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**Los efectos de la participación ciudadana en las políticas públicas locales\***

**Fabiola Mota (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid)**

[fabiola.mota@uam.es](mailto:fabiola.mota@uam.es)

**Carol Galais (Université de Montréal)**

[carolgalais@gmail.com](mailto:carolgalais@gmail.com)

**Pau Alarcón (IESA)**

[paualarcon@gmail.com](mailto:paualarcon@gmail.com)

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RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

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**Introduction**

An expansion of participatory mechanisms for elaborating public policies has developed during the last decades. This expansion, mainly at the local governmental level, seems to be related to two basic phenomena. First, the popularization of good practices that were outlined because of their extraordinary success, as the famous participative budgeting in Porto Alegre. This example, in particular, has become an object of benchmarking practices and has been replicated all over the world with more or less success. Second, the introduction of citizen participation as a “good governance” criterion. In this regard, the institutionalization of participation has been promoted by diverse actors –the European Union (see the Treaty of Lisbon) and the United Nations (see, for example, the local Agenda 21 action plans) between them. An impulse to the introduction of participatory mechanisms has been achieved in the elaboration of public policies at the local level, even if results have been globally different.

Some time has elapsed since the expansion of these participatory experiences during the 90s and the 2000s. Hence, it seems necessary to evaluate the public policies designed through citizen participatory mechanisms (policies that we call here “participated” policies). Does participation make any difference? Is the intensity of the citizen participation a variable that explains differences in the quality of the policy outputs?

An extensive revision of academic literature about direct democracy and citizen participatory mechanisms at the local level reveals that this field of study has received little attention until now. Normative political theories about deliberative democracy, direct and/or participative democracy (Barber, 1984; Habermas, 1991) have usually assumed a direct effect of citizen participation on the political process and the individual and collective benefits derived from that participation. In our view, this normative assumption implies the omission of a central question: what difference is introducing citizen participation into local political processes? How participation makes public policies different, or “better”? Do all kinds of participation produce the same effects on public policies? Are all areas of local governance equally susceptible to be affected by a participative process?

In short, because citizens’ participation in political decision-making processes is often considered a quality criterion *per se*,we lack empirical studies confirming or disconfirming this assumption. This study aims to find and provide empirical evidence to support the argument that the degree/intensity of participation produces differences with regard resulting policies. With this goal, we first start reviewing the literature on the alleged effects of participatory processes for putting forward some hypotheses regarding how participation makes an improvement in public policy output. In fact, our main hypothesis is that the more participated, the “better” (more plural, inclusive, responsive and accountable) are the resulting policies. In order to test so, we develop some indicators to verify the effects of the intensity of participation on the qualities of policies. Later on we present the comparative research strategy adopted for the Spanish case as well as the data collection and case selection strategies. Lastly, we discuss the main findings of some preliminary statistical analyses and conclude with a short assessment of the contribution made by this research to the study field of participatory policy.

1. **The consequences of participatory processes: citizens, society and public policies**

A participated public policy can be defined as a policy where we can identify some kind of direct citizen participation during the process of its elaboration (i.e., the public policy is an output of a participatory process, or a participatory process has been developed in order to identify the objectives or the actuations reflected in the public policy, for instance). Local participatory processes leading to participated public policies are supposed to generate effects in many directions. However, these effects have deserved much less attention than the participatory mechanisms themselves, that is, the tools that we employ to incorporate citizens to the decision-making processes –i.e. a referendum or a participatory budget. A growing set of empirical studies shows that the mere existence of direct democracy mechanisms can affect public policies (see Lupia and Matsusaka, 2004). In fact, local political participation transformative potential is a key issue in order to assess the quality of participatory processes (Subirats, 2005), showing certain existent confusion in the practice between participatory mechanisms characteristics and their external effects in the resulting policies.

Among the few empirical studies that have analyzed these impacts, we can distinguish three groups: 1) those which focus on the effects on citizens themselves (e.g., political behavior or attitudes) and other actors (including public administrations) involved in the mechanisms, as well as on the relations between them; 2) those studying the subsequent effects on society and institutions (socio-economic, with regards democracy, etc.); and 3) those concerned by effects on public policies. Our study belongs to the last group, clearly the least explored. Yet confirming a potential effect of participation on policies may be a first step to better understand the effects of participation on the whole society. Indeed, participation may not have a direct effect on these outcomes, but an indirect effect mediated by specific public policies.

