux 1998: 46). When the masses—at least symbolically—started becoming part of “public” opinion, a previously vaguely-defined concept resulting from discussion and reflection became an operative and measurable concept. Quantity displaced quality in the explanation of public opinion.

Although the Habermasian sense of public opinion was less influential in the United States than in Europe (Zask 1999), the extension of suffrage and mass media increased the interest in understanding public opinion. The control of Governmental actions by enlightened critical discussion and reflection would not be a central goal any more, and the emergence of Social Psychology during the first decades of the 20th century would contribute to the definition of the psychological mechanisms—“attitudes”, “stereotypes”, “instincts”—that seem to take part in the opinion formation process, always—and this is very important—from a new vision of “public” as a “mass of individuals” that are barely informed and easy to manipulate from exterior instances such as propaganda (Lippmann 1922). As a result of the historical coincidence between this process and that of the quantitative development of social research techniques, considered “scientific” and, therefore, “neutral” and “impartial” (Porter 1996), the conception resulting from this “public-opinion” binomial would fit perfectly with political and economic power objectives. That is how the

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3 For a more detailed explanation of this process see Reynié (1998) and Mañas (2012: 15-43)
opinion polls technique, based on a statistical survey methodology, became, first in the United States and later in Europe, the new objectivisation device for public opinion, its new channel for making it visible. The success of the discourse that legitimizes surveys and polls will imply the general consideration of their results as the social and institutional “reality” of opinion.

What are the consequences for the conception of “public”? In America, in the context of World War II, Sociology seemed to be much more interested in measuring public opinion than in reflecting on its definition as a sociological or political concept, that tendency being coherent with a dominant conception of population as a group of individuals that can be studied by establishing frequencies (Mañas 2005: 108). So, the opinion embodied by a “wise” public turns into a public opinion conceived as the mere addition of individual opinions. By the spreading of statistical polls, public opinion will be understood as an objective entity of reality, as true data obtained by a scientific procedure, whose original source is the sum of individuals. Opinion polls can successfully work because they assume that individuals’ usual behavior is a reflection of what the public thinks about the topics presented in the questionnaire, that being measurable by a pre-coded and standardized question approach. Individual or group social actors can hardly be “active” if their discourse is replaced by previously fixed stereotyped statements in a closed questionnaire.

AN UNCERTAIN LINK. CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AND OPINION POLLS IN SOCIAL DISCOURSE

The success of opinion polls comes not only from the social representation of the “scientific method of statistics” as a form of true and legitimate knowledge of reality⁴. As explained above, it arises in a context of an extension of suffrage in which the “opinion poll” product needs to be presented to society as a useful and functional tool for western democracies. The popularity gained by opinion polls can only be understood through their link with publication in mass media (Almazán 2009: 86). Thanks to this, the “public” could see a reflection of their “opinion”, which now boils down to a measure representing social consensus, namely, a numerical summary of the point of view of the “majority” with regard to public affairs. And it will remain in citizens’ perceptions as an autonomous form of authority, “public opinion”, which “speaks” and “is demonstrated”. Therefore, a core element of the legitimizing discourse of opinion polls was to highlight their qualities as a “functional” technique for democratic dynamics and, accordingly, as a tool for providing visibility for the opinions of citizens, who would find in them a channel of expression

⁴ Latour (1992: 197) describes in detail this way to represent science as the key for “discovering” nature without any social influence.
and, therefore, participation. The opinion poll machinery had become big business and it was important to highlight one of the most highly valued dimensions associated with its representation in a context of an extension of suffrage amid a mass consumer society: its potential as a democratic instrument.

From an institutional and academic standpoint, it seems that the key arguments legitimizing opinion polls as a method for researching public opinion have survived the major critical intellectual process that developed both in Europe and the US, starting mainly in the second half of the twentieth century. Despite the methodological objections that “day-to-day” aspects of the professional work involving opinion polls raise, they continue to this day to be a core activity in the public and private institutions that specialize in performing them systematically, using formats and procedures that are not very different from those used over half a century ago. However, one problem has been detected that affects the possibility of the surveys themselves: it is becoming more and more difficult to find people prepared to respond to the pollsters’ questions, either through an outright refusal to answer any of the questionnaire or through the trend in raising the percentage of “non-response” in certain parts of it. In other words, it is difficult to find individuals who decide openly to participate in an opinion poll. This lack of predisposition – does it indicate that citizens lack motivation for taking part in public affairs, or does it have something to do with a more or less explicit reservation towards the tool used? What seems clear is that the situation raises the need to take a second look at the discourse claiming a democratizing role for opinion polls. One way of ascertaining the continuity or current meaning of this argument consists of researching the perception that society has of statistical surveys or, put another way, understanding their collective representation and observing whether polls’ connection with democratic participation continues to be important in that perception.

The Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, since its creation in 1963 as “Instituto de la Opinión Pública” to the present day, is the Spanish public institution responsible for carrying out social research mainly through surveys, most of which are opinion polls. On several occasions this institution has shown an evident interest in the perception that Spanish society has of opinion polls through specific surveys. The first two polls were carried out in the early years of the democratic transition in Spain and the justification for them centered on connecting opinion polls as a method of social research to the recent democratic development of the country and to the levels of academic modernity of other European countries and the United States. The first of the polls was published in 1976 under the title “Las encuestas a encuesta” (“Surveys being surveyed”) (García Ferrando and García Llamas 1976), and the second, entitled “Las encuestas a encuesta, de nuevo” (“Surveys being surveyed again”) was published in 1981 (Justel 1981). It already became evident in these surveys that there was an interest in finding the key to understanding the absence of responses from individuals when taking part in opinion polls. It is this motivation that can be found explicitly in the most recent survey carried out by the CIS on social perception of opinion polls. It is another quantitative study, performed 25 years later, which was published with a similar title to the previous studies (Alvarez and...
Recognizing the difficulties faced by technicians in obtaining responses from the population on public opinion matters, it is considered that the “image of the poll” might be a variable explaining “non-response”. Apart from the different formats (face-to-face, telephone and internet) in which the questionnaire was carried out, the particular feature of this poll was its complementary function with a previous qualitative study, which was based on ten discussion groups. This initiative has particular relevance: the institution responsible for carrying out “official” opinion polls not only intends to submit their tools to public “consideration”, as occurred in the early studies of 1976 and 1981. Rather, it also wants them to be carried out using a qualitative method; one step further, in other words, for reflexive analysis of surveys as techniques for researching opinions. We consider that the empirical content of this qualitative study sheds much light on how to understand social perception of polls, and offers information that not only covers the usefulness of helping to draw up a questionnaire.

Although the discourse of the ten groups that form part of the study provides a fairly complete picture of the social perception of polls, we will not address all the conclusions of the study here, but rather only those dimensions regarding the role of polls to form a citizen participation mechanism within a democratic context.

A series of conclusions on the collective perception of the polls-participation relationship

The qualitative study discussion groups mentioned were held by the CIS in the autumn of 2006 in various Spanish towns, chosen for the size of the environment, a year before the economic crisis exploded and, therefore, in a context of growth and a reduced rate of unemployment. The majority of the groups included communities in relatively-stable working and economic conditions, and only one of them was formed by young adults in unstable working situations. These are circumstances which probably affect the discussion and, therefore, are important to the interpretation of citizens’ perceptions of the surveys. We shall now make a brief reference to two dimensions of the perception of polls: usefulness in general and as a participation mechanism.

For respondents, a poll is “useful” if they perceive that, by completing it, it will lead to the achievement of advantages or protection of rights relating to issues close to their daily, personal lives. And these issues are closely linked to the participants’ identity as consumers and users. Only in these cases, carrying out a survey seems justified, and the weight of its negative connotations with regard to “manipulation”, “wasting time”, reluctance to “provide information”, etc. which arise insistently in all groups, eases. The poll

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5 The ten groups were chosen according to age, gender, habitat and socioeconomic status. Both the technical description and the transcription of the ten meetings are available at the CIS Data website: [http://www.cis.es/cis/opencms/ES/1_encuestas/catalogoencuestas.html](http://www.cis.es/cis/opencms/ES/1_encuestas/catalogoencuestas.html) [Last access: 19/06/2012]
"is useful", therefore, when it is considered to form part of an “after-sale service” where the subjects can recognize their rights as “customers”. And, in the case of public services, where no sale occurs, the usefulness is in relation to the individuals’ involvement as users of these services that they regard as important in their daily lives: “health” (doctors, nursing, hospitals, waiting lists, etc.) and “transport” (the subway, buses, etc.) are often referred to as topics to which participants would be happy to respond:

“Now, the Social Security, for example, if you’re in hospital and you’ve had an operation, they send you a form afterwards, a survey, to check how you’ve been treated, what things you’ve seen that you dislike... And that is being responded to... (…)” G8, 7

“(…) Something you use every day, ‘Mercadona’, for example: we’re going to carry out a survey on whether the products are arranged well...something like that. So, well, you might say: OK then, I’ll answer that because it just happens that I shop at that supermarket and I want them to improve the service” G6, 17

This prioritization of “personal and individual use” enables us to reflect on its counterbalance: an appreciation of “public matters” as a power that goes beyond individuals and their immediate environment and could, in turn, claim the right to be a potential beneficiary of the possible uses of a poll, is absent from the discourse. The constant references to the first person singular indicate that individuals do not seem to include themselves in the category of what is “public” unless public services that affect them directly are put into question. The image of the poll, which remains tied up in a “strategic” function, for either businesses or political parties, also transfers the perception of its usefulness to highly specific and individualized strategies focused on satisfaction, where the subjects perceive their status as “citizens” more as “customers” or “users” than as members of a group with shared stances, aims or demands.

This is why it is difficult to find a discourse on polls making reference to their usefulness as a citizen participation mechanism from a more collective standpoint. The usefulness of polls to enable the free expression of opinions on matters that go beyond merely private issues, or their explicit association with democracy, only appear indirectly in the general discourse. The only group where the role of opinion polls as a tool for citizen participation is specifically addressed is that formed by young people in a precarious employment situation (G5). But what does participation mean in this sense? The participants’ statements show that “participating” consists of something that goes beyond issuing a vote in an election. It is understood more as an attitude of responsible and informed commitment to issues that affect citizens as a group. The importance attributed to this need for information and analysis relating to public affairs appears when the possibility of crea-

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6 G8, 7: Group number 8 made up of retired men, in medium-sized towns; page 7 of the transcription.
7 G6, 17: Group number 6 made up of professional men and women with permanent salaried employment aged between 31 and 45, in medium-sized towns; page 17 of the transcription.
ticing social debate through published polls’ data is pointed out. It is therefore assumed that the published data are not static -as if they were a “snapshot” providing evidence of the “state” of reality- but rather are capable of generating dynamics subsequently when shared and analyzed collectively. However, that perception comes up against a much more pessimistic view of the real extent of the possibility that polls can be perceived as a useful formula for channeling collective participation. The following remarks summarize this stance:

“Due to a lack of commitment and there being nobody who should give you that vision. To get you to join in and not suck the information out of you. Instead, you should be told that this poll will be useful for this and for that...you should be told a little what it’s about and, maybe that way, it might occur to you to say, hey, look, this is important” G5, 27

It is very interesting to hear the graphic expression used by one of the participants that is repeated in other remarks about “sucking the information out of you”, as if it were symbolically a sort of “extraction” of something private, personal and valuable, which is assumed, but does not involve the participant’s will. It is difficult when the survey is represented with a meaning of this kind for the respondents to add their own motivation to it. When the poll is represented as an interaction in which the respondents’ only role is to expose themselves with resignation to the “extraction” of the requested information, agreeing to respond to the questions means “to put up with” the interview rather than to take part in it. Most importantly, this imaginary representation of the situation totally decontextualizes the themes covered by the poll. It seems that the intended subject matter of the poll eventually loses importance and “drowns” in the very act of carrying out the survey, the format of which in the end impose themselves on the content. Experiencing the “poll situation” in such a way, and perceiving its “usefulness” as an instrument of political manipulation -this is a constant dimension in all the groups- it is difficult for the respondents to appreciate the value of the subject matter of the research and to perceive the connection between the performance of the survey and the possible beneficial results that could arise from taking part in it. These young people assume that surveys “are not responded to well” because, for this to happen, there would have to be a motivation for taking part, which would include (provided there was a reward) the respondent’s involvement in the subject matter under study. Moreover, the perception of remoteness and disconnection with the visible results of the survey with regard to collective interests eventually generates a sense of “frustrated participation”. The tone is one of resignation when discussing the usefulness of polls as a participation mechanism: “you don’t see the results”, “you don’t see any of this”, “there’s no point to it”. This explains the low level of commitment to polls, even

5 G5, 27: Group number 5 made up of men and women in a precarious work situation, aged from 25 to 30, living in large urban areas; page 27 of the transcription
if people agree to respond to them. It is therefore perceived as a very weak channel for participation, and it is assumed that the results will have little influence on political decisions. “Something else” would be needed in order for these opinions to be taken into account by political powers:

“What I do believe is that polls are a source of knowledge for those who carry them out. What I don’t believe in is the effectiveness of this knowledge. The government receives more pressure from the survey in the streets on housing than 20,000 surveys of whatever sort. What has coerced them or forced them to take measures is not the result of the survey” G6, 40.

“The streets” are becoming the symbolic place of “effectiveness” with regard to citizens’ demands, one which is also “feared” by the political powers. The question that, for the analysis, this comment provokes is the difficulty of finding a way to mediate between opinion polls as a device that renders an idea of a passive public and “the streets” as the prime setting for citizen action. This gives evidence to the fact that there are no generalised discourses on channels through which citizens participate apart from the “elections” or an old link with opinion polls, the public image of which is widely damaged. Specifically, they do not come up in discourses because they are not known by the average Spanish citizen. This is where different understandings of “opinion” and “public” should be put forward, along with research devices capable of responding to a more discursive content of the former and more active and participative content of the latter.

**OPENING PUBLIC OPINION TO DELIBERATIVE AND PARTICIPATIVE PRACTICES. A REFLECTION ON DELIBERATIVE POLLING AND PUBLIC DEBATE**

A new type of critique to the traditional idea of public opinion has been developed from the 1980s, which points to not so much the technical shortcomings of the device for measuring subjectivity or the very conditions of possibility of “public opinion” emanating from the polls (Bourdieu 2000), but rather to a more political dimension based on a “deliberative” approach which entails a different way of understanding the “public”.

This perspective arises from worrying about giving greater social legitimacy to public policy due to greater participation by citizens in the taking of decisions. This is a participation which, according to the theoretical focus of “deliberative/participative democracy”, would imply the implementation of mechanisms beyond those of classical elections with

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5 The recent demonstrations that, organized with the help of the various social networks on the internet, have taken place based on the “15-M movement” demonstrate this. It is no coincidence that the main slogan of these actions includes “the streets” as a main protagonist: “Toma la calle” (“Take the streets”)
two aims: on one hand, to allow citizens to have a say in the decision-making process, and on the other, that this expression would come from opinions which are well-informed and discussed, after a process of collective discussion and deliberation aimed towards the interest of all. As such, the idea is to have the democratic ideal of participation (Bryce 1987) overlap the “enlightened” ideal of deliberation (Habermas 1994). The implementation of this approach has been carried out using various formats, each of them implying a certain “formula” which seeks to combine these two principal ingredients: participation and deliberation. But what they clearly share is the skepticism to traditional polls as a way to obtain “the real public opinion”. These devices effectively represent major changes or innovations in the traditional poll procedure, while not discarding it in certain stages of the process, as occurs in the deliberative polls (Fishkin 1995) and the experimental surveys (Brugidou 2008, 2010; Grunberg, Mayer and Sniderman 2002), or they differ from them, such as in the participative budgeting, citizen’s juries, consensus conferences, other hybrid forums (Lascoumes, Callon and Barthe 1997) or the public debate (Revel et al. 2007).

It is remarkable that the idea of the “public” as a unique and indivisible group, with a low level of involvement, and holder of “one” “majority opinion”, is put into question. From a sociological approach which aims to analyze social research methods and the way they could influence or “shape” the concepts studied, the devices that try to combine the principles of participation and deliberation would involve a notion of the public similar to that of a “collective”, where it is understood that this concept refers to existential contexts and shared social discourses that, in turn, might differ from one to another. While not all collectives occupy positions of similar social legitimization, this does not prevent them from having their own views and, therefore, their own discourse on day-to-day events. The consequences of this theoretical perspective on the concept of “public opinion” are significant since it starts to be considered more a social than a psychological process that takes place not so much inside individuals as “among them”. This is, as stated by P. Beaud and L. Quere (1990: 4) an intersubjective process in which the collective subject shares a situation, a social position, which gives rise to the existence of a shared world of feeling. Opinion does not take root inside the psyche of the individuals, rather the individuals become “subjects” capable of interpreting and grasping the phenomenon that they will evaluate based on the perspective of a particular social position, which is in turn mediated by various types of interest networks, ideological conditioning, pressure groups, etc.

**Deliberative Polling and public opinion research: implicit assumptions**

As Sturgis et al. (2005: 30) point out, perhaps the most ambitious deliberative formula to try to resolve the weaknesses of classic opinion polls has been the deliberative poll. Its proponent, J. Fishkin (1995, 2001, 2005) highlights it as the only “wide-scale” mechanism capable of overcoming the dilemma between political equality and deliberation. In contrast to other techniques which the author considers more limited due to deficiencies or
the absence of statistical representativeness (self-selection of participants in participative budgeting or in public debate, insufficient samples within citizens juries or in consensus conferences), the deliberative poll will allow a sample of citizens which are statistically representative of the entire population to deliberate thoughtfully through face-to-face discussion on certain matters of general interest (Fishkin 1995: 200). The process, described in detail in Cuesta et al. (2008), implies the administration of the same survey at the start and end of an experience in which the participants debate, both in small groups and full sessions, the arguments for and against a specific matter of general interest. The deliberative poll was conceived to offer a measure of citizens’ opinions on a certain matter, as long as they had the time, resources and opportunity to think and debate on the matter. A measure is offered comparing the results obtained the first and second times the survey was given.

The methodology applied in this deliberative poll showed certain implicit assumptions. Firstly, the combination of participation and deliberation was resolved by focusing on the epistemic value of the device in terms of the importance of the second principle. In fact, in Fishkin’s texts, there are not as many explicit references to “participation” as to “political equality”, understood as fairly representative of every preference (Fishkin, 1995:58, 2005:40), which would be guaranteed simply by the statistical representativeness of the chosen participants. Therefore, the participative ideal is understood here as theoretical equality of opportunities for all to participate through a sample of participants statistically representative of the entire population. The self-selection or reduced samples found in other participative formats would therefore act as obstacles to achieving political equality. In any case, this principle appears to depend on that of deliberation: on various occasions, Fishkin (1995:66, 93) refers to how promoting participation or political equality was insufficient if this is not accompanied by a deliberative process: deliberation allows citizens to think about the power that they are exercising. Without it, there is no guarantee that this power will be used for the good of all. This idea allows us to observe a second assumption: that the need for an ad hoc “deliberative treatment” implies a certain idea of incompetence of the masses inserted into their real, vital contexts, to make decisions on public matters. This is precisely the argument that Fishkin makes, not only to criticise the uninformed opinions which come from traditional opinion polls but also to justify the need for creating an artificial context which, in fact, involves an experimental logic. This would solve the non-expert public’s informational and deliberative deficiencies on public matters.

By establishing deliberation as a fundamental value, this mechanism clearly sets the conditions of its development: it must be the product of informed discussion in which all arguments for and against the matter are deliberated equally and which the participants

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10 Cuesta et al. (2008: 25) created a list of the experiences participants had when taking the deliberative poll between 1994 and 2007. The Spanish surveys, examined in detail by these authors, were carried out in Córdoba in 2006, with the subject matter being “juvenile consumption of alcohol in the street”.
must weigh up simply for their quality as such (Fishkin, 2005:285). In this sense, Bernard Manin’s thesis, according to which the quality of deliberation is not ensured from a generic plural discussion where participants spontaneously deliver their points of view about the topic in question (Manin 2005a, 2005b), maintains that a mere discursive exchange of a group willing to voice their opinions on a given issue is in danger of ignoring any points of view whose direction and outlook differ from the majority opinion of the group. Considering that the quality of deliberation in the end depends not so much on the opportunity for an equal say for all of the participants, but rather on the guarantee that all the participants are informed about all of the arguments for and against the decision to be adopted, Manin believes that “contradictory” debate proceedings (based on presenting opposing arguments) have greater epistemic value (Manin 2005a: 250). That is to say they are more able to bring forth the “correct” decision after the deliberation process. Such is the approach which would preside ideally the dynamics of deliberative polling.

However, these assumptions pose problems for sociological analysis of public opinion. Firstly, the evaluation of the device appears to have been focused on measuring the change of opinion (Fishkin, 1995:290), in such a way that obtaining differing results between the first and second polls guarantees the success of the procedure: the deliberative “treatment” would have been successful. In this sense, considerations should be given to not only the experimental approach which measures the efficiency of a technique through pre- and post-treatment questionnaires but also to why the quality of a deliberative process must necessarily imply a change of opinion. It doesn’t seem to have been considered that participants may have a priori opinions which are well-formed or which are anchored in solid foundations. In fact, it seems to overestimate the capacity of mere information, however balanced and deliberated it may be, to imply a change that makes an opinion thoughtful, stable and, therefore, “desirable”. As Rosell explained when presenting another deliberative approach, ChoiceDialogues, “for controversial issues, a critical role is played by beliefs, values, emotions, and personal experience in addition to information” (Fishkin and Rosell, 2004: 56). Information is only a small part of the opinion formation process, and it is hard to assume that participants approach it in a “sanitised” manner without the ideological or affective intervention which always, more or less consciously, goes through any social position from which information is transmitted or received. As Livet pointed out (2007: 339), the appearance of emotions does not necessarily spoil a debate. It can actually reveal participants’ positions and their effective relationships. Actually, a deliberative process based on a “contradictory debate” implies a

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11 The reasons why the author considers that “plurality” or “diversity” of opinions does not guarantee adequate deliberation (in contrast to what occurs with “conflictive” or “contradictory” opinions) are set out in detail in Manin (2005b: 8-13).

12 This is the word used by Fishkin and Luskin (2005: 289) to describe “everything that happens between the moment of recruitment and the end of the weekend (the end of the process).”

13 A description of ChoiceDialogues in comparison with Deliberative polls can be found in Fishkin and Rosell (2004).
quantitative premise when considering the possible opinions that an issue can raise: how can we be sure that all points of view in favour of or against have been put forward, in order to guarantee a “balanced” stance? The fact that a great many conflicting arguments are presented does not mean that all of them carry the same weight or have the same symbolic effectiveness. Individuals form their perception through the social position they hold, so the mere exposure to opposing arguments will possibly not be enough to introduce these arguments into articulate and credible discourse, especially if the issue has strong ideological or social connotations. Therefore one needs to ask what guarantee there is, for topics that have particularly obvious connotations and that raise deep-rooted ideologies or positions, that the “balanced” exposure of opposing arguments can lead to an equally “balanced” opinion, since we understand the latter to be the outcome of a rapprochement of the points of discord. Similarly, in these cases, we could ask if that outcome is really sustainable in ordinary life, or if it is only virtual, simply a result of the device being put into practice.

The institutionalization of a participative device: the Public Debate

Despite the development and systematisation achieved by the deliberative poll, this activity has no legislative basis and, as such, has not been institutionalised as a mechanism regularly used to gather the opinions of citizens. The interest in focusing on the French experience of Public Debate is due to its special feature as an institutional practice of participative democracy: its activity comes from a public authority body with a nationwide reach, which was created, develops and works as stipulated by current legislation and, as a result, represents another in a line of government activities. This legislative basis constitutes an important difference with respect to other participative devices. Public Debate arose in the creation of the National Commission for Public Debate (CNDP)\textsuperscript{14}, in the Barnier law of February 2, 1995. This institution was set up with the aim of encouraging debate on “major public renovation projects of national, state and local interest that entail a strong socioeconomic or environmental impact” (Revel et. al. 2002: 9), becoming an independent and “neutral” authority (Revel, et al. 2007: 12) charged with impartially mediating between the decision-making authority and the public.

From the theoretical approach of the “participative/deliberative democracy” and, therefore, from a consideration of the “public” based on these premises, the concept of public opinion that stems from the Public Debate device can be understood as a communicational process that arises as a result of public deliberation and discussion, where the participants (“ordinary” citizens, representatives, experts, technicians and public authorities), making use of cognitive, rhetorical and discursive abilities, find somewhere to pose

\textsuperscript{14} The CNDP (Comisión Nationale du Débat Public) is not the first institution of this kind. It was preceded by Canada’s BAPE (Bureau d’audiences publiques sur l’environnement), which was created in Quebec at the end of 1978. For more information on the legislation, history and projects of the CNDP, visit www.debatpublic.fr
questions, offer replies and pose the questions again. In contrast to traditional polls or even deliberative polls, this perspective would imply to talk of “publics” in plural that exist as forms of collective coordination around a matter or problem on which they project their interests and concerns; “publics” considered collectives that discuss and express their opinions from concrete social positions. The principles of the CNDP, the specific nature and magnitude of the issue to be addressed, the fact that the process lasts for months, the resources that are required, and the infrastructure necessary for carrying out dozens of debate sessions make this mechanism hard to put into practice without public investment. Although Public Debate does not have “taking a decision” on the project being debated as its objective, and although its results are not linked to political authority (Delaunay 2008: 31), it is undeniable that “a possible decision” constitutes a horizon implicit in the discussion. For those reasons, the public debate is subject to permanent tension between its supposed use in elucidating a decision and the awareness that, in fact, nothing is decided here. It may be that this ambivalent relationship with the final decision contributes to the mechanism working in practice, even when it is not possible to guarantee a consensus as a final result. As Blondiaux pointed out (2009), public debate can be simultaneously considered as a place of expression of the conflict and a search for a consensus. However, in both cases, it is a place which, theoretically, allows for the expression of the opinions and points of view of all of those “members of the public” who wish to attend, without any form of pre-selection. The attendees’ implication and interest in participation (whatever quality it may be) seems to be guaranteed a priori, in contrast to the deliberative poll.

Ideally, Public Debate is conceived for creating dynamics that re-distribute political positions, in order to get a symbolic equality of participants. The device attempts to guarantee equity among the agents who take part in it through interactive communication and feedback of the points of view, in clear contrast to the dynamic set in other formats for registering the respondents’ position on public affairs, mainly the opinion poll and even discussion groups. By comparing the dynamics that are generated ideally in four devices, we can analyze, in a theoretical and schematic manner, the various forms of understanding two concepts that emerge from them: the “opinion” (whilst being aware that this generic name is not generally used in devices other than polls), and the group—the “public”—to which this refers (Figure 1).

In the first two cases, as a result of the asymmetry that arises in the respondent-pollster and group-moderator relationships, the opinion flows excessively in one direction, i.e. that which goes from the individual or group to the registry mechanism, whether a questionnaire or a recording of the conversation. Because of the symbolic “belonging” of these mechanisms to the pollster and moderator, their function consists merely of generating the conditions in order for the “collation” of what is expressed by the participant(s).
Clearly, the conditions of this unidirectionality are different if we compare the dynamics of polls and discussion groups: in the latter device there are possibilities for debate that do not exist in the former, but this occurs among equivalent identity positions with regard to the issues of the debate. The moderator, the only attendee belonging to the outside group of the participants, remains theoretically outside the debate and only intervenes in it to provide order. In deliberative polls, spaces are generated -the so-called “deliberative forums” (Cuesta 2008: 67), in which participants, selected at random, may debate the matter at hand by following a scheme known as “contradictory debate”. However, the formula used to “register” the opinion at the end —a post-forum survey with questions identical to those in the earlier survey— implies that more attention is given to measuring the effects of the dynamic than to the generation of an opinion formed through the exchange and feedback between different social positions with regard to the problem being debated. In contrast, the public debate is conceived in such a way that the “results” of the process are not produced until the various groups, which represent various stances with regard to the issues in question, have confronted their points of view on several occasions, therefore having the chance to revisit and amend them, where appropriate, in order to produce arguments from different positions, considered relevant for a potential decision, even if that decision does not finally arrive. Consequently, the opinion theoretically flows in several directions and is constructed and prepared time and again as the various collectives take part. This dynamic and discursive conception of how public opinion is formed is certainly shared by other devices —citizens’ juries, consensus conferences, citizens’ assemblies— which assume a concept of public opinion quite removed from that of the “snapshot” provided by traditional polling. But holding dozens of sessions over several months provides the public debate with a relatively prolonged period in which the opinion can “mature” and settle during the process.
Moreover, the concept of “public” presents particular nuances in each of the four devices considered in figure 1. In contrast to what occurs in opinion polls (the implications of which were referred to in the previous section) it would be possible to find in the discussion groups and even in the public debate a contextualized “public”, in other words, participants able to issue their opinions from the social position they occupy with regard to the issue addressed, shared with other participants with whom they identify, and that the device is capable in making visible. In the discussion groups, this shared identity in a “group work” situation would facilitate discursive opinions that eventually express collective, as opposed to individual, points of view. In the public debate, these sessions, which are always open, do not imply the formation of heterogeneous groups which debate separately one from another. However, it must not be forgotten that, although the a priori objective is to record all of the relevant arguments with respect to the matter at hand, they are still discourses which come from specific and various social positions with respect to the question addressed (the relevant arguments are not infinite and never come from the “social vacuum”) and which the participants can identify during the dynamic. In a deliberative poll, opinions do not necessarily come from groups which are socially contextualised since they are formed randomly between participants: as the small deliberative groups are socially heterogeneous, it is difficult to obtain a “positional” discourse that clearly identifies the collective holding a certain view or opinion about the subject to be addressed or debated. By trying to function as a necessary process to solve the supposed lack of information from citizens in their daily lives on public matters, the implicit concept of “public” in the deliberative poll even finds parallels with Lippmann’s work on the uninformed masses manipulated by the mass media. From this perspective, therefore, the public is only potentially deliberative: it needs to be stimulated —thanks to the dynamic implemented—in order to “escape” from its daily passivity and thoughtlessness.

On the other hand, the “passivity” referred to in figure 1 with regard to the discussion group does not mean the absence of conversational activity; clearly, the group’s discursive production is its reason for being. We refer to the fact that the group attendees do not have in mind an expression for the action, i.e. they do not expect subsequently any type of consequence relating to their remarks. The group expresses itself to enable things to be “known” but not to “act”. In contrast, the overriding idea behind the public debate includes the concept of an “active” public as an essential element of its philosophy. The fact that the mechanism is only implemented in very precise and identifiable themes, that the attendees may participate in further meetings where they expect other positions, different from those with which the participant identifies, and that the latent horizon of a decision is always present—even if it is not actually reachable—provides a huge help for the participants to feel involved with the device. A concept of an “active” public in which it is considered that attending meetings, expressing, exchanging views and revisiting one’s own views in light of all the arguments contributes to shaping a decision to be adopted, is also shared by other participative devices. However, in most of them the number of attendees is rather low in comparison to what public debate allows, due to a kind of prior selection formula. Entrance to the
sessions of public debate is totally voluntary and free, which can give rise to dynamics of a large audience. Anyone can enter or leave the meeting room at any moment, without there being any stipends to receive (in contrast to what happens, for example, in some citizens’ juries and in the deliberative poll). This is not without importance because this lack of prior selection could generate a specific sort of implication for some of the attendees, constituting a differential feature of public debate: the role of the participant as an attentive observer who does not speak or express him/herself in the discussion.

However, in which sense are these considerations supported by practical reality? The empirical analysis of the dynamic of the sessions generated by the Public Debate, by putting a concrete example into practice, provides us clues to understand if the real format of the sessions is compatible with the premises of the device.

The development of a debate dynamic: the case of the project to extend the Paris metro

On September 30, 2010 a public debate process, promoted by the CNDP, was launched. It was set to last four months (until January 31, 2011), in which time 75 debating sessions were held in various points of the region known as Île-de-France. The theme to be debated was the extension to the metro line, which would affect both the city of Paris and the suburban areas of the region. The debating process, for which there is a budget of six million euros, does not start from “zero”; what is put into motion, in truth, is a double, parallel debating process in relation to the two projects that are quite well developed but are at odds: the Grand-Paris project, supported by the government, with a focus on pursuing the connection and territorial promotion of business and technology centers, and the Arc-Express supported by the STIF transport union, which is more focused on improving the precarious transport conditions suffered by the “Franciliens” in their daily commute, mainly those who live in the suburban areas (banlieues). The CNDP organized some joint sessions in which representatives of both projects took part, mainly at the beginning and end of the process, but most of them are devoted specifically to debate each of the projects. Therefore, the CNDP appointed partial commissions, each responsible for one of the two projects.

As well as the points raised in the debate itself and the final outcome of it16, it is now interesting to observe some of the characteristics of the dynamic of the sessions. The inaugural session took place in Paris in a large auditorium, the amphitheater of the Porte Maillot Congress Center, which has seating for 3,500 people and where it was really difficult to find a spare place. What was most striking was that the only information that the debate would take place was released on the same day (September 30) through

16 All information on the two projects, the progress of the debate and the substantive conclusions can be found on the CNDP website: www.debatpublic.fr/
advertisements in local newspapers. Despite this, the auditorium was practically full (entry was free to anyone who wished to attend) and, in the course of around three hours that the debate took place, the hall remained practically full, without any visible spare seats until 11 o’clock at night.

How can a participation dynamic be managed in a session where, as well as almost 3,500 attendees, “absent” participants were able to join in by videoconference? I could immediately perceive that one of the professed basic principles for guiding the public debate—the theoretical equivalence—gave way in practice to a highly formalized dynamic, which followed a strict protocol for granting and measuring speaking time for attendees who, moreover, occupied different physical (and symbolic) areas for expressing their views. As can be observed in the photograph below, the participants’ seating location in the hall established a clear differentiation among them:

Figure 2.
Participants’ seating location in a Public Debate’s session
Paris, 30th September 2010

![Participants’ seating location in a Public Debate’s session](image)

Source: Prepared by the author

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17 The free newspaper “20 minutes” announced the event as follows: “At last you have your say on Grand Paris”, “With a budget of 6 million euros, this is the biggest public debate in history”. And the front page contained the following headline: “Grand Paris, the big debate: Franciliens are invited to express their views on the suburban metro projects. This is participative democracy on a large scale”.

18 The photograph, which is of poor quality, was taken from where I was sitting in the hall with a low-
Representatives of the CNDP, experts, technicians and top representatives of each of the projects in question were spread around two large tables (each with members of each of the two projects) facing the public and located on the stage of the amphitheater, thereby occupying the preferential speaking positions, not only because of their central location but also in terms of the speaking time granted to them during the meeting. The other attendees, the vast majority, were seated, as can be observed, in the rows of seats of the amphitheater, in a position that, except for certain participants who turned out to be elected representatives of certain collectives with a major interest and involvement in the subject (and who were sitting in the front rows near the stage) was more that of attentive observers—as mentioned above, very few people left the venue before the end of the meeting—than of active participants in the debate.

The member of the Commission chairing the debate introduced the various stages comprising it, which were scheduled perfectly, and granted time to each speech. The meetings I attended presented a structured dynamic in a very similar way. In the opening minutes, the member representing the CNDP took the floor to legitimize its function, explaining the aims and philosophy overriding the Commission and the Public Debate, insisting that its sole mission was to moderate a debate from a standpoint of neutrality, quality, transparency and fairness, without taking part in the debate itself. Following that, the people who were sitting at the tables on the stage (occupying leading representative posts on the projects, together with technicians and experts connected with the projects) explained what the projects consisted of, their guidelines, route map, etc., supported by a video on a big screen. Only after making this presentation, could the attendees who made up the “public” take the floor. They were told that they could only speak for up to “three minutes”, taking into consideration the high number of attendees who could choose to speak. The support staff provided a microphone to whomever, respecting their turn, raised their hand with the intention of speaking. The speeches that occurred in this phase of the session consisted mainly of brief comments on the perceived needs in the participants’ close, day-to-day contexts or, essentially, of questions made to one or other of the participants who formed part of the group of experts sitting at the tables on the stage who, as alluded to, took their turn to reply. One point attracting attention was that these comments and questions were often made by the same people, who introduced themselves as representatives of interested collectives or associations. In fact, as shown in Revel’s study on the dynamics of six Public Debate processes, the institutionalisation of the device has generated progressive standardisation in practices carried out (Revel 2007: 249) and, therefore, a certain “typical structuring” of the role that each one of the groups implied in the debate assumes. The representatives that defend the perspective of specific collectives are found to be especially active. Therefore, two clearly differentiated attitudes can be perceived among the “non-expert” public attending the debate: on
the one hand, the active participants who made comments or posed questions, most of them as representatives of associations, collectives, etc. and, on the other hand, the observers who wished to be present up until the last minute to be informed. Moreover, participation was not only possible by attending the meeting; the CNDP provided a space so that anyone who wished to take part via the internet could do so and their comments were noted and analyzed subsequently by the members of the commission. This point is of particular interest as it could be the key to extending participation to anyone unable to attend or unwilling to speak in public or through a “representative”. Another interesting aspect is the presence of information stands for each project in the corridors next to the hall in which the debate was being held. Before entering or on leaving the hall, attendees had the chance to gather a substantial amount of material to consult when not at the session, which consisted of “information” brochures on each of the projects being debated, the basic function of which was to advertise the projects. The volume of the published information was surprising. Videos and photographs of all the sessions, a transcription of the debates, reports, preliminary conclusions, final conclusions, etc. are all in the public domain and may be consulted by anyone who so requests, free of charge.

The information seems guaranteed but what about the participation? It is difficult for the dynamic described here, as well as the conditions in which it can develop (we should not forget that, in some cases, thousands of people gathered at these sessions), to have an obvious correlation with the premise of equity which presides the development of the debate. As Revel points out (2007: 245), this principle does not neutralise the elements that, independently of the arguments expressed, produce asymmetry in the position of the participants: social position, competences and other potential sources of domination. Interestingly, the procedure that was actually applied during these sessions is close to what B. Manin considers as the most satisfactory proposition for ensuring effective deliberation. The privileged statement of the experts representing each of the metro extension projects (each of the representatives offered different informative formats about the advantages of each project and the reasons why one should support them, as well as allowing temporarily a limited voice to the rest of the attendees) closely resembles Manin’s description of experiences which can, in his view, lead to satisfactory deliberation: “(...) in order for satisfactory deliberation to occur, it is relatively irrelevant whether these arguments are introduced without any dialogue between the deliberants. One can imagine that firstly orators, experts, personalities, present their points of view and deliberately opposing arguments in front of the deliberating assembly, and then that the assembly deliberates” (Manin 2005a: 254). What seems to emerge from this reasoning is a clear differentiation between deliberation and participation, giving priority to the former with regards to the epistemic value of any device which may incorporate both. And if this can be applied to the dynamics previously described, public debate, whilst offering interesting opportunities for deliberation, have not managed to consolidate ways in which this deliberation can acquire a fully participative nature.
CONCLUSIONS

The representations associated with the research devices are influential when preparing the concepts under study and, therefore, when shaping the perception of the participants about them. The analysis of CIS qualitative study demonstrates that the meager expectations held by the participants with regard to the ability of polls to be a participation mechanism and their lack of predisposition to respond to them indicate that the device has become detached from the argument that, in its beginnings, attempted to link it to democratic development. Opinion in the form of a percentage is offered as such a unitary and consensus figure that it is easy not to see the position itself reflected in it. The public is shaped more like an “audience” than an active collective, although that does not mean, as is also demonstrated in the study, that the participants lack opinions and arguments about current affairs. Nevertheless, there is no perception that the individuals’ participation as poll respondents will lead to any advantage or use for them, bearing in mind that polls have become identified more with commercial or party political strategies than with social research techniques, whether or not they are accredited by an institutional initiative. Such identification owes more to the over-exposure to advertising and sales promotions (telephone and internet companies, banking services, etc.) with which individuals are usually bombarded, than to the actual content and nature of the process which is carried out in order to obtain information. The group discourse of the afore-mentioned study shows that individuals do not take part in as many actual surveys as is supposed, and that their experience is a great deal more related to those sales strategies (which are confused with surveys), thus conditioning their perception of them. However, leaving to one side what are only sales promotions (whose appearance in the discourse about surveys is completely spontaneous and almost automatic, although they are really not related to surveys), when individuals try to consider the ability of polls to produce data which reflects “the reality of public opinion”, the conclusions are rather discouraging. Whether they be market studies made by private research institutes, such as social and, especially, political polls, carried out by private or public institutions (INE, CIS)¹⁹, lurking in the background during the whole discourse there is a “strategy” that is adopted only to benefit a specific business corporation, political party or government. What influence does this perception have on the validity of the polls carried out by research centres that rigorously follow “scientific” procedures? In light of the analysis of the discourse, it can be observed that although individuals believe in the neutrality and impartiality of “science”, which in polls or surveys manifests itself as the representative method of statistics, they are extremely dubious about the credibility of its results when they are able to disassociate the scientific procedure from the motivating intentions of the study, always perceived as having commercial and political strategies. So although the epistemic value

¹⁹INE: Instituto Nacional de Estadística; CIS: Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas.
of polls obviously depends on the respect for statistical representativity, there are other factors that, particularly in the study of “public opinion”, pose difficulties. On the one hand, it would be illusory to think that by merely applying the statistical method correctly, one is providing an “objective” and “neutral” device: drawing up the questionnaire entails establishing the categories that “consensually” one has deemed worth investigating. The choice of these categories—always likely to be stated discursively—implies a subjective act, no matter how serious, detailed or meticulous its creation process may have been. On the other hand, the evident lack of credibility that these surveys suffer from, combined with the feeling that participation in them has limited usefulness for ordinary citizens, equates to a lack of motivation and indifference in the responses. This not only has a bearing on the no-response percentages, but also suggests that it is highly possible many of the responses are not valid, since due to the desire to shorten the interview time, they are provided without the consideration they deserve. These and other problems (inhibitions in giving a genuine response when dealing with especially connoted subjects, possible misunderstanding of the statements, etc.) raise serious difficulties for viewing the results of the polls as a “true” reflection of public opinion, even when using statistically representative samples, a carefully designed questionnaire and a statistical treatment of the data; in short, citizens’ perceptions of the research method have an impact on the ultimate validity of its results.

On the other hand, finding a sample of statistically representative citizens is not equivalent to ensuring equal opportunities for all to participate. We understand participation as a process which is more complex and where there are various degrees and shades difficult to make equal. Some degrees will depend, among other things, on the social group of the subject, on the opportunities for collective expression generated during the debate dynamics led by a moderator, and, no less important, of the subject’s involvement with the object of opinion and even with the device itself. Although “self-selection” of participants, something which is common in various participative devices, is considered an obstacle by the deliberative poll’s assumptions, it is possible that it is that “will to be involved”, quite apart from any statistical selection or economic compensation, which guarantees a true participative opinion, one which does not bow to pressure or indifference, independently of the form that this participation takes.

Despite the question marks raised by Public Debates about whether their practical implementation fully corresponds with the theoretical guidelines of participative or deliberative democracy, we consider that the device itself has a high level of symbolic effectiveness in involving participants, although the degrees of “activity” in the effective participation vary. Although Revel points out that “ordinary citizens” are the ones that are silenced and absent in the debate, we consider that not participating in the interaction does not mean that taking part is not possible: “attend and learn” is probably the attitude of many citizens who turn up to the debate. Although they may not express an opinion, they attend voluntarily—without expecting any economic compensation—and stay in order to form a better-informed opinion. This is a relatively spontaneous attitude which may be interesting for the generation, a posteriori, of commitment and social debate. In
contrast to other mechanisms which, like the deliberative poll, select their participants a priori, voluntary attendance and paying attention without expecting any compensation is interesting for the cultivation of a society in which social debate on matters of public interest is encouraged.

The specific nature and magnitude of the questions to be debated, the legitimacy attributed to the process through the involvement of a public institution that moderates and guarantees the conditions of the debate, the existence of a culture of citizen participation (particularly in the case of France) that is buoyed by the implementation of initiatives such as this one, holding numerous, actual sessions, on-going publishing of information on the process, etc. represent reasons that probably incite more interest in participants to become involved than the dynamic established in the rules governing the debate meeting. This is why we talk of symbolic effectiveness with real consequences. Regardless of the final conclusions, the public debating process projects an image of public institutions concerned about the public’s opinions on subjects that supposedly affect them, assuming that, in effect, the participants have something to say and to contribute on this matter. And this image, without a doubt, encourages participation, even if it means simply attending as an observer or in order to read published information.

If the limited credibility of the surveys can affect their validity as a research method, we can likewise imagine that, to involve participants in public affairs will take more than channels to facilitate this involvement—social legitimization is needed. Participants have to perceive the importance of their active role, not only as conveyors of a “state of opinion” but also as agents whose discursive and argued opinions play a role in decision-making. To achieve this, it is essential that the representations associated with the devices designed to achieve participative opinions are related to the perception of their importance and usefulness from a collective standpoint. The role of institutions in this could be important, since although the provision of channels and format is always a way of constraining spontaneity, it might also be a new way of discovering citizens’ interest towards their active role in public affairs, beyond “election routines” as the only “standardized” context in which citizens feel that voicing their opinion has consequences.

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Beatriz Mañas is Ph.D. in Sociology (UNED) and lecturer in Methods and Techniques of Social Research in the Faculty of Political Sciences and Sociology (UNED). She has been visiting researcher in EHESS (Paris), UCLA (Los Angeles) and LSE (London). Her research interests lie in public opinion research and its relation with political participation.

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CITIZENS’ PERCEPTIONS OF POLITICAL PROCESSES
A critical evaluation of preference consistency and survey items

ABSTRACT
The current state of research does not tell us much about citizens’ expectations of political decision making. Most surveys allow respondents to evaluate how the current system is working, but do not inquire about alternative political decision-making procedures. The lack of established survey items can be explained by the fact that radical changes in decision-making procedures have been hard to envisage, but also by a general scepticism regarding people’s ability to form opinions on these matters. Political processes are, without doubt, complex matters that do not lend themselves very well to simplistic survey questions. Moreover, previous research has convincingly shown that most people in general have difficulties forming single, coherent and stable attitudes even towards far more straightforward political issues. In order to determine if trying to grasp attitudes towards political decision-making in future empirical studies can be considered a fruitful endeavour, this study sets out to critically assess the extent to which people express coherent preferences on these matters, and if preferences are in line with expectations in previous, rather scattered research. The study is based on the Finnish National Election Study 2011; a study which, contrary to most other election studies, includes a rich variety of survey items on the topic, and utilises a combination of strategies in order to explore patterns in the opinions held by citizens.

KEYWORDS
Citizen preferences; Direct democracy; Political decision making; Representative democracy; Stealth democracy.

RESUMEN
El estado actual de las investigaciones no nos dice mucho sobre las expectativas de los ciudadanos con respecto a la toma de decisiones políticas. La mayoría de las encuestas permiten que quienes las responden evalúen cómo funciona el sistema actual, pero no preguntan por procedimientos alternativos de decisión política. La falta de preguntas de encuesta contrastadas se puede explicar tanto por el hecho de que los cambios en los procedimientos de toma de decisiones han resultado difíciles de prever, como por el escepticismo general con respecto a la capacidad de las personas para formarse una opinión sobre estos asuntos. Los procesos políticos son, sin duda, asuntos complejos que no se prestan bien a preguntas simplistas de encuesta. Además, los estudios previos han demostrado convincentemente que la mayoría de la gente tiene dificultades en general para adoptar una actitud única, estable y coherente que tenga que ver con asuntos políticos incluso mucho más directos. Para determinar si el hecho de intentar captar las actitudes hacia la toma de decisiones políticas en futuros estudios empíricos es una empresa fructífera, este estudio pretende valorar críticamente hasta qué punto la gente expresa preferencias coherentes sobre estos asuntos, y si esas preferencias están en consonancia con lo que se esperaba en las dispersas investigaciones previas. Este estudio se basa en la Encuesta Electoral Finlandesa de 2011, un estudio que, a diferencia de la mayoría de los estudios electorales, incluye una rica variedad de preguntas de encuestas sobre este tema y utiliza una combinación de estrategias para buscar algún patrón en la opinión de los ciudadanos.