*Effects on citizens*

The literature about the effects of participatory mechanisms on citizens considers participation as an experience of a new way of doing politics that will change participants. These researches have a limited view of the transformative effects of participation, as to experience an increase in political engagement (Michels and De Graaf 2010), political knowledge (Mendelsohn and Cutler 2000, Tolbert et al. 2003) or civic skills (Rocha Menocal and Sharma 2008, Michaels and De Graaf 2010, Fung 2003), to mention a few potential outcomes: individuals should have a direct involvement in the process at stake. Yet participatory processes are not usually massive. This strand of research, in short, disregards that the first and main goal of a participatory process conducted by a local government is to produce a public policy, which in turn may have extended effects on individuals and society.

*Effects on society*

The development of citizen participatory mechanisms impact on society has been extensively examined. But in general without considering how these participatory processes turned in the first place into concrete public policies that have generated those effects. The most analyzed consequences in that field could be grouped in three main categories: effects on 1) democratic system - adducing that positive dynamics are being generated by these mechanisms- (e.g. Fung 2003, Fagotto and Fung 2009, Sommerville and Haine 2008, Fölscher 2007a, Fölscher 2007b, Gerber 1996a, Gerber 1996b, Camobreco 1998, Lascher et al. 1996); 2) improvement in goods and services provision (e.g. Speer 2012, Shall 2007, Björman and Svensson 2009, McGee and Gaventa 2010); and 3) economic factors, generally correlating community development, public spending and redistribution with the participatory mechanisms (e.g. Pares et al. 2012, Serageldin et al. 2003, World Bank 2008, Marquetti 2003, Boulding and Wampler 2010, Fred and Savoioz 1997, Field and Matsusaka 2003, Schaltegger and Feld 2001, Blomberg et al. 2004, Matsusaka 1995 and 2000). Nevertheless, boundaries between these categories are not unequivocal and many studies address several factors at the same time. In sum, even though we can see that citizen participatory processes are associated to outcomes of different nature and in different contexts (there are studies focused on experiences located around the world), all these researches reinforce the claim that it is still relevant to look into the concrete link between participatory processes and these outcomes, i.e. the participation influence on public policies formulation and implementation.

*Effects on public policies*

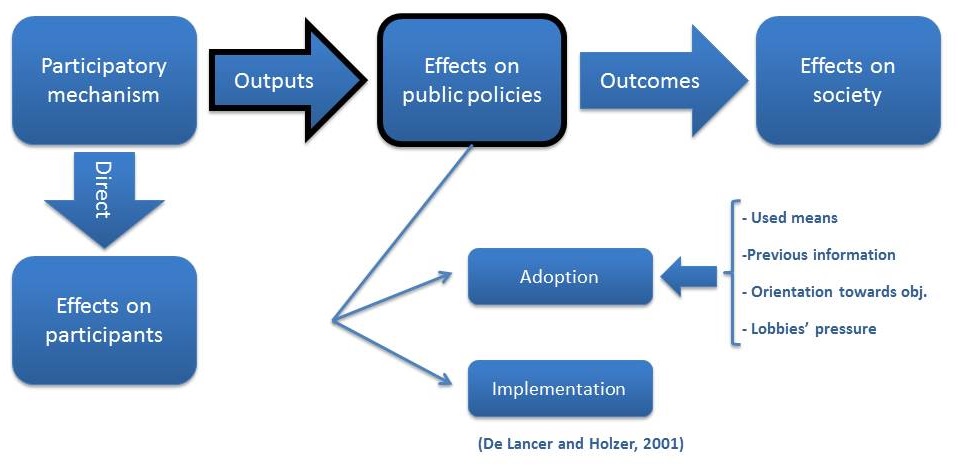
The literature review so far depicts a lack of attention to the effects of participation on the resulting public policies, although these are the first output of local participatory processes. In our view, this could be due to certain confusion between policies effects and design, i.e. between outcome and output, even if the former can be considered to some extent as a consequence of the latter. For a better understanding of what policy output involves it may be helpful the distinction between ‘adoption’ and ‘implementation’ made by De Lancer and Holzer (2001) with regards to the processes for start-up public management measures. The adoption phase is defined as the development of measures for the outputs, outcomes and efficiency. On the other hand, implementation phase refers to “the actual use of performance measures for strategic planning, resource allocation, program management, monitoring, evaluation and reporting to internal management, elected officials and citizens or the media” (2001:695). Our research focuses mainly on the adoption phase in order to check the possible effect of participation on the public policies design, although we will also look into the process of implementation for ascertaining that participation indeed affects public policies.