PALABRAS CLAVE
Democracia directa; Democracia furtiva; Democracia representativa; Preferencias ciudadanas; Toma de decisiones políticas.
INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, citizens have become more critical of the actors and institutions that form the basis of the representative democratic process, while turnout in elections as well as party membership have been in decline; a development described as a challenge to representative democracy. The most commonly suggested action in order to overcome this challenge has been to bring people back into politics with the use of more participatory forms of democracy. However, it appears likely that the success of such an endeavour is dependent on the support of citizens; support that is yet to be confirmed by systematic empirical research. If citizens do not consider this a desirable development, it is highly questionable if advances towards a more diverse set of opportunities for engaging in political issues can offer a cure to the malaise that has afflicted representative democracies around the world.

Citizens’ preferences concerning political decision making is in fact a highly neglected issue in the field of opinion research, resulting in a lack of systematic and balanced information. To a large extent, this insufficient knowledge is due to a lack of well-functioning and established survey items on the topic. Standard investigations of public opinion tend to be output or policy oriented. Voters are repeatedly asked to reveal their level of approval for specific governmental institutions and for democracy in general, but not about alternatives to existing procedures and how they would like the political system to work. With the exception of a few recent advances, most surveys show a striking lack of interest in alternative, democratic political decision-making procedures. Indeed, repeated surveys have shown that there is strong support for a more frequent use of referendums (Dalton et al. 2001; Donovan & Karp 2006; Bowler et al., 2007; Bengtsson & Mattila 2010; Anderson & Goodyear-Grant 2011). However, a single measurement does not provide the full story about people’s preferences (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse 2002).

There are several potential explanations for the absence of conventional survey items that are able to grasp process preferences. One important reason is that substantive changes in the way government is run have been difficult to envisage. Another reason is the underlying assumption that people lack the ability to form opinions on such complex matters as political decision-making procedures. Considering the fact that people’s ability to form stable opinions on far more straightforward issues (Zaller & Feldman 1992; Tourangeau et al. 2000), this perception is perhaps not surprising. Yet another, more practical reason is that issues at this level of complexity do not easily translate into simplistic survey questions.

Undoubtedly, it is of vast relevance for the discipline of political science to learn more about citizens’ preferences for political decision making. But before embarking on the big task of providing an overview of people’s true preferences on this highly complex matter, as well as accounting for these preferences, it seems appropriate to examine the extent to which it is likely to be a fruitful endeavour. The Finnish National Election Study 2011 (FNES 2011) is one of the rare exceptions to the typical non-existence of survey items dealing with political processes. The FNES 2011 includes a rich variety of questions on
political decision making, covering both alternative procedures and several differently framed questions on the same issues. The aim of this study is to use this rich dataset in order to study the extent to which people’s preferences display logical and coherent patterns in line with theoretical expectations. The issue is tackled by two different approaches: by looking at patterns among variables and among respondents.

The paper is structured as follows. The next section of the study expands upon existing research on citizens’ decision-making preferences, its conclusions and shortcomings. The problems involved with measuring process preferences are discussed in the light of more general research concerning survey research and opinion stability in the following section. The empirical part of the study is then introduced by a presentation of the empirical design, including a thorough introduction to the survey items used. This is followed by the empirical analyses of preference patterns with the use of factor and cluster analysis. The study concludes with a discussion of the empirical results and its implications for future research.

Process Preferences. An underexplored field of research

Political decision-making procedures tend to be stable, at least in advanced democracies. Most, if not all democratic systems rest on the principle of indirect representation; a system in which political parties play an important role. However, while the basic structures of democratic government in most countries have been constant over time, and support for democracy as a general principle stands high, a very different story can be told about citizens’ support for the main actors and institutions of democratic government, as well as their interest in participating within the representative framework. Erosion of citizen support for parties and politicians and decreasing rates of turnout has led to growing concern among political scientists (e.g. Norris 1999; Dalton 2004), which, in turn, has caused reformists to call for new forms of political participation. It is argued that more participatory forms of democracy would help overcome some of the cynicism and feelings of disempowerment that many citizens express towards the political arena today.

Repeated surveys, complemented by a relatively rich literature, provide us with evidence of widespread popular support of one participatory mechanism; specifically, the use of referendums (Dalton et al. 2001; Donovan & Karp 2006; Bowler et al., 2007; Bengtsson & Mattila 2010; Anderson & Goodyear-Grant 2011). By now, it stands clear that a majority of citizens in most advanced democracies are in favour of a more frequent use of referendums. Although it is clear that referendums are far from the only participatory mechanism that reformists are interested in, this is one of the few that are repeatedly asked in surveys.

The conclusion that a more frequent use of referendums and other forms of participatory reforms can help overcome the challenge faced by most advanced democracies has, however, been questioned. According to recent research, enthusiasm for direct democracy may reflect what people find lacking in representative democracy as much
as it reflects interest in a more participatory version of democracy (Bowler et al. 2007; Bengtsson & Mattila 2009). One of the main criticisms has been presented by the American scholars John Hibbing and Elisabeth Theiss-Morse. In their book Stealth Democracy (2002), they claim that people do not really want to become personally more involved in politics, and that the main reason for many respondents saying that they prefer more direct democracy in opinion surveys is that surveys generally do not offer enough relevant options for respondents to express their desire for political change (ibid., 88). The argument put forward does merit some credit since most of the research in the field is based on only single statements such as:

“Important issues should more frequently be decided by referendums” (FNES 2011)
“Referendums are a good way to decide important political questions” (ISSP 2004)

Hibbing and Theiss-Morse argue that the first preference of citizens is to make representative democracy function better, not to have more participatory forms of democracy. However, since people in general consider allowing current politicians to misuse their gained position for their own benefit to be a worse option, they reply to statements such as those above in a positive manner. In their own analyses, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse find support for what they label Stealth democracy. Stealth democracy refers to a form of a political system which instead of emphasising direct citizen involvement stresses efficiency, less debate and a more extended role for experts in the political decision making process. They reach their conclusions based on a very different set of indicators such as1:

“Our government would run better if decisions were left up to nonelected, independent experts rather than politicians or the people.”
“Elected officials would help the country more if they would stop talking and just take action on important problems.”

Ironically enough, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, who themselves have claimed that surveys in general do not offer enough alternatives for people to express their true opinions, have been strongly criticised on methodological grounds (see for example Neblo et al. 2010). The statements used in the Stealth Democracy study are indeed very colourful and do not play out different alternative forms of government against each other. Irrespective of if their interpretation of people’s preferences concerning political decision making is correct or not, an important contribution of their study is the raised awareness of the insufficient level of knowledge concerning citizens’ expectations about representative democracy, as well as its alternatives.

1 The two examples represent two out of four statements used in the Stealth Democracy index.
The argument put forward by Hibbing and Theiss-Morse has not been warmly welcomed in the flourishing research field of participatory and deliberative democracy. One of the most ambitious attempts to question the stealth democracy thesis is the recent study by Michael N. Neblo et al. (2010). By presenting respondents with a replication of the statements used in the Stealth Democracy study, as well as a positive rewording of each of these statements (what they themselves label Sunshine democracy) alongside other measurements dealing with willingness to participate in deliberative forums of various kinds, they are able to present a more reliable and reflective view on citizens’ expectations and wishes concerning participatory and deliberative procedures. And their conclusions are more in line with the popular view: people’s willingness to deliberate is far more advanced than what the sceptics have put forward. The study can be considered a step in the right direction as it uses a wider selection of items such as:

“If politics were (less/more)\(^2\) influenced by self-serving officials and powerful special interests, do you think that you would be more or less interested in getting involved in politics?”

“It is important for the people and their elected representatives to have the final say in running government rather than leaving it up to unelected experts”\(^3\)

Although some advances have been made in recent years, based on the current state of research about political processes it stands clear that we are lacking thorough empirical knowledge of citizen support concerning political processes. The debate regarding people’s wishes is still very much open. Not very surprisingly, it appears that not all agree on how democracy should work, but rather that different visions are to be found among the general public. Exactly what these alternatives entail, how common they are and to which extent they can be considered as clearly envisaged are however, questions that remain to be answered. One of the main problems with the current state of research is not only that preferences concerning one alternative or line of development is studied at the time (stealth democracy, referendum, deliberation), but also that each study uses a different set of indicators. Yet another problem is the lack of interest concerning the currently dominating system of representative democracy. Citizens are often asked to evaluate the trustworthiness of the political system, but systematic studies of the popularity of representative democracy in comparison with other alternatives are still very much lacking. Hence, in order to get the full picture of people’s preferences, it seems appropriate to offer a richer selection of process alternatives and to allow for simultaneous comparisons. If citizens are able to form opinions on these matters and hence answer

\(^2\) The study asked each respondent two different versions of the question in order to control for non-separable preferences (Lacy 2001).

\(^3\) The statement is formulated opposite to one of the four statements used in the Stealth democracy index designed by Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002).
questions of this kind in a coherent way is, however, a task that is important to investigate before embarking on these tasks.

**CAN WE EXPECT THAT PEOPLE KNOW WHAT THEY WANT?**

Of major concern in this study is if it is likely that citizens in general have formed opinions on such complex matters as political processes, and to what extent these opinions can be grasped by survey research. Taking into account the well-established finding that people’s opinions on far more simplistic issues in general are very unstable (Converse 1964), it would at first appear as rather unlikely. If people in general have difficulties forming stable opinions on far more simplistic issues and the answers retrieved from surveys are very sensitive to the order in which questions are posed or the wording used; how should they be able to answer questions concerning political decision-making procedures in a logical and coherent manner?

The current state of research tells us that the instability in attitudes expressed in surveys is due to many different reasons. Firstly, there is always the risk that instability and inconsistency stems from lack of interest, comprehension, knowledge or consideration on behalf of the respondents. These aspects are likely to result in non-substantial responses such as missing cases or don’t knows but also in unexplained “noise”, always present in survey research. When confronted with survey items that deal with complex issues that are not actively considered on a daily basis, such as political decision-making procedures, it is likely that the share of non-response or pure random response will increase.

But attitude volatility is not necessarily only due to lack of engagement or comprehension. In the literature on public opinion, the unstable attitudes of many citizens are often described as ambivalence (Lavin 2001; Steenbergen & Brewer 2000; Craig et al. 2005). It is now widely acknowledged that political opinions are not simply positive or negative but often both simultaneously. Citizens, who to some extent agree with two different sides of a political conflict, should not necessarily be accused of not having an opinion (Converse 1964). Moreover, it does not automatically reflect insufficiencies in survey instruments (Achen 1975). Rather, these more commonly complex attitudes often represent a problem of reconciling strongly held, but conflicting principles and consideration (Alvarez & Brehm 1995; Zaller & Feldman 1992). Ambivalence is hence a prevalent characteristic of the public’s political opinions, and it does have an impact on political judgement and choice. The extent to which people display stable and coherent attitudes in surveys may consequently depend on how consistent their internal views about an issue are, or how

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4 Two problems that have been described as major types of "artifactual" variance in survey research (Zaller & Feldman 1992).
homogenous the considerations that are recalled when confronted with a survey question are.\textsuperscript{5} People with relatively homogeneous or one-sided views will come up with consistent answers even if they do not retrieve the same considerations. By contrast, those with mixed underlying views are likely to give different responses when their answers are based on different considerations.

It is not easy to determine what level of ambivalence is likely to be apparent when dealing with attitudes towards political processes. At first, it might seem likely that these types of systemic and complex issues are more likely than others to involve ambivalent considerations. A rich variety of arguments pro and con certain decision-making procedures are easy to come up with and it is indeed not easy to pinpoint the perfect political system. On the other hand, one might very well argue the opposite. Ambivalence implies familiarity with various pro and con arguments on a specific issue, which is less likely to exist for issues of lower salience, where attitudes are less thoroughly considered in the first place.

Yet another important aspect to take into account when trying to measure opinions of any kind is the fact that survey questions do not simply measure public opinion, they also form it by the way in which questions are framed. It might even be that no true attitudes exist, but rather a balance of considerations where the result attained is dependent on the way the survey items are contextualised. The formulation of questions, the alternatives respondents are offered to take a stand on, and the order in which they are presented all have implications for the way respondents answer questions (Zaller & Feldman 1992; Tourangeau 2000). Thinking about format and framing from the perspective of this study, it is very likely that these types of effects will be stronger when dealing with matters with a high level of complexity or issues of low salience. But they are also likely to be emphasised when ambivalence is high due to their impact on the specific considerations that come into mind.

Based on experience from the field of social and political psychology, it stands clear that attempts to measure peoples' preferences of all kinds should be done with care, but also that preferences for political decision making are likely to be more sensitive to many of these types of instability effects than other issues. Due to the complex nature of the matter of interest and the sensitivity to the way questions are posed, the outcome of specific survey items should not be considered a snapshot of the public's true opinions. However, if it is possible to find coherent patterns or trends in the way in which people

\textsuperscript{5} According to the belief-sampling model (Tourangeau et al. 2000), instability is natural since the attitudes expressed in surveys are formed based on a sample of considerations, which happen to be activated at that specific moment. These considerations are in turn taken from the extensive database in our brain consisting of many previous evaluations, vague impressions, general values and relevant feelings and beliefs (Zaller 1992). As a result, the considerations that happen to be activated when the respondent is confronted with a certain question will be over-represented in the answer given. Which considerations are accessible is, in turn, influenced by a large number of factors such as the strength of the considerations, the context of the question or what considerations have recently been activated.
answer these questions, this finding should be considered important. Knowing that voters have preferences concerning political processes, even if they turn out to be vague, and that there is a cross-sectional variation in these preferences is a sufficient point of departure for future citizen-based studies on this topic.

**EMPIRICAL DESIGN**

The empirical analyses of the study are performed using cross-sectional survey data from the Finnish National Election Study (FNES) 2011 (FSD2653). The FNES2011 is a national representative post-election study performed after the Parliamentary election in April 2011. The study involves face-to-face interviews with a total of 1,298 respondents based on quota sampling and a self-administered questionnaire, returned by mail by 806 respondents. Due to the fortunate influence of scholars with a specific interest in process preferences, the FNES 2011, contrary to most other national election studies, includes a rich variety of survey items designed to grasp process attitudes and hence constitutes a very suitable source of data for these types of analyses. Since a vast majority of the items of interest were included in the self-administrated questionnaire, only respondents that have taken part in both parts of the survey are included in the analyses (N=806). Three different types of survey items covering attitudes towards political decision making (presented below) will be analysed in the empirical section.

In order to determine if there are logical patterns in peoples’ preferences towards these issues and if these patterns are in line with what is suggested in previous research, a combination of different empirical analyses will be utilised. The first empirical analysis will involve looking for patterns in the way people respond to the different measurements with the use of factor analysis. While factor analysis provides information about the degree to which variables correlate, it does not tell us much about similarities among individuals. The second empirical section will therefore use cluster analysis in order to find groups of individuals who share the same belief system structure (Fleishman 1986), and also to map the opinions held by individuals in each of the clusters to show they differ from each other.

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6 Data are available at the Finnish Social Science Data Archive: www.fsd.uta.fi.
7 The quotas were based on age, gender, and province of residence of the respondents.
8 The face-to-face interviews were conducted within five weeks of the election (18 April-28 May 2011). The last self-administered questionnaire was returned by the 14th of June 2012.
Grasping preferences for political decision making

Even though not of primary interest for the purpose of this study, a highly interesting question is of course what type of political decision making Finnish citizens prefer. In line with the literature review above, the nine questions included in this study are designed to grasp attitudes towards political processes of three different types or models: 1) more citizen involvement in political decision making; 2) pure representative practices; and 3) a more pronounced role for un-politicised, independent experts.

Three different types of survey items will be presented and analysed: 1) statements using a four point disagree/agree scale; 2) overarching, unidimensional questions using an eleven-point worst/best scale; and 3) two-dimensional questions about two different ways of making political decisions using an eleven-point continuum. The different questions are presented in more detail below and in Table 1.

The first type of questions are presented as single and relatively detailed statements about political decision-making processes, often related to how the political arena is functioning today. In this section three statements are included: one about referendums, one about political discussions for ordinary people, and one about experts making political decisions. The last statement is replicated from the Stealth Democracy study by Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002) where respondents are requested to specify their general level of agreement or disagreement with the statements on a four-point scale.9

Respondents are asked about their opinions towards the first two statements early on in the face-to-face part of the study and they are presented in conjunction with nine other statements on aspects related to voting. The statement about the role of experts is asked in the first third of the questionnaire together with 13 other statements, many of which are replications from the Stealth Democracy study but which are not relevant for the purpose of this study. They are relatively provocatively phrased and clearly designed to activate considerations dealing with efficiency.

Looking at the response pattern for the different statements it becomes apparent that they vary a great deal. In particular, the respondents’ reactions towards the statement “Finland would run better if political decision making were left to independent experts rather than politicians or the people” are negative. The statement can indeed be described as colourful and provocative, which is likely to contribute to the distribution of answers. However, considering the well-established acquiescence response bias for statements using agree/disagree response alternatives (Saris et al. 2010), this clearly negative distribution can be considered somewhat surprising. The distribution for the

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9 It should be noted that the formulation of the statement deviates slightly from the one used by Hibbing and Theiss-Morse due to the translation. The content of the statement does, however, correspond with the original. “Don’t know” was offered in the self-administrated questionnaire. The statement about referendums and political discussions asked in the face-to-face part of the study only reported spontaneous “don’t know” answers.
Table 1.
Survey items about political decision-making procedures included in the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>No intro used. Response categories: Strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Important national issues should more frequently be decided in referendums (f2f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean: 0.61, SD: 0.34, N: 795, Don’t know: 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Political discussions for ordinary people should be arranged in support of representative democracy (f2f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean: 0.64, SD: 0.29, N: 774, Don’t know: 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Finland would run better if political decision-making were left to independent experts rather than politicians or the people (Q)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean: 0.32, SD: 0.29, N: 719, Don’t know: 77, Missing: 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unidimensional questions</th>
<th>Intro: What is your opinion on the following forms of political decision making? Provide your opinion on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means ‘the worst way of making political-decisions’ and 10 ‘the best way of making political decisions’. (Q)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Regularly ask citizens about their opinions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean: 0.70, SD: 0.22, N: 793, Missing: 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Let experts in different areas make decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean: 0.57, SD: 0.24, N: 789, Missing: 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Make it easier for people to participate and discuss important political decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean: 0.72, SD: 0.18, N: 792, Missing: 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Let elected politicians make decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean: 0.63, SD: 0.23, N: 794, Missing: 12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Two-dimensional questions</th>
<th>Intro: There are different opinions about political decision making. Please give your opinion about the following statements on a scale of 0 to 10 by marking the number that best corresponds to your view. (Q)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Ordinary people should make political decisions</td>
<td>Popularly elected representatives should make political decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean: 0.68, SD: 0.24, N: 775, Missing: 31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Politically independent experts should make political decisions</td>
<td>Popularly elected representatives should make political decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean: 0.71, SD: 0.23, N: 777, Missing: 29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Q= item included in the If-administrated questionnaire, f2f= item included in the face-to-face interview. All items are recoded on a scale of 0 to 1.
two other statements about referendums and political discussions both lean towards the agreeing-side of the scale although with a different strength, but with slightly higher support for political discussions than referendums. Yet another interesting observation is that the share of non-substantial answers is substantially higher for the last, and rather provocatively phrased statement about independent experts, but also higher for the statement concerning political discussion. This is probably due to the fact that these two statements deal with issues that are likely to be new to many people.10

In the second set of questions, respondents are confronted with four different political decision-making alternatives and are asked to rank the four alternatives one at a time on a scale from 0 ('the worst way of making political decisions') to 10 ('the best way of making political decisions').11 Two of the alternatives are in favour of more citizen involvement in politics, one is in favour of political decisions made by elected representatives, and another in favour of political decisions made by field experts. The items appear at the beginning of the questionnaire after several policy questions. Despite the obvious contradictions involved in some of the alternatives offered, and the fact that respondents have answered the questions in a successive manner12, it is obvious that respondents tend to be very positive about all of them. There are slight differences concerning the degree, but all are evaluated well above the mean. The results are not very promising in these cases, neither concerning the stability of attitudes held by respondents nor concerning the construct of the survey item. The most positive attitudes are found for the two alternatives that involve more citizen involvement, while the least positive attitudes are found for experts as decision makers.

The third and last group of questions are two-dimensional. Here respondents are confronted with two different political decision-making alternatives simultaneously. The two alternatives are presented at each end of an eleven-point continuum, and respondents are asked to present their view on the scale. The design of the questions obliges respondents to make a choice rather than being able to agree with alternatives that can be considered contradictory. The two different pairs of alternatives offered to respondents are: politically independent experts or popularly elected representatives, and ordinary citizens or popularly elected representatives.13 These questions are asked towards the end of the questionnaire14 and they are designed to make respondents aware of the

10 The “don’t know” response alternative was not offered for any other item used in the study, except for the statement on independent experts replicated from the Stealth Democracy study.
11 ‘Don’t know’ was not offered as an alternative. The four questions are replicated from a Spanish survey (January 2011) conducted by the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS).
12 The four different questions were presented as one overarching question concerning “the best or worst way to make political decisions”, including four different sub-questions.
13 Unfortunately, the questionnaire did not include a question asking respondents to choose between ordinary citizens and independent experts.
14 One question was asked before the two questions mentioned above using the same scale and format. This question asked about the importance of discussions and debates compared to effective decision making and is not included in the analyses.
internal contradiction between the two options offered and hence to activate consider-
ations that take into account both alternatives. They are likely to stimulate respondents
to choose which alternative they see as the most attractive one or the option that is
more in line with their underlying preference. By forcing respondents to choose between
two alternatives, these questions also presuppose an antagonistic model where different
alternatives are seen as mutually exclusive rather than complementary. Looking at the
distribution of answers to these questions, it is clear that there is a tendency towards
high values, a tendency that corresponds to the one found for “the best way” questions
discussed above. Here, it does however appear as likely that the distribution is driven
by the actual contents of the questions rather than the format since high values in both
cases indicate support for decision-making processes dominated by elected representa-
tives.\textsuperscript{15} The share of non-responses is higher for these two questions than for the “best
way” items, but considering that respondents were forced to make a choice and the fact
that these items were placed at the end of a rather long questionnaire, the share should
not be considered alarming.

A general remark regarding the distribution of answers to the nine different survey
items about the different decision-making procedures presented above is that people
appear to express non-consistent attitudes. Clearly, the positive judgements made in
the “best way” items are contradictory. Moreover, while the two last questions demons-
strate very strong support for political processes where elected representatives take
care of decision making (rather than experts or ordinary people), a more frequent use
of referendums or political discussions for ordinary people get strong support in the
first two statements. By merely looking at the distribution of answers it is hence impos-
sible to make a positive evaluation about the consistency in which people answer
survey questions on political decision-making procedures or regarding the fruitfulness
of analysing these answers more closely. Rather, the distributions clearly indicate that
all types of decision making are highly rated, a result that looks like a response bias
along the same line.

\textsuperscript{15} In order to separate the effects of format and content, it would have been more effective to turn the scale
around for one of the alternatives. However, when looking at the distribution for a third question with the same
format included in connection with the two items used here, it seems as if the format effect is not overwhel-
mimg. This third item used the same intro about different opinions (see Table 1) where zero was presented
as “In politics it is important to discuss a debate thoroughly before making decisions” and ten “In politics it is
important to make decisions rather than to discuss and debate”. Here the distribution did lean towards the
left-hand side (that is closer to zero) with a mean of 0.48.
EMPIRICAL ANALYSES

In order to answer the overarching research questions set out in this study —if there are logical patterns in peoples’ preference towards political decision making, and if so, if these patterns correspond to what is set out in previous research in the field— a combination of empirical analyses will be performed. The first step involves factor analysis, and is able to tell us the degree to which the nine variables of interest correlate and constitute different dimensions. This strategy does not, however, tell us much about similarities among individuals. In order to study the extent to which there are groups of individuals who share the same belief system structure (Fleishman 1986) cluster analysis will be applied in the second step of the empirical analysis.

Preference patterns

The first analysis, involving a search for dimensions in the attitudes expressed by respondents, provides us with a result that is far more encouraging than by merely looking at the distribution of answers. In fact, the principal component analysis using Varimax rotation and extracting components with Eigenvalues above 1, which is presented in Table 2, results in three different dimensions that very much correspond to expectations based on previous research.

The first dimension is constituted by preferences in line with representative decision-making procedures. Four items load relatively strongly onto this dimension; three items that explicitly mention elected representatives as decision-makers, and one indirect measure of the use of referendums. The second dimension can be described as an enhanced role for citizens in decision making. Four different items, all in favour of a more extended role for citizens load onto this dimension. The third and last dimension is constituted of preferences in favour of using experts in decision making. All of the three different items that explicitly deal with the role of experts load onto this dimension. Overall, the pattern appears to be logical and support the existence of attitudes that have been put forward in the literature. According to these results, the way in which respondents confronted with survey items concerning political processes respond indicate at least some level of consistency. Moreover, the answers are structured along the different lines that have been pointed out in previous research.

The second dimension, labelled “direct citizen involvement”, does however merit a more thorough discussion. In the introduction to this study, the three different alternatives were presented as more or less antagonistic models of decision-making procedures. Either we assign power to citizens, elected representatives, or to experts. According to the factor analysis presented in Table 2, this is not necessarily how it is perceived by citizens themselves. The peculiarity is found in the two-dimensional item where respondents are asked if ordinary people or elected representatives should make decisions.
This item does not load negatively onto the dimension of citizen involvement\(^{16}\) even though it seems as if an attitude pointing in the direction towards a stronger role for citizens in decision making (rather than elected representatives) would go hand in hand with more direct citizen involvement. A likely explanation is that the dimension explicitly captures positive attitudes towards more citizen involvement, but without implying attitudes in favour of a democratic system where citizens would be responsible for making all political decisions. It is hence support for a model where the role of citizens is extended, and functions as a complement to pure representative structures, for example in the process of will-formation, rather than as an antagonistic model where citizens replace elected representatives as decision makers.

\(^{16}\) The loading is expected to be negative since a positive loading would indicate that respondents in favour of more citizen involvement in politics would prefer elected politicians to make decisions. As it turns out, the loading is close to zero. The way respondents answer this question is not connected to their responses to the items that load strongly onto this dimension.
Similar belief structures

The previous section showed that it is indeed possible to detect response patterns in line with the theoretical expectations outlined above although with minor exceptions. So far we can thus conclude that the way in which respondents answer questions concerning political decision-making procedures is not purely random. The factor analysis does, however, tell us little about similarities or differences among groups of individuals. This last empirical section turns the question around and examines the extent to which it is possible to identify groups of individuals who have answered the nine different items in a similar manner and if so, how many these groups are and how they have responded. Hence, instead of studying patterns among variables this second analysis is focused on patterns among individuals (Fleishman 1987).

This is done by applying a two-step cluster analysis using Schwarz’s Bayesian criterion (BIC), a method designed to automatically reveal natural groupings within a dataset that would otherwise be hard to detect. The analysis results in three different clusters, that is, the same amount as the number of components detected in the factor analysis presented above. The fit is, however, specified as fairly poor, which indicates that cohesion among, and separation between, the clusters is relatively low. But given that we are dealing with complex matters, a low degree of cohesion is hardly surprising. In order to get a picture of the groups detected by the cluster analysis, the mean values of each of the variables are presented in Table 3 along with Eta²-values that should be interpreted as the percentage of variance accounted for by each variable (Levine & Hullett 2002). In order to make the interpretation of the table more straightforward, the highest group means are marked in bold and the second highest in italics.

The cluster that stands out as the most distinct and easiest to interpret is cluster number 3, labelled “representative democracy”. The 170 respondents that constitute this cluster stand out as strong supporters of a representative political system. On average they display the most positive opinions towards placing, or rather preserving, decision-making power in the hands of elected representatives. The result is found for all of the three items that explicitly offers this as an option. At first glance it may seem somewhat surprising that this group also displays the most positive view towards arranging political discussions for ordinary people. However, when taking into account the complete wording of this item, the picture becomes clearer; the addition in the end of the statement “... in support of representative democracy” clearly provides a positive signal in favour of placing decision making in the hands of popularly elected

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17 The Bayesian information criterion (BIC) is a criterion for model selection among a finite set of models. It is based, in part, on the likelihood function.
representatives. Respondents in this third cluster can also be characterised as having a negative attitude towards experts in decision making.

The second cluster comprises 256 respondents which can largely be characterised as having a positive view of more direct citizen involvement. Moreover, they express less enthusiastic views towards elected representatives than the other two groups. This becomes apparent in both of the two-dimensional items where the respondents in this cluster are less inclined to provide an answer towards the end of the “elected representatives” scale, regardless of whether it is ordinary people or independent experts that constitute the point of comparison. Along the same line this group of respondents is inclined to agree with the statement that “Finland would run better if political decision making were left to independent experts rather than politicians or the people”. Taken as a whole, the respondents in this cluster are in favour of people having a larger say in politics, but it also appears that other

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clusters</th>
<th>Technocratic government</th>
<th>Direct citizen involvement</th>
<th>Representative democracy</th>
<th>Eta²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All differences between groups are significant p<0.001 (ANOVA). Clusters are retrieved from a two-step cluster analysis with Schwarz’s Bayesian criterion (BIC). S: Statement, BW: Best way, DO: Different opinions.

Moreover, in the Finnish translation, the part mentioning “representative democracy” appears in the introduction to the statement.
alternatives, such as expert rule, are considered, as long as political power moves away from elected representatives. This result is in line with a previous study among Finnish citizens showing that many people want change to the existing situation but they do not necessarily have well-thought-out options for the direction this change should take (Bengtsson & Mattila 2009).

Cluster number one, consisting of 231 respondents and labelled “technocratic government”, is most easily characterised by what they do not want, rather than what they want. This group is shares a sceptical attitude towards greater citizen involvement, or rather, they are more dubious than the respondents in the other two clusters. This group displays the lowest mean for all of the items that are designed to grasp perceptions of a more extended role for citizens in political life, that is, a more frequent use of referendums to make it easier for citizens to participate and discuss, frequently ask citizens and to arrange political discussions for ordinary people. The type of political decision making that this group of respondents favours is far less clear cut. It appears as if a mixture of experts and elected politicians is the answer. This group shows the most positive attitudes towards experts as decision makers, but the level of approval of elected representatives is generally high.

When looking at which survey items are able to differentiate the three groups from each other, it is clear that the statement about referendums displays the highest explanatory power $\eta^2 = 0.29$), followed by the two questions asking respondents to choose between different decision makers (independent experts/elected representatives and ordinary people/elected representatives) as well as the “best way” item asking about elected politicians. This, in turn, can be interpreted as favourable for the survey items as such since it appears that respondents are able to single out different preferences that exist among the public. Symptomatic of these items are that they either deal with aspects that are familiar to people, such as referendums or elected politicians, or that they offer respondents a clear choice between two alternatives. The survey items that have the lowest explanatory power all cover features that occur less frequently in public discussions, and hence are less likely to be familiar to general citizens. This is particularly true for the role of experts as decision makers or the use of deliberative tools such as political discussions.

Taken as a whole, the cluster analysis demonstrates that it is possible to identify groups of citizens that have different opinions towards political decision making. The interpretation of the contents of these clusters is, however, slightly different than the patterns found in the factor analysis. In both analyses a positive view of representative structures and a greater role for citizens in political decision making is a common denominator. However, we cannot identify a group of people that can be characterised as being strongly in favour of the role of experts in decision making, rather we get a group that is very sceptical towards an enhanced role for the people. Not very surprisingly we also find that survey items that cover more familiar decision-making procedures work better when it comes to differentiating between groups of citizens with diverse views on the subject than items with less common aspects.
CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Empirical research on citizens’ preferences concerning political decision making has expanded during recent years. Despite this growing interest, several basic questions still remain open. The aim of this study has been to contribute to a relatively new field of research by exploring to what extent attitudes expressed by citizens display coherent and logical patterns in line with the expectations reported in previous research.

For those interested in understanding how people think about political decision-making procedures, this study has provided a few positive results. First of all, it seems clear that we can find other types of preferences for political decision making than “more power to the people”. Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002) are hence on the right track when they claim that surveys that only measure opinions towards more participatory forms of democracy do not provide the full picture. In order to gain knowledge concerning peoples' expectations regarding political decision making and how these expectations vary among the general public, it is important to incorporate a more diverse set of questions on these topics into the standard repertoire of surveys. Moreover, when looking at patterns found among different survey items, it appears as if people, at least to some extent, are able to express their opinions towards political processes and that the answers they provide are along the same lines as outlined in the theoretical literature.

It does, however, also stand clear that survey items that cover political decision-making procedures that are more familiar to the general public function better when it comes to distinguishing between different opinions. When asking about less well-known aspects of political processes it seems to be good advice to go beyond the model with simple (and provocatively phrased) statements and instead provide respondents with more and balanced information concerning the procedures that are of interest. The more complex the issues get, the greater the risk of affecting the outcome by the way questions are contextualised, formulated and formatted.

The interpretation of attitudes held by respondents does, however, vary depending on the point of departure, the correlation among variables or the correlation among respondents. When departing from variables in the correlation and factor analysis, it stands clear that the patterns detected are in line with theoretical expectations; answers to items about the role of experts in decision making, representative procedures and an extended role of citizens are connected. The result can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, it corroborates expectations about the contents and direction of attitudes presented in previous literature in the field. Secondly, it is a confirmation of consistency in the way that people answer survey questions on the topic.

When we search for patterns among respondents rather than variables, it stands clear that cohesion is far from perfect, but that the groups that are formed make sense and provide new insights about the composition of people’s belief structures. One of the most intriguing findings is that the role of citizens in decision making appears to constitute a dividing element; while some are strongly in favour of enhanced citizen involvement, others prefers anything but that.
To conclude, it stands clear that the opinions expressed by respondents in the Finnish National Election Study 2011 were not random. Rather we find fairly distinct and logical patterns. Future attempts to grasp people’s preferences towards different decision-making procedures should therefore not be considered as vain endeavours. However, when measuring peoples’ preferences for political processes, it is necessary to proceed with caution. Measuring peoples’ opinions towards political processes should hence be done carefully and answers to single items should not be taken as a stable attitude.

REFERENCES


**Åsa Bengtsson** is an Academy Research Fellow and Docent of Political Science at Åbo Akademi University, Finland. She has published on public opinion, voting behaviour, political participation, and minority politics. Currently she is directing a research project on citizens’ preferences for political decision making, financed by the Academy of Finland.

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METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES FOR THE LARGE N STUDY OF LOCAL PARTICIPATORY EXPERIENCES
Combining methods and databases

RETOS METODOLÓGICOS PARA EL ESTUDIO CUANTITATIVO DE LAS EXPERIENCIAS PARTICIPATIVAS LOCALES
Combinación de métodos y bases de datos

CAROLINA GALAIS carolina.galais@uab.cat
Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona (UAB). Spain
JOAN FONT jfont@iesa.csic.es
PAU ALARCÓN palarcon@iesa.csic.es
DOLORES SESMA lsesma@iesa.csic.es
Instituto de Estudios Sociales Avanzados (IESA-CSIC). Spain

ABSTRACT
In this article we analyse the effects of different data collection strategies in the study of local participatory experiences in a region of Spain (Andalusia). We examine the divergences and similarities between the data collected using different methods, as well as the implications for the reliability of the data. We have collected participatory experiences through two parallel processes: a survey of municipalities and web content mining. The survey of municipalities used two complementary strategies: an online questionnaire and a CATI follow-up for those municipalities that had not answered our first online contact attempt. Both processes (survey and data mining) were applied to the same sample of municipalities, although they provided significantly different images of the characteristics of Andalusia’s participatory landscape. The goal of this work is to discuss the different types of biases introduced by each data collection procedure and their implications for substantive analyses.

KEYWORDS
Citizen participation; Data collection procedures; Internet data mining; Local participation; Participatory experiences; Survey administration mode.

RESUMEN
En este artículo analizamos los efectos de diferentes estrategias para la recolección de datos en el estudio de las experiencias participativas andaluzas. Examinamos para ello las diferencias y similitudes entre los datos recogidos mediante diferentes métodos, así como las implicaciones para la fiabilidad de los datos. Para ello, hemos utilizado dos procedimientos paralelos. En primer lugar, una encuesta a municipios y la minería de datos en Internet. La encuesta se realizó utilizando dos modos de administración diferentes, un cuestionario online y un cuestionario telefónico de seguimiento a los municipios que no respondieron al primer intento de contacto vía correo electrónico. Tanto la encuesta como la minería de datos fueron aplicados a la misma muestra de municipios, aunque arrojaron diferencias significativas en cuanto a las características del panorama participativo en Andalucía. El objetivo de este trabajo es discutir los diferentes tipos de sesgos introducidos por cada procedimiento de recogida de datos y sus implicaciones para posteriores análisis sustantivos.

PALABRAS CLAVE
Experiencias participativas; Minería de datos online; Modo de administración de encuestas; Participación ciudadana; Participación local; Procedimientos de recogida de datos.
INTRODUCTION

Most previous attempts at providing a general picture of local participation activity have used self-administered surveys sent to municipalities (DETR 1998; Birch 2002; FEMP 2002; Ajángiz and Blas 2008). Is this a reliable strategy that can provide a good overall picture of reality? Are there other alternatives that could provide better information? In this paper we try to answer these questions through an analysis of the data collection process regarding participatory experiences completed at a local level in Andalusia, a region of Spain. To do so, we examine the divergences and similarities that arise from the comparison of two different methods (one of them with two modes of administration, making three different data sources) of collecting and coding information regarding a few hundred participatory experiences.

The first main goal of this paper is to discuss the virtues and limitations of two contrasting strategies of data collection. The first strategy used was the more traditional one, a survey of municipalities. The second was a data mining strategy using the Internet. With this aim, we conducted two parallel data collection processes that tried to capture the same reality. In addition, the survey faced a common problem related to this methodology: dealing with refusals and with the resulting moderate response rates. To address this, the first mode of administration (Computer Assisted Self Interview, CASI) was complemented with a Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) survey. This allowed us to address two subsequent research questions. First, we asked whether the differences between our surveys were a product of comparing two different sets of municipalities (the larger and more engaged with the research topic, which answered our online survey in the first place versus the remaining ones that answered the telephone survey) or whether some of the differences were the result of using two different modes of administration (CATI vs. CASI). Second, once we aggregated these two sources of data, we were able to compare them with the results from our data mining approach to learn more about the biases each of them produced on the pictures of the reality obtained.

The structure of the paper is as follows. In the next section we justify why making these comparisons is important and present the research design and data collection procedures we have used. Section 3 makes the first comparison between the two stages of the survey (CASI vs. CATI). In this first comparison, our two universes were different and, as a result, we also expect to find important differences in the characteristics of the experiences collected. We discuss whether all differences were compositional (i.e., caused by the fact that we are measuring two different parts of our final universe). The complementary explanation is that some of these differences may be the result of the

1 A previous version of this paper was presented at the Conference “Methodological challenges in participation research”, IESA (CSIC), Córdoba, November 4-5, 2011. We thank the session discussant, the participants and Donatella della Porta for helpful comments.
two modes of administration used. Section 4 moves to the comparison of the final results of both data collection procedures (survey vs. Internet-collected information). We follow the same logic as in section 3, showing the differences in a few important variables and analysing to what extent they are due to the data collection mode. Section 5 briefly presents three potential future research strategies to continue exploring the causes of the remaining differences.

**Theoretical Framework and Research Design**

This paper stems from the decisions and challenges faced when gathering information on participatory experiences at the local level for the MECPALO project. One of the main goals of the project is to build several regional databases of participatory experiences developed at the sub-regional level. This is aimed at making a description of the characteristics of these experiences, as well as answering a series of questions related to the origins, democratic qualities and attitudinal consequences of those experiences.

We have argued elsewhere about the need to build close to local participation realities that go beyond the prevalent case study strategy (Font et al. 2011; Font and Galais 2011). However, drawing such a picture is not an easy task. Three different approaches are found in previous research. First, the selection of a limited subset of experiences that share some common organisational or territorial characteristics (“focused mappings” e.g., Schattan 2006; Sintomer et al. 2008). Second, the gathering of several varied experiences that try to capture the maximum diversity regarding those processes (Subirats et al. 2001; Della Porta and Reiter 2009). Third, the development of a survey of municipalities to obtain a list of the municipalities’ responses (DETR 1998; Birch 2002; FEMP 2002). Since the first approach allows building a more reliable but also more incomplete picture of reality, we wanted to assess the advantages and problems of the two remaining strategies.

It should be noted that we lack a census of experiences. That is, there is no sampling frame with which to start. Bearing this in mind, we started by designing a representative sample of Andalusian municipalities. Andalusia has 770 municipalities, from which we selected a sample of 400. These 400 municipalities are representative of the municipali-

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2 MECPALO is the Spanish acronym for the project Local participation processes in Southern Europe: causes and consequences. The project’s principal investigator (PI) is Joan Font and the research team includes researchers from three Spanish institutions, as well as a French team (PI: Yves Sintomer) and an Italian team (PI: Donatella della Porta).

3 The universe of analysis is formed by any participatory process (from a 2 hour consultation to a stable and periodical mechanism) whose aim is to discuss local policies or issues and which has either been promoted or has gained recognition from local authorities.

4 A similar argument has also been developed by other authors (e.g., Baiocchi et al. 2011).
ities with more than 1000 inhabitants. The sample was stratified by province and city size (Font et al. 2011).

Our main unit of observation comprises experiences and not municipalities. Sampling Andalusian municipalities (those that develop participatory experiences as well as those that do not) allows us to answer additional research questions (e.g., why some councils conducted few or no participatory practices while others undertook quite a few), but this is not the aim of our particular research. In addition, our sampling strategy guarantees acceptable variability among the contextual explanatory factors.

We then designed a web-based questionnaire that addressed more than 50 questions on the existence and characteristics of participatory experiences, and sent a link to our survey to the public officials in charge of citizenship participation affairs in each of these 400 municipalities or—in the absence of this position—to the mayor. A total of 120 municipalities responded to the call after three follow-up messages, which means that the final response rate for the CASI survey was 30%. Higher response rates were obtained in municipalities with more than 20,000 inhabitants and slightly higher rates in those governed by the political party to the left of the social democrats (United Left, IU; response rate 37%). The municipalities included in the study were asked to provide up to two experiences. Some did not report any, some provided one, and a few completed the questionnaire twice, once per each experience. These experiences were transformed into our units of analysis. Considering that some municipalities had not developed a participatory process and some provided two, this made up a total of 156 experiences.

However, the response rate pointed to some of the limitations of our final sample. It is known that non-response bias may jeopardise the reliability of the portrait presented by the data, as well as the relationship between variables. In our case this is particularly true with regards to the link between city size and local government ideology. For instance, if municipalities ruled by left-wing parties were more prone to answer the survey regardless of their participatory performance, but those ruled by conservatives only answered if they had successful experiences to report, this could weaken our conclusions about the relationship between ideology and participatory initiatives.

The survey research literature has shown that when high non-response rates may jeopardise the representativeness and variability of data, a possible course of action is to switch the mode of administration (Dillman et al. 2009). Thus, we launched a second phase of the data collection process. This second phase consisted of contacting the remaining municipalities that did not answer our online survey, relying this time on telephone interviewing. Two main hypotheses about non-response drove this effort. First, for

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5 There were two reasons for choosing only a section of the 770 municipalities. First, the need to exclude the smallest municipalities that develop interesting participatory practices, but hardly formalise them and do not have the resources to publish them on a website. Second, given the large number of municipalities in the next strata (1,000 to 10,000 inhabitants) we preferred to make a sample of them and retain more resources to undertake a more intense follow-up that could lead to a higher response rate.
municipalities without an evident interest in the field of citizenship participation, dealing with a (relatively long) self-administered questionnaire could be a reason for skipping the survey. Using a different mode of administration that avoided any writing and a shorter questionnaire lead by an interviewer, which conveyed a sense of duty to respondents while resolving their doubts, could increase the response rate. Second, we suspected that municipalities that did not have personnel devoted specifically to participation (especially smaller municipalities) might have been more reluctant to find the appropriate person to answer the survey. Experienced interviewers could reach this person more easily. The CATI survey achieved a 62% response rate (174 municipalities of the 380 that had not answered the CASI survey). As a result, the combined CASI and CATI surveys represent a 73.5% response rate (see section 3 for more details).

The next complementary strategy was carried out in an attempt to improve two previous processes to collect participatory experiences that had been performed in relation with the MECPALO project (Della Porta and Reiter 2009; Font and Galais, 2011). We searched the net for websites of the same 400 municipalities using keywords following the common standard for web content mining (Cooley et al. 1997). We used a codebook that followed the survey questionnaire, including most of the same information. This effort resulted in a new database containing 125 experiences. Previous research on web content mining agrees that the main pitfall of this data collection method is that “in the absence of a known population, a truly random sample [of relevant websites] is not possible” (Miller, Pole and Bateman 2010:4). Our work, however, avoids this flaw because it starts with a representative sample of Andalusian municipalities.

In this respect, we first compare the two parts of the survey data collected through the CASI and CATI methods. In this case, we expect to find important differences in the data since they correspond to two different subpopulations of the local universe. In addition, both CASI and CATI have strengths and weaknesses. Thus, we will probably also find differences that are the result of the two different modes of administration. In online self-administered surveys, there is no interviewer to enhance social desirability. However, this means that no one can either clarify the meaning of the answers or encourage responses (Bradburn et al. 2004). It is quite likely that CASI data contain much more item non-response (Diaz de Rada 2011) and possibly more measurement error due to the misunderstanding of more difficult questions. On the other hand, telephone interviewing may show more random measurement errors, more survey satisficing, and more social desirability response bias (Chang and Krosnick 2009). These effects may cancel each other out and result in similar data quality, thus justifying the decision to merge both surveys.

6 Experiences where too limited information (less than 20% of the variables) was found were not included in the final database. Approximately 20 experiences fit in this category.

7 A similar argument has been used in Diaz de Rada (2010) which shows that through the compensation of different sources of bias, the results of a combined personal and phone pre-election poll obtained better results than any of them alone.
Our second comparison is between (aggregated) survey results and our data mining search. To our knowledge, no comparisons between survey-obtained and web-collected data validity have been conducted to date. In this case, compositional effects should be more limited since the initial sampling for both strategies includes the same 400 municipalities. However, these differences should exist. First, because our survey strategy asked specifically about a maximum of two experiences per municipality, whereas the Internet search strategy would collect as many as were sufficiently documented on the web. Second, both data collection procedures have their own potential problems. Surveys are affected by the most common sources of error: the questionnaire and the role the respondents play in answering them. In its turn, Internet data mining may also introduce biases coming from the search engine (visibility of the webs caused by the amount of inlinks and outlinks and user searches) and from the researcher, including the keywords selected and the interpretation and coding of the results (Hindman 2008).

We will proceed by comparing the distribution of several relevant variables in these databases, and then move forward by comparing the explanatory power of the data source (our main independent variable) in a series of multivariate analyses. For these analyses, we have selected a set of dependent variables that have been proven relevant in participation studies (Table 1). First, and as a way to approach the phenomenon of the impact of participation on politics, we will look at the number of policy phases that were actually accessible for citizens during the process. We selected this variable as a proxy for influence, i.e., the degree to which citizens were involved in the public decision (Arns-tein 1971; Parés 2009). We will count the number of phases (diagnosis, programming, decision, implementation, evaluation) in which citizens had a say (Font et al. 2011). This produces a numerical variable that ranges from 0 to 5.

Next, we will consider whether the local government was the only driving force of those experiences. Some scholars have suggested that the direction of the driving forces (top-down vs. down-top) may affect the design and results and, in short, the qualities of the participatory process (Fung 2006; Della Porta 2008; Font and Galais 2011). Thus, we have generated a dichotomous variable that differentiates those experiences where civil society had played some role in proposing or organising the experience.