With regards to the factors influencing in adoption phase, Lancer and Holzer (2001) point to external and internal requirements, means in use, previous information or knowledge and orientation toward objectives, as well as lobbies pressure. Participatory processes should generate differences in these factors, as they supposedly entail a different decision-making style, with better and more information flowing between citizens and administration, maybe leading to different targeting priority and different scenarios for interests groups’ pressure. That is why it seems important to keep under control the degree of citizens’ involvement in the participatory mechanisms in terms of intensity of the individual participation.

As an exception of research directly addressing the effect of participation on public policies content, Gerber and Phillips (2005) compared the urban growth boundaries of 290 Californian cities decided through the ballet box to those decided through the usual parliamentary process. They show that direct democracy entails a systematic effect on the urban policies content, in the sense that they produce more extreme, restrictive, growth boundaries in relation to the previous status quo. Besides, these policies are more difficult to be revoked.

Figure 1 summarizes the alleged effects of participatory mechanisms in policy-making in individuals, and our focus on outputs (formulation and implementation) of public policies itself as a previous stage for ultimate effects on society and democratic governance.

**Figure 1: The forecasted effects of participatory mechanisms.**



Source: elaborated by the authors

1. **Research questions and Hypotheses**

For many reasons, local governments make an increasing use of participatory mechanisms in the policy decision making process. In general, it implies a sort of response to deficits in representative policy process. From this view, participatory processes help to solve at least four problems depicted in the representative model of policy making (Fung 2006): first, participatory processes increase citizens’ knowledge and help them to articulate individuals’ preferences regarding any policy issue at stake; second, it favours the articulation of citizens’ preferences and its accurate communication to political authorities; third, it incorporates more effective mechanisms of accountability than the electoral process; and fourth, it provides solutions to the increasing lesser capacity of state institutions for solving certain public problems. The latter involves to strengthen public capacities for problem-solving which is closely related to public policy outputs (policy formulation and implementation).

In this respect, the literature on public policy highlights the increasing limitation of state interventions for solving new and more complex collective problems that require cooperation and yet collaboration among state and non-state stakeholders. Many local problems, such as public security, children education and social services provision, require something more than an active consensus indeed; they often require a positive contribution (co-production) or even joint public decision making (co-governance) by beneficiaries as well as any citizen concerned. Moreover, the complexity of many social problems (multicausal and showing large variability across space and time) make them unwieldy by traditional bureaucracies (still arranged by policy areas despite the problems they tackle in its milieu, see Fung 2006: 681). Hence, participatory process can be very useful to overcome state capacity limitations to the extent that it may provide ideas, energy and resources from citizens and stakeholders, and it also may bring up new solutions and innovative strategies before complex problems (Booher and Innes 1999). That said, it is essential to take into account that participatory mechanisms required to overcome state capacity limitations probably demand a more intense involvement, and less extensive, than participatory mechanisms merely intended to clarify and convey citizens' preferences or even leverage mechanisms of public accountability (Fung 2006: 682). Therefore, the intensity of citizen involvement in participatory mechanisms becomes a crucial variable in order to explain the effects of participatory process on local public policies.

Therefore, our research question: are public policies involving more citizen participation at some point different to public policies barely (less) participated? In other words, is the effect of participation on policy outputs different depending of the intensity of the participation required by the participatory mechanism? More specifically, the main hypothesis we want to test is the following: The intensity of the participation matters. The more participated, the more effects in policies’ design and implementation regarding plurality, inclusiveness, responsiveness and accountability, which would latter translate in the aforementioned outcomes as depicted by previous research.

For testing the main hypothesis and the secondary that derive from it, we have developed a series of indicators in order to measure the outputs and our main independent variable, this is, the intensity of participation. At first, we proceed to enumerate the policy dimensions we will analyze and the concrete indicators for measuring them (see Table 1).

1. *Plurality of actors and views and inclusiveness*. Regardless of initial prospective and goals, we are concerned by the amount and variety of actors taken actually into account during the public policy implementation. On this respect, we will look to:

* Amount of actors considered in the implementation of the public policy (the more actors, the more plural). We consider here specific communities (i.e. parents, schools, the young, etcetera), associations, interest groups, unions, firms, political parties, etcetera.

*H1: The more intensive the participation involved in the participatory mechanism the more the participated policies should stand out for including more views, actors and stakeholders.*

* Particular observation also deserves the number of local departments involved in the policy formulation and implementation since the transversality of policies may be considered an indicator of policy innovation.

*H2: The more intensive the participation involved in the participatory mechanism the more the participated policies should stand out for concerning a higher number of local government departments.*

* Type of collaboration:The contribution of resources and ideas in policy making can take place in many ways, through collaboration like an expert, funding, economic management, provision of goods and/or services, monitoring or evaluation.

*H3: The more intensive the participation involved in the participatory mechanism, the more diverse types of stakeholder’s involvement in the policy implementation process.*

1. *Responsiveness*: Local public authorities should prove more responsive to citizen demands expressed through participatory processes.

* Broader external support: Policies issued from more intense participatory mechanisms should be more sensitive to the incorporation of previous demands of citizens and/or civil society. However, we can also sustain that given the ‘deliberative’ nature of more intense participatory mechanisms these may uncover new policy issues absent in the public agenda.

*H4: The more intensive the participation involved in the participatory mechanism the broader the external support of the policy (support coming from outside the participatory process).*

* Direct conversion of input in output: citizen preferences conveyed through the most intensive participatory mechanisms should be directly translated into public policies without further modifications by local authorities.

*H5: The more intensive the participation involved in the participatory mechanism lesser the modifications made by authorities to citizens’ policy proposals*.

1. *Accountability.* Participatory processes often incorporate new accountability mechanisms (Galais, 2010). As citizens get involved in the processes they may require from the authorities larger quotas of power, such as mechanism to monitor the process and watch that decision-makers do not deviate from citizens’ decisions. In other words, participants may push decision-makers to allow them to “control” their “investment” in terms of time and efforts. In the same vein, policies issued from more intense participatory mechanisms should be more likely to facilitate information about goals, costs, etcetera. In short, information shall be visible (i.e. available), abundant and complete (Papadopoulos and Warin, 2007; Gutmman and Thompson 1996; Galais, 2010). This facilitates holding accountable the local government for the management of the policy. It makes hence sense to consider that the more intense is the participatory process leading to a local public policy, the more accountable should be the political responsibles.

- Presence of monitoring (i.e. monitoring committee) and/ or evaluation mechanism incorporated in the public policy.

*H6: The more intensive the participation involved in the participatory mechanism more probably monitoring and/ or evaluation mechanisms have been incorporated in the implementation phase of the policy.*

* Existence of an available maindocument (a “plan”, a budget, a collection of guidelines and goals) which clearly states the decision-making process, the implementation of the decisions, etc. for the citizenry to monitor the development of the policy; and diffusionof the public policy once adopted.

*H7: The more intensive the participation involved in the participatory mechanism more the transparency and public diffusion of the whole policy process.*

**Table 1: Dimension of the public policies, related items and concrete questions carried out during the interviews.**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Dimension | Item | Question |
| 1 Plurality of actors and views and inclusiveness | Amount of actors | A collaboration of non-public organizations or associations of any kind was counted or planned in the implementation of the public policy? (a complete list of organizations is showed to the interviewed) |
| How many local government departments were concerned in the public policy design and implementation? (1,2,3, more than 3, no info) |
| Types of collaboration | What kind of collaboration? (consultation, funding, economic management, goods/services provision, monitoring, evaluation, other) |
| 2 Responsiveness | Previous demand | Does the policy correspond with a previous support from outside the participatory mechanism, before being approved by the local government? If yes, from who? |
| Modification | The citizen proposal has been significantly modified by local authorities? |
| 3 Accountability | Monitoring/evaluation | Was a monitoring (as a monitoring committee) and/or evaluative mechanism incorporated in the public policy approved by the local council? (it must be a mechanism different from the ordinary established mechanisms for all public policies by the local council) |
| Document existence | Can we find a document available in the Internet including information about that public policy?  If it exists, we will code how difficult it is to obtain it (easy: first Google page when introducing the name of the policy and the name of the municipality; medium: more than two Google pages, using different combinations of keywords or clicking more than 5 links; difficult: it is not available online but local government facilitated it to us; impossible: we could not have obtained it). |
| Diffusion | Was the public policy spread once approved or after its implementation? How? (low diffusion: online; medium: invitations to a key actors were sent; high: open public events and/or posters, local media or leaflets). |