Inclusiveness measures the attempt to involve wide and diverse sectors of society in the process (Fung 2006; Della Porta 2008). Such inclusiveness may be pursued either by extensive mobilisation strategies oriented to achieving a large number of participants, or through the plural representation of views and opinions. Thus, we use two different variables to capture this idea. First, we use a dichotomous variable that distinguishes experiences with an open call or random selection of participants from the census vs. all possible forms of restricted call (i.e., personal invitations). Second, we include the number of participants since this is a traditional indicator of the legitimacy of the participatory component of a process.
Finally, we take into account whether we deal with a temporary experience (from a one-hour session to a two-year process) or with a stable mechanism that shows the will of the promoters to institutionalise citizens' participation.

Table 1. 
Dependent variables: Dimensions, contents and response categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Origin</td>
<td>Promoter/organiser of the experience</td>
<td>Dichotomous: Only local government vs. local government and civil society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policies</td>
<td>Number of participatory policy phases</td>
<td>Continuous: 0 to 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusiveness</td>
<td>Plurality of actors</td>
<td>Dichotomous: Open to all or random selection vs. invitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusiveness</td>
<td>Number of participants</td>
<td>Continuous: Eight categories going from 1 (ten participants or less) to 8 (more than a thousand participants)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability</td>
<td>Temporary process or permanent mechanism</td>
<td>Dichotomous</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A two-step survey. Mixing modes of administration

In order to offer a first glimpse of the similarities and differences of CATI and CASI data, this section begins by comparing the sampling differences between the two. It then looks for significant differences among the dependent variables mentioned above. Finally, multivariate analyses are used to test to what extent data source may bias results when explaining such participatory features.

Table 2 shows the virtues of the mix-mode administration of the final survey quite clearly. A comparison of the first and second column of the table shows that the CASI survey had significant biases in the response rates of the different categories (much higher for large municipalities, but also in the province of Cordoba or in municipalities governed by the leftist IU). In contrast, the comparison of the initial sample (first column) and the final survey results (last columns) are remarkably similar for all variables and categories. As a result, we can be quite confident that a survey with a high response rate (74%), which is distributed quite homogeneously among all sectors, does not contain significant biases regarding potential variables that need to be controlled.

On the other hand, precisely because the types of municipalities that have answered the CASI and the CATI survey are quite different, we should expect significant differences
in the type of participatory processes obtained through each of these procedures. As expected, the first important difference appears when comparing partial non-response, which tends to be much higher in the CASI method. To provide just a few examples, partial non-response was 10% versus 0% for easy questions such as having a department in charge of participation or not, and 49% versus 1% for more “difficult” questions such as the number of people working full time on participation-related activities for the CASI and CATI methods, respectively.

Graph 1 displays a pattern regarding the policy phases opened for participation that also appears in other questions. There are differences in the results found through both modes of administration, since participation in the diagnosis phase is significantly more common among the municipalities that answered the CASI survey. On the other hand,

Table 2.
Composition of initial and effective samples of Andalusian municipalities by province, city size and party

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Initial designed sample (%)</th>
<th>CASI Survey (%)</th>
<th>CATI survey (%)</th>
<th>Total Survey (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Almeria</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cadiz</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cordoba</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Granada</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huelva</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaen</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaga</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seville</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,000-5,000</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>43.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,000-10,000</td>
<td>18.25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,000-20,000</td>
<td>18.25</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20,000-50,000</td>
<td>12.25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+50,000</td>
<td>7.25</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSOE</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>61.6</td>
<td>69.5</td>
<td>66.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PP</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IU</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent/others</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>294</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Survey E1107 (IESA)
participation in the decision, implementation and the evaluation phases in particular is more common in the phone survey. Such discrepancies may be due to genuine differences among the municipalities that answered the surveys and their practices, but are more likely related to response order effects (Krosnick and Alwin 1987; Tourangeau and Smith 1996). Indeed, established research states that respondents of self-administered, visual-presented questionnaires are more prone to check off the first response option presented, what is known as the “primacy effect”. On the contrary, when respondents are asked questions orally, such as in face-to-face or telephone interviews, they are more prone to agree with the final option offered, a phenomenon called the “recency effect”. These tendencies and likely biases that run in opposite directions are, however, likely to cancel each other out if we gather together the data collected through different administration modes.

Nevertheless, not all the differences between CASI and CATI surveys will be due to administration modes. As argued before, it is quite normal that some differences will...
arise since the municipalities that both surveys cover are not the same. To make a first step towards disentangling the effects of the administration mode and of the composition of both samples, we have conducted a series of regression analyses of the dependent variables justified above. Regarding the relevant controls, we have taken into account city size, since it is one of the most important variables that distinguishes both samples and which is likely to have an effect on the type of participatory processes developed. The variable “inhabitants” takes values between 1 and 5, whose meaning is consistent with the categories displayed in Table 2.

Graph 2 justifies the inclusion of additional controls. As it becomes evident, the municipalities that answered the CASI survey are more likely to have a participation department and a local participation plan. These two variables are likely measuring quite a different level of a city council’s engagement with citizens’ participation and the resources available to deal with it. We will include them in further multivariate analyses as

Graph 2.

Institutional resources by administration mode

*Denotes significant differences between the averages with a significance level of 0.05
**Denotes significant differences between the averages with a significance level of 0.01
N=416 and 415, respectively.
dichotomous variables where 1 denotes having a participation plan or having a participation department.

The results of the regression analysis are displayed in tables 3 (logistic regressions) and 4 (OLS regressions). In both tables, the first column for each of the dependent variables shows the explanatory power of the mode of administration alone, whereas the second column shows the effect of the administration mode once we control for some of the important compositional variables that distinguish both populations.

Table 3.

Explanatory factors of participation characteristics: Logistic regressions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Government as single organiser</th>
<th>Participation open to everyone</th>
<th>Stability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Only data source</td>
<td>With other variables</td>
<td>Only data source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data source: CASI</td>
<td>1.27 **</td>
<td>1.27 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inhabitants</td>
<td>- - .005</td>
<td>- - -1.122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation plan</td>
<td>- - .007</td>
<td>- - .34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation department</td>
<td>- - .1</td>
<td>- - .16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-.628 **</td>
<td>-.727 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2 Nagelkerke</td>
<td>.111 .112</td>
<td>.015 .032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>418 418</td>
<td>420 420</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*<0.05; **<0.01

Sources: Survey E1107 (IESA)

5 In this latter case, we have also coded as 1 those municipalities that do not have a department under this designation but where another department is in charge of participatory affairs. By doing so we do not penalise small towns.
Tables 3 and 4 show different estimation models for the five dependent variables analysed. In three of the five regressions, the coefficient for our main independent variable is not significant. For instance, when data are collected through CASI surveys, the government tends to be the principal organiser of the experience, and this relationship between the administration mode and this trend of participatory experiences does not disappear after controlling for organisational resources or the size of the municipality. The fact that the experience was open to everyone also seems to be affected by the administration mode in the sense that municipalities that administered our CASI survey tend to hold restricted processes. Nevertheless, the difference is not significant once we control for city size and resources.

In summary, the use of a combined mix-mode strategy resulted in a substantially higher response rate which would spare us some biased conclusions regarding the relationship between variables. This is probably a result of combining two different administration modes as the reduction in the bias is related to the size of the municipality since large cities were keener to answer our first CASI survey. Some differences between both databases (especially regarding the role of different actors) are still present when analysing those data and considering the administration mode as an explanatory factor. Nevertheless, in some cases these differences disappear when we control for the impact
of the administration mode on some factors that determine different populations (i.e., size of municipality and organisational resources related to participation). In most cases, the differences are not significant and this becomes an encouraging starting point that reinforces the strategy of merging both datasets.

COMPARING THE RESULTS FROM TWO DATA GATHERING PROCEDURES. SURVEY VERSUS INTERNET SEARCH

Our next step is to compare the survey dataset, where CASI ans CATI data have been merged, with data gathered through web mining. From now on, we will not distinguish between administration modes regarding surveys. In this case, the populations of the two datasets (survey vs. internet mining) should be more similar, since we are covering the same 400 municipalities. If differences are found, they should be the result of three main factors. Firstly, not every participatory process makes its way to being published on a website. This is evidenced by the fact that we have collected 432 experiences through the survey and only 125 through the data mining strategy. Moreover, even if some experiences can be tracked through the web, not all of them are equally visible. Some of them may lack the keywords or links that allow search engines to identify and present them among the first results. Second, the coders are very different. In one case, the respondent also plays the role of coder: she must retrieve her memories and subjective perceptions and then attempt to find a correspondence with the categories available in the questionnaire. In contrast, a data mining strategy implies that researchers act as coders or instruct coders about how to translate the information provided by municipal websites into final, meaningful values. Third, the survey allowed for a maximum of two experiences per municipality, whereas the data mining strategy put no limit on this number, thus resulting in a more limited number of municipalities in the latter database and a larger number of experiences per municipality.

The Internet data content mining process began with a careful search for key terms in the websites of our 400 sampled municipalities. The keywords successively searched

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If we give full credence to the survey results, the full number would be much larger since the average number of experiences acknowledged by the municipalities was around four, but we only asked them to report the details of two of them. There is also a potential bias in the selection they made of their two experiences. We therefore developed a complementary survey to analyse this possible effect, but the results are not yet available.

A total of 120 municipalities were sampled by survey and around 70 by the data mining strategy. Several experiences in the latter strategy correspond to supra-local processes that cannot be attributed to a single municipality.

1.3 experiences per municipality in the survey and 1.8 in data mining.
were: citizen participation, participatory budget, local agenda 21, citizen forum, assembly, survey, local democracy, e-government, e-democracy, strategic plan, and citizen participation department. Additionally, general web searches (Google) were made using the same keywords combined with the region’s name and selecting those processes that corresponded to our 400 municipalities. In each of these searches we searched five Google pages to find information about new participatory experiences or additional information about those already collected. When we could not obtain any new information amid the first five Google results, we stopped and moved to the next concept. Information was also researched on the website of the Andalusian Federation of Municipalities (FAMP, in Spanish), which hosts a database containing a few dozen participatory experiences.

Once an experience was found, we googled for additional information about the experience to complete as many fields of our database as possible. If we located an experience but the information available was too limited (less than 20% of the variables), we did not include it in the final database. We then coded the information obtained using the same variables and concepts reflected in the survey, excluding subjective questions as well as a few more questions that were of limited analytical interest.

To proceed with the analysis we will compare the results of both datasets and analyse the differences between them using the same strategy as in section 2. Table 5 shows that, even if the sampling frame for both data gathering procedures (surveys and web content mining) are identical, the final results show very different landscapes for the Andalusian municipalities. Surveys provide a more similar picture to the initial sample design, in which small municipalities were prevalent. On the contrary, Internet data provide very few experiences in small municipalities. A large number of them are found in large cities of more than 50,000 inhabitants. This is probably the result of differences regarding resources, which would have an impact on the efforts devoted to the online diffusion of these experiences. This triggers a serious underrepresentation of the experiences emerging from small municipalities.

These enormous differences could point to two radically different realities in all aspects. Nevertheless, the discrepancies among data collection procedures are not found for all the relevant variables in this study. In fact, the other two variables whose real distribution we know for sure are quite similar in both datasets. As Table 6 shows, only one province is significantly overrepresented by web data mining (Cadiz). Regarding the political party of the mayor, we find the exact translation of the actual party shares by city size amid the web mining data. Since the PSOE (social democratic
Table 5.

Number of inhabitants across data source

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of inhabitants</th>
<th>Survey (%)</th>
<th>Internet data mining (%)</th>
<th>Differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;5,000 inhabitants</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>-30.6*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,000-10,000</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,000-20,000</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20,000-50,000</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>8.3*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;50,000</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>-26*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Denotes significant differences between categories based on a two-sided test with a significance level of 0.05. N=537 (432 surveys; 105 data mining). Experiences involving more than one municipality are excluded (N=20). Source: Font (2001), Survey E1107 (IESA) and Internet data mining Andalusia 2011 (IESA).

Table 6.

Political party of the mayor and province by data source

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political party</th>
<th>Survey (%)</th>
<th>Internet data mining (%)</th>
<th>Differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PSOE</td>
<td>68.8</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>-8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PP</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8.7*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IU</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>-2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>432</td>
<td>105¹</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Survey (%)</th>
<th>Internet data mining (%)</th>
<th>Differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Almeria</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>-1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cadiz</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>10.7*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cordoba</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Granada</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>-3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huelva</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>-3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaen</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaga</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>-3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seville</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>-5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>432</td>
<td>122²</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Denotes significant differences between categories based on a two-sided test with a significance level of 0.05. Sources: Font (2001), Survey E1107 (IESA) and Internet data mining Andalusia 2011 (IESA).

¹ Excludes supra-local experiences, where no single government party can be identified (N=20).
² Excludes experiences that affected more than one province (N=3).
party) prevails in small municipalities, the experiences developed by this centre-left party are more important in the survey-collected database, where small municipalities are also more prevalent. We find exactly the opposite pattern regarding the conservative PP party (Table 6). Thus, even if we could apparently be facing an ideology bias, this is probably due to the underrepresentation of small municipalities when an Internet data mining strategy is adopted.

Graph 3 displays the differences between the two sources regarding the same variable shown in the previous section, namely the policy phases opened to participation. As can be observed, the implementation and evaluation phases are significantly less present among experiences collected through Internet data mining. This shows again that data sources are potentially relevant and, as a result, we will proceed with the same analytical strategy: to predict the same five dependent variables using the data source as our main independent variable and city size and resources as

Graph 3.

*Differences between administration modes for phases of the policy process

*Denotes significant differences between the averages with a significance level of 0.05  
**Denotes significant differences between the averages with a significance level of 0.01

Sources: Font (2001), Survey E1107 (IESA) and Internet data mining Andalusia 2011 (IESA)  
N=557
controls. Tables 7 and 8 show the regression coefficients for these variables. As can be seen, there are substantive differences between Internet-collected experiences and survey data for all our dependent variables. Experiences collected by means of web mining are less prone than survey-collected experiences to crystallise as permanent mechanisms and to open this kind of process to several policy phases. Moreover, they are also more likely to be driven exclusively by local governments. However, they are more inclusive as they are more open to everyone and able to mobilise more participants. Controlling for the number of inhabitants and/or the most important local resources does not make these effects disappear.

Table 7.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Government as single organiser</th>
<th>Participation open to everyone</th>
<th>Stability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Only data source</td>
<td>With other variables</td>
<td>Only data source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data source: Internet mining^</td>
<td>3.6 **</td>
<td>3.6 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inhabitants</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation plan</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation department</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.18 **</td>
<td>-0.4 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2 Nagelkerke</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>523</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^ The reference category for the variable “Internet mining” is “survey”.
*<0.05; **<0.01
Sources: Font (2001), Survey E1107 (IESA) and Internet data mining Andalusia 2011 (IESA)
Table 8.
Explanatory factors of participation characteristics. Survey vs. Internet mining
differences (OLS regressions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of policy phases opened for participation</th>
<th>Number of participants (categories)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Only data source</td>
<td>With other variables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data source: Internet mining</td>
<td>-.247</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inhabitants</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation plan</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation department</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>2.4 **</td>
<td>1.97 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>556</td>
<td>536</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*<0.05; **<0.01
Sources: Font (2001), Survey E1107 (IESA) and Internet data mining Andalusia 2011 (IESA)

Both the leading role of the local government and the permanent character of a participatory process are probably highly correlated with its likelihood to become noticeable and, as a result, to reach the Internet. Some stable mechanisms, such as participatory budgeting, have been introduced in recent decades and their attractiveness and intensity have produced considerable media and web visibility. On the contrary, other permanent mechanisms that follow the logic of sectoral or territorially-based consultation councils have existed for years and do not attract much media attention. Even when they make their way to municipal websites, the documentation they provide tends to be insufficient to consider them a valid case.

15 Very often only the internal regulation of their composition can be found, but no information on their real dynamics. This pattern is only broken in very large cities like Madrid or Barcelona that offer much richer information on these mechanisms.
The policy phases are very different and this has implications in the coding process. For instance, it would be difficult that two external observers or coders disagree on whether to qualify a particular participatory process as stable or as limited in time. However, the number of policy phases open to citizen participation is not so clear. Coding them becomes difficult even for qualified coders and their contents are difficult to understand for respondents that are not accustomed to thinking about this issue. We cannot claim that we know why these differences arise, but it is clear that these two questions are extremely different and that policy phases are a good candidate to expect a high respondent/coder influence.

Finally, the two aspects where the Internet processes score better (the two dimensions of inclusiveness) probably highlight the filters that help participatory mechanisms to make their way onto the web. The less interesting or spectacular processes, where politicians only try to avoid conflicts or to give legitimacy to sectoral policies through consultation with a limited network of actors would not reach local websites. Alternatively, we could consider that these practices are not interesting enough to give them visibility or to produce a participation section on the local website. However, when a municipality is surveyed, they will look at any practice they have developed to avoid appearing to be a passive administration. In the next section we present further strategies that could be pursued in order to confirm or discard these hypotheses.

**Prospects for Further Research**

Throughout the paper we have pointed to several explanations for these differences between data collected by means of surveys and data gathered through internet data mining. How important are each of them? Are there possible research strategies to disentangle their relative weight? Basically, we have pointed to two main reasons why the results could be different: because the universes they reflect are not identical or because the people who have translated the reality into codes have used different criteria. We want to briefly sketch four alternative strategies (two dealing with the different universes and two dealing with the role of the coder) that could contribute to understanding where these differences come from and their methodological and substantive implications. The first one is a strategy based on automated data content mining. In order to overcome the biases introduced by the professional zeal of researchers, several scholars suggest the use of automated tools such as indexing software (Zafarani et al. 2008). These tools automatically harvest all the information from a text or website and count the words and

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16 Some of these strategies have been partially developed and have contributed to checking data mining quality. Others have been developed, but a detailed analysis cannot be presented here due to reasons of space.
semantic roots. It is necessary to subsequently classify this information into meaningful categories, but this avoids missing some information due to fatigue, for instance. Issue discovery software, for example, lists the words and lexemes mentioned more than once in a website. Of course for this or any other indexing outcome to be meaningful, it is still necessary that the researcher read and process all the information available, but these tools may help overcome some coding biases.

A second alternative would be to have an in-depth, qualitative look at both raw databases, identify the cases that correspond to the same experiences and compare the coding reached by each of these methods, paying special attention to which kind of variables offer greater differences and why it may happen. In our case, 28 experiences are “repeated” in our primary raw records. That is, they were found through the Internet and also through the survey. Even if this does not constitute a large sample, it may be plausible to perform some tests to identify the variables that show larger discrepancies between the two kinds of coders (survey respondents/researcher).

These two strategies focus on how the coding procedures could have produced different results, whereas our third and fourth alternatives would explore the reasons why certain experiences are more likely to reach the databases using one or another data collection procedure. The third alternative would focus on the potential bias introduced by the survey respondents when they choose their two experiences, since they could have chosen the most interesting ones or those where they were more intensely involved. To explore this possibility, we selected those municipalities that had indicated in the original CASI survey that they had developed more than two experiences, but had only given the details about two of them. In a new telephone survey we asked them to give details about two additional cases, now selected through a more objective criterion: the most recent ones. A comparison with the originally provided experiences will allow us to examine this potential source of bias.

In addition, our fourth strategy could deal with the gatekeeper role of people in charge of local websites and how they can bias which experiences will or will not be published. For example, in comparing both databases we could check whether the processes that have been developed by the mayor and not by a specific sectoral department have a higher probability of reaching the web or whether alternative patterns of selection could be identified.

**Conclusion**

There is no single perfect method for capturing the reality of local participation processes. Using a large N strategy to analyse this reality may be fruitful and necessary, but it implies selection and standardisation problems that are not easy to solve.

Surveys addressed to institutions also have problems related to non-response and social desirability. In this case, the use of a mixed administration mode strategy allowed us to achieve a much higher and less biased response rate than the single initial usage.
of an Internet survey alone. However, problems related to social desirability and others such as the potential effects of the order of response categories or the difficulty of understanding response categories remain.

The alternative strategy of data mining has various flaws. In this case, the most crucial difference is that only a small part of the participatory experiences that appear in the survey have made their way to the Internet and some of them are so poorly documented that they cannot be studied. As a result, a data mining strategy produces a significantly different picture, where experiences developed in large cities that devote more resources to their websites are largely overrepresented. This problem may be less important in other countries where very small municipalities are less common than in Spain.

In any case, differences between the two strategies are not solely due to the bias introduced by Internet visibility. Both procedures start from different available information (the memories of respondents and the documents they want to consult when they answer versus the official reports that are found on the Internet), but in particular, they are interpreted and coded by different types of individuals that give different meaning to the variables handled in our study.

The use of careful comparisons, double-checking or alternative processes of data researching may help to understand where the differences come from and contribute to making data from different sources more comparable. Nonetheless, they will continue to provide different pictures of reality and we should be aware of the limitations and biases that each of them introduces. Even with these limitations, the picture provided by the data from any of the sources/methods of data collection discussed is more accurate than the one that is provided by the prevalent research design in the literature, namely, selecting a few case studies because they are the most successful available experiences.

REFERENCES


**CAROL GALAIS** is a postdoctoral fellow at the Université de Montreal. She holds a PhD in political science (2008, UPF) and is a member of the Research group Democracy, Elections and Citizenship at the Universitat Autonoma de Barcelona (UAB).

**JOAN FONT** is a senior researcher at the IESA/CSIC working on citizen participation in public policies. He was the research director at the major public survey institution (CIS) in 2004-2008. He has been a senior lecturer at the Political Science department of UAB (Barcelona) and a visiting scholar at the EUI (Florence) and UCD (Dublin).

**DOLORES SESMA** is a research assistant at the Institute for Advanced Social Studies (IESA-CSIC). She completed a Master degree in public policies (2008, UCM) and a Master in Social Science and Health (UB). She is also specialized in data analysis (CIS, 2007).

**PAU ALARCÓN** holds a predocotoral scholarship from the Ministry of Science and Innovation and is researching at the IESA/CSIC. He holds a Bachelor of Sociology (UCM), a Diploma of Statistics (UMH) and a Master in Contemporary Latin-American Studies (UCM). He has been a visiting researcher at the University of Sydney.

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TOWARDS A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF DEMOCRATIC INNOVATIONS
Lessons from a small-N fsQCA of Participatory Budgeting

HACIA UN ANÁLISIS COMPARADO DE LAS INNOVACIONES DEMOCRÁTICAS
Lecciones de un estudio de N pequeña sobre Presupuestos Participativos mediante fsQCA

MATT RYAN  M.G.Ryan@soton.ac.uk
University of Southampton. United Kingdom.

GRAHAM SMITH  G.Smith@Westminster.ac.uk
University of Westminster. United Kingdom.

ABSTRACT
While there has been a proliferation of academic interest in ‘democratic innovations’, most empirical analysis tends to rely on single case studies. Very little attention has been given to the comparative analysis of innovations, in particular the conditions under which they emerge and are sustained. Recent studies of participatory budgeting (PB) have begun to utilise cross-case analysis in an attempt to explain divergent outcomes. This paper argues that the comparative analysis of democratic innovations could be enhanced significantly through the application of the relatively novel technique of fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA). A small-N study of PBs is offered to identify the potential (and pitfalls) of using fsQCA to evaluate the conditions under which such an innovation is institutionalised effectively.

KEYWORDS
Democratic innovations; Fuzzy membership; Institutionalised citizen control; Participatory budgeting; Qualitative comparative analysis (QCA).

RESUMEN
Aunque el interés académico por las “innovaciones democráticas” ha proliferado, la mayoría de los análisis empíricos se apoyan en un solo caso de estudio. Se ha prestado poca atención al análisis comparativo de las innovaciones, en concreto de las condiciones en que emergen y se mantienen. Algunos estudios recientes sobre presupuestos participativos (PP) han comenzado a emplear análisis de casos cruzados en un intento por explicar los resultados divergentes. En este artículo se sostiene que el análisis comparado de las innovaciones podría mejorar significativamente mediante la aplicación de una técnica relativamente nueva, el análisis cualitativo comparado de conjuntos difusos (fsQCA). Aquí se ofrece un estudio de N pequeña sobre PP para identificar el potencial (y las dificultades) que entraña el empleo de fsQCA para evaluar las condiciones en las que tal innovación se institucionaliza de forma efectiva.

PALABRAS CLAVE
Análisis comparado cualitativo; Control ciudadano institucionalizado; Innovaciones Democráticas; Membresía difusa; Presupuesto participativo.
INTRODUCTION

This paper makes the case for a more systematic comparative turn in the study of democratic innovations, and specifically investigates the potential of fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) to take such work forward. To draw out the implications of this novel methodological approach for understanding the conditions for effective institutionalisation of democratic innovations, we apply fsQCA to a study of six contrasting cases of participatory budgeting (PB). While this is a relatively small number of cases for an fsQCA, the primary aim of the study is to ascertain whether it can be applied effectively to the analysis of democratic innovations. In particular, it allows us to explore important elements of fsQCA, including population definition, calibration of conditions and presentation and interpretation of outputs. In this way, the study can be understood as laying the groundwork for a larger medium-N analysis1 of PB and/or other forms of democratic design. We make no apologies that parts of the paper are technical in nature and may introduce unfamiliar QCA nomenclature, although we have sought to make the discussion as accessible as possible. If we are to make methodological advancements in the comparative study of democratic innovations, it is important to consider all aspects of the process for the sake of transparency (c.f. Wagemann and Schneider 2007).

THE CASE FOR THE COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF DEMOCRATIC INNOVATIONS

Even for those who retain faith in existing democratic institutions there is much evidence of a ‘democratic malaise’ (Dalton: 2004, Stoker: 2006) and an attendant growing interest in democratic innovations that recast the relationship between political elites and citizens. Levels of traditional political participation have fallen worldwide, for example, in terms of party membership and turnout at elections (ibid). Moreover, the focus on traditional forms of participation, such as voting, have been challenged because they do not engender significant and long-term engagement (Pateman 1970) and only aggregate what are often relatively uninformed preferences (Bohman 1997).

Democratic innovations have been defined as “institutions that have been specifically designed to increase and deepen citizen participation in the political decision-making process” (Smith, 2009: 2). They are of interest because they can allow those who usually do not participate in political decisions to do so, thereby potentially improving the legitimacy of democratic institutions and systems.

While the evidence base on the practice of democratic innovations continues to grow, there is a need for a more systematic comparative turn. This is imperative if, for example,

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1 Medium-N can refer to anything between 5 and 100 cases depending on the units of investigation and types of data and measures, but it most clearly applies to research involving 20 to 60 cases.
we are to better understand the conditions under which democratic innovations emerge and are sustained. And, since we are at an early stage of phenomenological development, comparative analysis is important in the process of conceptualisation of what counts as a case (Mill, 1950: 298). As a natural consequence of researchers’ diverse knowledge and interests, a reasonable consensus of the scope of the study of the emerging field of ‘democratic innovations’ is yet to form, although a number of theorists have begun to offer definitions (Fung 2003; Smith 2009; Warren 2009).

Even though there are still definitional problems to resolve, we are witnessing the development of a vibrant programme of research on democratic innovations. Much of the work is case-based, from which it is difficult to make generalizable claims about the nature of democratic design (although this does not stop many authors!). It is within the study of participatory budgeting (PB) that the most interesting examples of comparative work have begun to emerge. Early work tended to focus on single case studies of the paradigmatic Porto Alegre, detailing the conditions seen as crucial for its successful outcomes (Abers 2000; Baiocchi 2005). Further studies of individual cases in Brazil and beyond continue to dominate the literature, but significantly cross-case comparative analysis has begun to contribute to our knowledge of PB. Baiocchi’s single case study of Porto Alegre actually includes a comparative element: a ‘most-variant’ strategy of comparing districts with different starting points (2005: 167). This allows him to show that experiences differ within a city, but also that certain trends carry across localities despite potential barriers.

Nylen (2003) made an important contribution to the development of comparative work on PB, showing that the vast majority of publications focused on the paradigmatic ‘successful’ case of Porto Alegre or other cases with similarly positive outcomes. He argued that it was just as important for researchers to attend to ‘failed’ cases. Perhaps the finest example of a small to medium-n comparison is that by Wampler (2007). He compares PB in eight Brazilian cities, selecting cases with varying degrees of success in their efforts to deepen democracy. In explaining the variety of outcomes, he focuses on factors such as mayoral support, the role of civil society, mayor-legislative relations and financial health. Thus he identifies key influencing variables within a sample derived from a relatively controlled framework and population (Brazilian municipalities introducing PB) and tries to account for necessary conditions for deepening democracy.

Moving beyond Brazil, Goldfrank (2007) among others has compared PBs across municipalities in Latin America, while Talpin (2007), Rocke (2009) and others have compared PBs across European national borders. Rocke chooses a most-different strategy involving the selection of atypically weak, atypically strong and a typical PB case in each of three countries. This design allows her to answer questions about how country-specific contexts and frames shape the diffusion of PB controlling for positive and negative cases (in terms of typicality and success). Talpin uses a comparable design to investigate whether the educative and transformative effects of participation are similar across varying designs within-PB and across countries. Sintomer et al (2005, 2008, 2010) have made interesting developments in classification and hypothesis-testing/refinement across cases in Europe and beyond.
In the build-up of rich case study literature and the early development of a number of causal explanations for outcomes, an opportunity arises for a larger-N systematic cross-case comparison of PB processes that have been institutionalised in different parts of the world. But at this juncture, a comparison based on conventional statistical analysis is difficult to conceive for a number of reasons. First, it is not clear that we have enough cases on which to draw statistical significance—and for those cases that are available, it is not yet clear that they should all be classified as forms of PB. Second, case work and existing small-N comparisons suggest that causation is likely to be complex. Wampler, for example, suggests, “successful PB cases depend on a series of factors converging to support the delegation of authority” (2007: 159). Moreover, Peruzzotti has claimed that, “Democratic innovation is more likely to take place in a relatively grey area, where neither all of the significant variables promote change nor do all of them conspire against it” (2009: 58).

Studies point towards conjunctural forms of explanation; that is the presence or absence of any influencing factors may work towards success or failure depending on the context of the presence or absence of other causes. Traditional statistical methods focus on isolating the net-effects of a small number of variables over a large number of cases (Ragin, 2007: 177). They will struggle to adequately deal with the increasing number of potential configurations of explanatory variables acting in distinct directions.

We are then faced with a problem familiar to any traditional comparative researcher. That is, when we wish to make context-sensitive comparisons we are faced with a situation where we have too many potentially significant variables and not enough cases. However, Berg-Schlosser and Cronqvist suggest that Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) may offer a solution to this problem:

> Between the extremes of over-generalizing and “universalizing” macro-quantitative approaches, on the one hand, and purely individualizing case-oriented approaches, on the other, a meaningful “medium-range” social science can be built which, at the same time, has a higher explanatory power and a greater social and political relevance, (2005: 172).

PB appears ripe for a medium-N study which aims to advance the goals of both functional population definition (of what PB is) and robust causal analyses (of the combinations of effects that produce more or less successful cases).

**What is QCA and how would it be applied to PB?**

Ragin and others have worked to develop diversity-oriented ‘configurational comparative methods’ (Rihoux and Ragin: 2009). The underlying principle of all qualitative comparative analyses is that many of the social relationships we observe can be described using...
set-theoretic statements\textsuperscript{2}. In particular set-oriented thinking can help highlight relationships of necessary and sufficient causation in comparative case studies by observing subset-superset relationships. While statistical analysis can measure the effect of having more or less of one variable on another, configurational analysis investigates what combinations of conditions are necessary or sufficient to produce an outcome. Moreover, Boolean algebra can be applied to set-theoretic statements in order to highlight conjunctural and alternative causation\textsuperscript{3}.

Ragin shows that relationships of necessity and sufficiency between causal conditions\textsuperscript{4} and outcomes are set-theoretic. For necessity to be established the set of cases containing the outcome must be a subset of the set of cases displaying the cause. Similarly, for sufficiency to be established the set of cases containing the causal condition must be a subset of the cases displaying the outcome (c.f. Ragin, 2000: 214-217). This allows us to use simple Boolean negation operations to show how the absence of a condition contributes to outcomes. These types of set-theoretic relations are often masked by correlation-focused analyses (Ragin 2000; 2008).

While QCA has been used effectively in other sub-disciplines of political science, for example, in comparative welfare state research (Skanning et al, 2012), it has yet to be applied systematically to the study of democratic innovations. Pratchett et al (2009) offer a first attempt at using crisp-set QCA (csQCA) —this is where membership in a set can be either 0 (out) or 1 (in)— to try and uncover patterns of causation in PB outcomes.\textsuperscript{5} The strengths and weaknesses of crisp-set QCA lie in its simplicity and transparency. An illustrative example of a crisp set truth table is shown below. Membership of cases (Porto Alegre, Rome, Belo Horizonte, Sevilla) in the sets of causal conditions (A,B,C,D) and outcome condition (Outcome) can be read easily. Moreover each row of the truth table can be read as a logical case (potential combination of causal conditions) for which we have an empirical example. A full truth table would include all possible combinations so that logical remainders (logical cases without empirical examples) can be dealt with transparently.\textsuperscript{6}

\textsuperscript{2} This section draws heavily on Ragin and seeks to outline the most important aspects of QCA related to this research project. For book-length treatments of fsQCA methodology see Ragin (2008, 2000) Rihoux and Ragin (2007) and Schneider and Wagemann (2012). Introducing vast new terminology to their audience is a particular dilemma for those writing on fuzzy sets.

\textsuperscript{3} This is done by testing alternative conjunctions for relationships of necessity and sufficiency using Boolean logical operations such as ‘AND’ (the intersection of sets), and ‘OR’ (the union of sets).

\textsuperscript{4} In Fuzzy sets ‘variable’ is replaced by ‘condition’. It is incorrect to think of fuzzy set membership scores as variable because the researcher controls limits to the variation of values of the concept.

\textsuperscript{5} This study is somewhat undermined by the overall research question that was structured by the interests of the UK Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG). That said, the study represents a first attempt to use csQCA as part of a systematic review of evidence, in particular, comparison of existing case materials.

\textsuperscript{6} Even in large-N studies that take interaction of conditions into account we can expect many of the logical cases not to display any empirical examples. Large-N studies until relatively recently have paid little attention to simplifying assumptions.
Truth tables are useful not only as a visual aid but as the first step in collating data which can then be minimised to provide parsimonious explanations of relationships across the data. Minimisation allows us to systematically interrogate the explanatory conditions, reducing them to the simplest combinations possible. Let us take the last two cases (Belo Horizonte and Sevilla) in our truth table above. Here we have a positive outcome with two different combinations of variables. We adopt the notation utilised by the fsQCA software programme used later in this study for the sake of consistency, where ~ preceding the letter denotes absence of a case and * denotes intersection of sets.

\[ \text{A} \cdot \text{~B} \cdot \text{C} \cdot \text{~D} \] (Belo Horizonte)

\[ \text{A} \cdot \text{~B} \cdot \text{C} \cdot \text{D} \] (Sevilla)

If two cases produce the same outcome, but differ only in one explanatory variable, then the variable that distinguishes the two cases can be considered irrelevant and removed (Caramani 2009:72). This produces a simpler explanatory combination, namely:

\[ \text{A} \cdot \text{~B} \cdot \text{C} \] (solution 1)

We also see that the Porto Alegre case produces the outcome by the causal combination:

\[ \text{A} \cdot \text{~B} \cdot \text{~C} \cdot \text{D} \]

Given that we know the Sevilla case (\text{A} \cdot \text{~B} \cdot \text{C} \cdot \text{D}) also produces the outcome we can minimise to the simple combination

\[ \text{A} \cdot \text{~B} \cdot \text{D} \] (solution 2)

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7 fsQCA 2.5 available as a freeware download from http://www.u.arizona.edu/~cragin/fsQCA/software.shtml

8 In csQCA presence of a condition is usually denoted by a capital letter; absence by lower case.
It is unnecessary to introduce too much Boolean notation here (for more see Ragin 1987; Caramani 2009). However, if these were to be the only two combinations of variables that produced the particular outcome (X), then we can state that

\[ X = A^* \sim B \cdot C + A^* \sim B \cdot D \]

or alternatively:

\[ X = A^* \sim B \cdot (C + D) \]

(where + denotes OR)

We can then state here that Boolean minimisation has uncovered that A*~B (the presence of cause A and the absence of cause B in combination) is an insufficient but necessary part of an unnecessary but sufficient combination of conditions (an INUS condition⁹) for the outcome given that it is present in both combinations, but on its own, not sufficient: it requires the presence of either C or D.

However, csQCA has been criticised for using a crude dichotomous measurement. Dichotomisation of a variable is reasonable when there is a clear threshold of distinction between a score, which indicates the observation of an occurrence, and one that indicates its absence. But, PB is no different to many phenomena in social sciences, in that although potential causes or outcomes can be observed in many cases of a given phenomena, the degree to which they occur varies. Fuzzy sets¹⁰ suggest a more sophisticated analysis is possible. In a fuzzy set a case can be ascribed a value between 1 and 0 depending on its degree of membership in a set. This allows comparative researchers to describe degrees of variation. Fuzzy sets are in some ways simply an expansion in sophistication of the crisp dichotomisation. Each case will still display a membership score either side of the crossover point (0.5) which is closest to its crisp set membership.

Table 2. Represents the conditions from our earlier example in the form of an fsQCA data matrix.

Fuzzy-set scores begin to bridge the divide between qualitative and quantitative data. They allow variation in membership of a set but add qualitatively defined breakpoints that give conceptual meaning to set membership which, in turn, begins to bridge the gap between formal and verbal logic (Ragin, 2000: 160). So, for example, if the outcome condition is understood as ‘citizen control in participatory decision making’, fuzzy-set scores allow us to represent the degree of control. Using Arnstein’s seminal article on the ‘ladder of participation’ (1969) for illustrative purposes we can see how fsQCA analysis conceptualises a set of cases of ‘citizen control in participatory decision-making’, where cases

⁹ For more on INUS conditions, see Mackie (1988) and Wagemann and Schneider (2007: 6)
¹⁰ Fuzzy sets were adapted to social sciences by Smithson (1988) and Ragin (2000). They were previously developed for use in computer sciences by Zadeh (1965).
Table 2.
Indicative data matrix showing fuzzy membership in sets.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cases</th>
<th>Causal conditions</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porto Alegre</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belo Horizonte</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sevilla</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1.
Fuzzy set based on Arnstein’s ‘ladder of participation’
that display full citizen control have full membership of the set, manipulatory designs are located fully out of the set, and a number of cases ranging up from consultation to partnership display partial membership in the set (see fig. 1 below).

This represents a considerable advance for those who would wish to compare variation across cases, potentially offering one way of bridging the ‘unhelpful divide’ between theory and practice in the study of democratic institutions (Smith 2009).

There is no conceptual difference in the way the Boolean operation (e.g. minimisation) described for crisp sets above are applied to fuzzy sets. But it does mean that, among other advantages, more meaningful consistency and coverage scores can be calculated which give more nuanced explanations of the manner in which each causal formula explains the outcome.

If we take fsQCA to be a promising method for a “medium-range” social science programme of research on PB, we are faced with a number of questions. First, what counts as a case of PB? Second, can we adequately define conditions – both causal and outcome? And third (and more practically), is there suitable case material available that provides enough insight into these conditions? While the process of conducting a QCA is both constructive and deductive, it is also iterative, allowing constant revision of theoretical assumptions and measurements. The researcher must be clear about theoretical assumptions involved in measurement, selections of cases, choices made in order to achieve a parsimonious description of empirical regularities, and interpretations of results (c.f. Rihoux and Lobe, 2009: 237).

In fsQCA, case selection is inextricably intertwined with condition selection and calibration of sets. Unfortunately in a medium-N study, it is difficult for a single researcher to gain intimate knowledge of cases at the same time or rate. The addition of new cases one by one is challenging, because it has consequences for both population definition and condition definition. New cases may present a variation in the unit of analysis significant enough to force the researcher to reconsider the population. On the other hand the understanding of how conditions are observed in new contexts may force the researcher to revaluate the calibration of conditions. While this iteration is time-intensive, its transparency in construction of the research is a key methodological advantage of fsQCA.

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11 These scores are roughly similar to measures of fit as understood in traditional research methods and will be explained further in the analysis that follows.

12 In mainstream social scientific language conditions and calibration might be referred to as variables and measurement respectively. However, although related, they are quite different concepts. Conditions are sets into which cases have a degree of membership. Calibration is the process by which the membership in the set is formulated by defining full membership, full nonmembership and other degrees of membership. In other words connecting formal and verbal logic (Ragin: 2000).

13 This relates to the problem of distinguishing between scope conditions and influencing conditions (See Walker and Cohen: 1985)
SCOPE AND POPULATION

Ideally the first step of a QCA, once a concept of investigation is decided upon, involves defining a population of cases, drawing on existing theoretical knowledge. For this study, this involves defining what a case of participatory budgeting is – and what it is not. A number of challenges present themselves at this point. It may be that PB has not fully distinguished itself from other democratic innovations or indeed traditional or ongoing methods of participation and/or governance. The diffusion of PB beyond Porto Alegre and Brazil has been a highly differentiated process (Sintomer et al. 2008, 2010, Rocke 2009). It is difficult to know whether the adaptation of PB in new locations is a case of well thought out revision of a concept incorporating local knowledge, or a muddled end product based on a confused understanding of the process. Moreover there is plenty of debate as to whether programmes which call themselves PB in fact are PB, and whether analogous processes that prefer not to use the label are equally comparable.

The position of the Porto Alegre case as not just a poster case, but the archetypal PB, is a challenge in many aspects of this research agenda. There is not much point in defining the population based on the best case. Many activists-come-researchers or theorists may not wish to concede any ground on the attractiveness of what PB was in Porto Alegre before the concept migrated and developed. However, PB has necessarily been implemented in different ways as it has been adapted to different contexts. On the other end of the scale it could be equally foolish to define cases based on minimal criteria. A plethora of programmes now called PB may be so labelled only as a consequence of the perceived desirability of being seen to implement this innovative participatory design.

A related dilemma for a QCA is that the incorporation of conditions in the definition of the population of cases limits the scope of the research and influences the selection of conditions. Should different circumstances be treated as conditions affecting outcomes or do they in fact signify that some cases are examples of different phenomena? For example, is there a minimum level of money available to spend which defines a case as belonging in the population of PBs, or is the amount of money available to spend an influencing condition with which we wish to explain the emergence and sustenance of PB programmes? In QCA the researcher cannot escape tough decisions on what is fully relevant, partially relevant or completely irrelevant over a medium-N of cases. The discussion highlights the difficulty within such a comparative study of distinguishing variations in quality from variations in kinds of phenomena.

A further set of challenges present themselves in selecting cases for comparison. Deciding which potential cases to include and exclude, and collecting the necessary data to perform calibration and analysis, is difficult for a number of reasons. First, it is extremely time-intensive. Retaining the virtues of intimacy with cases in a medium-N comparative study is the qualitative strength of QCA. However, it could take a lifetime of work for any researcher to do in-depth qualitative research with a medium-N (see Bryan 2004 for the effort involved in a ‘lighter’ large-N study of town meetings). Therefore we rely on secondary sources in an fsQCA of this type. The difficulty here is that the
literature will often, for reasons of space or intentions of a study, document the quirks of a particular case and not all its basic elements. This makes a simple review of case materials for the necessary information on all the conditions for an fsQCA difficult. Therefore we have sought to complement existing secondary material with interviews with field researchers who carried out studies. This has three advantages\textsuperscript{14}. First, it enables us to access information on the specific conditions of interest when they are not in the original literature. Second, we can check our interpretation of the nature of conditions with a researcher familiar with the case. Third, we are able to engage the field researcher in the iterative process of refining our causal and outcome conditions – as well as the scope and population.

\section*{Conditions}

Selecting causal conditions in any form of comparative research relies on good hypotheses. The deductive element of QCA seeks to relate the conditions believed to be most important in explaining an outcome, identifying whether they act in the way we would expect across cases. In QCA this is combined with an inductive element as we learn more about how cases interact and reassess cases and conditions as we iterate across stages in the research.

The growing literature on PB provides ample candidates for conditions. Many of the types of claims that Wampler (2007), Avritzer (2008), Talpin (2009) and others make about causal processes in PB are in fact either explicitly or implicitly claims about set-theoretic relationships of necessity and sufficiency\textsuperscript{15}. For example Wampler suggests that the explanatory conditions, strong mayoral support combined with an active civil society is necessary for the achievement of most successful participatory budgeting programmes (2007: 258). Note that this differs to a correlational claim that the stronger the mayoral support and civil society are, the better the PB will be\textsuperscript{16}. One of the challenges to scholars of the variable-oriented tradition who wish to define conditions in an fsQCA is to switch to set-oriented thinking. Fuzzy sets are in fact variables “infused with theory” (Ragin, 2000: 6). This is because a fuzzy set disciplines the researcher to delineate with clear and precise knowledge and description the social phenomenon they seek to represent\textsuperscript{17}.

\textsuperscript{14}For this article three interviews with field researchers were undertaken. Ideally where available as many interviews as possible should be done, crosschecking evidence to increase robustness. This option increases over time as the numbers of cases of innovation, such as PB, and researchers studying them increase.

\textsuperscript{15}For a discussion of the set-theoretic nature of social science see Ragin (2000, 2007).

\textsuperscript{16}This is not to say that this claim cannot also be made.

\textsuperscript{17}For instance while height is a ratio variable with a fixed minimum and no meaningful maximum, ‘tall people’ is a set whose range must be defined by the researcher. Thanks to Carsten Schneider for this example.
In almost any cross-case comparison the number of conditions must be kept low – a challenge in itself. QCA has an advantage over other techniques in that it is transparent about the simplifying assumptions it makes about logical remainders (combinations of conditions with no empirical example). It also allows the researcher to control for logical remainders to an extent by limiting the number of explanatory conditions used in the analysis\textsuperscript{18}. An analysis of more than four or five conditions that seeks a parsimonious solution is methodologically inadvisable. As the number of possible combinations increase it is more likely that there will be several combinations of conditions to which none of the factual cases we know of correspond. When we do counterfactual analysis in QCA we make assumptions about these cases, but these assumptions become more difficult to defend as the counterfactuals become exponentially more numerous (Wagemann and Schneider, 2007: 22). Yet, looking at the growing literature, there are a wide variety of conditions that may be important for explaining PB, including, for example, the fiscal independence of a polity, the governing ideology of the political leadership, the health of civil society, the quality of deliberation at meetings, the role of the bureaucracy, etc.

A potential answer to dealing with the sheer range of conditions comes in the form of Boolean operations that allow us to logically construct conditions from the combinations of others. For example if we want to explain the outcome ‘improved democracy’, drawing on existing studies of PB we can make the case that this is present in a necessary combination of ‘citizen control’ AND ‘significant sums of money spent’. We would then calibrate set scores for cases on the aforementioned sets and compute the membership of their intersection (logical ‘AND’) to calibrate the set ‘improved democracy’\textsuperscript{19}. Similarly if we wish conceive the influencing variable ‘favourable political climate’ we could suggest that this can be displayed through ‘high fiscal independence’ OR ‘high political independence’ OR ‘high bureaucratic capacity’. In this case we would calibrate the set ‘favourable political climate’ by first calibrating the three conditions independently and then computing the union (logical ‘OR’) of these set memberships\textsuperscript{20}. Here formal logic allows us to retain theoretical and complex information in a relatively open way.

Nevertheless problems arise in this strategy also. Often it is difficult to know to what extent these conditions influence each other. Although these constructions may help limit the number of final conditions in the analysis, introducing more conditions in this way still increases the risk that the order in which these conditions occur is a significant explanatory factor, something QCA is often ill-equipped to deal with. Like the other challenges

\textsuperscript{18}In a QCA if there are k conditions, there will be \( 2^k \) logical combinations of these conditions.

\textsuperscript{19}In the case of logical ‘AND’ this is done by taking the minimum membership value of the case across the sets that intersect.

\textsuperscript{20}These combinations are used mainly as examples here. It will be up to a researcher’s case and theoretical knowledge to decide what relationship (‘AND’ or ‘OR’ or another operation) best describes the connection between the more abstract set and the slightly more concrete sets.
outlined thus far, these can be seen in a more or less positive light depending on the researcher’s methodological perspective. At minimum, the above discussion shows that QCA disciplines the researcher to think about how the selection of conditions will affect the selection, definition and measurement of cases and other conditions. The act of performing QCA forces the researcher to be transparent about the assumptions they are making, which cases and conditions are most important and how they interact with one another.