Source: elaborated by the authors

**3. Research design and data collection strategy**

We focus on the Spanish case for a number of reasons. This Southern European country has also experience the “boom” of participatory experiences as standards for good governance. Yet, a recent research has confirmed that “beyond the general demand for responsive policies based on citizen preferences, there exists a substantial gap between the level of actual and desired citizen input in policymaking” (Della Porta et al. 2014: 198). Moreover, Della Porta and colleagues found in the framework of the MECPALO research that in most of the Spanish participatory experiences at the local level there was a positive view of participation, but the connection between participation and policymaking was rather ambiguous. Hence, there is a need for clarifying the link between participation and policy to better understand the final outcomes of these processes. Finally, we have had access to valuable data that track several participatory experiences and their policy outputs previously analyzed in the MECPALO international project. These inputs feature a reasonable amount of variation regarding areas of governance and participation intensity.

Following a most similar systems design, we intend to compare policies which have been elaborated with more and less intense participatory mechanisms. Initially 10 experiences were randomly selected for each one of the 4 main participatory mechanisms from the sampling frame of MECPALO Spanish database (the details of the database building process appear in Font and Smith, 2013[[1]](#footnote-1)), making a total of 40 local experiences: 10 Strategic Planning, 10 Participatory Budgeting, 10 Permanent Mechanisms and 10 Temporary Mechanisms, under the assumption that different mechanisms may entail different degrees (intensity) of participation. Soon afterwards we decided to leave aside the Strategic Planning experiences since their policies are so closely related to the participation logic that it could bias seriously any comparison[[2]](#footnote-2).

In order to finally select 10 participatory experiences, according to their degrees of participation, an *intensity index* was elaborated by taking into account the presence and values of a series of variables that previous literature relate with higher participatory quality (see, for instance, Font and Galais 2011). These variables are the presence of a facilitator and/or external consultancy, the intervention of experts, the level of information provided to participants, the number of stages of the policy process the participatory mechanism is addressed to[[3]](#footnote-3), and the number of participatory tools[[4]](#footnote-4). All these variables were recoded so as to range between 0 and 1 (see Table 2 below), then added and recoded using the same criterion[[5]](#footnote-5). Before ordering the 30 participatory experiences according to their scores in the participatory intensity index we removed the cases where information of at least 3 out of the 5 index’ indicators was missing. Among the remaining cases, we have selected the five scoring higher in our participation intensity index and the five scoring lower.

**Table 2: Variables used for building the intensity index and their punctuations.**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Variable** | **Cathegories** | **Value in intensity index** |
|
| Facilitator and/or external consultancy[[6]](#footnote-6) | Both present | 1 |
| One present | 0.5 |
| None present | 0 |
| Experts | Yes | 1 |
| No | 0 |
| Information level | Low | 0 |
| Medium | 0.5 |
| High | 1 |
| Number of stages | 0[[7]](#footnote-7) | - |
| 1 | 0 |
| 2 | 0.33 |
| 3 | 0.66 |
| 4 | 1 |
| 5 | - |
| Number of participatory tools | 1 | 0 |
| 2 or more[[8]](#footnote-8) | 1 |

Source: MECPALO database

So, our 5 participatory mechanisms with higher intensity scores and the five with the lower are displayed in the table 3.

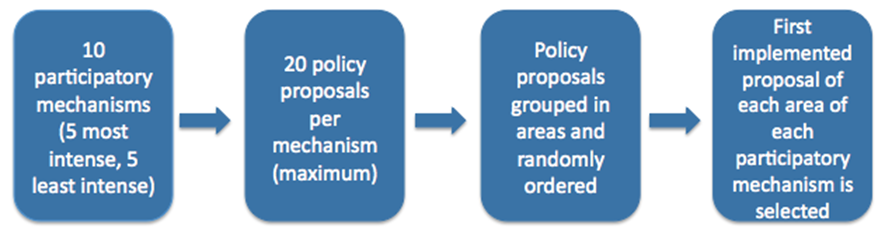
**Table 3.** **Number of participated policies per participatory mechanism and policy areas**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Municipality** | **Participatory mechanism** | **Intensity Score**  **CHERRY** | **Number of Participated policies** | **Policy areas\*** |
| Jerez de la Frontera | ‘Active Voluntary Work’ Forum for Voluntary Work Local Council creation | 1 | 1 | Citizen participation |
| Santa Cristina d’Aro | Participatory Budgeting | 0,73 | 7 | * Social Welfare * Sports, Youth, Leisure * Economy, Tourism * Environment * Citizen participation * ICTs * Urban Planning |
| Córdoba | Participatory Budgeting | 0,73 | 3 | * Culture * Environment * Transports |
| Santa Cristina d’Aro | Child Participatory Budgeting | 0,60 | 4 | * Culture * Sports, Youth, Leisure * Environment * Urban Planning |
| Parla | Women Sectorial Council | 0,50 | 2 | * Sports, Youth, Leisure * Citizen participation |
| Archidona | Participatory Budgeting | 0,23 | 1 | Urban Planning |
| Barberà del Vallès | Participatory Workshop for construction improvements in the Mil.lenari square | 0,20 | 2 | * Environment * Social Welfare |
| Jerez de la Frontera | Local Security Council | 0,13 | 3 | * Security * Social Welfare * Environment |
| Móstoles | Citizen Participation Sectorial Council | 0,07 | 1 | Social Welfare |
| Parla | Neigbourhood Councils | 0,0 | 4 | * Environment * Culture * Security |

Firstly, we needed to know whether the policy proposals made by citizens through these participatory mechanisms were finally implemented –and therefore became participated policies– or not. Then we proceeded in the following way: for each of these 10 local participatory experiences we had selected, we listed the policy proposals that were made by citizens during the process, selecting randomly up to a maximum of 20[[9]](#footnote-9) and we tracked them to determine whether they were finally implemented or not. In order to obtain such information, we carried out interviews asking for each one of the proposals to local public officers in charge of developing, adopting and implementing public policies, as well as to members of the local government, the opposition and participants[[10]](#footnote-10). The same fieldwork allowed us to review and complete our initial data (from MECPALO database) for the variables composing the participation intensity index, thus at the end we obtained an updated database with more complete information about the intensity of the participatory processes (named CHERRY database).

Secondly, we classified the policy proposals according to the local policy area they belong to. The Spanish Law 02/04/1985 regulating the bases of Local Government defines 26 different areas of action, such as tourism, welfare, employment and economic development, environment, etc. We have collapsed that classification generating 14 areas[[11]](#footnote-11). Following this taxonomy, we have grouped the policy proposals issued from each of our 10 finally selected participatory mechanisms (the five scoring higher and the five scoring lower in our participatory index). We decided to select a maximum of one policy proposal per area for each one of these 10 participatory mechanisms[[12]](#footnote-12). As we did not know if every proposal had been translated into a public policy (our unity of analysis), we randomly ordered these proposals within each area so that the first one being identified as implemented proposal during the fieldwork was our first option. If, during the interview to technicians of the local council, we found that this proposal had been implemented (or it was currently being implemented), the researcher asked the questions that translate into policy indicators (see questionnaire in Annex). If this proposal had been rejected or ignored by public administration, the next one was our target, and so on. See figure 2 for clarification about the final number of observations and case selection.

**Figure 2: Case selection: from participatory policies to implemented proposals.**



Thirdly, we did not expect to find one participated policy per area for each of our 10 participatory mechanisms[[13]](#footnote-13) and, in fact, the final number of units has been much smaller than 140, it is 28. Table 3 shows the final selection of our units of analysis and sorts out the 10 participatory mechanisms according to the recalculated intensity index from the CHERRY database.

**4. Data analysis for testing hypotheses**

We have carried out some statistical analysis for testing the hypotheses driving this research. Given the small number of cases and that most of our dependent variables –all of them concerning qualities of participated local policies- are not continuous, we have simply run correlations and bivariate logistic regressions between the independent variable –index of participation intensity- and each one of dependent variables. Where logistic regression applies, we have not included controls, but clustered standard errors by participatory mechanism, so as to avoid significant results that may actually be due to the experiences’ features. Following we present and discuss the main results.