DEFINING CONDITIONS FOR PB

The ultimate aim of this study is to draw on a range of cases to explain the conditions under which PB is institutionalised effectively: where democratic participation and ownership of budget decisions by ‘ordinary people’ becomes a convention. The outcome condition (or in traditional statistical language —the dependent variable) we are aiming to evaluate is citizen control of budgetary decision making. This happens when both agenda-setting and decision-making power in budget decisions is directed by and open to all citizens (in Boolean terms, the set of citizen control is created by the conjunction —logical ‘AND’— of these two conditions). We recognise that there are other outcomes that may be of interest to PB scholars, including redistribution of wealth, individual and group inclusion, education and budget literacy. We continue to collect relevant data on these potential outcomes and in time may create a more complex outcome condition that incorporates these conditions —or run separate analyses focused on these particular outcome conditions. However for this study we focus attention on how de facto citizen control of budgetary decision making is established, institutionalised and sustained.

Following a survey of the PB literature, interviews with three experienced field researchers (Josh Lerner, Brian Wampler and Anja Rocke), and an iterative process of reflection on populations and existing theories of participatory governance, we identify four key explanatory conditions relevant to understanding the institutionalisation and sustenance of PB understood as citizen control of budgetary decision making:

- Civil society demand
- Participatory leadership strategy
- Fiscal independence
- Bureaucratic support21

21 Initially this condition was specified as ‘capacity to reorganise bureaucracy’. Thanks to a suggestion from Giovanni Allegretti, we altered the condition to better reflect case knowledge and existing causal claims. Again this highlights the extent to which engagement with field researchers and the transparency of the process can lead to improved analysis.
Literature on Latin American cases in particular highlights *civil society demand* at the initiation of PB (Baiocchi 2005, Wampler 2007). Such studies focus on the extent to which a vibrancy and activism within civil society can generate organised pressure for PB from the bottom-up.

Latin American studies, furthermore, emphasise the importance of the *leadership strategy*, a theme also seen in European cases (e.g. Rocke 2009). This combines concerns about the extent to which participation is ideologically central to governing parties, the degree of support for participation across the party and political spectrum, and the instrumental incentives for government to engage citizens in decision-making.

Where diffusion has occurred across vastly different political units with different capacities and functions, the question of the degree of *fiscal independence* available to instigators of participatory processes has arisen. In the early work on Brazilian cases, the fiscal autonomy of municipal mayors was frequently part of the explanation of successful implementation (Abers 2000).

The inclusion of the condition *bureaucratic support* recognises a further source of the exercise of power that can act as a brake or catalyst for participatory reforms. There are important differences across polities in the extent to which political leaders are able to restructure the administration (including the appointment of senior bureaucrats) to enable PB (Abers 2000; Baiocchi 2005).

The inclusion of further cases would no doubt lead to further revision of conditions. Other candidates that will continue to compete for attention include: the existence of other participatory initiatives in a locality (Avritzer 2009), the degree of poverty and the democratic performance of the political system. However, we are confident that the four conditions we have selected represent the most significant causal claims made within the general literature on PB and reflect field knowledge from the cases we include in our analysis. We also need to limit our analysis to four conditions to reduce logical remainders as much as is possible for a small-N study.

**Calibration of Conditions in Cases**

The six cases selected for this study have been chosen to represent some of the sheer variety of cases and sources that any comparative study of this type must work with. The cases and sources are:

- Berlin-Lichtenberg (Rocke 2009, interview with Rocke 13/12/2010)
- Morsang-Sur-Orge (Talpin, 2007)
- Toronto Community Housing (Lerner and Van Wagner 2006, interview with Lerner 18/01/2011)
- Buenos Aires (Peruzzotti 2009, Rodgers 2010)
- Belo Horizonte (Wampler 2007, Avritzer 2009, interview with Wampler 16/03/2011)
Calibration involves relating verbal and numerical data. Ideally calibration should be done after cases and conditions are selected. Calibration naturally follows condition selection in particular and is linked to the definition of sets. We define the degrees of membership within the set in particular in relation to three key breakpoints: full membership in the set (score of 1), non-membership of the set (score of 0) and neither more in nor more out of the set (score 0.5). Depending on how confident we are that we have detailed enough knowledge to recognise different degrees of membership we can define other breakpoints for calibration which are linked to verbal statements, e.g. ‘more out than in’ (0.25) and ‘more in than out’ of a set (0.75) (Ragin 2000: 156).

Three methods of calibration are typically used in fsQCA. In many recent studies, conditions are defined by converting a continuous variable into a fuzzy set. This has become more common as quantitative researchers have become familiar with fsQCA techniques. None of the four conditions we have selected are of this form, although if the analysis were to incorporate poverty and/or democratic performance, we would have ready-made indicators for such a conversion22.

The most frequent method of calibration, and most straightforward in terms of understanding (but not necessarily implementation), involves drawing on rich qualitative descriptions in already existing casework. Cases are ascribed fuzzy membership values in the sets (each representing a condition). In our study, membership in sets takes one of eight values23 corresponding to the following logical verbal statements:

1.0 - ‘Fully in’ the set
0.83 - ‘mostly but not fully in’
0.67 - ‘more or less in’
0.52 - ‘marginally more in’
0.48 - ‘marginally more out’
0.33 - ‘more or less out’
0.17 - ‘mostly but not fully out’
0 - ‘fully out’

The first and most critical step is to define what constitutes full membership in the set, full non-membership, and the point of maximum ambiguity in membership. Nevertheless,

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22 See Ragin (2008: 89) for an introduction to this method of calibration.
23 Although there are nine values, the crossover point (value 0.5) is the point of maximum ambiguity of membership in a set. A tempting error of logic would be to assume that a case could have a membership score ‘halfway’ in the set. The verbal logic which ascribes to a membership of 0.5 in a set would be that a case is ‘neither more in nor more out’ of the set. Ascribing a case such a score places it in a logical limbo and removes it from the analysis. As a solution to this we have included the two ‘marginal’ conditions (0.48 and 0.52) to create the 7-value set, c.f. Ragin (2000: 156) which requires the ascription of scores either side of the crossover point. This is not simply a technical solution, but rather again corresponds to simple verbal description of the degree to which phenomena can be observed, namely ‘marginally more in/out’.
coding cases is an informative, inductive process. There is interplay here between case-knowledge and theoretical understanding.

Let us use the example of the set ‘participatory leadership strategy’. We start off with an understanding that full membership in this set is where the instigator/overseer of PB is ideologically committed to participatory politics and to implementing PB. Thus full non-membership is where the instigator/overseer of PB is not ideologically committed to participatory politics and is actively trying to derail or revoke participatory practices. We might say to the best of our ability that the point of maximum ambiguity (or crossover point) is represented by the instigator/overseer of PB being committed to participatory politics only to the extent that it fits in with other ideological or material goals. Support for PB is present but limited and fragmented across the governing ranks. Given our case knowledge we might then feel that there is enough evidence in the secondary literature and from interviews with field researchers to warrant relatively fine-grained fuzzy sets for the purposes of a more nuanced analysis.

We can say that Porto Alegre would achieve a fuzzy membership of 1 in this set as PB was the flagship of an explicit participatory philosophy of the instigating party. The PT proposed a programme specifically designed to involve lower socio-economic groups in public policy-making venues (Wampler, 2007:5), to give civil society organisations an input in making the rules of PB and to increase budget transparency (ibid:126). In comparison, we know that in Berlin we have a mayor committed to participation at the district level but there is a question as to whether this justifies similar membership given that the district mayor is not the only driving force in such a federal system (Rocke:2009). In Buenos Aires there was brief enthusiasm from those in power but this was based on contingent circumstances (Peruzotti 2009 Rodgers:2010).

For our purpose it is useful to visualise the cases on what we term fuzzy-maps (see fig. 2 below) so that we can make confident judgements that the numerical values we ascribe cases make sense both in relation to the verbal definitions of key breakpoints above, and our more tacit knowledge of the cases themselves and how they relate to the condition. Interplay then takes place where the researcher must refine the statements of calibration above in light of the information thrown up by the cases when the difficult process of coding takes place. Where we find cases which we know to have important differences on the degree to which they display the condition with proximate fuzzy membership scores, this may signal a need to consider redefining full membership. In our example, we could do this, for instance, by adding the caveat that the instigator/overseer of PB is ideologically committed to participatory politics and to implementing PB and is willing to take risky political decisions to uphold this commitment and recode the cases accordingly. What we seek is that the definitions of membership values will eventually make sense such that membership in the set is clearly calibrated to the theoretical meaning of the condition which we wish to test. We have found that these fuzzy-maps are particularly useful for guiding discussions with field researchers in attempting to clarify the conditions of particular cases with which they are familiar.
This process of calibration highlights the extent to which iteration is central to QCA in seeking both theoretical clarity and robust measurement for comparison. Measurements, scales and populations are not ‘given’ as they are often seen to be in traditional quantitative research strategies (Ragin 2000). Yet measures can still be constructed which are comparable across cases and conditions, allowing the use of Boolean algebraic operations to uncover relationships of necessity and sufficiency between conditions and outcomes across cases. And as new cases are added, we are often forced into reassessing the nature of membership of particular sets. This is nothing new as quantitative scholars have for years been looking at how concepts travel and can be meaningfully quantified across contexts. Nevertheless, by allowing these considerations at the level of medium-N, QCA seems to provide an alternative location for robust research on the spectrum of trade-offs between complexity and generalisability in social and political research. It is not clear, therefore, that the epistemological authority of QCA should be any less than that of more established methods (see Rihoux and Lobe: 2007).

The third method of calibration we use is merely an expansion of the first two. It uses algebraic combinations to combine sets of conditions to create more nuanced conditions—the logical ‘AND’ (focusing on case membership of the intersection of two or more sets) and logical ‘OR’ (focusing on case membership in the union of two or more sets) that we introduced earlier. As such, various combinations of multiple sets can be combined to form a single more complex set using simple algebraic logic.

For example, we calculate the set ‘fiscal independence’ (fi) from two other sets, namely ‘independent spending capacity’ (indspend) and ‘independent fundraising capacity’ (indfund) using fuzzy ‘AND’. In verbal language what we are theorising is that for a municipality to be fiscally independent it must have both independence in its spending decisions and its ability to raise funds. Table 3 below shows how this calibration using the intersection of sets (logical ‘AND’) plays out for our six cases.
Caseid | Indspend | Indfund | fi | outcc
---|---|---|---|---
Porto Alegre | 0.83 | 0.83 | 0.83 | 0.83
Berlin-Lichtenberg | 0.48 | 0.17 | 0.17 | 0.17
Morsang-Sur-Orge | 0.33 | 0.17 | 0.17 | 0.17
Toronto Community Housing Corporation | 0 | 0.33 | 0.33 | 0.33
Buenos Aires | 0.83 | 0.17 | 0.17 | 0.17
Belo Horizonte | 0.83 | 0.83 | 0.83 | 0.83

* Computing of case memberships and analysis presented in this study was produced using fsQCA 2.5.

### ANALYSIS AND EXPLANATION

The analysis that follows focuses on four influencing conditions,

- Fiscal independence (fi)
- Participatory leadership (pl)
- Civil society demand (csd)
- Initial bureaucratic support (ibs)

And their relationship with the outcome:

- Citizen control of participatory decision making (outcc)\(^{24}\)

These conditions across the six cases can be represented in a data matrix – see Table 4.

### Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>caseid</th>
<th>pl</th>
<th>ibs</th>
<th>csd</th>
<th>fi</th>
<th>outcc</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Porto Alegre</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berlin-Lichtenberg</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morsang-Sur-Orge</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toronto Community Housing Corporation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buenos Aires</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belo Horizonte</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{24}\) This outcome set is the intersection of the sets ´control by participants over agenda-setting´ (ca) and ´control by participants over decision-making´ (cd).
Testing for necessary conditions

The first step of an fsQCA is a test for necessary conditions to produce the outcome. Table 5 provides the output from the fsQCA 2.5 programme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analysis of Necessary Conditions</th>
<th>Consistency</th>
<th>Coverage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outcome variable: outcc</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditions tested:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pl</td>
<td>0.725552</td>
<td>0.603675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~pl</td>
<td>0.637224</td>
<td>0.922374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lbs</td>
<td>0.804416</td>
<td>0.794392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~lbs</td>
<td>0.463722</td>
<td>0.526882</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>csd</td>
<td>0.829653</td>
<td>0.762319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~csd</td>
<td>0.536278</td>
<td>0.666667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fi</td>
<td>0.678233</td>
<td>0.860000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~fi</td>
<td>0.589905</td>
<td>0.534286</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The consistency measures show the extent to which the conditions follow the fuzzy subset relation of necessity with the outcome\(^{25}\). In a study of only six cases we would require a very high consistency (probably 1) to make any robust claims about necessary conditions —as more cases are added, this demanding threshold can be allowed to drop slightly. Testing for the presence of the outcome first we see that no condition has a consistent relationship of necessity with the outcome set above 0.83. Civil society demand comes closest to a fully consistent necessity subset/superset relation\(^{26}\). We can investigate this further by mapping the cases graphically on a fuzzy X/Y plot (see below). We see that two cases, Buenos Aires (marginally) and Toronto break with the necessity relationship. If this were a consistent necessary condition we would see all cases dotted below the diagonal.

\(^{25}\) This is a somewhat basic explanation. For a more detailed explanation of the consistency measure see Ragin (2008).

\(^{26}\) If X is greater than or equal to Y across all cases consistency would be 1.
QCA requires us to always test for both relationships with the outcome and the negation of the outcome because causal symmetry is not assumed (unlike in traditional variable oriented research) 27.

In testing for the absence of citizen control in participatory budgeting we find a rather puzzling result that suggests participatory leadership is almost consistently necessary for the outcome. This is counterintuitive and again requires investigation of the x/y plot (Fig. 4). While the set membership in the absence of the outcome (Y-axis) is in almost all cases less than or equal to that in the causal condition (X-axis), this does not apply (marginally) to Toronto. Furthermore, on close inspection of the plot, we find that the Porto Alegre case has full membership in the causal condition and very low membership in the outcome. Logically we can say that such a case tells us little about the outcome in real terms. It is only the Porto Alegre case that is lowering the coverage28 score of this condition.

27 Membership in the negation of the outcome (no citizen control) can be easily calculated by subtracting membership in the set citizen control from 1. This negation operation is one of the cornerstones of fuzzy logic.

28 Set-theoretic coverage measures the proportion of instances of an outcome explained by a cause or combination of causes (see Ragin 2008: 44).
Table 6.
Analysis of necessary conditions for the outcome ‘absence of citizen control in participatory decision-making’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Consistency</th>
<th>Coverage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pl</td>
<td>0.939929</td>
<td>0.698163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~pl</td>
<td>0.466431</td>
<td>0.602740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ibs</td>
<td>0.533569</td>
<td>0.470405</td>
</tr>
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<td>~ibs</td>
<td>0.766784</td>
<td>0.777778</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>csd</td>
<td>0.699647</td>
<td>0.573913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~csd</td>
<td>0.710247</td>
<td>0.788235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fi</td>
<td>0.424028</td>
<td>0.480000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~fi</td>
<td>0.876325</td>
<td>0.708571</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.
A fuzzy X/Y plot for ‘absence of citizen control in participatory decision-making’ against ‘participatory leadership’
necessary relationship and we can imagine that if we observed a similarly consistent subset relation when we move to a medium-N analysis of cases, this coverage score is likely to change\(^2\).  

**Testing for sufficient conditions**

The sufficiency analysis is often the most interesting in QCA because it allows us to use combinatorial mathematics to ascertain how conditions behave when combined in cases. The first step in the analysis involves creating a truth table from the fuzzy data\(^3\). When using fuzzy sets no case exhibits full membership in any of the different logical combinations, nevertheless, logically they will have greater than 0.5 membership rather in only one. The column ‘number’ in the table below (reproduced from the fsQCA2.5 programme) shows the number of cases having greater than 0.5 membership in the corner of the vector space represented by that logical combination. This clearly shows the degree to which (unsurprisingly) logical remainders play a part in our study given the small number of cases. The ‘raw consist.’ column shows the consistency to which this combination observes the fuzzy subset relation for sufficiency.  

The second stage of the analysis involves minimizing the data to solutions. At this point we must make a judgement as to the consistency threshold for which we will accept a combination of conditions to indicate sufficiency in realising a positive outcome of citizen control. Depending on quality of data and numbers and types of cases this could range from 0.75 to 0.85 or even higher (Ragin 2000, 2005:11). For this indicative study we take a consistency threshold of 0.9: thus the outcome is coded 1 if 0.9 or above; 0 if below that point (see table 8).  

The final step in sufficiency analysis is to minimise the data into solutions. In a standard analysis, the software offers three solutions. The first is the most complex solution where no assumptions about logical remainders are made. The second is a most parsimonious solution where the computer programme allows assumptions about remainders which lead to the least complex solution. The third is termed the intermediate solution. This solution minimises the complex solution, to the extent that the researcher provides information about the direction causal conditions would be expected to act in counterfactuals for which they have reasonable grounds to make assumptions (sometimes called easy counterfactuals). Based on broad theoretical support within the PB literature, we expect the presence of all four conditions to have a positive impact on the outcome (see ‘Assumptions’ in the Intermediate Solution in table 9).  

---

\(^2\) For necessity coverage, the addition of cases where the X value is greater than twice the Y value will cause coverage to decrease while the addition of cases where the X value is greater than Y but less than two times Y will lead to an increase in coverage.  

\(^3\) This process is described in more detail in Ragin (2005).
Table 7.
Truth table showing fuzzy membership in the corners of the vector space for each logical combination and consistency of the fuzzy subset relation for sufficiency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>pl</th>
<th>ibs</th>
<th>csd</th>
<th>fi</th>
<th>number</th>
<th>outcc</th>
<th>raw consist.</th>
<th>PRI consist.</th>
<th>Product</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.507463</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>0.000000</td>
<td>0.000000</td>
</tr>
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<td>1.000000</td>
<td>1.000000</td>
</tr>
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<td>1.000000</td>
<td>1.000000</td>
</tr>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>0.999999</td>
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<td>1.000000</td>
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<td>-1.#IND00</td>
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<td>-1.#IND00</td>
<td>-1.#IND00</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.878788</td>
<td>0.515151</td>
<td>0.452709</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.
Cases coded for analysis with a consistency threshold of 0.9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>pl</th>
<th>ibs</th>
<th>csd</th>
<th>fi</th>
<th>number</th>
<th>outcc</th>
<th>raw consist.</th>
<th>PRI consist.</th>
<th>Product</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.507463</td>
<td>0.000000</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9.
Sufficiency analysis solutions for outcome ‘Citizen control in participatory decision-making’

**COMPLEX SOLUTION**
frequency cutoff: 1.000000
consistency cutoff: 1.000000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>raw coverage</th>
<th>unique coverage</th>
<th>consistency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><del>pl*ibs</del>csd~fi</td>
<td>0.488959</td>
<td>0.274448</td>
<td>1.000000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pl<em>ibs</em>csd*fi</td>
<td>0.476341</td>
<td>0.261830</td>
<td>1.000000</td>
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<td>solution coverage:</td>
<td>0.750789</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>solution consistency:</td>
<td>1.000000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cases with greater than 0.5 membership in term ~pl*ibs~csd~fi: Toronto Community Housing Corporation (0.52,0.83), Buenos Aires (0.52,0.52)
Cases with greater than 0.5 membership in term pl*ibs*csd*fi: Porto Alegre (0.83,1)

**PARSIMONIOUS SOLUTION**
frequency cutoff: 1.000000
consistency cutoff: 1.000000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>raw coverage</th>
<th>unique coverage</th>
<th>consistency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>~pl</td>
<td>0.637224</td>
<td>0.220820</td>
<td>0.922374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ibs*csd</td>
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<tr>
<td>ibs*fi</td>
<td>0.580442</td>
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<td>1.000000</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>solution consistency:</td>
<td>0.901492</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cases with greater than 0.5 membership in term ~pl: Toronto Community Housing Corporation (1,0.83), Buenos Aires (0.52,0.52)
Cases with greater than 0.5 membership in term ibs*csd: Porto Alegre (1,1)
Cases with greater than 0.5 membership in term ibs*fi: Porto Alegre (0.83,1)

**INTERMEDIATE SOLUTION**
frequency cutoff: 1.000000
consistency cutoff: 1.000000
Assumptions:
- fi (present)
- csd (present)
- ibs (present)
- pl (present)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>raw coverage</th>
<th>unique coverage</th>
<th>consistency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ibs~pl</td>
<td>0.488959</td>
<td>0.170347</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>ft<em>csd</em>ibs</td>
<td>0.580442</td>
<td>0.261830</td>
<td>1.000000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>solution coverage:</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>solution consistency:</td>
<td>1.000000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cases with greater than 0.5 membership in term ibs~pl: Toronto Community Housing Corporation (0.52,0.83), Buenos Aires (0.52,0.52)
Cases with greater than 0.5 membership in term ft*csd*ibs: Porto Alegre (0.83,1)
In the most ‘complex solution’ (with no assumptions made about counterfactual cases) we are presented with two solutions (combinations of conditions that are sufficient to produce the outcome across cases). The solution can be written as:

\[ \text{ibs}^* (\text{pl}^* \text{csd}^* \text{fi} + \neg \text{pl}^* \neg \text{csd}^* \neg \text{fi}) \rightarrow \text{Outcc} \]

(where ‘\(\neg\)’ represents absence of a cause and ‘\(\rightarrow\)’ implies ‘is sufficient for’)

The first possible causal path confirms what much of the comparative work on PB thus far has suggested: all of the conditions we have selected are independent necessary parts of an unnecessary but sufficient path to the outcome. Arguably this reflects the significance of the explanations of the archetypal Porto Alegre case (the case with greater than 0.5 membership in this solution term).

The second solution is more intriguing, suggesting that the negation (\(\neg\)) or absence of fiscal independence, political leadership and civil society demand combined with the presence of initial bureaucratic support is sufficient to produce citizen control in budgetary decision making. This again may seem counterintuitive, but when we go back to the cases we see that this closely reflects accounts of both Buenos Aires and Toronto. For example, in their explanation of Canadian PBs, Lerner and Van Wagner highlight that in general ‘participatory budgeting emerged when staff were passionate and prepared’ and ‘politicians were looking the other way’, amongst other explanatory conditions (2006: 15). If in a medium-N study we again found similar results in the necessity or sufficiency analysis it might force us to think about whether conditions are missing from our model or if theory needs refinement. One potentially attractive explanation is that it is not an absence of participatory leadership per se, but rather de-politicisation of the process that is the positive contributor to outcomes. It may be that a key factor in institutionalised participatory democracy in some localities is that the handing of budget decisions over to citizen participants is not an ideological issue that divides political parties.

In this pilot both solutions cover the outcome to a similar degree, but we might expect that with the addition of further cases the first solution would have higher coverage. However, this cannot be confirmed until the data is collected and analysis carried out.

The ‘parsimonious solution’ makes all assumptions about the outcome in counterfactual cases which will lead to the most parsimonious solution. It can be represented thus:

\[ \neg \text{pl} + \text{ibs}^*(\text{csd} + \text{fi}) \rightarrow \text{Outcc} \]

We see that even where the consistency of the relationship for these conditions is quite high, their unique coverage (the extent to which this set covers the outcome set independent of others) is low (ranging from 0 to 0.22). The parsimonious solution lacks theoretical insight and rigour but can alert the researcher to possible reasons to make new assumptions about counterfactual cases.

For the ‘intermediate solution’ we are able to insert directional expectations into the model: in other words, in counterfactual cases we would expect our conditions when pre-
sent to contribute causally towards the outcome\textsuperscript{31}. Again this assumption can be debated but the point for now is that it allows us to deal with counterfactual cases transparently. The intermediate solution reads as follows:

\[
ibs^* (fi^* csd^* + ^* pl) \rightarrow \text{Outcc}
\]

The intermediate solution is often the most interesting and the one most likely to be debated among the research community. In this small-N study, the intermediate solution is two-fold. The first path is a combination of civil society demand, fiscal autonomy and initial bureaucratic support. Political support is irrelevant. The second path; the absence of participatory leadership combined with the presence of initial bureaucratic support remains. The level of fiscal independence and civil society demand are irrelevant to this second solution term. It is intriguing as to whether the presence of initial bureaucratic support (ibs) will remain an INUS condition in all solutions as new cases are added.

This counterfactual analysis balances our theoretical assumptions that the presence of our selected conditions would be linked to the presence of the outcome in hypothetical cases, with the empirical evidence.\textsuperscript{32} We do this by matching empirical cases with counterfactual cases which allow for Boolean reduction (following the same process as in our earlier csQCA example). For example, starting from our second complex solution \(~fi^*ibs^*^-pl^*^-csd\), we assume that in the hypothetical case \(fi^*ibs^-pl^-csd\), fiscal independence is linked to the presence of the outcome and therefore we can logically drop it from the explanation.

We do the same for civil society demand using the matched hypothetical case \(~fi^*ibs^-pl^*^-csd\). However, any further attempts to simplify the solution either violate theoretical assumptions or empirical findings. When matching the counterfactual for the presence of participatory leadership \(~fi^*ibs^-pl^-csd\) we find that we already have an empirical example of this case in Mansur-sur-Orge which is not consistent with the outcome in sufficiency analysis (taking into account our frequency threshold of 0.9). This is also the reason that \(^-pl\) appears in the most parsimonious solution. The presence of bureaucratic support remains in the solution because the matched hypothetical case for Boolean reduction \(~fi^-ibs^-pl^-csd\) links the absence of initial bureaucratic support to the outcome which violates our theoretical assumptions on the condition.

We present the sufficiency analysis for the negation of the outcome as good practice (Wagemann and Schneider: 2007: 26). The intermediate solution again offers two different causal pathways, but we engage in no further interpretive discussion at this point for reasons of space.

\textsuperscript{31} Given the small number of cases in our analysis both parsimonious and intermediate solutions will be based on a large number of unobserved cases.

\textsuperscript{32} Further explanation of the process of counterfactual analysis in QCA is provided by Ragin and Sonnet (2008).
Table 10.

*Sufficiency analysis solutions for outcome ‘Absence of citizen control’*

**COMPLEX SOLUTION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Solution</th>
<th>raw coverage</th>
<th>unique coverage</th>
<th>consistency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><code>pl*~csd*~fi</code></td>
<td>0.650177</td>
<td>0.650177</td>
<td>1.000000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>solution coverage:</td>
<td>0.650177</td>
<td>0.650177</td>
<td>1.000000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>solution consistency:</td>
<td>1.000000</td>
<td>1.000000</td>
<td>1.000000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cases with greater than 0.5 membership in term `pl*~csd*~fi`: Morsang sur Orge (0.67,0.83), Berlin Lichtenberg (0.52,0.83)

**PARSIMONIOUS SOLUTION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Solution</th>
<th>raw coverage</th>
<th>unique coverage</th>
<th>consistency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><code>pl*~fi</code></td>
<td>0.816254</td>
<td>0.166078</td>
<td>0.931452</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>pl*~csd</code></td>
<td>0.650177</td>
<td>0.000000</td>
<td>1.000000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>solution coverage:</td>
<td>0.816254</td>
<td>0.166078</td>
<td>0.931452</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>solution consistency:</td>
<td>0.816254</td>
<td>0.166078</td>
<td>0.931452</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cases with greater than 0.5 membership in term `pl*~fi`: Berlin Lichtenberg (0.83,0.83), Morsang sur Orge (0.83,0.83)

Cases with greater than 0.5 membership in term `pl*~csd`: Morsang sur Orge (0.67,0.83), Berlin Lichtenberg (0.52,0.83)

**INTERMEDIATE SOLUTION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Solution</th>
<th>raw coverage</th>
<th>unique coverage</th>
<th>consistency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><code>~fi*~csd*pl</code></td>
<td>0.650177</td>
<td>0.650177</td>
<td>1.000000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>solution coverage:</td>
<td>0.650177</td>
<td>0.650177</td>
<td>1.000000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>solution consistency:</td>
<td>1.000000</td>
<td>1.000000</td>
<td>1.000000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cases with greater than 0.5 membership in term `~fi*~csd*pl`: Morsang sur Orge (0.67,0.83), Berlin Lichtenberg (0.52,0.83)
CONCLUSION

We make no apology that this is primarily a methodological paper that may feel, on first inspection, out of place given the current trajectory of research on democratic innovations. But there is growing recognition that if we are to better understand the conditions under which democratic innovations emerge and are sustained, existing theoretical and case study work that dominates the field needs to be complemented by systematic comparative analysis. This paper has sought to investigate the potential of using fsQCA to develop such a social scientific programme of research. In particular it applies fsQCA to the study of six very different PB initiatives from around the world.

This illustrative study indicates the potential for such methodological innovation. Proponents of fuzzy-set techniques extol the method for its capacity to incorporate the best of quantitative and qualitative strategies. While its achievements and shortcomings continue to be debated (De Meur et al: 2009), our study suggests that there is sound reason behind this claim. The iterative process of moving between theory, cases, definition and calibration can be time-consuming and frustrating, but it has a number of virtues.

First, the study of democratic innovations, and PB in particular, is blessed with a significant amount of theoretical and case study material (often in one and the same study). Assiduous case-research is vital for QCA. If we hope to move beyond the single case or small-N analysis, but wish such comparative analysis to be theoretically-informed, then fsQCA holds a great deal of promise.

Second, the process is relatively transparent: the analysis is replicable and other researchers are able to review the outcome of the process in terms of the set scores ascribed to different conditions. And our own innovation of engaging field researchers in the process of defining and calibrating conditions means that it is possible to employ an on-going process of collaborative reflection and verification. As more case knowledge emerges, and we revisit the analysis, the process of re-definition and re-calibration remains transparent.

A third virtue of applying fsQCA is the potential to generate unexpected and often counter-intuitive pathways for explaining the outcome. In our sufficiency analysis, we uncovered two very different pathways, one of which has generally been overlooked in the literature. The generation of such pathways—and the way in which this will refocus attention on case material—is important in a field of study which has been dominated by the exploration and analysis of the cause celeb, Porto Alegre.

The study that we offer in this paper can only be illustrative given the small number of cases. However, our contention is that it provides strong evidence that fsQCA will prove to be a valuable methodological tool in improving our social scientific understanding of democratic innovations. We have provided the groundwork; the next step is a medium-N fsQCA that engages with even more of the valuable case material and with the increasing number of field researchers familiar with the cases. The desire to understand the conditions under which democratic innovations are institutionalised makes comparative analysis highly relevant and provides surer grounds to make claims and recommendations about sustenance and decline of participatory institutions.
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**Matt Ryan** is a PhD candidate in Politics and International Relations at the Centre for Citizenship, Globalisation and Governance (C2G2), University of Southampton. His doctoral research focuses on the comparative analysis of democratic innovations, with a particular interest in the methodology and application of fsQCA.

**Graham Smith** is Professor of Politics at the Centre for the Study of Democracy (CSD), University of Westminster. He is author of a number of articles and books on democratic theory and practice, including *Democratic Innovations: Designing Institutions for Citizen Participation* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

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**ACCEPTED:** 27 October 2012
Abstract
The design experiment is an experimental research method that aims to help design and further develop new (policy) instruments. For the development of a set of guidelines for the facilitation of citizens’ initiatives by local governments, we are experimenting with this method. It offers good opportunities for modeling interventions by testing their instrumental validity—the usefulness for the intended practical purposes. At the same time design experiments are also useful for evaluating the empirical validity of theoretical arguments and the further development of these arguments in the light of empirical evidence (by using e.g. the technique of pattern matching). We describe how we have applied this methodology in two cases and discuss our research approach. We encountered some unexpected difficulties, especially in the cooperation with professionals and citizens. These difficulties complicate the valid attribution of causal effects to the use of the new instrument. However, our preliminary conclusion is that design experiments are useful in our field of study.

Keywords
Causality; Citizens’ initiatives; Design experiment; Pattern matching; Policy instrument design.

Resumen
El experimento de diseño es un método de investigación experimental que tiene como objetivo diseñar y desarrollar posteriormente nuevas herramientas (políticas). En este artículo experimentamos con este método para desarrollar un conjunto de directrices que permitan a los gobiernos locales facilitar las iniciativas ciudadanas. El método ofrece la oportunidad de modelar las intervenciones poniendo a prueba su validez instrumental (su utilidad para el fin práctico que se proponen). Al mismo tiempo, los experimentos de diseño son útiles también para evaluar la validez empírica de las discusiones teóricas y el posterior desarrollo de esas discusiones a la luz de la evidencia empírica (usando, por ejemplo, técnicas de concordancia de patrones). En este trabajo describimos cómo hemos aplicado este método a dos casos y discutimos nuestro enfoque de investigación. Hemos hallado diversas dificultades inesperadas, sobre todo en la colaboración de profesionales y ciudadanos. Estas dificultades complican la validación de efectos causales al nuevo instrumento. Sin embargo, nuestra conclusión preliminar es que los experimentos de diseño son útiles en nuestro campo de estudio.

Palabras clave
Causalidad; Concordancia de patrones; Diseño de herramientas políticas; Experimento de diseño; Iniciativas ciudadanas.
INTRODUCTION

Experimentation as a research method in political science and the science of public administration was out of vogue for a long time. As King, Keohane and Verba observe: “Political science is rarely experimental. We do not usually have the opportunity to manipulate the explanatory variables; we just observe them.” (1994: 185). In public administration the situation does not seem to be much different (Houston and Delevan 1994; Perry 1994).

Morton and Williams claim that: ‘Political scientists often rule out experimentation as a useful method for many interesting research questions’ […] However, experimentation is increasing dramatically in political science’ (Morton and Williams 2008). Indeed, the number of scientific articles based on experimental research in our discipline’s journals has grown over the recent decades. In such articles experiments are often used to test scientific hypotheses in laboratory settings where both the intervention and the contexts are stringently controlled and manipulated. On the other hand, in the world of politics and public administration ‘experiments’ and ‘pilot projects’ abound: new institutions (such as the direct election of mayors, new electoral rules), and new modes of citizen participation (interactive governance and more recently citizens’ initiatives), are put to a practical test outside strictly manipulated laboratory settings before implementation on a wider scale. Sometimes, but not always, such ‘experiments’ are followed by evaluative research. But even if such laudable efforts at evaluation are made, more often than not they fail to provide a sound evidence base to determine the instrumental validity of the instrument —to determine if its works.

In our research project ‘Citizens making their neighborhood’, we use ‘design experiment’ methodology, following on the ideas of Gerry Stoker and Peter John (Stoker and John 2009). They argue that design experiments are a useful tool in the context of applied research in political science and public administration. John et al. (2011) demonstrate the usefulness of experimental research designs (including design experiments) in developing successful policy interventions aimed at changing civic behavior. In our research project we follow in their footsteps by using a design experiment to develop successful governmental strategies to facilitate so called citizens’ initiatives (from here on referred to as CI’s). CI’s can be considered as a form of citizen participation in which citizens collectively engage in activities aimed at providing local “public goods or services”, (for example the promotion of livability and safety in their street, neighborhood or town). A distinguishing feature of such initiatives is that citizens decide both on the aims of their activities and play the main role in the actual implementation. The role of the municipality (and other relevant local agencies) is mostly limited to providing support and facilitation. Many Dutch municipalities — partly in the light of the need for budget cutbacks— want to stimulate such CI’s, but are looking for guidance and advice on how they can play a facilitative role in such a way as to maximize the chances for success of these initiatives. The success of such initiatives may be defined in terms of a variety of criteria, such as:
The attainment of citizens' objectives
Improved quality of the neighborhood
Empowerment of citizens
Increased trust in government and politics

Stimulating and facilitating CI's asks for new patterns of interaction between citizens and governments, and requires new know-how on the side of local officials and their organizations. This is now widely recognized, which is testified by a host of reports, brochures and case-descriptions with lists of do's and don'ts in case of CI's, sometimes even advertised as 'best practices'. But a theory-based, validated tool to establish what interventions contribute to successful CI's is as yet unavailable. Therefore, the project 'Citizens making their neighborhood' was initiated. The aim of this project is to develop a set of guidelines that public sector professionals can use in facilitating and supporting CI's.

These users include local actors on two levels of action:

- **Frontline workers in** municipalities and other local organizations (e.g. housing corporations or welfare organizations) who support and facilitate participation of residents in the context of urban renewal and neighborhood policies.
- **Managers and (elected or appointed) officials** who bear strategic responsibilities and are also responsible for securing the openness and responsiveness of their organization in case of new modes of citizen self-governance, including CI's.

In this contribution we focus on the development of guidelines for the frontline workers. We worked together with these frontline workers in our research project. In our interactions with them we were aware of the fact that over many years they were expected to look at residents as either subjects (to abide by governmental rules and regulations), clients (when consuming public services) or citizens (voicing their needs and demands through elections and other non-electoral channels for public participation). However, many professionals are not accustomed nor professionally equipped to deal with self-governing community members, who initiate improvements in the quality of their neighborhood or other parts of their lives. The guidelines to be developed therefore should help these officials in mapping the motivations, possibilities, problems and frustrations of residents involved in initiatives. This requires that the frontline-workers develop an

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1 The project is based on a collaboration among three Dutch cities, the Dutch Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, NICIS (Netherlands Institute for City Innovation Studies) and two Dutch universities (Twente and Amsterdam).

2 Rank-and-file officers work at a third level, in the regular departments of the municipal or service organization. They provide standard predefined services, facilities or implement policies and enforce rules and regulations.
adequate understanding of the dynamics of voluntary civic action. That is precisely the reason why our main theoretical frame of orientation is found in the Civic Voluntarism Model formulated by Verba and his associates (1995) and the CLEAR model (Lowndes et al. 2005) that is based on this model.

The development of guidelines for the professionals in the context of a design experiment implies a two stage process. First, in the early stages, an instrument has to be designed. Typically this is done by the researchers based on their theoretical knowledge. But the initial design might also be (partly) based on the professional knowledge and experience of practitioners or the everyday knowledge of citizens. Second, the researchers develop theoretical expectations (hypotheses) about the anticipated effects of the actual use of this set of guidelines (the experiment) and confront these expectations with data collected about the actual process and its outcomes. This second stage is in fact identical to performing a formative evaluation in which the effectiveness of a policy intervention is investigated. Subsequently, if the results of this initial evaluation point to opportunities for improving results, the initial instrument is to be adapted and the improved instrument is re-tested.

In this contribution we first will elaborate on the reasons why we have selected the design experiment as a research method. We do so by comparing it to other methods. We will subsequently describe how we conducted our design experiment. For the various stages of the design experiment we have described our choices and their implications. Finally we reflect on the implications of our choices in the light of a number of (partly unexpected) problems.

**Criteria for selection of a proper research design**

We considered a number of criteria in selecting a proper research design. First (1), the research design would have to be theory-based. Our set of guidelines should be based upon well-founded hypotheses about the expected effects of particular interventions. Thus, theory would provide a sound basis for the initial design of the instrument. Theory, moreover, provides the main benchmarks (expected results) against which the observations of actual results are to be measured. If observed results fall short of these theoretical expectations, the theory (or an adapted version thereof) has to provide the basis for recommendations for further development of the instrument. Second (2), the research design should allow to make valid causal inferences (internal validity). The question is: does the instrument (here the guidelines) under study indeed contribute to observed results in the context where the intervention was made? Third (3), the design has to allow for opportunities to intervene (adopt our guidelines for professional behavior) and to control key parameters of the research situation. CI's are typically characterized by continuous interactions between a variety of different actors over longer periods of time. Preferably, the intervention and its effects should be studied in settings that reflect such complex conditions. Fourth (4), the research should preferably allow to generalize con-
clusions to a wider population of cases (external validity). Ideally, the adopted design should score high on all four criteria.

In the next section we will discuss classical experiments, action research and design experiments in the light of these criteria. This comparison will bring out the strengths and weaknesses of the various alternatives.

**Classical experiments**

In classical experiments an intervention (traditionally called ‘treatment’) is performed on one group of subjects, whilst a control group does not undergo the treatment. By random assignment of the subjects to the experimental and the control group it is decided who receives the treatment and who does not (randomized controlled trial). A pre-test is administered in both experimental and the control group where the condition with regards to the dependent variable is measured. A similar test is also used to measure the situation after the treatment. If a difference occurs in the changes between the pre- and post-tests occurs between the two groups, this difference can be attributed to the treatment.

Obviously, experiments require a firm theoretical basis to identify both the treatment variable and the dependent variable and to formulate the anticipated effects of the former on the latter (1). Therefore the experiment meets our first criterion.

The power of experiments to make causal inferences (criterion 2) is so strong, that this method is called ‘golden standard’ in research: ‘These trials produce a more warrantable form of knowledge than other methods’ can provide and for that reason experiments are considered as a superior tool for establishing causal relationships (Babbie 2004; John, Cotterill et al. 2011). Basic conditions for establishing causality are met: the cause and the effect co-vary; the cause precedes the effect and the effect cannot be spurious (because of the randomized control).

With regard to our third criterion (3) the classical experiment design takes place in a laboratory setting which allows for a considerable degree of control over the conditions in which the intervention is made and for control over the intervention itself. Finally, the generalization of results is straightforward, because the subjects in the treatment and the control group are typically individuals, randomly selected from a well-defined population (4).

Nevertheless, classical experiments require rather specific and exacting conditions. First of all, the number of subjects in the two groups has to be large enough to even out all variance in relevant characteristics. As Ray Pawson and Nick Tilley (Pawson and Tilley 1998) argue, however, if subjects are not individuals but collectivities it may be difficult (and practically impossible because of the costs) to find an appropriate number of cases; the possible variance might be very high because of the complexity of the systems.
and the population to select from small. Furthermore, although an experiment allows for strict controls on the intervention and conditions, this typically is achieved by a strictly controlled laboratory setting. In the context of CI’s it will be difficult if not impossible to realize either of these exacting conditions: the number of CI’s that can be selected for experimental purposes is likely to be limited and imposing experimental controls in a laboratory setting is impossible.

**Action research**

The goal of action research is to acquire knowledge for the good of disadvantaged groups in society. “The disadvantaged subjects define their problems, define the remedies desired, and take the lead in designing the research that will help them realize their aims [...]. Implicit in this approach is the belief that research functions not only as a means of knowledge production but also as a tool for the education and the development of consciousness as well as mobilization for action.” (Babbie 2012:313).

This approach is unique for action research. Just like classical experiments, action research actively and consciously interferes in reality. Here the deliberate interventionism is different from other forms of social science research in which researchers scrupulously try to avoid to influence the process under investigation. Unlike most social scientists action researchers are “... focused on the input of policy makers and the refinements of an intervention. They offer an iterative methodology that relies on cycles of direct interaction with the decision makers and on refining how policy makers intervene” (Stoker and John 2009:362).

Because of their desire for relevance and political preoccupations action researchers are very much practically oriented. Some action researchers even consider theoretical relevance as an obstacle for practical relevance: building on established theories might prevent researchers from asking ‘questions that really matter’ (Swanborn 1984) in the eyes of their target groups. In the light of our first criterion we conclude that action research is a-theoretical if not plainly anti-theoretical.

In methodological terms it is hard to characterize action research. Neither Babbie, nor Swanborn or John et al. provide a discussion of how researchers operating in this tradition secure the internal validity of their results (criterion 2). Action research has a questionable methodological reputation, because many of its advocates are fervent adherents of the dictum: ‘relevance rather than rigor’. Too often the prescriptions of action research are not based on solid empirical evidence. Even Susman and Evered (1978), in general sympathetic towards action research, admit that ‘When action research is tested against the criteria of positivist science, action research is found not to meet its critical tests’. However, they claim that another type of knowledge can be generated, and is relevant in terms of generating good organizational knowledge. Action research focuses on specific, real-life, real-time problems and situations, and has an interventionist orientation, aimed at innovation and problem-solving (Susman and Evered 1978). Therefore action research at least to some extent meets our third criterion. Finally, the orientation of action research
research on the specific case and its ideologically driven identification with a *particular* target group not only stand in the way of a careful consideration of theory and method, but also might prevent action researchers to consider the generalization of their findings (criterion 4).

All in all, we conclude that traditional action research has been dominated so heavily with political preoccupations that methodological problems regarding questions of internal and external validity were of little concern.

Design experiment

Design experiment methodology combines the action researchers’ concern with relevance with an ambition for theoretical and methodological rigor. Historically, design experiments have been the province of the artificial and design sciences, artificial intelligence, architecture, engineering and medicine (Gorard, Roberts et al. 2004:578). Notice that the word *design* in the name of this methodology does not refer to the *research design*. The term design refers to the blueprint of a new *instrument* that is to be developed during the research process. In the social sciences the method was initially used in educational science to help determine what learning strategies and teaching methods might be effective in education. The methodology ‘allows the educational researcher to study learning in context, while systematically designing and producing usable and effective classroom artifacts and interventions’ (Gorard, Roberts et al. 2004:579). As Stoker & John (Stoker and John 2009) observe, this methodology so far has hardly been used in political science and public administration, while other forms of experimental research are steadily increasing in popularity. The sparse use of design methodology is remarkable. As we have stated in the introduction, ‘experiments’ and ‘pilots’ abound in the domain of politics and public administration: there are numerous innovations in public participation, policy programs or institutional reforms that could be studied with the help of design methodology. The design experiment claims to provide an evidence about ‘what works’ in the early stages of the development of a policy intervention…” (Stoker and John 2009). The aim of design experiments is to provide answers to design issues. To begin with, this implies that in answering its core questions design methodology takes its starting point in available theories. Therefore Stoker and John are right in claiming that [d]esign experiments are not a-theoretical. […] Design experiments work with one or several theories. They develop a practical understanding of what could work, which can derive from social science theory and/or the intentions of those carrying out the intervention. (Stoker and John 2009:360). The theory may serve to provide a priori ideas about certain interventions and their effects. Besides, the experience and professionalism of the officials and researchers involved can suggest new applications of the theory, or can provide new ideas for mechanisms at work.

While the instrument is implemented, the process and the intermediary results are closely monitored and evaluated. On that basis the researcher may give advice on how to improve the instrument. This iterative process of design, trial, error, redesign, trial, etc.
is not only practically relevant. It also provides the opportunity to evaluate the empirical validity of interesting theoretical hypotheses in the context of a field experiment. Our first criterion—a theoretically based method—is clearly met.

One of the most challenging tasks in performing design experiments is to provide a rigorous analysis that allows for maximum feasible internal validity (criterion 2). This is daunting because typically field experiments are conducted in the context of one or only a few cases. Design experiments share with classical experiments the desire to study the effects (based on a before-after design) of theoretically interesting interventions. But design experiments, for reasons explained in the aforementioned, can neither rely on the comparison of an experimental and a control group (composed of randomly selected units of observation), nor is it always possible to use multivariate statistics for demonstrating causal effects and to control for spuriousness.

Instead, design experiments rely on a different strategy for establishing causality. In classical experiments the causal process is considered as a black box and the operation of causal mechanisms is assumed rather than observed. Like other qualitative methods of research, design experiments are based on the identification of causal mechanisms and hypothesize a causal process that is specified in terms of sequences of expected events. On the basis of this, the researcher(s) will collect data on the occurrence of the predicted events, these data units can also be called causal-process observations or CPOs (Collier 2011). This amounts to a careful reconstruction of actually observed sequences of events in the context of one or more experimental situations that are matched with theoretically expected patterns in sequences of events. Therefore this technique is also referred to as pattern matching. Pattern matching is part of the method of process tracing, ‘an analytic tool for drawing descriptive and causal inferences from diagnostic pieces of evidence’ (Collier 2011).

In addition to the theoretical plausibility of the anticipated effect(s) there are two additional pieces of empirical evidence in design experiments that provide support for the hypothesis that X has contributed to Y (here e.g. the success of a CI). First there should be a change in the scores on Y after the treatment. Moreover, there should be evidence that theoretically plausible causal mechanisms have set in motion sequences of events that have contributed to the observed change in Y. Thus DE-methodology offers the possibility to observe the effects of the use of the instrument over time and of the process taking place after the use of the instrument that may lead to the expected change in Y.

A final concern is the need for external validation of design experiments (criterion 4). In this respect, there are two validity threats. First, design experiments may not be externally valid because of the disturbances introduced in the process by the presence and interventions of the researchers (so-called Hawthorne effects). Second, the external validity of one or a limited number of design experiments is of course a priori limited. Therefore, protagonists of design experiment methodology (Stoker and John 2009) emphasize the need for external validation of the initially developed instrument in a wider number of environments.
OUR DESIGN EXPERIMENT STEP BY STEP

On the basis of the above arguments we conclude that for the aims of our research the design experiment promised to be an effective research instrument. But making such a decision in the abstract is one thing. Implementing such a relatively new methodology in practice is another. Therefore, in the second part of this article we will describe our experiences so far in conducting our design experiment.

According to the recent literature (Gorard, Roberts et al. 2004; Stoker and Greasley 2005; Stoker and John 2009; John, Cotterill et al. 2011), a design experiment implies the following steps in the research process. Theory always comes first. Relevant theoretical ideas form the basis for the development of the possible intervention(s) that should lead to a desired outcome. Practitioner’s experiences can be used as well, for example, to translate initial theoretical idea’s into workable interventions. These interventions have then to be implemented in a small number of relevant real-life situations. Third, intensive and detailed recordings of the project and the intervention(s) are indispensable to allow conclusions about the causal process that links the intervention to the potential effects. If the process or the (intermediate) effects are not in line with the expectations there may be grounds for adaptations, through rounds of iterations; cycles of designs and redesigns. Finally, in order to enhance the external validity the researchers can also perform a study with appropriate statistical power to confirm the effect of the use of the new instrument. In the remainder of this paper we will describe how we went through these different steps in conducting our (still ongoing) design experiment.

Theory first

The aim of this research was to develop an evidence-based set of guidelines for facilitating successful Ci’s. However, one defines the success of such initiatives (see the introduction), an necessary ingredient for success is (continued) involvement of citizens, who initiate and develop these projects. Therefore, we considered stimulating citizens’ (continued) involvement as the key factor in defining the success of facilitation of Ci’s. In order to develop an initial set of guidelines we started our research project by studying available theoretical and empirical knowledge. The civic voluntarism model (Verba, Schlozman et al. 1995) and the related CLEAR-model developed by Lowndes et al. (Lowndes, Pratchett et al. 2006)) provided us with a theoretical basis for identifying the main factors explaining the likelihood of citizens’ involvement in Ci’s. In short, both Verba and Lowndes state that first one must be able to participate in order to do so. Time, money and civic skills are needed for people to participate. Second, without motivation no one participates. Only if an individual wants to participate, he or she will do so. And furthermore, help from people and organizations contributes to the chances that people participate; networks enable participation. Also mobilisation plays a, sometimes underestimated, role; when people are asked to participate, the odds that they do raise considerably. Finally, response from governmental side is very stimulating. Lowndes abbreviated
these five factors as follows: Can do, Like to, Enabled to, Asked to and Responded to. Together they form the acronym ‘CLEAR’.

Knowing the main factors explaining citizen involvement, also provides the basis for considering how professional ‘facilitators’ might undertake remedial action when problems occur (cf. Lowndes et al. 2006).

On the basis of this theoretical analysis and a subsequent secondary analysis of 21 case studies about CI’s (Bakker et al. 2012) we drafted a seven page memorandum with a set of guidelines for professionals involved in the CI’s. The memorandum can be considered as a first version of an ‘intervention theory’. One of the main principles underlying this memorandum was the presumption that ‘facilitators’ should not take policies, planning procedures and routines as their starting point, but instead begin at the motivations, ambitions and capabilities of the citizens. This way the CLEAR framework (Lowndes, Pratchett et al. 2006) was made into a useful tool for analyzing the starting situation and finding interventions to support CIs. Our theoretical framework and the memorandum basically served two purposes during the research. On the one hand they provided the concepts and categories that helped us in systematically monitoring the CI’s, and the effects of the interventions by the professionals. On the other hand, it enabled us to provide structured feedback to the facilitators and formed the basis for suggestions for adjusting their intervention strategies when necessary. As such this document also served as the first version of the set of guidelines for facilitators of CI’s, that was the envisioned ‘end product’ of our design research. In an appendix we present a checklist which we used to present our analyses and our recommendations. This list is a summary of the tool, and serves here as an illustration of how we worked.

The framework and its underlying ‘intervention theory’ imply a wide range of hypotheses. These hypotheses link attributes of the facilitator’s (orientations and actions) to the key dependent variable (citizens’ continued involvement in CI’s). The general idea underlying these hypotheses is that through their attitudes, orientations and actions ‘facilitators’ can affect the various CLEAR factors and via these influence the likelihood of citizens’ involvement in CI’s. In the context of this contribution it is impossible to provide a complete list of the hypotheses implied in the model. Instead we will use two hypotheses for illustrative purposes in subsequent sections. These hypotheses relate to (one aspect —citizens’ skills— of) the Can do factor and the Responded to factor from the framework. The hypotheses read as follows:

- **Can do**: To the extent that facilitators have an accurate picture of the deficits in the skills that are needed in the group of citizens involved in the CI and supplement any deficits therein, citizens’ (continued) involvement in CI’s is more likely.
- **Responded to**: To the extent that facilitators respond to citizens’ needs and demands for support in realizing a CI, citizens’ (continued) involvement in CI’s is more likely.

Experimenting with the set of guidelines will demonstrate whether these theoretical ideas can be confirmed.
Selection of cases

To perform a design experiment, there ‘has to be a small number of settings where the experiment is carried out or, in many cases, just one setting’. (Stoker and John 2009:366). A number of considerations of both a methodological and a practical nature were important for the selection of our cases. The cases should satisfy the criteria in our definition of CI’s. In addition the projects had to be located in one of the three municipalities participating in the research consortium involved in our research (see footnote 1). Moreover, the project should neither be too short-lived (in order to study changes over time) nor should it exceed over the three year period of the research project. Next to these demands, the willingness of citizens and professionals who are actually involved in the CI’s to cooperate in our research was of crucial importance. Especially the professionals’ cooperation could make or break the research. Since, after the application of these criteria, there was hardly an abundance of cases to choose from we were happy to find two appropriate cases we could work with. The two selected citizens’ initiatives that serve as our experimental cases are the realization of a Neighborhood Museum in the city of Enschede and the ‘Street Name Project’ in Hengelo. In both of these cases we found professionals who were not only willing to cooperate, but also very interested in the research.

Due to practical contingencies we had to begin our fieldwork for both of these projects before the first version of our set of guidelines was fully developed. In both our cases the initiating citizens, on the basis of their own legitimate considerations determined the starting moment. From a researchers’ perspective it would have been better if the groups had started a couple of months later, so that we would have been able to test a prototype of our instrument at the outset of the process. However, for obvious reasons we as researchers were not in a position to determine the starting moment.

Collaboration with policy-makers, practitioners and participants

In literature on design experiments in education usually the role of teacher and researcher are combined in one person. Stoker and John (2009) think that in public administration applications it is very difficult to imagine researchers taking over the role of (for example) a social worker or a police officer. Indeed, in neither of our cases taking over the role of the supporting officials was an option. It is the official, not the researcher, who already has a relationship with the participating citizens, who knows the neighborhood and who is formally responsible for the interventions. A good working relationship and a mutual understanding between the researcher and the professional(s) involved was therefore indispensable. In both cities we worked closely together with the front-line officials concerned with the CI’s. We also involved their managers and policy officers to gain support for our recommendations on how the experiment were to be implemented.

The role of the researcher in our project is dual, we made recommendations as to how the front-line professionals were to apply the set of guidelines to each situation and
we observed how the process of realization of the initiatives went on\textsuperscript{4}. In the course of the development of the projects, we first explained the intervention theory memorandum and we proposed to the professionals to have two meetings for every round of iterations. One in which we gave feedback of what we observed up to that point. For the second meeting we applied the set of guidelines to the situation on that moment. In doing so, we took the CLEAR-factors one by one and answered three questions:

- What is needed in the case of this CI (with respect to e.g. the 'Can do', and the 'Responded to' factor)?
- What is already available (Which skills, motivations, networks etcetera are available within the group of citizens)?
- And finally: what aspects are problematic (what is still required?) and how and by whom can any of the problems be solved?

On the basis of the responses to these questions we formulated recommendations for possible interventions, and we asked the professionals to implement these.

The cooperation with the participants (the initiators and other active citizens in the projects) was of another nature. When the researchers first met the participants and introduced themselves and the research project, most participants reacted positive, some were indifferent and a few were critical. Considerable efforts were made to explain the position of the researchers and the importance of them attending and observing the meetings. We promised confidentiality and explained our reticence (the observer never commented during meetings on the main process). Notwithstanding our efforts, there was some awkwardness from both sides. Some participants indicated they felt uneasy with the presence of an observer. Others did not bother, or were very curious about the research and the researcher. For the researcher it occasionally was uneasy to only act as an observer, and to refrain from reactions to any of the things that happened and questions that arose. This felt especially awkward at moments when the researcher held information that could have been of good use during the meetings.

Data collection

For the purpose of causal attribution in the design experiment we first needed evidence about the possible effects that CI's might have had on a number of key variables. Here it was especially important to monitor the CLEAR factors (e.g. the resources of and the

\textsuperscript{4} The researcher in the field has long-term experience in the field of facilitating and supporting active citizens, and is thus well equipped to interpret the interactions between supporting officials and participants, and can make expert judgments on how to translate theory into practical and workable suggestions for interventions.
responsiveness towards the participants), because these factors were critical for the (continued) involvement of citizens in the initiatives (as the key element for CI success). To establish these effects we have first used data about changes in these key variables collected by pretest. In addition to this we wanted to monitor whether any changes in these key variables could be demonstrated to be the result of the CI and the facilitation. For that purpose we used observation reports of meetings—, and additional material, such as policy documents and interviews with managing officials.

Observation reports were written by the researchers based on notes taken during the meetings. In the case of the Neighborhood Museum, there were monthly or sometimes fortnightly meetings with all the volunteers and the community worker. For the Street Name Project—, professionals and volunteers met in various settings, at irregular intervals. We sat in and observed as many meetings as possible. In addition, we tracked the e-mails that were sent between participants and read the documents and minutes (if available) the participants drew up themselves.

For reasons we already mentioned, we were in both cases unable to conduct a genuine pre-test. Instead we conducted interviews with participants at an early stage of each project. Using a standardized questionnaire with additional open questions, we asked all volunteers about their backgrounds, their attitudes towards the municipality and semi-governmental organizations, their supporting officials, as well as their goals and their expectation about support and facilitation. We repeated the interviews with the same individuals near the end of the research period. On the basis of the observation reports, additional materials and the combined results of the pre- and post-tests we were in a position to trace patterns through which interventions by facilitators were (or were not) followed by expected changes in relevant CLEAR factors and contributed to the continued engagement or disengagement of citizens (a key element of CI success).

**Applying the set of guidelines. Making interventions**

We agreed with the facilitators to apply the set of guidelines in two ‘rounds’. In the first round, we used our preliminary instrument primarily to analyze the CI process. On the basis of our observations we made a number of recommendations for each case. In presenting these to the professional(s) we explained how we reached our conclusions, asked the professionals if they agreed on the analysis, and asked them whether they felt it would be feasible to implement the recommendations in the subsequent round (a period of five or six months). Based on these discussions we sometimes adapted our conclusions and advice. But in most instances the professionals agreed with both our diagnoses and the interventions we proposed.

The meetings with the professionals were carefully prepared in our research team in order to minimize the risk that professionals might be offended by our conclusions or recommendations. We wanted to avoid the impression that we were ‘breathing down their necks’, being judgmental or feeding back information to the professional’s super-
visors. Clearly this could have inflicted major damage upon our good working relations with the professionals. For that reason, we phrased all our feedback carefully in terms of observed facts and meticulously explained the theoretical rationale for recommendations, avoiding a critical tone. For example, in the neighborhood museum case we formulated the following advice: “For the progress of this initiative a draft a budget estimate is needed. The participants in this initiative apparently lack the particular skill to make this draft. Something should be done to remedy this. Therefore, we recommend you to intervene. What might help to this avail? Are you willing and able to draft a budget estimate yourself?” Although, sometimes, the professionals might still have interpreted this as a hidden reproach (“Why didn’t you help them right away?”) our relations with them remained friendly and cooperative.

What we had not anticipated, however, was that in the daily practice of the professionals our recommendations might get “lost”. One of the professionals in the Street Name Project during the second round of interviews frankly admitted that, during the six months that had passed after the first talk with him, he had not consulted the documents containing our recommendations. Therefore, only two out of five of the recommended interventions were implemented in this project.

In the second case, the professional involved in the Neighborhood Museum implemented only one of the recommended seven interventions. This recommendation (see our example above) was about the draft of the annual financial year estimate for the group. The other six recommendations were not implemented for various reasons. As a result, we had only limited input for the redesign of our initial set of guidelines. In the next section we will demonstrate how our design experiment provided both confirmations and falsifications of the (intervention) hypotheses based on the CLEAR model.

Evaluating the validity of hypotheses and changing the instrument

In the absence of a strictly experimental design the technique of pattern matching may be an important tool for testing causal hypotheses in the context of a design experiment. In this section we explain how we have used this technique in our study. We will focus on the previously discussed example of the ‘Can do’ factor (skills) and the related first hypothesis. Based on the hypothesis that a lack of certain skills amongst participants will jeopardize citizens’ continued involvement in a CI, we discussed the observed inability of the CI initiators to draft a budget and their lack of knowledge about their financial and legal liabilities, with the facilitator. We suggested that he should intervene and help the group in these respects, by doing it himself. The “intervention hypothesis” underlying this advice was that such support would allow the CI to proceed and boost the motivations and confidence of the participants leading to a continuation of their involvement in the initiative.

This “intervention hypotheses” based on the CLEAR-model imply a particular sequence of events. If the ‘Can do’ factor is falling short:
The group will fail to perform crucial tasks (a)→ leading to: a blockage of process (b)→ after having identified the lack of skills as the cause of this (c) → Professional is advised to intervene (d) → The professional heeds this advice (e) the crucial task will be performed (f) → CI proceeds (g)→ Citizens' retain motivation and increase their sense of personal competence (h) → Citizens' remain involved in the CI (i).

The case of the Neighborhood Museum allowed us to observe whether this hypothesis and its implied sequence of events (pattern) matched the actual pattern of occurrences. We observed that in spite of all good intentions and attempts amongst the CI participants, months went by debating financial issues and trying to solve them. Members lacked overview of the revenues they might have, and were not in agreement on spending priorities (a). Moreover, it was unclear who was responsible for budgetary decisions, and what implications this might have for the legal liabilities of the board members (a). Because of this the budget and issues of legal liability and financial responsibilities were a recurrent and major issue on the agenda of the group meetings for an extended period of time, leading to considerable frustration in the group (b).

In using the CLEAR framework, we observed that crucial skills were lacking and shared this conclusion with the facilitator (c) and advised him to provide support (d). Subsequently, the professional provided assistance and (after trying to coach the ‘treasurer’ of the group) made the draft estimate himself. (e). By the professional a draft budget was prepared. It was discussed and agreed upon without much discussion in the next CI meeting (f), this allowed the CI participants to continue their initiative and concentrate on substantive issues, rather than on tedious financial and legal concerns (g) this boosted members motivation to proceed. The new developments that followed increased their sense of personal competence (h) which contributed to their continued involvement in the CI (i).

Our theoretical framework implies many similar expectations. In a previous section we have also provided a second example of such a hypothesis, pertaining to the ‘Responded to’ factor. Facilitators can have an important role in stimulating the continued involvement of volunteers in CI’s by being responsive to their requests and needs for support. Here our guidelines imply that facilitators should be open to requests for support from citizens and take action when such requests are made. If this advice is heeded:

The group will be supported to perform crucial tasks (a) → Citizens’ therefore will be satisfied or become even more motivated and will increase their sense of personal competence (b) → Citizens remain involved in the CI (c).

In our case studies we have found numerous instances that corroborate this advice. But, surprisingly we also found a number of cases where this was not the case. On the basis of this evidence, we were forced to reconsider our initial guidelines, leading to a reformulation of our instrument. In working with the guidelines, however, we noti-
cated that in at least two situations—notwithstanding the authentic efforts of professionals—there was sometimes considerable frustration amongst the citizens about the responsiveness of their facilitator. In these cases the facilitators acted in line with the idea's in the instrument and did their best to be open to requests for support and provide support when such requests were made. To their surprise, however, the expected benign results did not follow on the requests for assistance. Instead the participants showed quite some resistance. Only on the basis of interviews with participants we began to realize that explicit requests and demands are formulated (or not formulated) and should be understood, in the context of citizens' expectations regarding the role of the facilitator. On the one hand, this implies that if participants explicitly ask for support they oftentimes not only expect some kind of response but may also expect a particular type of response. In the case of the Neighborhood Museum, for example, the facilitator upon requests for assistance, tended to take the lead and made decisions himself, to the frustration of the citizens' who were merely expecting his advice on how to do particular things themselves. In other instances, however, expectations with regard to the role of the facilitators may not be stated explicitly. According to our initial guidelines we stated: if facilitators are not asked for support they should refrain from action (even more so, because citizens might be irritated by facilitators who impose themselves; see previous case).

In the Street Name Project, however, citizens' considered it as the self-evident, “natural” role of the facilitator to take a lot of responsibility in the implementation of the plans they had initiated. The professionals had asked them to come up with new initiatives, why should they also execute them? —according to one of the members during our interviews. In the same time the facilitators were vainly waiting for the citizens' explicitly formulated requests for support. On the basis of these observations, in the first round of our two experiments, we added a key element to the set of guidelines: facilitators should not only be open and responsive towards explicitly formulated requests for support but also be aware of the (implicit) expectations that citizens have regarding their role and the style of supporting and types of support provided with the CI participants. On this basis we amended the initial guideline and advised the facilitators to explicitly discuss such expectations with citizens.

These two examples demonstrate how the technique of pattern matching can at the same time be used for evaluating the instrumental validity of policy instruments (here our guidelines for facilitators) and establishing evidence for the empirical validity of theoretical hypotheses (implied in the CLEAR model). In the above we have tentatively outlined some expected patterns (sequences of events) and for illustrative purposes provided some (sketchy) evidence of empirically observed patterns. Using data from our pre-tests, post-tests (e.g. sets of standardized survey items about citizens sense of personal competence), in combination with interviews and other qualitative data can and will be used for a more rigorous and systematic form of pattern matching.
Pitfalls and learning points

‘Practice makes perfect’, or so they say. We are convinced that the design experiment is as yet by no means a fully developed research methodology. Many of its do’s and don’ts are still to be worked out. The experiences of scholars who actually use this new methodology provide an important mechanism through which the methodological quality of design experiments can be improved. It is for this reason that we reflect on some of the lessons we learned in experimenting with a design experiments as a research tool in political science and public administration.

A first important lesson we drew from our project is that the problem of controlling the experimental environment in the context of a politico-administrative design experiment may be even more difficult than in an educational context. In educational settings, one can rely on a relatively stable environment both in terms of timing (rosters), locations (classrooms in a particular building) and groups of students. In CI’s, however, the researcher has no control on who initiates a project, why, when, what about, how long and how. All this is in the hands of the initiating citizens. The relevant interaction of the initiators amongst themselves and with other actors can occur pretty much everywhere and at every moment, in changing settings. As we already saw in our project this created problems in organizing timely pretests at the outset. But there were other problems as well. The Street Name Project, for example, started out with three volunteers. One of them did not show up any more after the first encounter. The second volunteer after four meetings announced that he was forced to stop due to health problems. Finally, the third volunteer left unannounced to hibernate in Spain. Although the last person returned and still plays a major role in the process, during a considerable period it was uncertain, whether our carefully selected case was still “alive”. These complications came on top of some of the well-known problems of design experiments in education, like having to work with busy professionals, whose priorities may shift over time and who may change jobs without being immediately replaced. Although we only had the opportunity to study two situations closely, we believe that in these respects our cases were not atypical. We suspect that such instability may very well be part of the natural context of CIs.

Secondly, we may have underestimated the complexities created by the multiple prescriptions implied in our instrument. Rather than one singular treatment, our set of guidelines was a multifaceted heuristic device for the professional who would have to use this for developing a coherent facilitation strategy that typically comprised of several interventions. In a context where multiple interventions are likely to be made, the attribution of causal effects (a major challenge in any case) will be further complicated. The design-experiment method might be less demanding when the instrument to be developed would have involved a smaller range of interventions.

In hindsight, we could have improved our research by involving the professionals even more closely, and in an earlier stage. So far, we have made the analyses of the appropriate interventions ourselves, following the initial version of the set of guidelines, and we formulated the recommended interventions ourselves. We now know that at
least one of the professionals was not fully aware of the importance (with respect to the research process) of actually following up on the recommendations; clearly no observations on the effects of the instrument can be made if interventions are not carried out. In addition, we could have made better use of the expertise of the professionals in making adjustments to the tool.

To improve the instrument, newer and better versions should be tested in sequence. Had we had a more advanced version to start with—one that could have been used by the professionals with little or no help and recommendations—a further improved version could have been used in the second rounds of iterations. We would have had a better opportunity to make more advanced improvements before the end of our research project. Up until now we performed two rounds of testing and (partial) improvements; hopefully we succeed in doing yet another round before the end of the project period, that would bring us a step further in the development of an effective tool.

**Conclusions**

Conducting a design experiment in politico-administrative settings is relatively new and, as a result, proved somewhat adventurous. Applying this method in two cases, we encountered some unexpected difficulties.

On balance, we are convinced that—notwithstanding such problems—the design experiment method has so far helped us to develop a theoretical basis for the design of a practical tool for the facilitation of citizens’ initiatives. This list of guidelines is not fully developed yet, but the experiences so far are encouraging. The professionals involved in the project have already indicated in what way the instrument is helpful for them. Moreover, the first effects we have been able to establish provide confirmation for the basic principles underlying the instrument and essentially confirm the instrumental validity of the set of guidelines. When we have collected and fully analyzed new additional data (e.g. the posttests that will still have to be administered) we can make full use of our data and will be well positioned to further improve the instrument.

An important analytical tool used in establishing the impact of particular types of facilitation (X) on the success of citizens’ initiatives (Y) was the technique of pattern matching. This technique provides an alternative for traditional experimental and quasi-experimental techniques for causal analysis in the context of small N research. It is based on the identification of key theoretical mechanisms that causally link causes (X) and effects (Y) and the specification of a theoretically expected course of events. This course of events is then compared with the empirically observed course of action. This implied the need to make rather precise expectations about the anticipated effects of the use of the set of guidelines. On the basis of these anticipated effects we were not only in a position to test but, if necessary, also to alter the hypotheses (and redesign the instrument). In due process, this also offered opportunities to explore new insight in the dynamics of the participatory processes in CI’s such as the role of expectations with regard to the
supporting officials and how the type of motivations play a role in starting and quitting the participation in a CI.

The external validity of small-N designs (including design experiments) is known to be more problematic than in large-N research. Of course, in our experiment on two cases, this is no different. This design experiment can be considered as a first step; once our instrument is fully developed, the possibility opens up of performing a (quasi-)experimental study with statistical controls.

So far, we have not found a better way to address our specific research objectives. With all its flaws, the design experiment method allows for the development of new instruments, since it allows us to judge its effectiveness and make adjustments. This helps us to also test and adjust theoretical ideas, not in the laboratory, but in a real-life environment.

REFERENCES


Judith Bakker Drs. is junior researcher and Phd-candidate in the Department of Public Administration in the School of Management and Governance of the University of Twente. As a practitioner—consultant, trainer and coordinator—she supported volunteers and active citizens for over eighteen years. She studied sociology at Radboud University in Nijmegen and graduated in 2009. Currently she works for the research project ‘Citizens making their neighborhood’ and on her Phd-dissertation. Studying the support of active citizenship means for her studying what she used to do.

Bas Delters Prof. dr. is prof. of Public Governance and program leader of the research program Innovation of Governance at the Institute for Innovation and Governance Studies at the University of Twente, The Netherlands. His research interest is in urban policy, urban democracy and citizen participation. Until 2010 he was convener of the Standing Group on Local Government and Politics (LOGOPOL) of the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR). Currently he is member of the Board of the European Urban Research Association, Overseas Editor of Local Government Studies and member of the Editorial Board of Urban Research and Practice.

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**APPENDIX**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Required elements for every Citizens’ initiative</th>
<th>What is needed in the project?</th>
<th>What is already available?</th>
<th>Suggested intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resources</strong> (CAN DO)</td>
<td>The ability to draft a financial year estimate</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Supporting professional makes a proposal for a financial year estimate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time / money / skills / accommodation</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Motivations</strong> (LIKE TO)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Networks</strong> (ENABLED TO)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mobilisation</strong> (ASKED TO)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Response that matches expectations</strong> (RESPONDED TO)</td>
<td></td>
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Part of the preliminary instrument: Scheme based on the CLEAR framework (Lowndes and Pratchett 2006). In Italic: first example as used in the article.
WHAT CAN ETHNOGRAPHY BRING TO THE STUDY OF DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY?
Evidence from a study on the impact of participation on actors

¿QUÉ PUEDE APORTAR LA ETNOGRAFÍA AL ESTUDIO DE LA DEMOCRACIA DELIBERATIVA?
Evidencias procedentes de un estudio sobre el impacto de la participación en los actores

JULIEN TALPIN  Julien.talpin@univ-lille2.fr
CNRS/Ceraps. France

ABSTRACT
The study of the individual effects of participation has mainly focused on the impact of deliberation on actors’ preferences, mostly based on quantitative and experimental research. I argue here that ethnography, based on a praxeologic and process approach, can offer broader results on actors’ learning in participatory devices than the cognitive effects generally emphasized. Grounded in a case-study of a participatory budget in Rome, the research shows participation allows learning new skills and civic habits but may also bring about a greater distrust with politics. Explaining the learning process, the paper stresses the different learning potential of participatory institutions. A condition for the durability of the effects observed is that participation be repeated over time. This requires integration within the institution, which happens for only a few; the majority of participants being disappointed stop participating. Speaking the language of the institution, some participants are however integrated enough to acquire further civic skills and knowledge, and even to endure a politicization process. Finally, the study of actors’ long-term trajectories allows drawing conclusions on the social conditions of civic bifurcation. Ethnography thereby allows grasping the long-term consequences of civic engagement.

KEYWORDS
Cynicism; Learning; Participatory budget; Political ethnography; Socialization.

RESUMEN
El estudio de los efectos individuales de la participación se ha centrado sobre todo en la influencia de la deliberación en las preferencias de los actores, basándose principalmente en la investigación cuantitativa y experimental. En este artículo defiendo que la etnografía, mediante una aproximación praxeológica y procesual, puede ofrecer resultados sobre el aprendizaje de los actores en contextos de participación que van más allá de los efectos cognitivos que se suelen destacar. Apoyándonos en un estudio de caso sobre presupuestos participativos en Roma, la investigación demuestra que la participación permite adquirir nuevas aptitudes y hábitos cívicos, si bien puede generar también una mayor desconfianza en la política. Al explicar el proceso de aprendizaje, el artículo acentúa el diferente potencial de aprendizaje de las instituciones participativas. Una condición para que los efectos observados sean duraderos consiste en que la participación se repita a lo largo del tiempo. Ello requiere integración en la institución, lo que solo ocurre en algunos casos, pues la mayoría de los participantes se decepcionan al dejar de participar. Sin embargo, algunos participantes, al manejarse bien en el lenguaje de la institución, están lo bastante integrados como para adquirir nuevas aptitudes y conocimientos cívicos e incluso para asumir un proceso de politicización. Por último, el estudio de las trayectorias de los actores a largo plazo permite extraer conclusiones sobre las condiciones sociales de la bifurcación cívica. Por tal motivo, la etnografía permite que se comprendan las consecuencias a largo plazo del compromiso cívico.

PALABRAS CLAVE
Aprendizaje; Cinismo; Etnografía política; Presupuesto participativo; Socialización.
INTRODUCTION

The study of the impact of participation on actors has mostly taken the form, until now, of research on the effects of deliberation on actors’ preferences. The work of James Fishkin (Fishkin 1995; Luskin, Fishkin and Jowell 2002) is of course symbolic of this approach, and has since then given rise to a rich literature (Gastil, Dillard, 1999; Goodin, Niemeyer 2003; Barabas 2004; Hansen, Andersen 2004; Rosenberg 2009). While these works have brought important advances in the understanding of participatory and deliberative phenomena, they face a number of shortcomings. Three are emphasized here, related to the question of the individual impact of participation. First of all, these research are mostly based on experimental designs (such as deliberative polls), which leads to question the external validity of the results and their transferability to the social world, made of power relationships and conflicts of interests. We still don’t know, for instance, whether individuals’ preferences are as malleable when actors’ interests are directly at stake in the discussions. Then, these studies only offer a short-term analysis (a few days or weeks after the deliberative event) of short-lived set-ups (one or two week-ends), so well that we still know little about the long-term consequences of engagement in more permanent participatory or deliberative institutions. Finally, focusing on the before and the after rather than on what happens within deliberative arenas, these works hardly ever question the conditions of possibility and felicity of the observed impact, so well that it is often difficult to determine precisely what is the origin of preference change (Ryfe 2005). More deeply, they focus solely on the cognitive consequences of deliberation (impact on preferences), while participation in such experiments could also have more practical effects, with the development for instance of new civic skills.

I offer here in contrast an analysis of the effects of participation on actors based on a non-experimental research, on the long-term, focusing on what happens inside and around the participatory institutions, in order to understand what institutions do to actors. While several ethnographic studies have been dealing with participatory institutions (see especially Baiocchi 2005), none of them focus specifically on the way participants are affected by the experience, as is ambitioned here. A praxeologic and process analysis of the effects of participation is therefore proposed. It appears first of all necessary to take into account the learning potential offered by institutions. All institutions —and thus all participatory devices— are not granted the same learning potential. I stress here, through the in-depth study of Rome 11th district participatory budget (PB), that actors are affected differently depending on the intensity and frequency of the interactions institutions permit. More precisely, the nature of interactions (type of meetings and facilitation, type of material supporting the discussion, organized tours on the field, moments of sociability, collective actions, etc.) shape the type of learning, of skills and competences, allowed by the institution, which cannot remain a black box to the analyst.

Then, the way actors live this experience should also be taken into account from a comprehensive perspective. Depending on the evaluation of the experience —positive
or negative—, the type of learning and the effects will be different. I will thus show that disappointing or frustrating experiences mostly create cynicism, participants rapidly exiting the institution. On the contrary, those who have a positive interpretation of participation increasingly become integrated within the institution, and can therefore be more deeply affected. Finally, I describe the long-term trajectory of actors. What did they learn? What new skills and competences have been incorporated? Can a change in discourses or argumentative repertoires be observed over time? Do learning lead to a politicization process for actors (who could start voting again, engage in civil society or local politics, etc.)? The paper concludes by arguing that, in the observed case, the effects are not only linked to deliberation, but also to the informal interactions taking place around the discussion phases. In so doing, deliberation is relocated in the diversity of the activities taking place in participatory institutions.

This research is based on a two years ethnographic study in 3 PBs (Rome, Seville and Morsang-sur-Orge). More precisely, it relies on (a) the observation of more than 120 public meetings—which allows noting the evolution of argumentative repertoires; (b) on 30 life-history interviews with participants, scrutinizing the role of previous political socialization in the eventually observed bifurcation of individual trajectories; (c) on interviews with the organizers of the PBs, to grasp the spirit of local civic life beyond the PB. I focus here solely on Rome 11th district case however to offer a thicker description of the case. Some comparative elements from the two other case-studies are used to draw some more general conclusions. The article is therefore based on a two years ethnographic study—between December 2004 and September 2006—in and around the participatory budget of Rome 11th district in Italy. This case has been chosen as it offers an important co-decision making power to citizens and makes of the education to citizenship one of its central goals.¹ In order to understand the impact on individuals of repeated participation in a PB, it was necessary to follow actors in situation—to evaluate whether the way they interact in public evolved through time—which was done through the observation of 54 public meetings of the Roman XI PB. It was then necessary to replace this experience in the broader biography of actors, in order to evaluate the novelty of the observed competences and the meaning it had for them, hence the dozen life-history interviews conducted with more or less engaged participants².

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¹ This research takes place in a broader project. See Julien Talpin, 2011.
² Diversity was the main driving factor for the choice of interviewees, in terms of age, gender and previous political participation (both activists and non-activists).
**Taking the Context into Account. The Learning Potential of Participatory Institutions**

While experimental methods aim at neutralizing the context, ethnography ambitions on the contrary to take the context of interaction into account to see to what extent the results can be explained by situational or other factors. From this perspective, the learning potential offered by institutions has to be scrutinized to evaluate their potential consequences. All institutions—and thus all participatory set-ups—do not offer the same learning potential, the experiences they offer to individuals being of an unequal richness. The inception of participatory budgeting in 2003 in the 11th district of Rome was part of a radical political project, embodying the will of a recently elected Communist mayor close to the far-left anti-globalization movement, “to deepen democracy.”

Procedurally, the Roman PB is based on a cycle of annual meetings based on the budget calendar. The district is divided into seven neighborhoods that are the central spaces of participation. At the start of the year, an assembly is organized in each neighborhood, during which delegates are elected after a short presentation of themselves and their goals for the neighborhood. PB delegates do not have a representative function however; they are regular participants, pillars of the participatory body.

Next, and this is the heart of the process, thematic working-groups meet 4 or 5 times for a two-hours meeting over the following months, in order to set-up projects related to the five principal municipal competencies, in particular urbanism, the network of roads and waterways, green spaces, cultural policies, youth activities, and sports. The meetings of the working-groups are open to the delegates as well as to all inhabitants (including foreign citizens) of the neighborhood.

Working-groups meetings generally take the form of small thematic discussion groups—they break up in small groups focusing on the different areas of competence—gathering between 5 and 10 participants, along which it is not uncommon that pictures, maps or power points be presented. A crucial element in the structuring of the interactions, that was only introduced the second year of my observation, is a sheet of paper—called Verbale, as it works as an official report of the meeting—that each group has to fill-in, by listing the nature of the problem that is discussed, its location and the potential solutions evoked. This document is then sent to the technical services of the municipality, who answer on the same sheet. This tool plays a crucial role in the dynamic of the discussion, framing them as a problem-solving talk. Participants isolate a problem, offer a concrete solution and discuss it. A few weeks later they receive an answer from the...

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*To do so “thick descriptions” should be offered, which is not possible here for reasons of space. See Geertz 1973.


*The Verbale is pretty close, from a formal point of view, of the “beat form” described by Archon Fung in the case of Chicago. See Fung 2004:61-68.
technical services of the administration, stressing the financial and technical viability of the projects. These sheets embody an important cognitive element —potential source of learning for individuals— by synthesizing the comments from the technical services. The problem-solving aspect of the discussions does not foster however the development of general political discussions, often considered useless or loss of time, as will be seen later. Learning technical know-how and getting in touch with the political stakes of an issue does not necessary go together. Another important element in the structuring of participation, the website, bringing together all the dates, reports, etc. and where an on-line discussion forum on the proposals has progressively been created.

Finally, at the end of the process, a neighborhood assembly is organized —where participation is more important than in the working-groups, up to a hundred— during which the participants vote for one project per theme, the first one (in terms of vote) per category being integrated into the district budget. The allocation of up to 5 million euros —20% of the municipal investment budget— is thus directly decided upon by the residents of the district.

Beyond its procedural format, the learning potential of a participatory institution also depends on the diversity of the public it gathers. The richness and the creativity of the PB directly stem from bringing together actors with varied initial knowledge and competencies. While the rate of participation is weak, since only 1,498 people participated in 2004, which represents approximately 1% of the population of the district, the public in the PB is relatively heterogeneous, although certain categories are over-represented. First and foremost there was real gender diversity, since in 2004, 53% of the participants of the Roman PB were women (Ummarino 2005:178). In terms of generations, while we can observe an over-representation of those over 50 years of age (36% of participants were older than 51), all age brackets were represented, with 12% of participants being students, for example. In regard to socio-professional categories, there was an over-representation of white-collar employees (25% of participants) and an under-representation of the unemployed (only 5% of the total). The participants of the Roman PB have, in general, a higher than average level of education, with 24% having a university diploma, and 41% with at least a high school diploma. Finally, there was a marked over-representation of activists: 63% of the participants were members of an association, a political party, or a union (d’Albergo 2005:75-76). This last point appears particularly important to the extent that it is precisely the interaction between activists and non-politicized actors that allows the acquisition of most new capacities.

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6 The role of this type of form can be seen by comparing with other cases, in which it is not used, and where interactions were less rich and precise. See Talpin 2011:142-144.
7 We will not seek here to debate the topic, although fundamental, of the legitimacy of decisions made in institutions with such a limited public.
8 These numbers are certainly inflated by the fact that activists are more likely to respond to questionnaires than others.
Despite the clear over-representation of certain fractions of the population, which only confirms the weight of social origins and of cultural resources in political participation phenomena that has already been largely documented (Gaxie 1978; Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995) it is possible to underline the strong diversity of the participating public, in particular with regard to other, more conventional, political arenas. These actors with heterogeneous profiles bring up different types of knowledge and of expertise during public discussions in order to give weight to their reasoning and to convince the audience of the logic of their propositions. Three types of initial competencies have been observed: local knowledge, technical know-how, and political competence. Each form of knowledge and expertise is not mastered by all of the participants. Some possess many forms (activists, architects, etc.), while others appear relatively weak. Lacking access to systematic socio-demographic data on this matter, it appears nevertheless evident that technical knowledge —considering the professional competencies it requires— is reserved for individuals from certain socio-professional categories, and that political competence is directly correlated to cultural capital. Inversely, local knowledge is the weapon of the weak, the resource for those who do not have any other. Such as workers who could only count on the strength of their workforce in production relationships, the weakest residents can only count on their personal experience of the territory to draw upon in participatory budgeting meetings.

To what extent interactions between this heterogeneous public in the framework of the Roman PB allows learning to happen? Beyond the desire to democratize the decision-making process, the Roman experiment expressly promotes the desire to create an active and critical citizenship. The first article of the PB constitution —that has been written by elected officials in cooperation with participation experts— thus clarify that “the PB aims for the promotion of an active citizenship through the inclusion of citizens in the decisions of the district.” Beyond this political understanding of the PB, the facilitators of the meetings also see in the PB a true school of citizenship, the goal of the experience being to “offer an opportunity for personal development to citizens by making individual knowledge a common resource for all citizens.” This is especially embodied in the way they facilitate the meetings, trying to follow what they see as a Habermasian perspective. To what extent engagement in this type of institution affects the trajectories of actors and is able, as it claims, to create a more competent citizenship, ready to participate more actively in the public sphere?

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9 This classification is inspired in part by Sintomer 2008.
10 See the site of the Roman participatory budgeting program: http://www.municipiopartecipato.it/pages/index/tab/regolamento
11 Meetings are facilitated by members of a Roman association contracted by but independent from the municipality, Progetto Sensibilizzando, composed of young professionals particularly socialized to social work and social sciences.
LEARNING THE DISCOURSIVE NORMS OF THE INSTITUTION TO INTEGRATE IT DURABLY

A crucial condition of socialization through participation is that it be repeated in time, the intensity of interactions being a condition to the bifurcation of individual trajectories. Not all citizens participate in the PB with the same level of intensity. The PB is structured by circles of participation, which reflect the regularity of participation and the degree of integration within the institution. Three concentric circles can be distinguished. To exist and stabilize, participatory institutions need to create a group of regular participants, that I call the “group of good citizens.” It is generally composed of 10 to 15 volunteers, who form the first circle of participants. A “group of good citizens” existed in each neighborhood assembly of the Roman PB—but also in the other cases studied. Well integrated into the institution, they knew the rules of the game and regularly speak in front of the assembly, so well that they have an important influence on the behaviour of others and on final decisions. The second circle is comprised of intermittent participants, who only attend a few meetings each year, especially for voting. Finally, the third circle is comprised of the population as a whole and thus represents the 95% of the population that never participates in the PB.

Integration to the “group of good citizens” appears necessary to be affected by participation, as irregular participants revealed almost unimpressed by a superficial engagement. To integrate this group, individual must first be present regularly, participation being seen as a minimal form of engagement and of support for the process. They then have to be able to speak in public. The participatory bodies studied rely in fact on public deliberation for making their decisions. Participants must therefore possess or acquire the confidence necessary for public speaking in order to promote their needs or projects. The necessity of voice embodies a first filter, as indicated by the weakest participation in discussion meetings—the working groups—as compared to decision meetings (limited to a vote and featuring only a few speakers). While, in 2004, 1,498 people participated in the Roman PB, only approximately one hundred regularly participated in the working groups. Although the exit mechanisms cannot be reduced only to the fear of speaking: factors such as the amount of time required for such a participation, level of interest in meetings that are not directly decision-oriented (even though they play a role in the selection of propositions to be voted), and the implicit delegation to “delegates” who, without being representatives, are there precisely to ensure the construction of proposals. These factors cannot be pushed aside—they also embody a first filter.

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13 This makes the durability of effects linked to participation to mini-publics, lasting only one or two weekends, rather dubious. See Talpin, Wojcik 2010.
14 Sometimes, however, for matters of time, discussions were settled by vote. Vote was always preceded by a collective discussion allowing for the definition, clarification, and evaluation of propositions and arguments.
15 More precisely, 278 people participated in the working groups in 2004. This number, however, includes repeated counts of individuals who participated in many meetings, to the extent that we can estimate that about one hundred participated regularly in the working groups.
Next, not everyone speaks up within the working groups. 21% of participants in working groups thus never spoke in the observed meetings. This data does not reflect however inequalities among participants’ interventions—some actors speaking up many times and for lengthy comments, others only speaking briefly and once. It also shows the importance of the procedural device for access to public speaking. Working groups meetings were divided, as a general rule, into three or four small discussion groups, each one comprised of 5 to 10 members. This allowed the majority of participants to speak, unlike other studied cases where the groups were larger (at least twenty or thirty people) and the rate of speaking lower (68% in Morsang-sur-Orge, 40% in Seville). Those who remain silent are condemned to remain at the margins of the institution. Participating irregularly, they can pick up some information, but they are not significantly affected in their civic practices. I never met a regular participant, truly integrated in the PB, who never spoke in the public assemblies.

Not only must the participants speak, they must also speak appropriately, according to the requisite discursive norms regulating interactions in these institutions. A necessary condition for integration within the institution is the respect of the grammatical rules defining the correct way to speak in public (Cardon, Heurtin, Lemieux, 1995; Céfaï, 2002; Lemieux, 2010). Individuals simply cannot say anything and everything in public; if they do they are heavily symbolically sanctioned, as indicated by an example that occurred in the Tormarencia neighborhood.

Mazia was coming for the first time to a PB meeting, and was apparently motivated by a personal trouble: the trees in her street had not been cut down for a long time and their branches created a danger for cars and pedestrians. She wanted to make a proposal to the PB on this issue, but was apparently frustrated when she learnt that it was impossible as this was the last PB session of the year, impeding any new proposal to be made. The other participants—regular ones—invited her to stay anyway, as she would be allowed to vote for the proposals concerning the neighbourhood. She answered: ‘I cannot vote on the proposal related to street X, as I don’t know it. And this street does not concern me’. She therefore decided to leave the meeting: ‘At this point, as there are no problems related to my street, I’m going; because personally I don’t know anything about those [other] problems’. A man nevertheless greeted her and encouraged her to come back the following year: ‘At least you did […] not your duty, because it’s not a duty, but something good’. Mazia, obviously upset as she was speaking faster and faster in a rather aggressive tone, made clear she would not come back as her problem was

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16 We accounted essentially for speakers in the working groups, since the other meetings—elections of delegates or voting—were not set up to have a collective discussion. Thus, 340 of the 430 participants in the working groups that we observed spoke up at least one time.

17 This idea is central in all literature about deliberative democracy—of Kantian inspiration—with the strength of publicity being attributed by Habermas (1985) to the nature of communication, by Etler (1994) to the strategic quest for convincing the undecided, or by Fearon (1996) to the submission to certain social norms.
not taken into account. She was therefore sanctioned for her parochialism by the other participants: ‘Enlarge your horizons. You focus too much on your own street here we’re not working for our own streets egoistically, but for everybody.’ Mazia, feeling attacked answered: ‘I will enlarge my horizons when I’ll see my problems solved’. Roberta explained to her afterwards that the delegates of the PB were not like delegates of their street or their zone, but of the whole neighbourhood. Mazia never came back to the assembly.\(^{18}\)

As often, tensed interactions reveal the rules of the game implicitly followed by actors (Boltanski, Thévenot 1992). Usually, participants know they should not voice self-interested proposals; so they do not. In this case however, this newcomer, participating for the first time, did not know the grammatical rules of the institution. As they had been infringed, the rules had to be recalled and defined explicitly: ‘here we’re not working for our own streets egoistically, but for everybody’. Overly personalized interventions, centered on the private interests of speakers, are severely sanctioned within PB assemblies, through the attribution of disparaging reputations —“bigmouth,” “consumer,” “egotistical,” “lobbyist”— and a symbolic form of exclusion. This question is all the more complex in that the PB allows for an opening of public action to traditionally excluded forms of knowledge, and especially local knowledge. The latter being necessarily linked to a form of individual, personal, and relatively idiosyncratic practice, speakers must frame it in such a way that it can appear compatible with the grammar of the institution. Local knowledge is thus never an end in and of itself. It must lead to a more general discussion of what must be done. While the participants may start with a personal narrative to illustrate their complaints, they must nevertheless move toward a generalization arising from it. To be heard in a participatory arena, one must adopt the point of view of the community and aim for the general interest. The definition of the general interest is constructed in interaction by the group of good citizens. It implicitly promotes a unanimist version of the common good, in which proposals have to foster the interests of all the residents of the neighborhood. Other definitions of the common good —like giving more to those who have less— were never discussed in the assemblies, all the more as the most marginalized inhabitants of the area were not present in the PB process. Thus, the working consensus on PB discursive interactions had, partly, a contradictory effect to its initial goal: instead of including as many residents as possible, it very often excluded those who could not speak immediately the language of the institution.

While an orientation toward the common good is required, this must not take the form of overtly political or partisan discourse, which is often considered “blabber” or “politicising,” appearing both ineffective and not useful for carrying out the projects of the PB. When the participants get carried away in general or political discussions, they are interrupted and brought back to order by a “but what is your proposal, in the end?”, such as Giorgio in one meeting, that was bashed publicly by another participant for not being specific enough in his street rehabilitation proposal: “You’re doing philosophy here. We

have to point out some specific streets”. Speakers must therefore promote the general interest, while still connecting it to a concrete project that does not appear to be motivated by a private interest. It is in this sense that discussions within these institutions are at first not directly political, to the extent that the subjects brought up must first be approached from a practical angle—a problem is raised to the members of the community—before being generalized, that is to say presented as collectively treatable.

Thus, the first thing participants learn in a PB—and which is a condition for their integration within the institution—is to speak according to requisite grammatical forms. Mastery of the specific grammar of the institution, through mechanisms of sanction and gratification, can thus appear, as voting did when it was introduced in Europe in 19th Century, as a process of the domestication of citizens, who must conform to the correct ways of acting in the public sphere. In this case, the dominate actors—the group of good citizens—are able to impose their definition of discursive norms, which appears excluding some actors, often less accustomed to civic life.

Scrutinizing the norms of civic life would have been impossible without spending months on the field, observing patterns of interactions and regularities, and sometimes seeing a breach in the normal course of the situation. It should be stressed, however, that in PB institutions people do not act as in ordinary life. While experimental methods have been criticized for drawing conclusions from artificial settings ungeneralizable to real-life situations, the same could be argued in the case of political ethnography. The main difference, however, is that while PB participants had to take a public role, adapted to the publicity of the situation, the latter is part of social life, it is not created artificially by the social scientist. The conclusions that can be drawn from this research are therefore restricted—and can only be extended—to public situation learning.