*Plurality of actors*

*H1: The more intensive the participation involved in the participatory mechanism the more the participated policies should stand out for including more views, actors and stakeholders.*

Figure 3 displays the bivariate relationship between our index of participation intensity and the involvement of several actors. We do find a positive statistical correlation between the number of public and non-public organizations collaborating in the implementation of the participated policy (min=0, max=9) and the intensity index of the participatory mechanism (coefficient *r* de Pearson 0,46). Hence we cannot reject this hypothesis.[[14]](#footnote-14) More interesting yet, the involvement of only a few organizations is significantly more likely as the intensity of citizen participation increases: Participation organisms, consultant agencies and trade unions. Therefore, the participation of other types of stakeholders, such as civic associations, political parties and firms, does not increase with a higher intensity index.

**Figure 3. Pearson R values for actors’ involvement and index of intensity.**

*H2 The more intensive the participation involved in the participatory mechanism the more the participated policies should stand out for concerning a higher number of local government departments.*

We have also found some positive relationship between the index of participation intensity (measured as a dichotomous variable –the five most intensive mechanisms versus the five least intensive) and the number of local governmental departments concerned with the policy at stake (see results in table 4). This finding, although only statistically significant at the 90% confidence, allows us to keep the hypothesis about the transversality of local policies coming from most intensive participatory mechanism. This can be regarded as an evidence of the innovative effect of intensive citizen participation on policy output: it would contribute to overcome the more traditional bureaucratic process of policy design and implementation. Nevertheless, it is worth to note that the final cost or budgeted cost of these policies is lesser than the one of policies coming from lesser intensive participation (Pearson’s r= -0,919). This finding could be related to a common conclusion about the effects of citizen participatory mechanism on public policies: less public spending (Field and Matsusaka 2003, Blomberg et al. 2004, Matsusaka 1995 and 2000, Schaltegger and Feld 2001). However, it is also possible that public authorities underestimate the citizen policy proposals so that it explains a lesser public spending.

**Table 4: Logistic regression on policy ‘transversality’ and index of intensity**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Coef  (s.e) |
| Intensity (high vs. low) | .78+ |
|  | (.39) |
| Constant | 1.45\* |
|  | (.36) |
| Pseudo R-Squared | .16 |
| N | 140 |

Standard errors in parentheses

+ p<0.1, \* p<0.05, \* p<0.01

*H3 The more intensive the participation involved in the participatory mechanism more types of collaboration displayed by stakeholders in the policy implementation process.*

Given a list of possible forms of collaborations (expert advice, funding, economic management, provision of goods, monitoring, assessment and others) only the number of stakeholders involves in the policy assessment is positively correlated with the index of participation intensity (see figure 3). Nonetheless, this is a salient finding since policy assessment is essential for controlling the policy outcomes. To the extent that citizens and policy stakeholders are involved in formal and evidence-based procedures in order to assess whether the policy management or the economic, social or environmental effects of the public policy are as expected, it implies a better quality policy. Table 5 shows that a higher intensity index is especially correlated with the assessment type of collaboration by civic associations (neighborhood, youth, environmentalist, sportive, etc.), employers organizations, participatory organs and other public administration (no local).

**Table 5. Logistic regression on assessment collaboration and index of intensity**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) | (8) |
|  | Associa-tions | Unions | Private enterp. | Emplo-yer assoc. | Particip. Org. | Parties | Con-sultants | Public autho-rities |
| Intensity index | 3.22+ | .00 | 1.24 | 4.72\* | 3.80+ | -.40 | 6.57 | 2.90+ |
|  | (1.68) | (.) | (1.22) | (2.03) | (2.21) | (1.51) | (4.25) | (1.70) |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| \_cons | 1.02\* | -2.20 | -1.91\* | -6.20\*\* | -1.96 | .04 | -5.84+ | -2.61\* |
|  | (.35) | (1.56) | (.72) | (1.44) | (1.27) | (.54) | (3.18) | (1.08) |
| Pseudo R-Squared | .118 | .000 | .022 | .121 | .189 | .003 | .231 | .101 |
| N | 28 | 10 | 28 | 28 | 28 | 28 | 28 | 28 |

Standard errors in parentheses

+ p<0.1, \* p<0.05, \* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.001

*Responsiveness*

*H4 The