19 Observation notes, Montagnola working group n.1, Rome, 18th January 2006.
21 Learning in school, or in more intimate contexts might therefore be different.
22 A sign of difficulties in integrating into the participatory budgeting institution is the very high degree of turnover, since approximately 50% of participants in 2003 did not come back in 2004. High turnover rates have also been observed in Morsang and Seville, as well as in many (and non-PB) participatory devices. See Blondiaux 2008.
on the margins of the institution. While this learning process is intensive, it only involved around a hundred people in the Roman case. Among the hundred regular participants, only 21% were not initially engaged actors (d’albergo 2005:76) and they were the ones who could be the most affected by their participation. While different forms of learning could be stressed, such as technical knowledge (linked to urban or budget issues) or a formation to collective action, the emphasis is put here on deliberation as a practical achievement and on the transmission of political knowledge.

**Learning to deliberate. A collective competence**

What is generally qualified as deliberation, understood as a reasoned exchange of arguments aimed at taking a collective decision, can be broken down into a series of gestures and practices, requiring of each participant specific competencies: learning to listen to others, respecting them by speaking politely in turn and without aggression, to ask questions for clarification, and to make “concrete” and “constructive” proposals. The practice of deliberation, far from being spontaneous, requires both a procedural organization and a collective learning process. We can in this vein evoke the experience of the neighborhood assembly of Montagnola, where a learning process took shape over time, by imitation and trial and error.

The first two meetings of the year had been chaotic. The approximately thirty participants had refused to divide into working groups —against the advice of the organizers. This refusal led to a disorganized debate, some speaking over others, not listening to each other, jumping from one subject to another. At the third meeting, a month later, the participants decided to divide into working groups, which were then only comprised of 6 to 8 members. The dynamic of the discussion changed dramatically. Within the group that I observed, the discussion was calm and constructive, the moderator occasionally clarifying, “not all at the same time,” and “each one in turn.” A speaking list was organized, proposals written down, and those who cut off speakers were systematically sanctioned. A good deliberation was thus able to arise, resting on the collective evaluation of arguments for and against a given proposal. In a short time, by the imitation of rules of good behavior defined by the facilitators, citizens had learned to debate; the improved organization of the discussion allowed them to move from an agonistic and sometimes aggressive debate to more cooperative and constructive exchanges.23

It was thus through trial and error, as a result of failures discovered in the process (observations shared by the participants about the ineffective nature of discursive messiness), thanks to the enlightened influence of facilitators who never ceased emphasizing the importance of simple procedures of discussion management, that a collective apprenticeship could occur. The learning of the role of the (good) citizen occurs in this way, first through the acquisition of relatively standardized and conventional ways of

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doing, which can only come up in interaction. Participation in PB assemblies thus allows individuals to learn to express their opinions, to speak in public, to manage a meeting, to distribute speaking turns and to allow less competent actors to speak.

From this perspective, ethnography and quantitative research can appear complementary in participation research. Indeed, before and after research design have stressed convincingly that people do learn along deliberation, their preferences becoming more informed (Price, Capella 2005; Gastil, Black and Moscovitz 2008; Jacobs, Lomax Cook and Delli Carpini 2009; Esterling, Neblo and Lazer 2011). But the learning consequences of the practice of deliberation cannot be reduced to its cognitive aspect only, people acquiring as well know-how and practical competences that are difficult to grasp through questionnaires.

**Spreading political knowledge**

Despite the exclusion of properly political discussions in participatory arenas, they are not cut off from the local political field, to the extent that participation is a way to expand the political knowledge of the public and can even constitute a space of individual politicization. Although the spread of political knowledge does not occur directly in public meetings, the “groups of good citizens” of the PB also appear to be spaces of sociability. It is thus most often in the hallways, in interpersonal discussions after meetings, in parties, at the bar or in the street that a relationship to politics and a collective interpretation of the commonly lived existence was constructed. The position adopted by a given actor during a meeting was explained through his/her partisan affiliation, and recent municipal decisions were commented upon, as were the advances or barriers of certain dossiers; sometimes members even went as far as to speak of the president of the Council at the time, Silvio Berlusconi, usually to mock him.

Participants thus discover the local political field and the different organizations that make it up. Their engagement allows them to meet, sometimes personally, certain actors in the political field and the first level of elected officials. They can also more easily identify their political color (which was far from being the case for all at the beginning) and situate words and actions according to partisan orientations. They learn to negotiate with elected officials, to play with rivalries and power relations among parties to promote their interests. Finally, participants discover the functioning of the administrative machine, the division of competencies, and the conflicts within the institution. During the public meetings themselves, speeches by certain established actors can sometimes lead to veritable courses on local political power relationships or municipal institutional functions, on the condition of not taking an overly partisan tone. Party members evoke the latest municipal decisions, housing rights advocates tackle the homeless situation in the city, and environmentalists share their knowledge on global warming or urban planning. At a Roman working group meeting, Maurizio, an activist from Legambiente, the main Italian environmental organisation, made a very didactic intervention on the implications of the Kyoto protocol for the public transportation policies of Italian municipalities: “You know
that anyway, the Kyoto protocol has come into force in Italy since yesterday [15.02.2005] and Italy has to decrease its CO2 emissions drastically in the following years [...] 30 per cent of the use of cars in this city regard trips of less than 3 km i.e., distances easily reachable by bike. It means we could decrease CO2 emissions by 30 per cent just thanks to bikes! Anyway, [...] soon all the metro stations will be equipped with bike parking [...] it’s a global trend24. Through their engagement in PBs, participants are constantly acquiring new knowledge on the political system and on a variety of salient public issues. Given the exclusion of political discussions from public meetings, politicization happens more often backstage than frontstage however. It is easy to see that while sharing this information has a persuasive goal, it also embodies a substantial cognitive contribution for the actors. In this vein, participatory budgeting institutions can represent spaces of politicization, such as for this participant who declared having “discovered a passion for politics.”25

**Becoming cynical by participating**

Participation in the PB can finally take the form of a negative, critical, or cynical politicization. Hundreds of participants in fact exit the institution in the middle of the year, as indicated by the high rate of turnover.26 The PB might only offer a trivial amount of power to citizens they say, as illustrated by the slowness and sometimes the absence of the realization of projects approved in PB assemblies, and it might be a way for political powers to manipulate citizens and to stifle contestation. Although exit is generally silent, actors preferring to vote with their feet, cynicism and disappointment is sometimes openly expressed in the assembly:

The participants had been talking for some time about the difficulty for the municipal council not to respect the decisions of the zone assemblies, when Giovanna raised the tone and got literally outraged about the PB process, crying out for five minutes against the insufficiencies of the concrete achievements: “The PB has not done anything yet since its creation! It’s a shame! I feel I am a fool. Every time you [the facilitator] tell me not to say this or that, that it is not possible, that it’s not in the competence of the Municipio, that it has already been accepted, etc. What is this all for, then? I really feel I am a fool! I made proposals ten times and they haven’t changed anything!” People tried to calm her down, which worked after a few minutes. Most of them, explained to her that some projects had been achieved, even if they mostly told her to be patient. Their arguments did not seem to convince her however. Giovanna never came back. 27

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24 Observation notes, Garbatella, mobility working group, Rome, 16th February 2005
26 Out of the 978 participants in 2003, a just over 500 did not take part in the process in 2004, for example. We can observe that just as many activists as non-engaged participants dropped out from one year to the next.
27 Observation notes, Roma 70, Working Group no. 3, April 12, 2005.
Disappointed by the model, some participants became more cynical after their participation, as much about participatory democracy in particular as about politics in general. For some, this frustrating experience of participation led them from apolitical to anti-political attitudes. When more actors come out disappointed than satisfied, one can wonder if, in the end, experiments in participatory democracy, when they do not offer sufficient power to citizens or when the participation is not well enough organized, might have a more negative than positive effect in terms of politicization. Far from regenerating democracy, these experiments, if they are not conclusive enough, risk reinforcing a casual suspicion of public life. Clemente Navarro and Joan Font showed for instance a higher distrust and defiance of local government for participants than for non-participants of deliberative experiments (Font, Navarro 2010). While this is not true for all participatory experiences, it is nevertheless appropriate to underline that, in order to have a significant civic impact, experiences must be positively evaluated by citizens, which remains the exception in Europe.

Evaluating Long-Term Effects of Participation. The Value of a Process Perspective

While short-term learning processes deriving from participation have received a great deal of attention—especially in experimental or quasi-experimental research—little attention has been paid to the long-term and more stable consequences of participation. What do people become after 6 or 12 months of participation? To what extent the effects of participatory engagement are durable or on the contrary short-lived? Having spent two years of the field—while not enough—, gives some indications on the civic trajectories of regular PB participants. The mobilization and the acquisition of new competencies can only be understood, however, when placed within the larger trajectory of a particular actor, by comparing it to his past experiences, allowing to understand how new experiments are assimilated, rejected, or incorporated.28 This is what I have tried to do—mostly using the interviews conducted with the participants.

Approximately one hundred participants, provided that they were sufficiently invested in the process, became more competent following their participation experience, acquiring technical, political, and practical knowledge and know-how that they did not possess previously. But to what extent can these new civic capacities bring about a bifurcation in actors’ trajectories? Does civic learning in PB institutions translate into a more durable socialization to politics?

Although many citizens were disappointed by their participatory experience, others continued to participate despite initial difficulties, and sometimes saw their civic trajectory

28 On the use of the concept of “career” in the sociology of social movements, see Filleule 2010.
radically transformed. A dozen individuals engaged in the PB thus reinvested their newly acquired competencies in other organizations. One of the paradigmatic examples of 11th district PB’s impact on local civil society is the creation of Roma 70 (one of the neighborhoods’ of the district) youth social centre. In the first year of the PB experience, young people—teenagers between 16 and 22—started participating in the PB and rapidly cooperated to push forward a proposal to create a youth social centre in the neighborhood, as they were lacking a place to gather for social, political, cultural and leisure activities. The proposal was largely voted in at the end of the process, and, more interestingly, it translated rapidly into public policy and public works. A year and a half later, the youth social centre opened its doors, this rapid realization being linked to the direct support of the administration and especially the PB councilor. The latter appeared indeed extremely satisfied with the project, directly fomenting active citizenship according to him: “There is also the case of the young people of Roma 70. They were initiated to public life through their participation to the participatory budget in Roma 70, formulating ideas and proposals that became more and more interesting with time. These teenagers of the neighborhood constituted themselves, autonomously, in a cultural association [that manages the centre]. Now, they are organizing projects on the territory and give autonomous vocational training classes. I think this is a typical example of how other processes of self-organisation, self-training and self-management, which are really important for me, can be created from the participatory budget. They build a competent citizenship.”

I had the chance to visit the centre, and saw how active it was locally, organizing political debates (rather oriented on the left, most of its members being young leftist activists), local actions, concerts, private lessons, etc. The managing team—composed of the young students who had presented the project in the PB assembly—lived, therefore, its first associative experience. These teenagers were able to re-invest the competences they had learn while participating in the PB, in the framework of this newly created association. The realization of a PB proposal therefore resulted in the creation of an association, and in the acquisition of new skills and competences for actors. On the other hand, it also translated in the exit from the PB process of these newly engaged association members. Roman PB therefore directly encourages (even financially) the bifurcation of individual trajectories in the sense of revitalization of local civil society.

Local associations also look to the PB for potential recruits. Modes of engagement and of expression in fact seem largely comparable between the PB and certain neighborhood associations, so much so that the transfer from one to the other can happen easily. I regularly observed leaders from neighborhood associations invite—more or less publicly—active members of the PB to join their organization. In this sense, participatory democracy can appear as a way to enrich local civil society, by producing new civic actors who strengthen the ranks of existing organizations and encourage the creation of new associations.

29 Interview with L. Ummarino, PB councilor, Rome, 9th January 2005.
30 For much broader effects of PB on civil society, see Baiocchi, 2005.
The growing engagement of certain actors with political professionals has also been observed. Regular participants of the PB, who were not official members of a party, were contacted and co-opted by elected officials and political parties in order to be added to municipal electoral lists for the next elections. The paradigm case of Floriana can be noted, as she experienced a process of practical politicization, marked by an increased engagement following her participation in the PB.

Her local engagement first allowed her to discover a neighborhood reality she had not known about: “I remember, at the first assembly I participated in, they were talking about gardens, lights, etc. and a man whom I did not know got up timidly and said, with a clearly foreign accent: ‘I understand that you are busy with public gardens. But you must know that for us, during the winter, there are elderly people who die in the gypsy camp.’ He was a delegate from the neighboring gypsy camp. And that was like a punch in the stomach. These two realities...” The direct meeting of a social reality distant from the heart of the PB allowed her to “become aware of certain crucial social problems in the neighborhood. Often, “moral shocks” are the origin of a more direct engagement, a first step in a process of politicization (Jaspers 2001). She thus became active in the PB and this experience allowed her to acquire both practical skills and a network of acquaintances of local officials, which she was then able to use in the political field. Having always voted, but without being an activist for a political party or association, she underwent a process of practical politicization. She was indeed contacted —after three years of participation— by the municipal majority to be on the electoral list of the Rifondazione Comunista in the local elections: “I liked this experience in the PB so much that I wanted to continue at a higher level [...]. It’s new for me, I always voted, but I had never really been active in anything. So when the mayor suggested I be on the electoral lists, I was very flattered, and I said yes, of course.”

The newly acquired civic capacities as well as the progressively constituted network are resources political parties try to catch in their quest for legitimacy and local establishment. Floriana was not the only participant of the PB who was offered to be on the electoral lists for the 2006 local elections, but the others refused. The participatory budget can thus appear as an alternative channel for the recruitment of local political elites, alongside the political parties that traditionally play this role.

Who are the actors who were more deeply affected by participation, in comparison to the others? Why a dozen of the hundred regular participants saw their civic trajectory affected, in terms of new engagements or political commitments, and not the others? One essential condition for politicization through participation is that the engagement be repeated over time in a relatively intensive fashion. The more affected were therefore

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32 We emphasize that recruitment outside the party is a classic practice at the municipal level, but that it generally occurs for local association leaders, who have a different profile from the most professionalized members of the participatory budgeting institution who are on municipal councils. On this subject, see Le Bart 2003.
simply the more engaged. But why did they engage more than others then? The intensity of participation is itself dependent upon the biographical availability of individuals—students and retired people, as well as idle activists seeking new engagements, are particularly invested in the PB. In the case of Floriana, her trajectory of politicization cannot be understood if not linked to the time freed up by her retirement and the sentiment of “idleness” that followed. Her engagement thus allowed her to “feel alive again.” As a matter of fact, biographical availability is socially driven, working-classes working two jobs a day or who have irregular working shifts have other concerns that the local common good. PB engagement is a luxury some cannot simply afford.

The repetition of participation does not depend uniquely on biographical availability however, but also on the elective affinities between the norms and topics of discussion of the PB and the expectations and dispositions of participants. The most intensively engaged were indeed interested in urban planning, educational or environmental issues, and were also marked by a form of civic good-willingness. Neighborhood do-gooders—they often had previous forms of civic engagement (writing letters to the mayor, voting regularly and sometimes participating to a local association)—they found in the PB a way to value their civic and personal dispositions. The words of Antonio, when presenting for delegates are typical of this profile: I’m someone who gets angry all the time. I’m fighting all the time. And I’m tired to ear, each time I complain or try to do something, ‘but who are you?’ I answer that I am an Italian citizen who pays his taxes. I get angry all the time about the wastes and misuses of public funds. […] About cars that are stolen or crushed, about recycling, about cleanness of the streets, etc. […] I am not belonging to any political party, but I believe in the revolution of how to spend taxes. After two years of PB participation Antonio joined a local comitato di quartiere. Furthermore, in order to participate intensively in the PB, one must believe that such an engagement can be worth it, that it can have an impact, and that it can be worthwhile to spend time on it—many considerations that are far from shared by a majority of citizens in contemporary democracies (Braconnier, Dormagen 2007). In order to participate regularly enough to be affected by PB engagement, one should therefore show some form of minimal trust with political institutions. While participatory democracy aimed at re-politicizing disengaged citizens, it appears that the most remote from the public sphere have little chance to participate and be affected significantly. Concern for the local common good and biographical disponibility are far from being equally spread along the social spectrum.

33 On the concept of “biographical availability,” see McAdam 1986.
34 Montagnola votation assembly, Rome, 4th of February 2005.
CONCLUSION. ALIVE AND LIMITS OF POLITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY

While the different elements presented here might be interesting as such, to what extent do they deepen the understanding of the individual and collective learning processes deriving from participatory engagement? The individuals presented here could remain relatively idiosyncratic, isolated among the majority of Rome 11th district PB participants, this case being itself isolated in the ocean of participatory democracy. This raises the question of the external validity of the ethnographic method.

The results presented here should be read as illustrations of a more regular pattern of self-change through participation that I was able to sever out through repeated observation. The generalizability of ethnographic data indeed comes from come from a constant comparative method (Glasser, Strauss 1967). This was first achieved by comparing discursive interactions in time and between sites. Each assembly being composed of dozens of discursive sequences, this research is based on the comparison of hundreds of discursive sequences among ordinary citizens in PB institutions. The comparison between them allows severing out (discursive and practical) rules —that people follow in general— and deviations, and thus grasping the cultural structures appearing in PB interactions (Eliasoph, Lichterman 2003). Regularity appears indeed as a strong marker of normativity. Each new observation should either confirm, or inflect, the conclusions drawn from the previous observations, in a movement towards generality and typification (Schutz 1970). What I saw in Rome could indeed be compared to what I was observing in two other sites, in Seville and Morsang-sur-Orge. This allowed distinguishing local idiosyncrasies and more general phenomena.

Patterns and regularities were not only observed at the interactional level however. I also observed regularities —with a lower n however— in the evolution of the trajectory of some of the actors I followed over two years. I was able to see that those who stayed and participated intensively, and developed new forms of civic engagement, were specific in comparison to the broader public of PB. Idle and “unemployed” civic agents, concerned by the local common good, they found in the PB an ideal form of engagement, which opened up new political paths to them. The results of ethnographic studies —while hardly replicable —can also be compared to other ethnographic studies on similar objects. From this perspective, the results presented here can be compared— and eventually amended— to other participatory devices and other sites. Mathieu Berger’s work shows the norms regulating interactions in Brussels are to a large extent comparable to those I observed in the three sites I studied (Berger 2008). Héloïse Nez’s research similar learning patterns of learning in Cordoba and Paris (Nez 2010); and it is only by multiplying such comparisons that deviations and common patterns will be severed out, and finer grounded theories built.

Finally, ethnography allows grasping a crucial element hardly taken into account by other methods, namely the meaning participation has for actors. To understand who is affected or not and why, it is necessary knowing how participants felt along the way. Satisfaction or dissatisfaction appear from this perspective crucial elements in explaining
learning processes. Participants were not indeed passively marked by the norms regulating interactions in participatory institutions. They were able to interpret and react to these normative requirements, to play with them eventually, and therefore be affected by them differently depending on their previous civic, personal or professional experience. Only when the past and the present are taken together in a process perspective can the meaning and consequences participation has for actors be adequately understood.

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WHAT CAN ETHNOGRAPHY BRING TO THE STUDY OF DELIBERATIVE...


Julien Talpin is a permanent research fellow at the CNRS (Ceraps/Université Lille 2) and currently visiting fellow and Fulbright scholar at the University of Southern California. He has recently published “Schools of democracy. How ordinary citizens become competent in participatory budgeting institutions”, and edited the issue Ethnographies de la participation, journal Participations, 2012-3.

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AUTONOMOUS ACTIVIST-RESEARCH
The case of the squatters’ movement in Madrid

INVESTIGACIÓN ACTIVISTA AUTÓNOMA
El caso del movimiento de okupaciones de Madrid

MIGUEL ÁNGEL MARTÍNEZ LÓPEZ miguelam@cps.ucm.es
Universidad Complutense de Madrid (UCM). Spain

ELISABETH LORENZI FERNÁNDEZ elisabeth.lorenzi@gmail.com
Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED). Spain

ABSTRACT
Citizen participation has been recently incorporated in the design and implementation of different public policies but participants have often criticised that there is little room for autonomous modes of citizen participation within institutional frameworks. Which are the specific features of autonomous processes of citizen participation compared to the most institutional ones? How does autonomous participation develop? This article deals with the methodological aspects of autonomous participation. In doing so, we will present an experience of autonomous activist-research within the squatters’ movement of Madrid which lasted for two and a half years. In particular, we focus on the methodological decisions taken by activist-researchers and describe the major contributions of this participatory process. We argue that such an activist-research process was based upon three different strategies which provided a productive framework for the participants’ involvement: a) an open, horizontal and self-managed group of activist-researchers; b) an open-source and copy-left commitment in order to fulfill an equal access to the production of knowledge; c) a qualitative and comprehensive methodology which allowed to gather a wide range of information taking into account the social diversity within the squatters’ movement.

KEYWORDS
Activist-research; Autonomous citizen participation; Methodology of social sciences; Reflexivity; Squatters’ movement.

RESUMEN
La participación ciudadana ha sido recientemente incorporada en el diseño e implementación de diferentes políticas públicas, pero quienes participan han criticado a menudo que existe poco espacio para las modalidades autónomas de participación ciudadana dentro de los marcos institucionales. ¿Cuáles son los rasgos específicos de los procesos autónomos de participación ciudadana comparados a los más institucionales? ¿Cómo se desarrolla la participación autónoma? Este artículo expone algunos aspectos metodológicos de la participación autónoma. Presentamos una experiencia de investigación activista autónoma desarrollada con el movimiento de okupaciones de Madrid durante dos años y medio. En particular, nos centramos en las decisiones metodológicas adoptadas por los investigadores-activistas y describimos las principales contribuciones de este proceso participativo. De este modo, argumentamos que este proceso de investigación-activista se fundamentó en tres estrategias que proporcionaron un entorno productivo para la implicación de los participantes: a) un grupo de investigadores activistas abierto, horizontal y autogestionado; b) un compromiso con el “open-source” y “copy-left” para garantizar un acceso igualitario a la producción de conocimiento; c) un enfoque metodológico cualitativo y comprensivo que permitió reunir un amplio rango de informaciones e integrar la diversidad social presente en el movimiento de okupaciones.

PALABRAS CLAVE
Investigación-activista; Metodología de las ciencias sociales; Movimiento de okupaciones; Participación ciudadana autónoma; Reflexividad.
INTRODUCTION

Like Alice in Wonderland, social scientists deal with social reality as we were setting up a looking glass and, simultaneously, as we were pointing to the illusions that this and any other social construction involve. Our major goal is to offer an accurate image of the social world around. This, however, includes our own image. It also implies that, at the same time, we disbelieve the usual reflections provided by common sense and popular explanations. Real life is what we see and perceive, as well as too many other hidden things (events, people, information, networks, processes) that we do not see so easily. Social science is about uncovering the social relations and social facts that make all these things happen. Regardless how evident they appear to our eyes, our scientific purpose is to determine how social facts influence individual and collective behaviours. However, the notions of ‘science’ and ‘scientific method’ have been very controversial within the field of social sciences. The most extreme positivists argued for an unified conception of natural and social sciences based on the same goals of objectivity, the same distant attitudes towards the reality-out-there and the same empirical-analytical-causal approaches. Whilst, long-standing debates around this issue led to a more pluralistic notion of both ‘social sciences’ and the ‘scientific methods’. Critics of positivism argue that the social world differs substantially from the natural world, even if the former depends hierarchically on the latter. It is also possible to identify causal relationships within the social world but those relationships only provide partial accounts of the social facts and relationships which, above all, have different meanings for different social groups. In addition, when social scientists adopt and apply specific methods of social research, and when our results are socially spread out, we are usually participating in the social reality in a more intense and controversial way than natural scientists —this leaving apart the technological consequences of any kind of knowledge. Clouds, insects and planets do not care about human theories about them, but humans do care and react even during the process of being subjected to scrutiny (Galtung 1977, Wilden 1987, Woolgar 1988, De Sousa et al. 2003).

According to these last assumptions, Participatory Action-Research (PAR) in general, and Activist-Research (AvR) in particular, historically appeared as a proposal to make more explicit the involvement of both researchers and people subjected to research. This awareness or reflexivity has political implications since it implies overt debates about social inequalities and power relationships during the process of research. The methodological design and implementation is thus a matter of social participation in which the scientists’ contributions are crucial to inform, help or guide the whole process. Most of the decisions are collectively discussed and different types of people are able to contribute at different stages of the research and perform different tasks. In the end, social scientists are not the only ones responsible for the production of social knowledge, and this does not necessarily demerit its scientific quality in terms of uncovering the crucial social relationships and facts that constrain our lives. According to the major proponents of PAR (Fals Borda 1985, Rahman 1991, Park 1992, Reason 1994, Villasante 2006, Greenwood
2007) this approach combines, in a flexible and creative manner, multiple research techniques in the production of knowledge, without necessarily excluding those coming from positivist conceptions of social sciences. The scientific and political goals of the process, the available resources and the theoretical premises underlying the research questions, will guide all the participants to make the most convenient and adequate methodological decisions. Therefore, theory and practice are mutually connected in the form of a spiral, zigzag or continuous dialectics. By ‘theory’ we mean all the previous knowledge and worries that participants bring about to the research process. Theory is also nurtured by the knowledge produced by the PAR / AvR process, included learning experience of participants and different forms of communication triggered by them. By ‘practice’ we mean the actions taken by the participants in order to change their surrounding world. These actions would be closely connected to the knowledge produced along the research process. Obviously, acting out from a PAR process does not immediately entail a social change. More frequently, what such a process generates is potentialities of social change rather than a powerful social change itself. Most of the literature (Cancian 1993, Villasante 2006) point out different levels of political outcomes, usually below the initial expectations, and conflicts with the researchers’ academic interests and the institutional constraints are often mentioned (Petras and Porpora 1993). The participation of subordinated, underprivileged, exploited and deprived social groups into PAR processes does not imply, mechanically, that their living conditions will improve. The main reason is that all these groups are obliged to interact with social scientists, authorities and wealthier groups who can hinder the emancipatory strategies outlined during the process.

Activist or participatory social scientists do not abandon their scientific skills and concerns in order to become full-time activists. Rather, they aim at combining both social dimensions of their research activity in a virtuous, yet variable, manner. Their political involvement in a participatory research process may adopt different forms, these being useful in different degrees and forms of relevance for the production of knowledge. For example, a precise selection of informants, the economic and material resources needed, or the distinction of controversial points within ongoing local debates, may be obtained more efficiently by activist researchers than by conventional ones. Hence, we do not mean that social researchers can be absolutely free to chose any kind of methodological approach for any particular situation. Many constraints stem from the researchers’ institutional affiliations, from the type of social and political organisations they work with, form the political context, from the available resources, from previous historical experiences, etc.

Activist-Research (AvR) —or ‘militant research’ (Malo et al. 2004, Shukaitis et al. 2007, Fuster 2009, Cox and Flesher 2009)— may be defined as one of the types of PAR processes through which researchers pursue more effectively the goals of social change linked to the political goals of the social groups, organisations and movements involved. Compared to most PAR approaches, AvR emphasises as much as possible the autonomy of those who promote the research process. Ideally, this would involve a complete self-research process without the need of external help, although some expert
researchers may be already part of the collective who launch and conduct the process. ‘Autonomy’ means, basically, that State authorities, for-profit corporations, external organisations and non-activist individuals are not considered stakeholders in AvR processes. They are intentionally excluded. And what about social scientists? They are welcome just in case they feel themselves as part of the self-researched group, organisation or movement, in terms of sharing their political goals and participating in their current political activities. Their militant identity, thus, acquires priority over their scientific one, although the latter is essential to perform the most technical aspects of the research. In practice, autonomy is not usually absolute because some particular resources and ties with external bodies may be inevitable for most participants.

According to Zamosc (1992), activist-researchers differ from simple committed-researchers (or, say, organic and critical intellectuals: Cox 1998) because of the addition of ‘synergy’ to ‘sympathy’-and-‘empathy’. Committed-researchers just aim to produce sympathetic knowledge that can be useful for the emancipatory goals of a subordinated group, with no need of their own immersion into this group. Activist-researchers, on the contrary, are called to produce knowledge from within the group’s experience (empathy) and to engage themselves into its political practices (synergy). Sympathy is taken for granted in AvR, but not enough. Empathy, on the other side, requires dissent and critical thinking. These are a sort of fundamental rights-and-duties for activist researchers so that they should be present in the definition and realization of strategies, as part of a synergic collaboration. Thus, researching from within and with activists, means to merge and to share knowledge—even critically and conflictively. This involves that the production of knowledge is closely connected with the sharing of knowledge. As Jimeno (2004) argues, activist-researchers do act as citizens when they share their skills. On the other hand, activists alone are also spontaneous and regular producers of social knowledge. They do define concepts, they make judgments about both their environment and their own internal dynamics, they gather and accumulate different sorts of information and, not the least, they base their decisions and actions upon pretended rational analysis. In sum, activists are reflexive practitioners, which means that an AvR process may not be so disturbing for them as a non-participant may expect.

Since the 1990s, the increasing utilization of the term ‘participation’ in public policies runs in parallel to the decreasing attention paid to the material and cultural conditions that constrain the engagement of people in public affairs (Young 1990: chapter II; Martínez 2011a). Participation has been institutionalised (Blackburn et al. 1998, Cooke et al. 2001), subjected to market strategies of city governance (Borja and Castells 1997) and mostly restricted to what Arnstein (1969) called placation, therapy, and manipulation. Although many local governments accepted or even promoted participatory procedures in order to achieve legitimation of their planning schemes, deliberation and voting under time-pressure were usually showed as their most positive results (Martínez 2011b, Eckardt 2011). Today, too many social groups are still excluded from participatory processes, relevant decisions are not publicly debated, and institutional participation tends to lack sufficient depth and duration. In addition, the production of outstanding and reli-
able knowledge is rarely one of the explicit purposes in the experiences of institutional participation. Needless to say, the representative model of liberal democracy, the rule of powerful elites and the never-ending impulse to the city growth-machine coalitions, are usually out of question in such participatory processes.

As a contrast to institutional processes of citizen participation, this article presents an experience of AvR in which a high autonomy and an explicit aim of providing new knowledge were its key features. The AvR process was conducted within the squatters’ movement of Madrid along two and a half years (2008-2011). Both valuable political and methodological lessons can be learned from it. Instead of a detailed explanation of the context, practices and challenges faced by the Madrid squatters, we focus here on the methodological aspects of the AvR process carried out. In the next section we introduce the key issues and concepts involved in AvR. We then examine the main significant decisions taken along the AvR process within the Madrid squatters. Accordingly, we distinguish three dimensions that made possible the coherence and efficiency of this particular AvR -self-management, copy-left and qualitative inclusion of social diversity. The final discussion focuses on the outcomes and limits of this autonomous participatory process.

**CHALLENGES, RISKS AND LIMITS OF ACTIVIST-RESEARCH**

The closer a participatory process is to direct democracy, the higher are the risks of unintended effects. Promoters of citizens’ participation must accept that the initiatives, proposals and actions brought about by participants, may conduct the process through very unexpected paths. Autonomous groups such as political squatters claim for a radical change within the capitalist system. They do practice direct democracy in wide parts of their everyday lives. Squatted houses and social centres use to be managed by regular assemblies. Within the squatted spaces many smaller groups come together, based on similar horizontal ways of organisation, in order to promote meetings, parties, workshops or cultural activities. People who attend squats are also encouraged to participate as much as they like, although every squat is based upon different formal and informal rules (Pruijt 2004, Domínguez et al. 2010, Piazza 2011).

In squats there is a permanent tension between openness and closeness. While most groups are apparently open to the incorporation of new members, this is a very slow process of getting in touch, building mutual trust and sharing efforts in multiple activities. The same apply to researchers who are not familiar with the squatting milieu. An AvR process within a squat or a local squatting movement demands, thus, a high degree of previous involvement of those who promote it. Newcomers and sympathisers are welcome, but at least in Madrid, there is no way for starting an AvR if no squatters or former squatters take part in the endeavour. For such a purpose, activist background, as we verified, is more valued and credited than a scientific background, although the latter may add legitimacy to the project. Therefore, AvR within squatting requires a previous ‘synergy’ rather than
just a forthcoming one (Martínez 1997). Otherwise, we would face the risk of launching an AvR without the participation of activists.

The second risk at play is the controversial definition of what knowledge means in such a context. Both activists and activist-researchers must accept that an AvR process is able to produce general knowledge as well as ‘critical knowledge’. By the latter we mean that common assumptions, stereotypes, hidden episodes and self-identities may be challenged by the results of the research. That is to say, no-one ought to expect that a self-research produces a rough self-legitimation of the social movement in which the process is developed (Offe 1985, Zamosc 1992: 118). Consequently, the movement’s weaknesses, troubles and past declines have the chance to be discussed and subjected to public examination as much as the strengths, the legitimate aspirations, and past achievements.

The issue of knowledge is a very controversial one in PAR traditions. Critics of PAR and AvR claim that these approaches lack objectivity, neutrality and methodological standards. Our own standpoint about these criticisms may be summarised as follows (Fals Borda 1985, Martínez 1997, Villasante 2006).

First, activist-researchers need to produce some degrees of objectivity in order to claim that they are knowing anything outside their own lives or from inside. However, while objectivity implies some personal distance from the objects of knowledge, these may vary a lot. Therefore, variations from human words to human behaviours and to social events, entail different capabilities to objectify. Some of them are easier than others in terms of allowing an objective account. On the contrary, some of them demand a more in-depth effort of interpretation in which the researcher’s subjectivity play a substantive role. The same may be applied to the social sciences in general, so this is not just a problem of both PAR and AvR (Galtung 1977).

Every researcher determines the objects and subjects of research according to previous social categories. Among them, political or ideological preferences are as legitimate as others. Resulting objectivity is neither absolutely defined nor valid forever because it is always subjected to new criticisms, to improved measures and to qualitative assessments paying attention to different aspects of the issue. AvR, indeed, is a methodological device which does not disguise these problems. Rather the opposite, activist-researchers are opened to the contributions of all kinds of participants in order to define as accurate as possible the type of issues and concerns which are investigated. Public deliberation is not only a democratic situation, but also a technique to contrast and verify previous research results. Equally, the more qualified activist-researchers are those who can contribute to the methodological standards required in order to conduct the process of research.

Secondly, neutrality cannot be claimed as a universal value of social sciences. Absolute neutrality is impossible. Consider, for example, the fact that conventional researchers are tied to the funds, the rules and the definition of problems made by the institutions and social elites who support the research (Pollack 1980). Given that, we could find more freedom in activist-researchers who do not depend so strictly on those institutions while,
at the same time, they try to practice an explicitly value-oriented research in agreement with the political organisations and movements with whom they work. This, of course, may also impose some constraints on the research but it is a matter of empirical test whether the academia or the movement erodes more the researchers’ autonomy. At the end, any external constraint reduces neutrality. The point is how to preserve the researchers’ and activists’ decisions from the influence of those who do not participate in the AvR itself.

The third peril faced by AvR is its disconnection with social change. In our case, due to the various degrees of involvement, not all the activist-researchers are used to engaging in direct actions against the capitalist system as squatters intentionally pretend to do. Every AvR develops with its own rhythm and pace. These can differ substantially from those of the activists-squatters in our case. How to bring about significant and agreed changes through AvR? As mentioned above, a process like this entails mutual learning and coordination, so that a careful planning of actions for change should deal with that basic core of uncertainty. The actions would even fall within the ambiguous scope of either “social action” or isolated “claims” without greater implications in terms of the models of political organisation of the collective, the positions and interactions with other political actors—all this including the models of society that activists-squatters defend.

As we shall see later, our case study was based on the agreement that we were setting up the “action” of writing a book about the history of squatting in Madrid. In addition, the intention of raising political debates and contributing to strategic reflections and mutual-aid among different groups of squatters in Madrid was openly manifested from the very beginning. In this case there was no other social or political change strictly defined in advance, but the range of options was not closed at all (Petras and Porpora 1993). Thus AvR, at its basic level, could be understood as one academic work performed within the movement, rather than a necessary set of actions to improve current struggles. Even when we tried to avoid this danger (the absence of “high level” actions) and the consequent asymmetry between activist-researchers and regular activists, the lack of a horizon of political action, apart or stemming from squatting itself, drew a striking limitation in this particular AvR.

Many authors have noted that PAR is committed to both the production of knowledge and the improvement of grassroots organisation. This goes far beyond the empowerment of activists or the promotion of occasional socio-economic, educational or cultural interventions. Genuine and ambitious PAR (and so would do AvR) “is committed to achieving structural change objectives” (Fals Borda 1985: 72), “the empowerment of the people so that they can change the environment (both social and physical) to their benefit (...) and the re-establishment of the status of popular wisdom and its promotion.” (Rahman 1991: 26) Notwithstanding, activist-researchers would reject political leadership of the processes (Gianotten and De Wit 1991: 109-113). They are expected to engage in political action as much as activists are expected to engage in AvR, by learning about methods and theoretical insights—even though a gap between both would always remain.
Facing these problems, there is the option of reducing the scope of changes. This can be done by focusing on the group who launches the AvR or, even broader, on the groups of activists who are called to participate. Some authors proposed the rule that ‘analysers’ instead of analysts are the guidance of a self-managed participatory process (Lapassade 1980: 194). ‘Analysers’ are social problems, real practices, conflictive events and contested institutions which emerge in a participatory process and scale up the agenda of urgent issues. Once they are identified or discovered, participants’ efforts are addressed to deal with them and to explore practical ways of acting as attempts to solve them, if possible. Whether these analysers urge immediate and feasible actions, whether they point to macro-structural spheres of society, they would have the capacity of conducting the AvR in a fruitful manner.

The last theoretical remark in this section has to do with the boundaries and grey zones between AvR and institutionalised participatory processes. AvR consists of a scientific work done by activists with different degrees of political commitment and scientific qualification. As we argued, the group of activist-researchers is based on a wide autonomous self-management of the process. This enables autonomy in regards to external institutions -State or market powers, no less than other civic organisations and social movements. However, there are certain degrees of dependency on the movement to which activists belong.

In the case of the squatters’ movement, direct democracy is a basic feature of their internal organisation, this being also adopted by any AvR developed from within this movement. AvR involves some sort of political action as well. This can be reduced to the popularization of the knowledge produced, or, going further, can be expanded to the design, discussion and promotion of direct actions following the scientific results (Zamosc 1992: 120-121). As Conti (2004: 56-59) argued, activists should lead the process in order to create a useful, critical and realist language, only to increase the power of cooperation, organisation and political strategies aiming at their emancipation. Through workshops and publications, for instance, some starting points can be drawn up, but the ulterior trajectory of the process is opened to modifications at the light of producing “new capabilities to fuel practices” (Situaciones 2004: 102).

Institutionalised participatory process, on the contrary, embodies hierarchical structures of power, strict procedures for the allocation of funds and a plural composition of groups as participants. Hidden agendas of authorities and elites can be also playing a very influential role in the process. Although the evolution of the process is also open and able to include emerging proposals, political actions use to be delegated on representative and elected bodies. Thus, both institutional participation and conventional research tend to precede collective action, if action happens at all. Explicit political actions are not performed at the same time as the process of participation is developed. In this context, consultancy and deliberation devices are hegemonic among the participatory techniques to be implemented, while other means to raise political consciousness and to provoke campaigns of mobilization are not so prominent. Hence, one-dimensional views of citizen participation either without regarding the relevant contexts of social inequalities at
play (Eckardt 2011, Martínez 2011a) or just avoiding social movements’ activities (Malo et al. 2004: 156-160), prevent eventual AvR.

Nevertheless, according to Villasante (2006: 306) the last opposition is a very narrow-minded one since there are multiple axis and combinations of practices for making a participatory process. In particular, he distinguishes between three main “waves” of participatory techniques, depending on their respective scope: 1) “short-waves” involving dialogues, *constituent analysers*, ‘transductive’ analysis, operational groups and ‘reversive’ self-learning; 2) “middle-range waves” connecting micro and macro dimensions of society, horizontal strategies of research, network analysis and sustainable-participatory democracies; 3) “long waves” dealing with the ‘creative devolutions’ of knowledge, semiotic analysis, the focus on needs and satisfiers, and the claims put on by the global justice movement. Villasante’s stance is that any specific participatory process should be designed or evaluated through the strategic combination of these three methodological scopes. Usually, this combination is not absolutely separated from dominant social, political and economic institutions. At least, it involves some basic interactions between researchers, activists and institutional bodies. Hence, there appears a grey zone of several ‘reversive’ positions and arrangements between extreme autonomous and extreme institutional positions.

Additionally, we contend that the autonomy of collective self-research is also dependent on its members’ conditions of living. If they are attached to State or market institutions (for instance, as faculty staff in the university or as freelance professionals), their participation in the AvR may involve different types of interests and some may be presented in overt mutual contradiction. On the other hand, an institutionalised participatory process might be transformed into a more self-managed one in case some independent associations and groups of citizens force the elites to attend their social needs and their demands. Neither AvR or institutional participation are free of unintended consequences, although their points of departure display quite different likeliness of things to happen.

**Methodological decisions of an Activist-Research experience**

**Starting AvR within a significant context**

First of all, we must present very briefly the evolution of squatting in Madrid. Initial experiences of squatting in Madrid can be found in the late 1970s as part of the citizen movement (Castells 1983) and the anarchist union CNT who demanded a fair treatment comparable to the other labour unions. The major unions received buildings and resources by the authorities as a compensation for their properties seized by the previous Dictatorship. The squatters’ movement started to develop in Madrid in the mid and late 1980s, but its main expansion occurred in the decade of the 1990s. Most of the squats publicly known were Social Centres, although some squatted houses were also claimed
and provided a basic resource for the squatters’ movement. *Autonomists* and different groups of social anarchists (rarely associated with the anarchist unions) (Wilhelmi 2000) launched and ruled most of the squats. However, different social groups of youngsters, neighbours, artists and leftist activists in other social movements also approached and joined the squats (Martínez 2002).

After 1995 a new penal legislation prosecuted squatting and increased the punishment of this political practice. The heavy wave of criminalisation and the short duration of many squats provoked a notable crisis in the squatters’ movement during the first half of the 2000s, with the exception of few remarkable cases. Recently, at the end of the last decade, starting around 2008, a new explosion of squats in Madrid took place simultaneously and brought with it a greater diversity of experiences, actors, ideologies and cultural references. As a novelty, three squats were even legalised (Domínguez et al. 2010). After the May-15 Movement (2011), a new wave of numerous squats, both Social Centres and houses, placed squatting again in the public agenda of Madrid, with new generations of activists incorporated into the movement.

In such a context we started up our AvR in October 2008. At that time, a modest campaign for defending squats was launched in Madrid. Within that frame, some debates, parties and demonstration took place. However, the campaign ended suddenly and no further coordinations between different squats took place. Our own project was born independently from that campaign and attempt of coordination but was very closely related to. AvR was promoted by a university professor of sociology (one of the authors of this paper) within a new squatted Social Centre in downtown Madrid. The name of this squat was Malaya to indicate that the owners were immersed in an enormous case of municipal corruption (in the city of Marbella). The AvR proposal was approved by the general assembly of the squat. It consisted in a monthly seminar to debate about squatting with the ultimate purpose of writing a collective book on the history of squatting in Madrid. Around twenty people attended the first meeting. Few people were contacted purposely while most of the participants came on their own, attracted by the ads that were spread out. The group included university researchers, former and present squatters, university students, activists of other social movements and sympathisers with squatting in general. As the leaflet of the initial call, mainly distributed through independent media, stated:

"We suggest to rewrite the history of the squatters’ movement in Madrid going beyond the accumulation of data about past experiences, trying to reveal the crucial debates that occurred, the achievements, the conflicts and the different stances at play. All the participants in the seminar are capable to decide how to proceed. (…) The writing of a book or any audiovisual document is an opportunity to trigger in-depth social and political debates among activists, both former and current squatters. There is no intention of becoming the official speaker of the squatters’ movement nor of any particular squat. Instead, the seminar aims to reflect collectively about facts, tendencies and strategies which were relevant for the movement.”

(1st call to the Seminar on the Political and Social History of Squatting in Madrid)
Knowledge production was as explicit as the intention of gathering different types of squatters in order to share and debate about their ideas on squatting. A book on the social and political history of squatting seemed to be an adequate product in which to materialise that goal —knowledge from a diverse range of insiders’ perspectives. The participants in the seminar formed an autonomous group themselves with the power to decide subjects of discussions, who would be invited to talk, and how to distribute the resulting information. The seminar itself became one of the several self-organised groups within Malaya and acquired identical responsibilities as other groups attached to the self-management of that squatted Social Centre. Notwithstanding, only the promoter of the seminar joined the assembly of this and two of the following Social Centres where the seminar was hosted.

The squatters’ movement in Madrid never experienced a regular or formal coordination. There were some attempts in the past when some squats were evicted, calling for a demonstration or joining together in direct actions and debates. Informal ties showed to be stronger than both the apparent ideological conflicts among squatters and the various attempts of failed coordination. The continuous replacement of activists and the different waves of evictions did not help much. During the 1990s an autonomist organisation, *Lucha Autónoma*, was closely involved in many squats (Wilhelmi 2000). Some famous Social Centres also produced valuable texts and reflections, while serving as references for new generations of activists and attendants to squats (Martínez 2002). During the 2000s the squatters’ movement endured some internal splits over the issue of turning squats into legal status through agreements with the municipal government. Given this background, the purpose of the seminar was to establish an open situation for the meeting of all types of squatters. Nevertheless, this was too optimistic. Most of the seminar attendants had affinities or previous contacts with the Social Centres where we met, including a high degree of social diversity among them in terms of ideological positions, political experiences and age. From the very beginning, it was decided to invite selected people to debate with the seminar’s participants on a regular basis. The group also agreed upon the ‘copy-left’ character of the information produced by the seminar as it is explained below.

Another relevant aspect of this process is the support and collaboration of different activist groups beyond the seminar’s participants. Above all, we enjoyed the space and resources provided by Malaya during the first months as well as by four other Social Centres in the inner city during the next two years (Patio Maravillas I and II, La Mâcula and Casablanca). A non-profit organisation, Nodo50 (www.nodo50.org), provided us with free access to an e-mail list. In January 2009 the first meeting of SqEK (Squatting Europe Kollective), jointly promoted by several members of the seminar, was hosted by an independent bookstore, Traficantes de Sueños (www.traficantes.net), run by former autonomists and squatters. Later on, Diagonal (www.diagonalperiodico.net), a bi-weekly journal devoted to social movements, included in their website a banner calling for contributions of documents and personal testimonies to the seminar. Lastly, another friendly website, www.okupatutambien.net, displayed information about the seminar, and many indepen-
dent media publicized information about each forthcoming meeting (http://madrid.indymedia.org/, www.otromadrid.org/, www.kaosenlared.net/, www.klinamen.org, etc.).

This network of mutual aid was enriched with the conference (April 2010, Patio Maravillas) given by a SqEK member, Alan W. Moore, about his current project on European Social Centres (http://occuprop.blogspot.com/), the exhibition (from April 2010 up to day, at Casablanca) of black and white photographs about squatting in Madrid made by Álvaro Minguito (www.alvarominguito.net), and the organisation of a theatre play (Pieza didáctica de las ocupaciones) directed by César de Vicente Hernando and his company Konkret (September 2010 at Casablanca). Other SqEK members -Hans Pruijt, Thomas Aguilera, André and Edward Dee- also presented their views on the ‘institutionalisation’ issue in a public talk at the CSOA Casablanca (February 2012). Apart from them, we called special guests (former and present squatters, above all, but also one historian, two lawyers and one journalist) to contribute to the sessions of the seminar. With the exception of some internal meetings where we distributed tasks to do, all the sessions of the seminar were open to the free attendance of interested people. We could estimate this participation in around 300 people in total. Five out of the fourteen public sessions were particularly crowded (between 30 and 80 people) probably due to the themes under discussion: legal issues, squatting for housing (2 sessions) and gender relations (2 sessions). Significantly, these five events dealt less with historical accounts of the squatters’ movement than with the present concerns about squatting. On the other hand, no more than 10 people attended four of the sessions.

After the last public event of the seminar in September 2010, the activist-researchers who conformed the core of the seminar kept in touch through e-mail and met several times along the next year in order to fulfill the objective of writing collectively a book (or e-book). Two more people, who were previous participants in the seminar, contributed to this final stage of the AvR with the edition of some texts. Furthermore, edited texts were sent to the guest speakers asking them for a revision of their words before these were spread out. Some chapters and final tasks had no volunteers in charge so a university student, and former member of the seminar, was paid to finish them -money came from a publicly funded research project.

Key methodological dimensions of AvR

We consider that three methodological pillars sustained this process of AvR and were crucial for its development and acceptance within the squatters’ movement:

1) **Self-management and openness.** Although there were initial proposals about the contents of the research, at each session all the participants were able to suggest changes, to express their opinions and to commit to the agreed tasks to be carried on. The subscription to the e-list drew a line between those more engaged in the whole process
and those who just joined one or several public sessions. Only after attending a face-to-face encounter could one claim to join the e-list. In general, everybody was invited to get more involved and to attend the organisational and closed meetings as well.

We distributed to the core group the communication activities regarding the announcement of the public sessions, the contact with guest speakers, the writing of questions to be used during the debates, the role of introducing and coordinating every public talk, and, finally, the edition of texts. In practice, this group was made up of around eight people, although an average of twenty became registered in the e-list. Nobody from outside the group could have an influence on the opinions and decisions made without joining the group and commit himself/herself in the regular work. This means that the group behaved widely autonomously from even the Madrid squatters’ movement and the particular assemblies of the squats where we met.

Self-management implied a horizontal way of facing the work at every meeting. That is to say, no structured hierarchy was behind, although a practical one always emerged due to the greater or lesser dedication of every member. Since it was a complete voluntary-run, militant and non-profit work, every participant decided to be in charge of tasks according to his/her own will, capabilities and availability. Horizontality and openness meant here that everybody was welcome to join and to participate with equal rights. We tried to make transparent both our own affiliations and the initial goals of the project. These might be discussed too and, as a matter of fact, they were refined and modified throughout the process. Deliberation entailed cooperation and negotiation too. Within this frame, decisions were made according to the criteria and arguments expressed by the participants. The final goal of writing a collective book mainly based on the transcripts of the debates as a sort of general and descriptive picture about the squatters’ movement helped avoid fierce discussions and controversies.

Finally we also worked under a very low-cost scheme. Beverages, snacks, photocopies, one e-banner as an advertisement of the seminar, the transcriptions of the talks and one professional final edition of the book were the only major expenditures. Most of them were paid with the budget of a research project that one of the seminar members had available at his university. Two other members participated in a university workshop and also contributed to the seminar with the money they got. Other small donations were received. We planned a party in one of the squatted Social Centres in order to collect some funds, but a sudden eviction aborted the plans and we never tried that way of fund-raising again.

2) Collective production and free access to knowledge. The seminar relied on collective debates rather than on individual contributions. Previous classic research on squatting was inspiring but seemed to produce unintended effects on activists who did not use it or just refused it due to the academic distance it created. Thus, the new attempt consisted in setting up a mix of different activists and a few professional researchers who were able to create a new collective narration about crucial facts, events and views on squatting.
Initially, the design of the whole process of AvR foresaw the implementation of conventional methods of social research such as personal interviews, discourse analysis and statistical records. However, once we started to work technically, we discovered that the required skills, resources and personal dispositions overwhelmed ours. Therefore, we decided to focus on the public debates as the principal devices for the collective production of knowledge. The debates were lightly conducted and moderated through the questionnaire we prepared the days before each of them. The guests’ presentations, participants’ opinions and interactions held were just dependent on the constraints of time and mutual respect that someone tried to take care of. The more we focused on these public sessions, the more we gave up the efforts devoted to conventional research methods. The latter had the added problem of time availability and technical qualification, which were too demanding for many of the seminar fellows.

On the other hand, the social activities we organised —such as the talks about squatting in Europe, the photo exhibition and the theatre play—, the contacts with former squatters and the dissemination of the calls to the seminar meetings, were easier to develop for most of the participants. In addition, all of these activities were sources of valuable information about the history of squatting and enriched the participants’ knowledge. Almost without noticing, we ended connecting social networks of activists and invigorating the public debate on squatting.

Closely related to this approach, we all agreed upon the distribution of all the registered debates under a copy-left license. This means that all the outcomes of the seminar would be freely available for non-commercial purposes and could be replicated, quoted and spread out extensively. To us, this attitude was coherent with the libertarian and autonomous ideology which is prevalent within the squatters’ movement and it served as a transparent way of asking for the voluntary contribution of everyone according to his/her abilities and knowledge. By claiming copy-left licenses it is recognised that a great part of the work is really made collectively and no individual author is the exclusive producer of the information collected in the book. However, these licenses also entail that individual contributions are explicitly acknowledged and can hold their respective authorship rights. Copy-left licenses, and the whole open-source movement, just ask the authors to share their products to the extent that others can reproduce them and use them without paying for it, unless both parts agree on any payment regarding the costs of the means used for distributing the information -take for instance, the printing costs of a book. It is a matter of choice for the authors to protect their rights as authors by either using copy-left or copyright licenses, but in the seminar we encouraged the former and there was no particular objection to that.

3) Qualitative and comprehensive approach. As we mentioned before, a relevant internal diversity within the squatters’ movement is a feature that cannot be let aside. Otherwise, we will produce a very partial account. Rough pictures about this movement are usual in the mass media and, less frequently, in conventional academic research. Hence, one of the first aims of the AvR process was to accept this diversity, to uncover

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it and, if possible, to integrate it in the debates we promoted. This implied to focus on the different subjective experiences and political orientations, not less than on significant conflicts and assessments about both the evolution and the impacts of the movement.

Instead of offering a unified image of squatting, we opted for collecting a manifold view which could include self-criticisms and opposing interpretations. On the one hand, the research should emphasise a public recognition of all the social and political complexity involved in squatting. On the other hand, we preferred to show raw differences and conflicts without pretending to represent a fake consensus among participants. We supplied every session with all the knowledge we previously had in order to provoke debates and make explicit practices, discourses, events and actors of the squatters’ movement. The final edition of the transcripts was made with the same purposes in mind.

This is a methodological option that consists on giving priority to qualitative and comprehensive information because, we argued, we could thus encourage people to appropriate knowledge and generate a new one. At the end, the book is basically a very descriptive collection of the debates after a careful edition of the texts and the addition of short qualified texts about the issues at stake. The main advantage of this technique, compared to the gathering of quantitative stuff, is that participants have more room to contribute and to orientate the interpretations of meanings. From the conventional standpoint of social sciences, what we made was a combination between group interviews and participant observation. Most of the participants were used to these open debates in many squats so the research objectives and the previous organisation of each session were just additions to a common practice among squatters and sympathisers.

The final step of the process was the edition of the book. This endeavour had a three-fold dimension: a) to improve the texts with additional information about events, cases or references; b) to select the most relevant parts of the debates in order to ease the final reading; c) to allow all the participants with whom we were in contact (through email or phone) to revise their opinions and intentions in advance of the final publication. Activist-researchers also added introductory texts in order to improve the context and understanding of each session. These were submitted to internal review by other seminar members.

**Conclusions**

AvR is one of the branches of PAR. Both share a common tradition of gathering together politically engaged social scientists side-by-side politically engaged workers, activists and deprived groups. Beyond this coalition, ‘scientific militancy’ or ‘militant science’ entails a specific methodological complexity on its own that deserves a careful attention. Our case study serves to illustrate the key points of this participatory and activist methodology.

First of all, AvR is a matter of social interaction between identities on the move. None of the participants keep a unique feature to define his or her identity, but several strands from outside and inside strive to be expressed. Neither the pure activist, nor the pure
researcher exist in a participatory process like this. Therefore, identities are continuously negotiated and modified along the process. Once everybody accepts that the research is made for the sake of activism, activists start to develop or adopt some research skills. In parallel, researchers need to adapt their scientific standards to the concrete ends that are deemed to be achieved and the specific circumstances of the situations where the AvR is developed.

The AvR process should empower all the participants. The main way in doing so is by urging them to reach agreements about the level of depth of the knowledge to be produced and their degree of involvement in the movement’s current activities. What stems from our case is that a basic activist trajectory or, at least, a proved connection to the squatting scene was necessary to launch the AvR process from within a particular squat. Once the process started, it was open to a wide range of people with different activist or scientific backgrounds. Everybody who attended was able to deliberate and make decisions collectively. It seems inevitable to divide the group into a core and a more volatile cloud of occasional participants, this implying a certain practical hierarchy although there were no explicit barriers to move from one side to the other.

Secondly, the context also matters. The squatters’ movement is a radical and leftist one, embedded in particular subcultures and countercultures (Koopmas 1995, Martínez 2002). Sometimes social sciences are seen by squatters as academic exercises from outside the movement, full of bias and with little substantive interest for the political debates among squatters. Nonetheless, some useful documents and books were produced by squatters themselves —usually, holding university degrees— or by sympathetic researchers (for example, VVAA 1997; VVAA 1999; Wilhelmi 2000; VVAA 2001; Adell, Martínez et al. 2004; Toret et al. 2008, Domínguez et al. 2010). While most of these writings share with our process a copy-left and a respectful attitude to the squatters’ movement —without necessarily avoiding self-criticisms—, the process of production differs significantly.

As mentioned above, political coordination between the Madrid squats had been scarce and experienced multiple troubles. Our AvR actually intended to increase bonds between different types of activists. Self-research about their own history was suggested as the arena where this enriched social network could emerge (if not a proper formal coordination), although this exceeded our expectations. Thus, we were both cautious and active within this particular context. Indeed, we found out that there was a strong attachment towards our seminar within the Social Centres where we met. Additionally, we also verified that a political coordination was not in the agenda of most of the Madrid squats at that period. These were evident boundaries to take into account along the AvR process.

Thirdly, the aspects of this context that we have already highlighted had a great influence in our capacity to act politically. The main results of the seminar were basically, to meet, debate and publish a lot of information about squatting in Madrid. Some of the issues (such as the historical roots of the movement, detailed legal aspects and the conflictive gender relations, for instance) were rarely reported in previous publications and
the seminar contributed to enlarge the knowledge about them. This means that research took priority, at the end, over political practice, unless we consider that the autonomous and committed way of doing AvR was undoubtedly a politically-oriented practice. Given our participation in the five squatted Social Centres that hosted us, this did not result in a substantial increase of the engagement in squatting of most of the core members. Those who already were engaged, remained, but there were no new incorporations. The other way around was also left unexplored since the most active squatters of these squatted spaces did not feel too attracted by the research-centred work of the seminar. Notwithstanding, the group of activist-researchers kept its wide autonomy and enhanced the mutual knowledge and informal ties with hundreds of squatters and sympathisers, which can be regarded also as a practical consequence of the experience.

The kind of reflexive methodological approach that this AvR entails is similar to that of the collaborative and activist ethnography (Rappaport 2008, Schensul et al. 2008, Hale 2006) while is not so close to the problem-solving or pragmatic approaches (Greenwood 2007). As many of those practitioners argued, included most of the pragmatists, the choice of this method is not only a matter of moral or ideological values, but also a rational choice according to the special qualities of the human group under observation or, better, self-observed. However, AvR is a tool of reflexivity guided by a small part of the whole group - the squatters' movement. Hence, the environment of relationships between activist-researchers and activists sets a limit to the actual autonomy of the process, and it also shapes the adequate approach to know the social reality (Chambers 1997, Malo 2004, Villasante 2006, Fuster 2009). Participants in AvR, as conscious agents of those relationships, take collective decisions along the process. Although some starting points and crucial decisions may be adopted at the beginning, a lot of improvisation and discussion about further steps occur in the next stages.

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MIGUEL ÁNGEL MARTÍNEZ LÓPEZ is Sociologist and PhD in Political Science currently affiliated to the University Complutense of Madrid. He is an activist-researcher involved in the Spanish squatting movement and the M15 movement. He researches in the field of urban sociology, social movements and participatory democracy. Most of his works are available at: www.miguelangel-martinez.net.

ELISABETH LORENZI FERNÁNDEZ is PhD in Social and Cultural Anthropology from Complutense University, Spain. During her career development she observe social movements studies, sustainable development, mobility and intercultural process. These issues are crossed by a deep interest on methodological challenges and applied anthropology. More information about her publications in http://elisabethlorenzi.wordpress.com.

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Reflexive feedback on research conducted in an association

POR UNA SOCIOLOGÍA PÚBLICA SOBRE DEMOCRACIA PARTICIPATIVA
Reflexiones sobre una investigación realizada en una asociación

HÉLOÏSE NEZ heloise.nez@univ-tours.fr
Université de Tours. France.

ABSTRACT
This paper develops a reflexive approach on the relations between research and action in works on participatory democracy; a topic in which bridges are numerous between academic, political and activist fields. It aims at analyzing the impact of the close links between sociologists and actors on the methods and results of research and, reciprocally, the role of sociology in developing participatory practices. Relying on Michael Burawoy’s reflection on “public sociology”, our own research experience in an association, and other research studies conducted in Europe, we define five ways sociologists carry out research on participatory democracy in collaboration with the actors. Beyond a reflection on the social reception of our research, the challenge is to develop a critical and committed sociology on participatory democracy with a view to contributing to the political debate and public action from a critical viewpoint.

KEYWORDS
Critical sociology; Participatory democracy; Research-action; Social sciences epistemology.

RESUMEN
Este artículo desarrolla un enfoque reflexivo sobre las relaciones entre investigación y acción en los trabajos sobre democracia participativa, una temática en la que los vínculos entre los campos académicos, políticos y militantes son numerosos. El objetivo es analizar el impacto de las estrechas relaciones entre sociólogos y actores sociales en los métodos y resultados de la investigación y, al mismo tiempo, el papel de la sociología en el desarrollo de las prácticas participativas. Apoyándose en la reflexión de Michael Burawoy sobre la “sociología pública”, en nuestra propia experiencia de investigación en una asociación y en otras investigaciones en Europa, se definen cinco posturas de sociólogos que trabajan en colaboración con los actores sociales sobre la democracia participativa. Más allá de una reflexión sobre la receptividad social de nuestras investigaciones, el desafío consiste en desarrollar una sociología a la vez crítica y comprometida sobre la democracia participativa, para contribuir al debate político y a la acción pública a partir de una capacidad de distancia crítica.

PALABRAS CLAVE
Democracia participativa; Epistemología de las ciencias sociales; Investigación-acción; Sociología crítica.
**INTRODUCTION**

For a decade, research on participatory practices has proliferated as these processes aimed at engaging “ordinary” citizens (i.e. neither elected officials nor practitioners) in local public policymaking were spreading in Spain, Europe and on other continents (Font 2001; Santos 2002; Fung and Wright 2003; Avritzer and Navarro 2003; Bacqué, Rey and Sintomer 2005; Blondiaux 2008; Smith 2009; Bacqué et al. 2010). While there are many gateways between the academic, the political and the activist fields on participatory democracy, few works have developed a reflexive approach on the relationships between research and action. However, the research conducted in collaboration with local actors is quickly developing as attested to in France by the profusion of PhDs conducted in the context of an Industrial Training Convention for Research (French acronym CIFRE). The CIFRE convention is a work contract subsidized by the National Association for Research and Technology (ANRT), which enables PhD candidates to pursue a thesis while being a wage earner in an association, a company or a public institution. While diversified financing schemes contribute to the development of research on participatory democracy and its dissemination in non-academic circles, this particular context of research production and its impact on results have yet to be analyzed. The aim of this article is to conduct an in-depth study of this methodological aspect by exploring the diverse positions of researchers interested in participatory democracy. The idea is to highlight the relationships between research, expertise and activism on participatory democracy by analyzing the impact of the close links between sociologists and field actors regarding research methods and results and, vice versa, the role of sociology in the development of participatory practices.

This epistemological and methodological analysis is in line with an article by Michael Burawoy entitled *For public sociology* (2005), which fuelled many debates across the Atlantic on the social role of sociology. Before him, Charles Wright Mills (1959) had already dedicated his essay on “sociological imagination” to the dissemination of knowledge to a non-university public. In this plea in favor of a sociology whose scope would go beyond academic circles, Burawoy invites sociologists to reach out to a public other than their peers and to commit themselves actively with their socializing groups. He develops a typology that distinguishes between four sociology subtypes: professional sociology, which produces knowledge for its peers so as to accumulate scores of knowledge; policy sociology, which is guided by a customer’s demand; public sociology, which is intended for an extra-university public; and critical sociology, which is defined as the reflexive analysis of the tools and research programs of the discipline.

*Translated from the French by Patrice Cochet-Balmet.

1 We use the term sociology in the broad sense, aware that other disciplines are also concerned with research on participatory democracy (political science, urban studies, history, etc.).

If the boundaries between these different types of sociology are porous, Burawoy defends a public sociology perspective to initiate and develop a dialogic relationship between the sociologist and the public, in which each comes forward with his or her goals and adjusts to the other. More than a simple incentive to reach out to new public, the American researcher chiefly invites sociologists to partake in the creation of public and to organize themselves into public. He thus encourages them to commit themselves with people and groups taking part in public life and engaged in political debates.

As defined by John Dewey (1927), the word “public” here has a twofold meaning: as a space of discussion where different actors may meet and dialogue, and as a group of people seeking to influence politics. To a greater extent, Burawoy prompts researchers to ponder over the dissemination of the knowledge which they produce: “Knowledge for whom and knowledge for what?” (Burawoy 2005: 12). In doing so, he echoes questions raised by two of his predecessors in the presidency of the American Sociological Association (ASA): “sociology for whom?” (Lynd 1939), which is intended solely for an university public or other public; and “sociology for what?” (Lee 1976), which is centered on the objectives of society or also interested in the means necessary for their fulfillment.

Burawoy defines here the position and the interest of a public sociology in a general way in the sociological discipline, regardless of the objects of study. The objective of our paper is to develop this reflection on public sociology from a particular object of study, the processes of local participatory democracy. The literature on participatory democracy, participation and deliberation is plentiful and diverse. We focus here on the empirical research on participatory practices (participatory budgets, neighborhood councils, devices of participatory town planning, citizen juries, deliberative polling) on a local and regional scale. Our interest is in institutional forms of participation, even if associations and citizens can play a significant role in the emergence of these processes led by governments. The deliberative dimension of these devices can be important such as the case of citizen juries and deliberative polling, or less so as regards most of the other processes. Rather than approaching all the works on participation and deliberation, we chose to focus on this object of study because the researchers analyzing local participatory practices often maintain a more direct relationship with the action and pay particular attention to the impact of their studies on the transformation of participatory policies. As regards this aspect, research on participatory democracy bears a closer relationship to the militant fields (for example, research on an association or a social movement) insofar as they raise suspicions regarding the researcher’s position at the same time in the academic sphere (which often accuses researchers of a lack of distance with their object of study) and with regard to those investigated (who can, on the contrary, blame researchers for a lack of commitment to action) (Broqua 2009).

This question arises all the more when researchers share an affinity with the mobilizations or the participatory policies they observe. How can we reconcile this double role of researcher and activist, or at least of citizens committed or concerned by the participatory processes they observe? How can we answer the classic dilemma of any
field work, that of the just measure between distance and commitment? And how can we reconcile rather than set apart these two positions in order to advance scientific research while contributing to the action on participatory democracy?

In an attempt to answer to these questions, our reflection is based upon a participant observation conducted from 2006 to 2009 as a part of the Institution-Citizen Partnership for Research and Innovation (French acronym PICRI) on local participatory practices in the region of Paris and in Europe. The specificity of these PICRI programs, which are sponsored by the Parisian region in the context of citizens’ conception of science, derives from the collaboration of a team of researchers and field actors (in our case, an association) in the production of a research project and the dissemination of the research results. For three years, I have coordinated this research program as a research officer in the Association for Local and Social Democracy and Education (French acronym ADELS) within the framework of a CIFRE convention. ADELS brings together elected officials, practitioners from local government bodies and associations, researchers, activists and citizens who are committed at the local level with a view to exchanging and presenting proposals for the development of participatory democracy at the local scale. This historical actor in promoting the idea of decentralization and of local participation in France, which was created in 1959 within the popular education trend (Hatzfeld 2005, Roux 2011), now defends, some fifty years later, a conception of participatory democracy that provides a connection between the principles of political equality, social justice and self-organization (ADELS 2010). The activities of ADELS fall under several areas, from training sessions for local actors to studies of action through the organization of conferences (meetings on local democracy), as well as the publication of the monthly journal Territorîes and books on participation.

Building on this particular experiment, I shall first of all discuss how the research has been conducted in this associative context. What are the specificities of this sociological position and how does it differ from other ways of carrying out research? What are its contributions and limitations from the standpoint of research and of collaboration between actors and researchers? This personal experience may contribute to reflections on public sociology and participatory democracy because the objective of our program was specifically to undertake collaborative research between the university sphere and association actors on local participatory practices, and to reflect upon our approach. To analyze the diversity of views on public sociology and participatory democracy and to question the social role of such research more widely, this experiment will be cross-referenced with other ways to produce research in Europe through observations made of programs being conducted in four research centers of Spain, Italy, Portugal and Germany. By extrapolating our observations through the comparative method (Werner and Zimmermann 2004), I shall differentiate five typical positions held by sociologists on participatory democracy before drawing conclusions on the stakes involved in developing a sociology which is both committed and critical with a view to contributing to the action while maintaining the ability to react with critical distance.
RESEARCH CONDUCTED WITHIN AN ASSOCIATIVE FRAMEWORK

Directly inspired by the University-Community Research Alliances (ARUC) in Quebec, the Institution-Citizen Partnerships for Research and Innovation (PICRI) are a financial tool set up in the region of Paris in 2006 to enable joint research between associations and public research organizations. The PICRI was promoted by the Citizen Science Foundation, an association created in France in 2002 with a view to democratizing science by engaging citizens in the production of scientific research. This conception of research is part of a more general trend which redefines the relationships between experts and laymen in scientific and technical issues. This movement, which has opened the door to a new way of doing research for the historical and sociological studies of the sciences (Collins and Evans 2002), was inspired in France by the publication in 2001 of the book by Michel Callon, Pierre Lascoumes and Yannick Barthe on technical democracy. By qualifying in these words the process to democratize the sciences and scientific techniques, the authors show that engaging citizens in political and technical decision making redefines the relationship between knowledge and power, and blurs the traditional borders between expert and “layman” knowledge. The idea was to consider the role of non-professionals in the production of scientific knowledge and to reallocate the “power to know” (Bonneuil and Gaudillière 2000) so that counter-powers may have independent means to acquire the available expertise.

The PICRI program in which I was involved from 2006 to 2009 was conducted in collaboration with ADELS and two research laboratories of the CNRS (National Center for Scientific Research of France)3. The research concerned local participatory democracy in the region of Paris and in Europe through a comparison of experiments conducted at different government scales in the region and of innovative experiments in other European contexts, primarily in Rome and Berlin. The purpose was to analyze the nature of the participatory practices, the dynamics created, and the achievements and limitations of such approaches. The research centered more specifically on the construction, the nature and the taking into account of citizens’ knowledge in participatory processes by exploring the notion of citizen expertise, and on the genealogy of the practices by analyzing the transfer of knowledge and experiences from one site to the other. This experience seemed particularly interesting to us within the field of local democracy where bridges are already numerous between the university, associative and political spheres to generate joint knowledge between researchers and association officials. The aim of our program was thus to produce scientific knowledge on participatory democracy, and train local actors by integrating the findings of research

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3 The two research institutes were the Habitat Research Center (CRH) and the Cultures and Urban Societies Laboratory (CSU). Marie-Hélène Bacqué and Yves Sintomer were the research coordinators. For more information about this research and training program, see the ADELS website, accessed on 24 October 2011: http://www.ADELS.org/formations_etudes/Picri.htm.
and the dissemination of knowledge to encourage the actors to reflect upon their own practices.

The twenty researchers involved in the program were able to engage in exchanges with the participating practitioners in two distinct contexts. In the first instance, ADELS organized two training cycles in 2007 and 2008 on citizens’ knowledge in participatory processes. These training sessions were targeted at local actors in the region of Paris. Fourteen people participated in the first cycle: two elected representatives, three territorial agents, three association professionals, four neighborhood councilors and two association activists from seven territories in the region (several districts of Paris, a suburb, a department, and an inter-municipal association). Twenty-three people participated in the second cycle, which centered on the issues of participatory town planning: two elected representatives, six territorial agents, two professionals, an association professional, three association activists, five neighborhood councilors and four academics from eight territories of the region. For the most part, these various actors had no links between them (aside from those from the same territory) as one of the goals of the training sessions was to create a network of actors interested in participatory democracy in the region. In conjunction with the training officer of the association, I organized four one-day sessions in Paris on the nature of citizen knowledge, the collection and exploitation of knowledge, knowledge exchange and the inclusion of citizens’ knowledge in the public decision-making process. At the end of each cycle, we organized an academic stay in Rome followed by another in Berlin so as to widen the debates beyond the French context. Both the actors who had initiated innovative participatory practices and the researchers who analyze innovative processes intervened in these training sessions. We provided the participants with a series of questions and asked them to prepare their interventions with a view to responding to the participants’ concerns, which were expressed at the beginning of each training cycle and set out in the objectives of each session. The researchers could thus present their work at different stages of the research process, from the first wording of assumptions up to the presentation of more advanced results. The stays, arranged in collaboration with La Sapienza University in Rome and the Centre Marc Bloch in Berlin, enabled the actors in the region to compare their own experiences to those of practitioners in other European contexts and to exchange ideas with the researchers analyzing these mechanisms.

In a second step, we organized a dialogue between the actors and researchers when the results of the PICRI program were presented at two international conferences held in Paris; the first on the genealogy of participatory democracy in 2008 and the second on citizen knowledge and urban issues in 2009. Although the interventions were primarily undertaken by the researchers, half the participants were local actors (especially professionals of local government bodies and associations, but also some elected representatives and citizens involved in participatory processes in the region of Paris), who could thus gain knowledge of the results of our research and discuss them. A debate was also staged during the Local Democracy Meetings organized by ADELS in 2010, in which elected representatives, technicians, members of associations and neighborhood
councils from different French cities participated. The aim was to present the first book of the PICRI program (Bacqué et al., 2010) and to take stock of this experiment between researchers and members of the association.

Contrary to the notion of the researcher in an ivory tower, this way of doing research is characterized by a permanent link with field actors when conducting research and by putting the results to public debate. I followed the same research approach for my PhD, prepared within the framework of the CIFRE convention at ADELS, which dealt with citizens’ knowledge of town planning in Paris and Cordoba (Nez 2010). The purpose was to define the epistemological contribution of ordinary citizens to local public action and discuss elitist conceptions of democracy, according to which citizens are supposedly incompetent as soon as said conceptions extend beyond the sphere of their immediate interests. My method for analyzing participatory practices consisted in participant observation. The aim was an ethnographic-type investigation, characterized by a prolonged presence in the field and insertion in an interknowledge environment (Burawoy 1998; Beaud and Weber 2003; Cefaï 2003). In addition, I maintained a dialogue throughout the research manufacturing process with the wage earners and activists of ADELS. More formal debates on the results of my PhD were also held in collaboration with the practitioners and administrators of ADELS at several stages of the research. Upon completion of a three-year field study, I presented the first results of my PhD at the ADELS Summer University in 2009. The fact that these exchanges occurred before I started to write enabled me to incorporate the actors’ remarks and questions upstream of the writing process. I also stepped into the debate at the Local Democracy Meetings organized by ADELS in 2010 in Grenoble, where I presented more advanced results of my research at a workshop.

The contributions of a public sociology on participatory democracy

This research conducted within an associative framework, in line with the “public sociology” position as defined by Burawoy, includes at least three types of contributions. Through regular exchanges with the field actors, I could first of all enrich the sociological analysis. Regarding the topic of citizen knowledge in participatory democracy, which was central to both the PICRI program and my PhD, the actors were prompted to reflect on their practices, which fed our sociological analyses. For example, when the typology of citizen knowledge in participatory democracy developed by Yves Sintomer (2008)—which distinguishes between ordinary reason, citizen expertise and political knowledge—was put up for debate during a PICRI training session, the discussions with the field actors revealed new categories of analysis. An ADELS administrator, who was a former elected official in local democracy in a Paris district and is involved in numerous associations (especially Tam-Tam, an association specialized in town planning and party to a concerted plan of action for the “ZAC Paris Rive Gauche”4), insisted on the prominence

4 For the “ZAC Paris Rive Gauche”, one of the last major urban operations still in progress in Paris, a...
of the “network competence” of associations to form counter-assessments in view of the projects being undertaken by public authorities. Sharing the networks maintained by every member of an association in different spheres of local political life (town services, local elected officials, associations and participation authorities, press, universities, etc.) is indeed a skill in its own right which fuels the construction of associative expertise. The typology of citizen knowledge could hence be specified and developed in the field of participatory town planning through dialogue with field actors (Nez 2011).

These exchanges within the PICRI training sessions provided a unique field of observation for those paying attention to the relations between the positions and views of both the researchers and the actors on analysis categories which are also action principles (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991). The way actors understand the researchers’ categories to feed and justify their discourse (by interrogating the impact of research on the action and hence its social effectiveness) can thus be analyzed, as well as how to merge the influence of the actors with the reflections of the researchers. For example, when I presented my typology of citizen knowledge of participatory town planning (which differentiates between local, professional and activist knowledge, as well as individual and collective knowledge) at the ADELS Summer University in 2009, a Tam-Tam activist showed his interest when describing how the action of his association had evolved: “The very existence of local knowledge, then of citizens’ expertise, and finally political expertise follows the evolution I experienced during the different phases of the ZAC Paris Rive Gauche”. Association officials have thus borrowed this typology to substantiate their discourses, enabling them to specify the contribution of ordinary citizens in participatory practices and legitimize their participation, even if certain categories (such as describing associative knowledge as “expertise”, whereas the demands of associations, in the face of the expertise of town departments, is knowledge not to be partitioned) seem less useful than others to serve their purpose.

Finally, this position which could be depicted as “halfway” (since it involves both permanent links with the field actors and the researcher’s autonomy when producing research) interestingly goes beyond an overhanging dimension of research typical of Pierre Bourdieu’s epistemological position where the sociologist thinks he is imbued with a mission to unveil reality to the actors who are supposedly plunged in the world of illusion. It enables us to “take actors seriously” (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991) and to enrich the analysis of their reflections, while maintaining a kind of scientific distanciation. This method therefore interestingly combines taking observations into account from the individuals’ viewpoint according to their judgment ability, and a critical approach that integrates factors which do not always appear to actors, such as social determinatives.

permanent committee was set up in 1997 to engage associations, neighborhood councils and institutional partners in discussions on the construction of the urban project.
Limitations as regards the relationship between actors and researchers

There are, however, a number of limitations. The first one refers to a problem of scientific legitimacy, which I encountered repeatedly when conducting research in an associative framework. Although this research position in close connection with action often granted me privileged field access, with ADELS opening a number of doors through its networks, this was not always the case. ADELS is indeed identified as an activist, defending a certain conception of participatory democracy, which may prove problematic when meeting actors promoting another vision. Such was the case when I wanted to conduct an interview with the officials of the Campana Eleb consulting firm, whose participatory method is disparaged within the association (Nez and Talpin 2010). The activist position of ADELS may thus have made contacts more difficult, which prompted me to adjust my entrance according to my interlocutors (putting on my associative ‘hat’ or, more often, stressing my university background). In other cases, I was running the risk of being instrumentalized by the actors, for instance when, during a sociological interview, a cabinet member of the elected representative in charge of local democracy in Paris insisted that the association publish an interview by the elected official in its journal. The question that arises, as soon as field actors are ‘input’ into scientific production relates to researchers’ autonomy. The ability to maintain a critical distance is an essential element to adopt a global approach to participatory practices, which incidentally was acknowledged by the majority of participants in the training sessions and the PICRI conferences, who enjoyed the opportunity given to them to take distance where they often feel as if they were “blindfolded”. I came across this difficulty in particular in one of my fields, where the research report prepared in the PICRI context was censored by the elected official since he did not value the actions of his delegation enough. The aim of this intermediate report was to compare the participatory practices of several territorial government bodies headed by the Communist Party in the region of Paris. However, it was not in the interest of the local authority in question to emphasize the communist aspect of its management. Still, it was a local authority with which the ADELS had signed several contracts in the context of training sessions and of a conference which secured it a sizeable portion of its annual income. This experience highlights the limitations to carrying out research in an associative context when there are conflicts of interest between the economic constraints of an association, which operates as an office for the development and design of certain activities, and the independence required of research activities.

In addition to these difficulties associated with the insertion of ADELS in the field of “participation practitioners” (Nonjon 2006), the main limitation of our investigation mechanism is the same one that researchers blame elected officials for implementing, participatory practices based upon “selective listening”, that is to say, when such officials

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5 This question is all the more acute within the framework of ADELS, which after facing financial difficulties for several years, finally closed its doors in 2012.
summarize the debates without giving decision power to the citizens. This conception of research is relatively conventional since final interpretation rests with the sociologist, even if fed considerably by discussions with the practitioners. In line with the reflections of STS (Science, Technology and Society) studies on the involvement of groups in decisions which concern them (Epstein 1995; Wynne 1996; Callon, Lascoumes and Barthe 2001; Barbot 2002; Collins and Evans 2002), it may be important to involve the actors much earlier in the research collective, and not only when returning the results. This was partially the case with ADELS when defining the research axes and when selecting the fields, but the discussions between actors and researchers have remained limited to that phase, without initiating a permanent dialogue throughout the research preparation process. Nevertheless, the employees and the activists of ADELS, far from being “laymen” on participatory democracy, may contribute to the research from their own expertise—in the same way as associations of AIDS activists, patients assert themselves as experts among the experts, by proposing new forms of experimental clinical treatments (Epstein 1995; Barbot 2002). Indeed, they are in possession of an “interactional expertise”, which means “they have enough expertise to interact interestingly with participants and carry out a sociological analysis” (Collins and Evans 2002: 254). Starting from the technical democracy model, several ways to engage actors could thus be imagined in the research production process itself so that actors exert real influence on the elaboration of the problematic, the formulation of hypotheses or even the redirection of research under investigation.

Finally, while this double role of sociologist and activist enriches the analysis and motivates the carrying out of research, it is not free of tensions and contradictions. It is not only the classic question of the distance from our “pre-notions” or “values” —widely discussed in the literature since the works of Emile Durkheim and Max Weber— which arises, but more especially that of the conflicts between the values indispensable to any militant commitment and the process of research. As phrased perfectly by Bernard Lahire (2004: 60), “the action rationale requires unshakable faith, whereas the knowledge rationale may sometimes drive towards certain disenchantment of the world.” I was faced with this challenge when writing my PhD thesis: activist commitment requires a strong conviction about an object which scientific research desecrates little by little. If my initial look at European experiments in participatory democracy was not naive, it still remained enthusiastic. However, as the field survey unfurled, a growing doubt crept in on the scope of the participatory processes as well as on the researcher’s role in the development of these experiments, which is partially linked to my study cases. In Cordoba, the municipal team abandoned the participatory budget eight years after it was launched following an eventful history which led them to revise the objectives of political equality and of social justice. In Paris, where participatory democracy was at the heart of Bertrand Delanoë’s program in 2001, its prominence was only marginal during the 2008 elections. The sociological analysis thus reveals the degree of discrepancy between the participatory ideal advocated by ADELS in its manifesto (ADELS 2010) and the practices effectively implemented in the European context.
A TYPOLOGY OF PUBLIC SOCIOLGY POSITIONS ON PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

During my research on participatory democracy in an associative context, I maintained various relationships with the action. I mainly tried to conduct the research in permanent interaction with the actors and to put the results of my research to debate with those investigated following a “public sociology” perspective as defined by Burawoy and as I described previously. But I also took part in public or internal debates organized by public institutions, political parties or associations as an academic expert (which is sometimes more akin to the “policy sociology” position in Burawoy’s typology), contributed to the training sessions of local elected representatives, or helped inhabitants to build an argument to assert their point of view in front of public authorities. To question the researchers’ social role and their impact in the development of participatory practices, it is important to distinguish these various activities which bring together several positions of public sociology. The elaboration of a typology allows us to go beyond the general definition proposed by Burawoy and to approach the multiplicity of positions which the researchers working on participatory democracy maintain with the action. The objective is to clarify what we understand by “public sociology” with regard to this particular object and to estimate its impact both on the research and on the development of participatory practices according to the degree of commitment of the researchers in the action.

To elaborate this typology, I shall rely not only on my own personal experience within the PICRI program, but also on other research programs in Europe. It is a question of giving a more general reach to my typology, by analyzing the research conducted by centers that are particularly active in the participatory democracy field. This selection is not exhaustive, but it allows obtaining a relatively wide panel of European research on this topic. To choose these study cases, I followed several criteria: sociological research conducted on local participatory practices, the diversity of institutional and scientific contexts in Europe, the involvement of researchers in the action and/or in reflexivity towards the action, as well as a context of collaboration with public institutions, associations or other citizens’ groups. The objective was to extrapolate my own observations made within the framework of ADELS and the two centers of the CNRS by diversifying scientific traditions and institutional contexts. I observed the methods used by the researchers working on participatory democracy in four European research centers: the Institute for Advanced Social Studies (IESA) in Cordoba, the Centre for Social Studies (CES) in Coimbra, the Centre Marc Bloch in Berlin and La Sapienza University in Rome. The observation was facilitated by the fact that the majority of these researchers were involved in the PICRI program, which allowed me to exchange my views with them during numerous scientific meetings (both conferences organized by the PICRI in 2008 and 2009, but also five international conferences held from 2008 to 2011) and numerous academic stays (two short-term stays in Rome and in Berlin, and five four-month stays in Cordoba from 2006 to 2010). We exchanged information about our research practices during scientific discussions intended to develop reflexivity on the relations between research and action, and in more informal discussions.
From a Weberian perspective, the goal of the typology is to establish semi-abstract ideals, knowing that these unreal constructions do not exist as such in reality and that combinations between the various types are possible (Weber, 1947). If the various positions held by sociologists on participatory democracy aims at clarifying the analysis by simplifying reality, my stand within the PICRI program and my PhD show that a researcher can move between these various roles according to the expected results from the point of view of the research and the action. I suggest distinguishing five typical ideals of distinct ways to do research in collaboration with the actors on participatory democracy, knowing that the researchers often combine several positions: the “dialogist sociologist”, the “organizer sociologist”, the “practitioner sociologist”, the “expert sociologist”, and the “compagnon de route sociologist”. While the “dialogist sociologist” attempts to establish a dialogue and a process of mutual education with his or her audience, the “organizer sociologist” does not only put the results of research to debate, but integrates the actors into the research collective. The “practitioner sociologist”, on the other hand, takes part directly in the action as an internal or external consultant by using methods originating from the social sciences. The last two positions, those of the “expert sociologist” and the “compagnon de route sociologist”, play the role of advisor to the actors in a contractual or militant relationship. These various positions distinguish themselves according to the degree of the researchers’ commitment to the action (from a position of dialogue to the direct involvement in activities through organization and advice), the type of commitment (academic, professional, activist), the nature of their relationships with the practitioners (formal or not, contractual, friendly, etc.), the place research occupies in their approach (as the main objective or as a tool for the action), and their impact on the action (more or less strong and direct).

The distinction between these various positions aims at developing the typology of Burawoy from the specificities of research on participatory democracy by being interested in the forms characterizing both “public sociology” and “policy sociology” in this object of study. I shall not develop here the position of the “pure scientist” (which corresponds to the positions of “professional sociology” and “critical sociology” in Burawoy’s typology), who seeks the recognition of peers rather than to exert some influence on the reality he or she studies, since sociologists working on participatory democracy are often involved in their object and/or their research fields. This specificity of the thematic of participatory democracy can be understood not only in terms of the profile and the trajectory of the researchers who choose to work on this question by combining a scientific approach with a political reflection and even an activist commitment, but in terms of the interest which the actors show towards the research conducted on this theme by reading the work of the researchers and seeking expertise within the framework of their activities. Thus, here as

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6 Research can certainly be undertaken in this perspective on local participatory processes, but given the angle of my paper, I focus here on sociologists’ positions to deliberately seek a link with the local actors and an impact on the action.
in militant fields, the distance to the object and the place the researcher occupies within the environment studied are chosen not only by the researcher, but also co-built by the group (Broqua 2009).

The dialogist sociologist

The “dialogist sociologist” corresponds to Burawoy’s definition of “public sociologist” in its “organic” version. These sociologists initiate a mutual dialogue and learning process with their public: “In the same genre of what I call traditional public sociology we can locate sociologists who write in the opinion pages of our national newspapers where they comment on matters of public importance. [...] There is, however, another type of public sociology — organic public sociology in which the sociologist works in close connection with a visible, thick, active, local and often counter-public. [...] Between the organic public sociologist and a public is a dialogue, a process of mutual education” (Burawoy 2005: 7-8). The main activity of this kind of public sociology hence consists in initiating a dialogue between sociologists and their public, which implies an epistemological split and especially allows returning scientific research results: “We have spent a century building professional knowledge, translating common sense into science, so that now, we are more than ready to embark on a systematic back-translation, taking knowledge back to those from whom it came, making public issues out of private, and thusregenerating sociology’s moral fiber” (Burawoy 2005: 5).

This is the main stance we adopted in the context of the PICRI program and which I followed when writing my PhD, whereas these approaches are characterized by two features, as we could see: sociologists carry out research in close connection with field actors and organize public debates about their results. As I described in the first part of this paper, a dialogue between actors and researchers was organized at several stages of the research manufacturing process. It is also this position of research that prevails among the researchers working on participatory democracy at the Centre Marc Bloch in Berlin and at La Sapienza University in Rome. When they observe experiments of participatory budgets in the Berlin region, processes of participatory town planning in a district of Berlin or a participatory budget in a district of Rome, these researchers conduct their work by immersing themselves in the field (often developing long-term ethnographical inquiries, which sometimes brings them to live on their research field) to maintain close relations with the institutional and social actors. They then put to debate the results of their research to return their work to those investigated and to begin a discussion with the members of institutions, foundations, associations and/or citizens’ groups. This was, for example, the approach followed by Carsten Herzberg and Cécile Cuny when they conducted research on participatory budgets in Lichtenberg and in Potsdam on the one hand, and on participatory practices in the district of Marzahn Nord on the other (Cuny and Herzberg 2008, Cuny 2009).

This practice of public sociology is founded on alternating moments when researchers discuss among themselves in a “confined” conception of research in laboratories,
and others when sociological knowledge is discussed “outdoors” (Callon, Lascoumes and Barthe 2001). It is thus not a question of eliminating the experts, but of organizing cooperative research between specialists and “laymen” by establishing spaces of dialogue between “those whose job is to produce knowledge and those who are the immediate or unknown public” (Callon, Lascoumes and Barthe 2001: 67). As the theoreticians of technical democracy define it: “To speak about outdoor research is to underline a form of commitment in which the formulation of problems, the modalities of application of knowledge and the know-how produced, as well as the necessary opening of the research collective prevail” (Callon, Lascoumes and Barthe 2001: 149). This new form of organization and integration of research in society allows investigating new ways of doing research, which may integrate demands which the researchers would not have thought about before. This alternation between laboratory research and outdoor research enables us to combine activist commitment and scientific distanciation at the same time, that is to say, to take the actor’ discourses seriously (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991) and to maintain the autonomous production of research.

The organizer sociologist

The “organizer sociologist” offers another way of doing research wherein actors join the research collective. In this case, it is not the researcher who observes and interprets reality, but the sociologist who creates a process for the actors themselves to be able to observe and interpret their reality. This “research-action” design was developed in France in the late 1970s around the concept of “sociological intervention” and promoted by the team of Alain Touraine at the Center for Sociological Analysis and Intervention (French acronym CADIS). Its aim is not only to produce a sociological analysis, but also to promote reflexivity among the actors and to help them get organized: “To talk about intervention instead of experimentation is to pursue an action at the same time as a knowledge goal” (Touraine 1978: 188). This sociological intervention approach has, however, various limitations in the French context from the viewpoint of cooperation between actors and researchers (in the end it is the sociologists who writes and not the actors) that results in action, which is reduced in the majority of cases.

The situation is different in Latin America and in Spain, where the research-action method has had a notable influence on the training of participatory democracy practitioners. In 1996, the sociologist Tomas R. Villasante, who has written several books on participatory democracy and social transformation (Villasante 1995; 2006), created a master’s course in research and participatory action at the Complutense University of Madrid intended for students and local government practitioners. His objective was to teach new methodologies to work on participation based upon Paulo Freire’s pedagogy (1974) and the participatory research-action developed in the 1970s and 1980s in Latin America according to which citizens themselves decide on the possible alternatives to the problems they share. In this respect, this research position is closer to Gramsci’s notion of “organic intellectual”, as far as “the [organic] intellectual
has to be thought-provoking, for the members of the class with which he is organically bound, raising their awareness of their community of interests and creating within this class a conception of the homogeneous and autonomous world” (Piotte, 1970: 19). The master’s courses held in Madrid, but also in Barcelona, Seville and Bilbao, have had a considerable impact on participatory practices in Spain: more than half the experiments in participatory budgets, for example, initially hired people who had been trained there (Ganuza 2010: 34),7 while the members of two research centers where I studied organized training sessions in participatory budgets based on this research-action approach. In Cordoba, Ernesto Ganuza (a former student of Villasante) developed participatory methodologies to train the agents and representatives of the first participatory budget model (from 2001 to 2003). At the Centre for Social Studies in Coimbra, Giovanni Allegretti organized training sessions for municipalities wishing to create a participatory budget on the basis of Paulo Freire’s pedagogy. By encouraging cities to set up such processes, these training sessions contributed to promoting these mechanisms in Portugal, which grew from about ten in 2009 to thirty-four in June 2011 (Allegretti 2011).

We have not adopted this research-action position in the context of our PICRI program since there is a risk of creating confusion between the role of the actors and that of the researchers. While it underlines the advantage of going further in associating actors to the production of research, this impact on action is sometimes detrimental to the quality of research. While the master’s course in Spain has had an undeniable impact on the quality of methodologies used in participatory processes, the results in terms of scientific research are not as convincing, which, on the other hand, was not Villasante’s main objective. In France, this method was used as a part of another PICRI program entitled “Renewing the practices of urban project conception: for a closer monitoring and a stronger cooperation between town practitioners, associations and citizens in the region of Paris”, with whom we organized the conference on citizen knowledge as part of the urban issue in 2009. Under the leadership of Agnès Deboulet, this program was conducted in collaboration with CNRS laboratories specialized in urban studies, the International Association of Technicians, Experts and Researchers (AITEC) and tenants committees. The research-action approach has enabled consolidating groups of inhabitants and prompted researchers to join their struggle, especially with regard to coordinating actions against the demolition of working class areas. Nevertheless, the shortcoming was to make it more difficult, if not impossible, to access certain pieces of information held by institutional actors, whereas researchers were seen as being on the inhabitants’ side.

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7 Former students of Tomas R. Villasante have recently published a methodological guide on this research-action method applied to participatory practices (Ganuza et al., 2011).
The practitioner sociologist

In connection with the occupational training sessions we have described above, researchers may at times become directly involved in the setting up of participatory processes through the use of methods originating from the social sciences. This type of researcher is then a “practitioner sociologist” who plays a direct role in the action by taking on, for example, responsibilities inside a local administration or by intervening as an external consultant. If the involvement by such sociologists enables setting up innovative participatory practices, they are often challenged when developing a critical approach to a process which they contribute to implementing. This is, for example, the stance adopted by Ernesto Ganuza, who played a consultant role with the municipality of Cordoba in setting up a participatory budget on the basis of participatory methodologies. Employed by the municipality, he has played a decisive role in setting up and defining the methodology of the first participatory budget model in Cordoba. As a researcher at the Institute for Advanced Social Studies (IESA), he organized deliberative polling on the practice of the botellón, or outdoor binge drinking gatherings, in Cordoba (Cuesta et al. 2008) and on water management in the region of Andalusia (Ganuza, Garrido, Lafuente 2009; Jorba 2009). Within the framework of another form of participatory mechanism, in 2006 the Italian researchers involved in the PICRI began work to create a “Citizen Town Hall” in the first district of Rome (the historical quarter). The Citizen Town Hall is a public space for informing, debating and presenting proposals on the development of the local town planning scheme of this capital city (Cellamare 2006). The researchers played a full role in implementing this Citizen Town Hall by lending it scientific credibility and by offering local associations and the district administration cultural, technical and organizational support. In these cases, the sociologist takes part in the action as a practitioner involved with the public authorities, more than as an expert sociologist from an external position.

This practitioner sociologist position is shared by the researchers who experiment with innovative methods as part of randomly selected participatory processes, such as citizens’ juries and deliberative polling. The Planungszellen (planning units) and citizens’ juries were invented in the early 1970s by two fully-fledged sociologists, with a few months interval in Germany and in the United States. In the same quest for new democratic forms of town planning, Peter Dienel (1978) and Ned Crosby (2003) created a process for a small group of randomly selected citizens to deliberate on a public policy issue and to formulate a series of recommendations after receiving information from specialists. Once this university experiment moved into the field of local participatory democratic practices, the researchers have continued to play an essential role in organizing the procedure, guaranteeing the pluralism of information and the smooth proceeding of the debates. Their role is similar in the context of deliberative polling; a procedure engineered by the American political scientist James Fishkin (1995) in the early 1990s consisting in using the opinion poll method (i.e. the selection of a representative sample of the population) and in organizing a debate between the people selected over several days on the basis of pluralistic information so as to enable each participant to voice an
informed opinion on a given topic. These positions are at the origin of a particular commi-

ment by sociologists, which privileges the effects of their methodologies and focuses on the importance of the action to the quality of scientific research.

The expert sociologist

Less involved in the action, the “expert sociologist” advises the actors through a concep-
tion of sociological expertise guided by the client’s demand. The involvement by these sociologists in the action is less extensive than in the case of the practitioner sociologist. Indeed, it is often about occasional interventions with a public institution to give advice about their participatory policies or to propose an evaluation of them. While this conception of the expert sociologist often corresponds to a will to disseminate the research experience on participatory democracy to institutional actors, it is closer to Burawoy’s conception of policy sociology: “Policy sociology is sociology in the service of a goal defined by a client. Policy sociology’s raison d’être is to provide solutions to problems that are presented to us, or to legitimate solutions that have already been reached” (Burawoy 2005: 9). Sociologists are often invited by local communities to intervene in participatory democracy as “university experts”, that is, to present their work, to summarize debates during actors’ meetings or to take part in the assessment by authorities of the processes. We prefer to use here the term “expert sociology” rather than “policy sociology” to empha-
size this dimension of expertise typical of sociological research. This position secures privileged field access and better knowledge of the actors’ opinions by multiplying “off-

the-record” discussions outside official interviewing situations, but there is a risk of instru-
mentalization by some actors (especially institutional ones) and of losing credibility with others (the association actors and citizens involved in participatory processes).

This position has, at times, been adopted by the majority of the researchers on the sites I analyzed, in particular by Giovanni Allegretti who has requested in every corner of the world to communicate his expertise on participatory budgets (with local authorities, international institutions, associations and citizens’ groups, etc.). I have also adopted this position repeatedly within the framework of my research. As I had been conducting my research in the 20th borough of Paris for a year and a half, I was invited by the new municipal team to partake in a restricted think tank on the evolution of local democracy as a university expert. The aim of the work group composed of local elected members, neighborhood councilors and of two experts (Julien Talpin and myself) was to write out a new neighborhood council charter. The group met some ten times from May to July 2008, where we gathered the opinions of key participation actors in several Parisian boroughs and other cities, and debated internally. The integration of this restricted group has proven quite interesting for my research since it has secured me behind-the-scenes access to municipal power holders (especially the discussions inside the mayor’s cabinet), where I could observe lively debates which were not expressed publicly. However, the elected official in charge of participatory democracy borrowed our scientific justification of random selection as a means to attract new public and diversify the participants’
sociology in order to push through a reform to increase the prominence of randomly selected members in the neighborhood councils of the 20th borough. Still, he was not too keen on broadening participation to other social categories as his main concern was to differentiate from the participatory practices of the previous mayor, and especially to reduce the role of counter-power acquired by certain neighborhood councils. Under his mandate, the impact of our sociological expertise on action diminished in a possibly harmful manner, and the neighborhood councils declined sharply in the 20th borough. Moreover, our intervention was also rather badly perceived by some neighborhood councilors and association actors, which may then thwart field access.

The “compagnon de route” sociologist

Finally, researchers’ involvement with local actors, institutions or citizens’ groups is sometimes more akin to an activist than a contractual position. In this sense we are talking of a “compagnon de route sociologist”, which refers to the position of the intellectuals who accompanied the Communist parties in Europe by sharing a number of ideas, but without taking out a membership card. This affinity was present in the two Western countries which had a powerful Communist party after the Second World War, namely France and Italy. This committed position with participatory democracy practitioners facilitates field access and boosts contribution to action at the risk, however, of losing face before other actors (for example the institutional actors when getting involved with an association or a social movement). This perspective whereby sociologists provide friendly support to ideologically akin actors is frequently adopted by the researchers who work on participatory democracy in the research centers I selected in Europe. In particular, it is the approach Carsten Herzberg took when analyzing the participatory budgets in the region of Berlin while contributing to defining the outlines of an academic expert and a political militant invested locally, or of numerous French and foreign researchers who followed the experience of the participatory budget of institutions of higher education in the region of Poitou-Charentes (Sintomer, Talpin 2011).

It is also with this perspective in mind that I have become involved in the local group of the Greens in the 20th borough or in a citizens’ collective in Belleville. In Belleville, the members of the collective for revaluation of the neighborhood, whose meetings and activities I attended for more than a year, have gradually prompted me to become more than a simple observer by challenging me on issues of methodology (to design, for example, a questionnaire to collect the opinions of passers-by on the condition of the Belleville boulevard). I accompanied the group in some of its activities, while lending a sociological eye, as I continued to observe it in the context of my research. On the other hand, the

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8 Since their creation in 1995 in the 20th borough, the neighborhood councils had been composed of one third political activists, one third association officials and one third citizens who were randomly selected from electoral rolls. In 2008, the proportion of randomly selected neighborhood councilors increased to 51%.
Green activists invited me to present my research at several stages of its progress at their weekly debates. I thus presented the first findings derived from a one-year field investigation on the Parisian neighborhood councils in 2007, which enabled me to engage in an enriching dialogue with certain participants. For instance, a neighborhood councilor, who incidentally is also a Green activist, drew my attention to the unequal social distribution of occupational knowledge within such a local participation process. In 2011, I spoke again as a part of a “citizen training” cycle on participatory democracy, which enabled me to return the results of my PhD to a number of actors I met on the field. Generally speaking, I often reply positively to the requests from actors involved in participatory democracy, especially in the context of training sessions for elected members (above all the Communist Party in France) as the objective is to develop the social usefulness of my research by attempting to influence their practices.

**A difficult just term between commitment and distance**

By varying the degrees and modes of researchers’ commitment to action, these five positions produce different results as regards research as well as practices. They reveal the challenges sociologists face to maintain a critical distance with respect to their object of study from the moment the research work goes hand in hand with a commitment to practitioners. Indeed, the researcher runs the risk of becoming an auxiliary to a movement or a policy and the actual effects on discourses and participatory practices do not always turn out as expected. However, while there is a risk in serving as scientific support for elected officials to legitimize their practices, which are sometimes quite far from the objectives, these positions typical of a sociologist committed to action also show that research may be effective from a social standpoint.

From my viewpoint, what is at stake is the development of a sociology on participatory democracy which is both critical and committed so as to contribute to the political debate and public action through the ability to maintain a critical distance. I agree with Philippe Corcuff (2004: 176) when he suggests outlining “a direction where commitment rests on the achievements of now autonomous social sciences”. In the face of Weber’s opposing relationship between politics and science as a vocation, which distinguishes two kinds of completely heterogeneous problems (Weber 1919), the idea is to “consider both tensions and bridges between the scientist’s ethics and the activist’s ethics, by giving up on dreams of purification” (Corcuff 2004: 181). As stated in turn by Lahire (2004: 59, 65) from another epistemological position which defends the specificity of scientific skills, “It

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9 Far from the clear separation between “social sociology” and “experimental sociology” presented by Lahire, Corcuff suggests, as I have tried to do in my research, to “think at the same time resemblances and differences, continuities and discontinuities between professional sociology and actors’ sociology, but also interrelations (thus in both directions: the formalization of concepts from common cognitive-discursive plans and the usage by the actors of notions coming from the social sciences)” (Corcuff 2004: 188-189).
only remains to consider the concrete routes through which the sociologists may, without killing or weakening the scientist inside them, usefully contribute to reflection and public action”. The idea is then to combine a public and a critical sociology approach, which according to Burawoy (2005: 10), are the “conscience” of policy sociology and of professional sociology, to continue to develop reflexive knowledge on participatory democracy. Contribution to the political debate and to public action is thus based on a position which is committed but autonomous with respect to the political and social field.

**Conclusion**

With regard to my research experience in an associative context and to the various positions sociologists develop on participatory democracy, I would like to underline the interest, from a scientific point of view, of making a strong commitment to the participatory practices we observe. In a first instance, a public sociology position provides us access to the field and, more particularly, behind the public scenes to which we have access only when we are involved in the action. Often, the most interesting observations take place in these exchanges behind the public scenes, which also permit us to gain an understanding of what happens in the public arena. Collaboration with actors also allows us to enrich our works with the reflexivity they develop with regard to their practices, and thus develop new categories of analysis. The question that arises, however, is the autonomy of researchers and their capacity to maintain a critical distance. We can observe effects of censorship by our institutional interlocutors, but also of self-censorship when we do not want to hurt actors who are close to us or disparage a heart-felt initiative. The challenge is to not minimize the critical dimension of our works, knowing that they are going to be read by others, both by those we observe and whose cause we support and by those who are opposed to the participatory practices we study and could use these works to criticize them. The double role of researcher and activist can also make both positions more difficult to hold, as conducting research can lead to a certain disenchantment of the world. In spite of these limitations, it seems to me that the game is worth the candle from the point of view of scientific research.

But what is the impact on political action? A public sociology approach mainly allows proposing a critical analysis of a participatory initiative to help the actors to stand back and reflect on their own practices. Critical analysis is certainly not reserved for researchers as some practitioners deeply reflect on their action, but researchers can facilitate this taking of critical distance. Another contribution to the action can be seen in terms of the dissemination of methods and experiences: research provides methodological equipment and permits capitalizing on the experiences. The training sessions organized by ADELS within the PICRI program played this role with actors invested in participatory democracy in the region of Paris. In the same way in Spain, the researchers played an important role in the adoption of participatory practices by the local authorities but also by some social movements by spreading methods originating from the social sciences. From
its emergence in mid-May 2011, some students in master's degree programs on participatory methodologies participated in the _Indignados_ movement by moderating large assemblies, and influenced their functioning through the dissemination of methodological guides which circulated in militant circles (Lorenzana, Basagolit, Bru 2001; Lorenzo, Martínez 2001). The effects of public research on participatory democracy can thus go beyond the institutional sphere and come to strengthen social movements.

However, some conditions must be in place so that the research can have an impact on the action. The first one is the existence of spaces of dialogue between actors and researchers at the various moments of the research, not only at the time of returning the results to those investigated, but also during the formulation of problems and the development of the initial hypotheses. Beyond the sphere of ethnographical research, it is necessary to establish specific spaces to create this dialogue through financing aimed at developing partnerships between research laboratories and associations as occurs in the PICRI programs. “Confined” research does not transform itself into “outdoor” research just like that. In the context of the increasing precariousness of associations in a number of European countries, it requires financial means to create spaces to establish a dialogue between interlocutors who are not still used to working together. The second condition is that, in their activities and objectives, researchers must disseminate their research beyond academic circles. To develop in the scientific field, public sociology requires a transformation of academic rules, which often privilege the dissemination of works in reviews only read by peers or in conferences closed to the general public\(^\text{10}\), to ensure that other ways of conducting and spreading research are also valued in academic careers.

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\(^{10}\) On the difficulties reconciling intellectual work and anti-establishment action in the academic sphere, see the stimulating article of Pierre Rimbert (2011).


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Héloïse Nez is PhD in Sociology (Université Paris 8 / Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona), Lecturer of Sociology at the Université de Tours and Researcher in the UMR CITERES (Cités, territoires, environnement et société). The main topics of her research are local participatory democracy, social movements and citizen competences.

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The aim of this book is to analyse the degree to which online political forums are deliberative and, consequently, whether virtual forums could increase the deliberative character of our democracies. In the first chapter, the author carries out a concise and very well focused review of the main deliberative theories and models, and then in the second chapter goes on to collect and operationalise the deliberative criteria that characterise a public space of deliberation. In these two first chapters the author establishes the theoretical framework that will be applied in the following chapters for the empirical investigation of online political forums.

At the beginning of the book, the author anticipates that the study of web based forums could be considered futile because of the rapid technological evolution that, I can add, is giving now more prominence to social media such as Facebook or Twitter. I agree with him that written online debates will keep on existing both within web formats or within new media because they offer a system of communicative exchange unique and irreplaceable.

Specifically in the first chapter, the author discusses the concepts of deliberative democracy from Habermas (1989) and Sennett (1992). He starts the discussion with a sociohistorical analysis of the emergence of the public sphere in the 18th century and its decline in the 19th century. This example of public sphere is considered by these two important theorists as an ideal model of deliberation to be regained. The author then goes on to compare the notion of deliberative democracy with other models of democracy (liberal, republican, the aggregative model) in order to identify the reasons that are used to justify the supremacy of the deliberative project. Finally, Kies provides several criticisms concerning the feasibility of the deliberative project, which are presented and counterargued: a) deliberative values and procedures are unadapted for our complex societies, but they are in any case more adapted than other models of democracy; b) a deliberative model cannot be applied to large-scale political systems where numerous and urgent decisions are taken, although deliberation does not need to be applied to the entire decision-making process and to all public decisions; c) it is naïve to assume that citizens and politicians will act deliberatively, but rather the deliberative attitude could be assumed to stem from the communicative presuppositions that are immanent to any human being and from everyday practices that incorporate deliberative dimensions; and, d) the inclusive criterion of deliberation is restricted by several barriers, although according to Young (2000) there are measures to
promote inclusive and plural debates, to prevent domination of certain actors, and to favour alternative and less formal modes of communication.

In the second chapter, the author states that the operationalisation of the deliberative theory demands awareness that the deliberative theory is composed of two levels of requirements: 1) The deliberative norms that a political debate should follow, and 2) how these deliberative norms should be applied at the different levels of the decision-making process. There is sufficient agreement about the deliberative norms, but not about how these criteria should be concretely applied at the different levels of the opinion- and decision-making process. In the first section of this chapter, the deliberative criteria (inclusion, discursive equality, reciprocity, justification, reflexivity, empathy, sincerity, plurality, external impact) are presented by clarifying their definitions and the way these have been operationalised by the deliberative democrats. The author provides a practical table that synthesises the methods (basically, a combination of content analysis, surveys and interviews) that are considered to be most appropriate for measuring each deliberative criterion (table 2.2). Then, in the second part of the chapter, the author tackles the controversial question about when and where to apply the deliberative criteria within the democratic process. For the author, there are at least four different views: 1) the globalising approach considers that deliberative procedures should be applied to all social and political associations; 2) Habermas (1996) defends that they should be limited to core state institutions; 3) Gutmann and Thompson (2004) consider that they should be extended to the civil society and private associations if the decisions they take have a clear and binding political impact; and, 4) for Dryzek (2000) the discursive requirements should take place exclusively within civil society. The problem with these views is that they have not been empirically confirmed. For example, it is not clear —following Habermas’ assumption—that the debates taking place within the parliament are more deliberative than debates taking place outside state structures, or there is no proof that civil society is more prone to deliberation since it is less subject to the economic power in contrast to state institutions, as Dryzek defends. For the author, the deliberative endeavour cannot evolve unless it enters an empirical phase that would allow testing the assumptions of political theorists and the deliberative potential of the different political actors and contexts of opinion —and will— formation. That is the focus of the subsequent chapters.

In my opinion, the most important contribution of this book comes after the theoretical part: from chapters 3 to 6. Here the author applies the previous operationalisation to online political forums and assesses the potentials and limits of Web-based forums for political deliberation. In so doing, he takes into account four dimensions: a) the number and the plurality of citizens who debate on online political forums, that is, the usage of the online political forums; b) the type of the actors hosting the online political debates: the offer of online political forums; c) the contextual factors such as the political impact of the forum, moderation rules, the ideology or the political culture of the group or actor, which may influence the deliberativeness of online debates, and
related to this, d) the specific analysis of how deliberative criteria are being unfolded within a series of online political forums.

The author grounds his analyses on a wide array of data sources according to the four dimensions to be studied. In chapter 3, in order to analyse the extension of online political forums, he studies several surveys conducted in the EU member states and electoral surveys carried out during US presidential and midterm elections and presidential elections in France. The results show that an increasing number of citizens interact online for political purposes, and that the younger generation are using more online political forums than older generations. In France, during the presidential election of 2007, 17% of Internet users reported visiting online forums. In the USA, 4% of the Internet users had actively discussed politics online during the presidential election of 2004 and the midterm election of 2006. Here we have to take into account that the measures of online activity are different.

With regard to the question of the online political forums offered by different actors, the author reviews several studies that measure —basically by means of content analysis— the Web-interactive offer of the parliaments, the cities, and the political parties in the EU and the USA. The Web-interactive features analysed are the presence of e-mail, online forums, e-consultation forums, contact information, opinion polls, and chat rooms. The analysis reveals that most of the actors provided basic interactive features such as e-mail or contact information but not so much a more discursive offer such as online forums or online consultation. This is the case of the 44 European national and regional parliaments (plus the European Parliament) analysed. On the contrary, municipalities are more likely to offer possibilities of discursive interaction. Larger cities are more likely to host Web forums than small cities and cities from the Scandinavian countries are more likely than their UK and French counterparts to host online forums. Nevertheless, political parties are far more likely to host online forums. A total of 163 parties' Web-sites in the 25 EU member states were analysed and 47% of them provided a Web forum and the Eastern parties were more likely to host an online forum than the Western parties (53.8% versus 41.9%). And in relation to the level of participation, one party out of three that hosted an online forum had a high rate of participation in its forum. Therefore, the low discursive offer of the parliaments and the high online discursive offer of the parties could suggest that online deliberation has received greater acceptance in the civil society. This idea support beliefs expressed by Dryzek and Gutman and Thompson that civil society is the best place to construct a critical public space and that the concentration on online debates in the civil society could signify that the state structure is not colonizing discursive activity. Nevertheless, Kies himself argues that this interpretation should be scrutinised by analysing the extent to which other actors in civil society (NGOs, associations, blogs, etc.) implement and use online forums. I can add, that political parties can be considered, precisely, actors of both the state and civil society. And the presence of online forums does not mean that they fulfil deliberative purposes.
In relation to the contextual factors and the fulfillment of deliberative criteria of the online political forums, in chapter 4, the author first summarizes and compares the main results obtained by 10 previous studies that analysed a total of 29 online discussion spaces. Secondly, in chapter 5 he examines two original case studies: the forum of the Italian party “Radicali Italiani” and, in chapter 6, the electoral blogs for electing district councillors, implemented by the French city of Issy-les-Moulineaux.

Thus, the author reviews 10 existing case studies that measure the deliberativeness of the online debates in different contexts and countries. They have been distinguished from the viewpoint of their potential impact on the decision-making process (low external impact or higher external impact on political decisions) and of the categories of actors (media forums, civil society’s forums, parties’ forums, institutional forums). And each online forum has been measured on the basis of 6 deliberative criteria: reciprocity, justification, plurality, empathy, reflexivity and external impact. One of the main objectives of this chapter is to observe whether the level of deliberativeness varies according to the impact of the online forum on external decisions. The hypothesis is that if ordinary citizens believe what they write in the forums could have an impact on the decision-making process, they will be more motivated in participating in the forum and in adopting a deliberative attitude. The overall analysis shows that the forums that have a strong political impact are more likely to be characterised by respectful and reciprocal exchanges (reciprocity and empathy) and encourage their participants to learn from each other (reflexivity). These are experimental or e-consultation forums designed or sponsored by political institutions, such as municipalities, environmental agencies, central governments or parliaments, which normally are moderated and are under strict rules of identification, and with the issues at stake being controlled by the institution. However, the effect on deliberation of having an external impact on decision-making, could not be verified for the criteria of justification and plurality because of the different methods and dimensions used for measuring the criteria, so comparison between the cases is not possible.

In order to reach a more precise understanding of the role of the external impact factor and of how to apply the deliberative criteria to specific cases, in chapter 5 and 6 the author examines two original cases: the forum of the “Radicali Italiani” and the electoral blogs set up for the online election of 16 local councillors in Issy-les-Moulineaux.

The online forum of the “Radicali Italiani” is one of the most successful forums worldwide with more than 550,000 messages in 2007 and around 26,612 people registered in 2003 at the time of the second congress and the online elections of its executive board. The author analyses the functioning of the forum during 2004 and 2005. In order to evaluate the functions, activity, and deliberative quality of the forum, he examines the statistics provided by the party on the usage of their Web forum, carries out 40 face-to-face interviews with leaders, party members and supporters, and finally, uses an online survey distributed among forum users and non users (who are aware of the existence of the forum). The results show that the Italian Radical’s forum is exem-
plenary insofar as it is highly frequented, it is characterised by a dynamic and qualitative debate, and it fulfils several functions useful for the party members such as information, formation, recruitment and a militant function. As for the deliberativeness of the forum, his investigation is based essentially on survey and interviews and shows that criteria like plurality, reflexivity, empathy and discursive equality are only partially met. The majority of users are men, highly educated, interested in politics, and supporters of the party, but this homogeneity is counterbalanced by the fact that 30% of the users do not vote for the party and the shared perception that the forum encourages alternative voices and suggestions.

Also, regarding the reflexivity dimension, all the survey respondents stated that their participation in the forum had “sometimes” or “often” been influenced by the forum’s content. Finally, the external impact is very high since many party leaders participate in the forum, even initiating e-consultations on specific topics, and almost one in four users considers that participation in the forum can influence the leadership.

In the last chapter, Kies analyses the district council election of 2005 in Issy-les-Moulineaux, which combined an exclusively online voting and an almost exclusively online campaign through an electoral blog of each district. In each blog the candidates could introduce themselves and their electoral programme and propositions, and debate with the citizens of the district. The author studies the sociodemographic profile of the participants in the blogs and carries out a content analysis of the postings. The results are rather disappointing: only 3% of the electorate voted in the elections and the level of participation in the blogs was low and dominated by few candidates and mainly by men. The campaign blogs did not achieve a sufficient level of reflexivity (most of the postings do not contain instances of progression of the debates), reciprocity (less than one thread out of two received at least one comment and few threads hosted a lively debate) or discourse equality (the most active candidate was responsible for one out of three messages posted). However, the candidates made some concrete proposals on important and varied issues, so in this respect the blog has had, to a certain extent, an external impact. The debates were also respectful and constructive, thereby meeting in this sense the criteria of empathy.

In conclusion, the author is successful in justifying and measuring the deliberative criteria of democracy and applying them to online political forums. This is the major achievement of the book: it shows how to measure deliberative criteria in specific cases and varied contexts, and how they can be applied to the concrete examples of virtual forums. In this sense, Kies contributes to deliberative theory by gathering important empirical evidence and showing the online deliberative potential of actors both belonging to political institutions and to civil society. Nevertheless, the reader gets the impression that Kies has tried to cover and compare too many cases, actors and studies, which perhaps differ excessively in terms of methods used, levels of analysis and circumstances involved. In the end, the results seem contradictory and the picture obtained is somewhat blurred. In chapter 3, parliaments and municipalities fall short in terms of interactive features on
their webs, but two of the most deliberative e-consultation forums studied in chapter 4 were designed and sponsored by a parliament and a municipality, although in chapter 6 a failed example of deliberative virtual space was carried out by a town hall, as well. In addition, we really do not know if the deliberative character of some of the existing online forums is due to the external impact factor or to other numerous factors that are mentioned but not clearly assessed. For the author the potential impact of the online forum is the most prominent factor explaining divergence in the deliberativeness of the online debates. But, for example, the participative culture and ideology of the “Radicali Italiani” seems to have been an important factor for the high involvement and the certain level of deliberativeness of their forum. In addition, other factors need to be analysed in a more systematic way: the nature and variety of the topics discussed, the moderation and identification rules within the forum, the objectives when designing the forum, the publicity given to the forum, or the circumstances of the population targeted for participation. In this sense, the forums well designed for political consultation are more likely to be more deliberative than newspapers or magazines websites or social newsgroups. And, probably, the failure in terms of participation and deliberative engagement in Issy-les-Moulineaux is due to the lack of publicity of the electoral blogs, the tiny powers of the councillors to be elected and a population already tired of so many e-democratic initiatives of their major. In the end, the author concludes that the real question is not so much whether the online debates can be deliberative (because, definitively, they can) but in which circumstances do the online debates foster deliberative forms of debates and contribute to promoting the deliberative values and procedures within the existing political process.

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ROSA BORGE BRAVO
Open University of Catalonia (UOC)
Gianpaolo BOIOCCHI, Patrick HELLER and Marcelo SILVA
Bootstrapping Democracy. Transforming Local Governance and Civil Society in Brazil
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Does participatory budgeting produce qualitative changes in the society? In Bootstrapping Democracy, Baiocchi, Heller and Silva tell us, convincingly, how participatory budgeting has transformed the relation between civil society and the state in some Brazilian communities. This transformation tends to empower social actors vis-à-vis local state.

Baiocchi et al. propose an original framework to analyze one of the classical topics in participatory democracy: the Brazilian Participatory Budget (PB). There are two relevant aspects why this book should be read: firstly, because it focuses in experiences of participatory budgeting that are not “best practices”, providing a balanced view of PB success and failures. But, above all, Bootstrapping Democracy should be read because it focuses on the consequences of participation. As Fung (2011) has written, we can now speak about a second generation of studies on the Brazilian participatory experience. This second generation is addressing the complex causality patterns and the effects of PB. Bootstrapping Democracy is a good representative of this new wave.

The much celebrated orçamento participativo of Porto Alegre inaugurated a sequence of participatory institutions in Brazilian local budgets. The experience of Porto Alegre was significant for its capacity to include popular sectors which had been traditionally excluded from politics (Baiocchi 2005). In this sense, Porto Alegre was an ideal “blueprint”, “transplanted” in different settings with different outcomes. Currently, the enthusiasm around PB has led way to a more balanced view of its consequences and real impacts.

Bootstrapping Democracy is organized in six chapters. In the Introduction and Chapter 1, Baiocchi et al. mark the limits of their subject (the impact of PB in civil society organization). In Chapter 2, we are situated in the scene of participatory budgeting in Brazil, its precedents and trajectory. In Chapter 3, the logics of inquiry are clarified and the methodological strategy is justified. In Chapter 4, we find a description of how political contexts and PB’s institutional design does influence in each of the cases under investigation. In Chapter 5, the authors explicitly address the shifts in civil society. Finally, in the conclusion, the main evidence is situated into the big dilemmas of participatory democracy. Surprisingly, at the end of the conclusion, we find a sub-epigraph where results are compared to those of other developing countries such as South Africa and India. This conclusion “Beyond Brazil” opens the door to new inter-societal comparative approaches.

One of the strong points of the book is actually its methodological strategy. Which are the real consequences of an ambitious policy as the PB in a developing country such as Brazil? To isolate the contribution of PB, the authors designed a qualitative
investigation based on four mirror cases. These cases consisted in four matched pairs of PB and non/PB cities, each pair being homogeneous in terms of population, geographical region, electoral results (Partido dos Trabalhadores) and equal socio-economical background. Thus, the four non/PB cities worked as a “control group” to contrast that the effects of PB where a direct consequence of it. This inter-regional controlled strategy is quite rigorous, and it gives strong support and validity to the main findings.

In general terms, PB had a positive impact in the activation of civil society. In three of the four cases: “Cities that introduced PB experienced a shift in the form of engagement from traditional forms of discretionary and personalized engagement [patronage] to more participatory and institutionalized modes, albeit with varying degrees of success” (p. 126). In the non-PB cities any change was observed in the period under scrutiny. However, this positive relation was dependent on the previous organization and autonomy of civil society itself.

In two of the cases, Baiocchi et al. found that social organizations went from prostrate relations with the state (subordination to the local state through discretionary processes of patronage) to affirmative relations (still certain subordination, but through transparent procedures and institutions). In other words: through PB, traditional clienteles and patronage were dismantled and replaced by institutional open channels. Anyway, we feel tempted to question if this was not another way to select the participation of certain social actors in detriment of others. As Clemente Navarro showed (2000), it is possible that a new participatory bias was emerging from PB institutions. Is affirmative democracy a new form of patronage? In which situations would it happen?

The other two cases of PB are extreme. In Joan Monlevade, civil society engaged in PB but did not lose its autonomy and equidistance vis-à-vis the state. This would be an ideal case of mobilized democracy where civil organisations are able to combine participation in institutions and keep their autonomy, critical eye and mobilization. According to the book, this happened because social actors were strong and independent enough before the PB. At the other extreme, the case of Mauá showed that the introduction of PB can produce demobilization. In Mauá, traditionally-clientele organizations had their funds cut and combative-activist sectors were institutionalized (key activists taking government posts). Ultimately, the introduction of PB triggered shifts in social organizations and their relation to local state; but this relation —positive or negative— is dependent on the previous —strong or weak— situation of civil society.

Baiocchi et al. also identify the institutional design of PB as a condition for the empowerment of social actors. In some way, institutional devices entail distortions in the formulation and communication of demands. For example, in much decentralized designs (hegemony of neighbourhood assemblies), there was an overemphasis on local narrow interests. In other settings, strategic orientation and district level assemblies counterbalanced excessive localism. The role of mediators and delegates was also relevant and it was frequently
exercised by activists. The outcome of activist mediation seemed to be ambivalent: it can produce a positive accommodation of civic organizations (preserving autonomy) or it can drive to demobilization and submission. The institutional environment of PB, in any case, makes a difference. As the authors note, “The line between embeddedness and synergy, politicization and capture is indeed a fine one”.

Bootstrapping Democracy represents an extraordinary effort to reconstruct the process of demand-making and the chain of sovereignty in the context of PB. This is a strong contribution to the empirical research on democracy: how do popular demands travel from citizens to the local state? Which are the real channels, mediations and distortions? How does this occur through participatory budgeting? In the reconstruction of the chain of sovereignty, from people to the local state and vice versa, this book offers a suggestive proposal. Nevertheless, we missed to see a clearer, more detailed exposition of the demand-making process. How does a regular demand travel from the quarter assemblies to the official budget? Which are the obstacles, distortions, formal and informal institutions that the demand had to pass through? On the other side, which are the top-down mechanisms, rewards and punishments articulated by local state to exercise control on popular demands? Though Bootstrapping Democracy offers a general insight, we need more in depth, micro qualitative research to identify the matrix of relations placed into circulation around PB.

Participatory policies are now mature enough to study their impacts. Nevertheless, there are other effects of citizen participation which are as much important as the reorganization of civil society: a) the learning of democratic skills (Talpin 2011); b) the promotion of social justice and redistribution (Fung 2003); c) the modernization of public administration (Ganuza and Sintomer 2011); d) the improvement of public decisions and problem-solving (Fung 2004); e) the decentralization of investments (Funk and Gathmann 2006); f) the increasing of public satisfaction (Olken 2010); g) transparency of government and trust (Wang 2007, Handley 2010), etc. In short, direct participation is supposed to produce many other benefits, so it would be wonderful to see studies which pay attention to a broader spectrum of consequences.

In any case, Bootstrapping Democracy represents a leap forward in the analysis of the real consequences of participatory politics. This is not magic: the outcomes and effects of citizen participation depend on the specific institutional design and the previous organization of social actors. In effect, participatory budgeting is not magic, but, under appropriate conditions, it can produce extraordinary democratic changes.

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PATRICIA GARCÍA ESPÍN
Instituto de Estudios Sociales Avanzados (IESA-CSIC)
Julien TALPIN
Schools of democracy. How (sometimes) ordinary citizens become competent in participatory budgeting institutions

Clearly, we cannot expect that all participatory process have individual cultural consequences on its participants. However, some of the previous literature has created too high expectations regarding this issue and Julien Talpin’s book contributes to demolish part of these expectations. This first important result of the book happens even if the author chooses one particular type of process (participatory budgeting) where these effects could be expected and are not fully unrealistic: Some participants devote time, intellectual and affective energies in these processes where real decisions that affect citizen’s lives are made. Cultural changes among participants occur, but only in certain circumstances, for specific groups of people and more for some attitudes (and behaviours) than for others.

Beyond this general conclusion, the book is important and innovative for several reasons. First, because of the topic. The empirical analysis of the cultural consequences of participatory processes is crucial because it has been one of the important promises of most of the deliberative and participatory democracy literature. Second, because the approach followed is new and quite well justified: most of the previous literature is based on quantitative approaches measured immediately after the participatory process has been completed¹. Talpin argues convincingly the importance of capturing real behaviours, to analyse them once the immediate emotional reaction to the process has vanished and to capture them through participant observation that allows viewing the constant interaction between the citizen, the process and the fellow participants. The book is an excellent example of how a qualitative ethnography can provide an excellent empirical account that captures realities that surveys have trouble to cope with. Third, the book is relevant because there is no other analysis of this same topic done in a so rich and contextualised analysis, with a European focus and using a comparative approach to several cases. Previous research offered interesting quantitative insights of deliberative opinion polls or citizen juries or more qualitative ones of Brazilian experiences (Baiocchi, 2005), but we lacked a so detailed analysis of a set of European cases.

The book develops through a series of chapters that play all an important role. It starts with a well-grounded criticism of the most well-known literature on the topic that focusses on short term attitudinal changes measured through surveys. Chapter 2 discusses why institutionally driven participatory processes have appeared, with an or Fournier et al (2011). For a critical perspective justifying the need to analyse long term effects see O’Neill (2001).

¹ Examples of this approach are Fishkin (2009)
emphasis on the role they have played in the rebuilding of the political identity of the post-1989 European left and presents the 3 cases to be analysed (participatory budgeting in Morsang, Rome and Seville). Chapter 3 presents the official and semi-official discourses that authorities and participants use about these processes, what he calls the “grammars of participation”. Chapter 4 goes clearly beyond “who participates” and makes an interesting contribution to the question of why participants get involved in these processes. Chapters 5 and 6 reach the main question of the book: do people change in these processes? Chapter 5 makes a convincing explanation of why change is so limited (limited deliberation, strong previous preferences) and about the necessary conditions for cultural change to appear. Chapter 6 focusses precisely on the core group of participants where these changes occur in some cases and traces some of the possible trajectories this people follow.

This is not only a very interesting book, but also a really convincing one. Probably, the most important limit we can point is precisely due to the richness of the book: it opens too many doors and while in some cases it shows us all the complete contents of the room in others it only allows to have a short look through the crack. I will mention one of the possible examples. The idea of the “grammars of participation” and the double inclusionary/exclusionary role it plays is quite interesting, but precisely because of that we would like to hear more about it. Each participatory process has a representation of itself and of its relationship to the wider world and participants feel compelled to adapt to it (or to leave). The need to use arguments related to public interest or to redistribution, the attitude of listening to others or to share the idea of the Seville “besieged citadel” process, threatened by all external actors, may all be part of these grammatical rules. Clearly, many participants have adapted to most of these rules and some have left because they did not want to adapt to them. But is this grammar (as the metaphor suggests) a real package that has to be adapted globally or do many participants survive in the process without necessarily sharing all this picture? Has this grammar been created in the process or were large parts of it shared ideas of participants when they first arrived to the participatory budgeting process?

The book lacks an explicit justification of why Southern Europe is a region that deserves a common analysis of its participatory processes. However, the specific cases chosen help building this explanation: political processes led by the left, with a strong emphasis (at least in their discourses) in redistribution that distinguish them from many of the most common European processes, where the emphasis is placed on efficient management or on democratic innovation per se. This is precisely one of the very central final questions that the book raises.

Some of the most common grammars of participation combine uncritically all their potential virtues and suggest they could be democratic cures for (too) many problems. Chapter 5 in Talpin’s book is a brilliant demonstration that life

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2 On the importance of different political goals among European processes of participatory budgeting see Sintomer, Herzberg and Röcke (2008).
is often more complicated and that the potential empowerment function of these participatory processes is quite contradictory with their role as producers of better policy-making: the process characteristics needed to produce better (critical) citizens (e.g., conflict and politicization) are not only different, but probably opposite to those needed to produce policies that better fit citizen preferences (e.g., deliberation and technical arguments).

This is not the only contradiction of traditional participation analysis that the book helps to uncover: the processes analysed illustrate quite clearly that the tendency to mix-up deliberative and participatory theory and experiences as if they were all the same is quite problematic. The 3 cases of participatory budgeting discussed in the book are clear representations of the values and practices of participatory democracy…but are quite limited in their deliberative values! Chapters 2 and 4 show that these processes have quite limited interest in the public exchange of ideas and that they are quite closer to participatory settings typical of revolutionary processes than to the Western processes of mini-publics to which they are often compared.

Finally, the book contains several other promising ideas that I would love to see prosecuted in the author’s future publications. For example, without being a central topic of the book, it contains a quite rich discussion of the potential sources of disappointment with participatory processes. A more systematic discussion of this material would be much welcomed. A similar thing happens with one idea that Talpin shares with other (quite different) American approaches: the explanatory role of conflict aversion\(^3\) in explaining (in his case) limited deliberation and disagreement. If “political avoidance” (Eliasoph, 1998) is not only part of American settings, but develops also in the institutions built by the European left to promote redistribution and empowerment we might have to conclude that this is not part of a national culture of political avoidance but of a more general human mechanism of avoiding face-to-face conflict.

In any case, because of the questions it raises, because of those that it convincingly answers and because of the serious empirical evidence it provides, *Schools of Democracy* is a book that anyone interested in the recent debates about democracy must definitively read.

**References**


\(^3\)For example, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002) give also a very central role to conflict aversion in their explanation of why Americans prefer not to be personally involved in policy making.

JOAN FONT FÀBREGAS
Instituto de Estudios Sociales Avanzados
(IESA-CSIC)
In 1989, the city of Porto Alegre launched the participatory budget (PB). Since 2001, when the First World Social Forum was celebrated, the PB has been spreading around Europe. Democracia Participativa y modernización de los servicios públicos (2011) deals, precisely, with this wave of participatory budgeting in Europe. As the book shows, political parties from the left wing, social movements, international institutions (EU, Central Bank, etc.), city networks and experts have lead the process of diffusion of PB in Europe, and all these actors have played an active role in the "learning activities". According to the authors, the number of participatory budgets implemented in European cities has been increasing from thirteen experiences in 2001 to fifty-five in 2005 and over a hundred in 2008. Thus, it is time to ask ourselves which are the successes and weaknesses of this extraordinary process of transmission from the South.

First, what accounts for this proliferation of participatory budgeting in "the North"? Is it just the effect of an attractive method or a shared discourse across hemispheres? And, to what extent does the term "participatory budgeting" (PB) have the same meaning in both sides of the Atlantic, in Porto Alegre and Rome? Can we observe any real change in terms of administrative modernization, redistribution of wealth and the deepening of democracy in the cities that use PB?

With these questions in mind, Sintomer and Ganuza undertake a wide-range qualitative study that analyzes over fifty PB experiences performed in 2005 in ten European countries. According to the authors "it was necessary to undertake a research in Europe that used a methodology able to go beyond speeches and well-intentioned statements" (p.9). Based on an extensive and rigorous fieldwork, in which seventeen researchers from ten different nationalities have been involved, the work transcends the traditional case study and explores the reality of participatory democracy in Europe by using comparative analysis. The research strategy is based on four dimensions, "four concentric circles" according to the authors. At the center, a circle provides the bulk of qualitative data by using participant observation in participatory processes (twelve cities from five countries). In this case, the ethnographic material have been addressed to reveal the key connections between the political and social arenas, as well as to get knowledge of the institutional and cultural context surrounding PB’s. In a second circle, there was an intensive fieldwork dominated by semi-structured interviews to key stakeholders (politicians, civil servants, association’s members, etc.). The third stage of investigation was devoted to case-studies. Finally, the last circle consists of secondary sources, reviewing the literature and integrating the results.
At the beginning of the book, participatory budgeting is defined as the involvement of unelected citizens in the allocation and distribution of public expenditures (p. 18). As this is a very broad category, the authors establish five basic criteria to ensure homogeneity enough to do comparative analysis among cases: the initiatives must be aimed at budgetary items, they must focus on the local level (or at least at the district level), meetings must be frequently held and deliberation must be present. Finally, PB must include accountability measures.

The body of the book is divided in three parts. The first part reviews the different institutional frameworks, political cultures and legal settings that host the participatory initiative. In the second part, we find a detailed analysis of the “convergences and divergences” in PB institutions in Europe. Here, Sintomer and Ganuza assess the so-called “Porto Alegre effect”: they analyze to what extent European PB’s are similar to the Brazilian experience. In the third part, the authors go to the impacts, consequences and challenges of these European participatory experiences. Specifically, they pay attention to three areas: the transformation of public administration, the changes in terms of social justice, and the “democratization of democracy”.

It is noteworthy the richness in the description of PB’s through which the reader get immersed into the daily routine of participatory processes, for example, neighborhood assemblies in Bobigny (France). By extending the “analytical zoom”, the authors do account for the multi-causality inherent to participation. They highlight the crucial role played by path-dependency to show how the structure of civic society and social organizations, the arena of political parties and other political platforms have a clear influence on the heterogeneity of PB procedures. The culture broth in which PB emerges has a lot to say about the different designs and its consequences. Sintomer and Ganuza identify six “big” models of PB, six ideal-types: the “Porto Alegre adapted for Europe”, “proximity participation”, “consultation on public finances”, the “public-private negotiating table”, “community funds at the local and city level”, and the “representation of organized interests”. As the authors show, the hybridization of models is the general trend in Europe, and it is quite striking that PB means very different things, participatory institutions with very different aims and capacities.

The recent deployment of these devices and the lack of quantitative data, make it difficult to carry out systematic comparisons of the impacts of participatory budgeting in Europe (Sintomer et al., 2008). However, the book concludes that it is in the field of administration and public policy where greater outputs are observed. In contrast, the link between participation and social justice/redistribution seems to be weak. In a similar manner, the causal path from participation to the deepening of democratic culture is clearly weak if we compare it with the Brazilian experience. In this regard, there is a key difference among the PB in Western Europe and the Porto Alegre model: whereas the later had a two-way boost, where both social movements and local governments were involved (Santos, 2005), empirical evidence shows that most of European PB’s were powered from the top, without the support of grassroots...
movements backing it up. Does this mean that the involvement of social actors in the design and implementation of PB reinforces its outcomes in terms of social justice, redistribution and democratic culture? The authors are not conclusive in this respect but, in any case, this is a strong hypothesis which deserves further research. The value of PB itself depends —quite a lot— on its social transformative goals and effects.

The potential of participatory devices to foster transparency and accountability in the public sector are the issues in which the literatures on participatory democracy and administrative modernization have found synergy. According to the evidence presented in Sintomer and Ganzuza’s book, in European ground, the main transformations dumped by PB are those related to public administration culture and organisation. However, impacts seem to be modest and partial, not radical qualitative transformations (p. 169). In this subject, Sintomer et al. find evidence of the quality improvement in public services through the incorporation of local knowledge. They also identify an increasing of effectiveness and efficiency in service delivery through networks with the Third Sector organizations. Another positive impact would be the streamlining of communication circuits between administrators and citizens, besides a greater accountability in financial issues. In addition, PB has fostered the promotion of coordination and join-up government among administrative departments. Thus, we can say that in areas related to public effectiveness, efficiency and accountability, PB seems to produce positive outcomes.

In regard to the administrative culture, PB was a “breath of fresh air”, with officials reorganizing their organizational charts and task distributions; but it is also a crash among classic bureaucratic roles and the flexibility required by citizens’ intervention. Despite all these relevant findings, in the book, we miss a more detailed empirical analysis of the impacts and consequences of PB in the dynamics of local administration. Which are the chains of causality that lead to partial improvements or failures? But also, which are the obstacles and problems that participation poses to the current administrative culture and resources? As an starting point, Sintomer et al. face these questions in regard to European PB’s, and this is an important contribution to a literature which has recently fallen “from the heavens” to tackle with the real impacts and consequences of participatory politics. As Bherer (2011) has written in a recent literature review on participation and changes in public management, more comparative research —both qualitative and quantitative— is needed. And, in any case, the big question would be whether the participation of the “ordinary citizen” is transforming the administrative culture and in what sense it happens (Bherer 2011).

The international literature on participation has rarely considered simultaneously the scope of public administration modernization (Sintomer et al., 2008); but, inevitably, discussions on democratic innovation and administrative change run in parallel (Brugué, 2009). Alongside with Sintomer’s book, Fung (2004) gave us some clues about the changes in public administration produced by citizens’ participation. In what he calls “accountable autonomy”, Fung identified some patterns of change: for example, greater autonomy in operational
levels, more transparency and control by the public from below, increased innovation and dissemination of good practices, greater cross-fertilization and coordination between departments, and greater trust between actors facing common problems. On the other side, the challenges have been also remarked: participation can trigger distrust in the government, poor decisions, loss of control, or under-budget allocations for the effective implementation of the policy (Stansbury and Irving 2004). The advance of Sintomer and Ganuza’s book has been precisely to go beyond the previous piecemeal research to offer a more comprehensive view—despite their focus on PB. Actually, the comparative character of their study provides much more evidence on the achievements and obstacles at introducing participation in the administrative process.

The study of the problematic relation between the New Public Management and PB is also a strong point of the book. At a time when New Public Management (NPM) recipes are being implemented all around Europe, is participatory budgeting contradictory or complementary to them? Do they point to different paths of public sector modernization? For Sintomer and Ganuza, PB represents a “third way” in the modernization of public administration different from bureaucratism and mercantilisation (p. 162). In this sense, the role of citizens in the networks of administration is critical to understand the different models we are talking about. Can we talk about an active, empowered citizenship emerging from PB? Are citizens becoming active participants in some areas and public services, and passive consumers in others? The authors get evidence that PB has mainly encouraged “consumer” and “codecisor” roles rather than self-management and assessor ones. In Porto Alegre, self-management was decisive, especially in poor areas. There, citizens were involved in the whole process of public policing (from design to evaluation). In contrast, in most European experiences, citizens take part in decision-making with different intensities (codecisor role); or they are introduced as costumers using channels such as satisfaction surveys around the quality of goods and services (consumer role). But, beyond this fact, how do citizens and civil servants relate in each phase of public policing? Where does participation work best? We need more research to know how the logics of bureaucratism, mercantilisation (NPM) and participation are embedded in the daily functioning of public sector and the tensions among them. If we want to improve public services, courageous decisions must be taken in regard of different logics of deciding, working and producing public goods.

In summary, Sintomer and Ganuza’s book should be read because it is an ambitious contribution to the research on participation since it widens the comparative approach, poorly developed to the date. Secondly, this is an important contribution for its focus on public sector modernization. And, third, it is a very comprehensive radiography of participatory methodologies and its dilemmas in the current Western Europe. The branch of hypothesis and evidence that the authors find is a tempting invitation to continue the investigation on the field. Given the policy of cuts in public spending and the current attempts to reform the public sector, we really need to advance what happens when citizens’ preferences...
and knowledge come into the process of public production. What will be the future of participatory politics in the context of fiscal discipline? Real consequences and impacts will have to say a lot in the debate. In this respect, Sintomer and Ganuza have opened-up new windows, and we really feel invited to lean out and see what it lies beyond.

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PALMIRA PAYÀ
Institut de Govern i Politiques Públiques
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB)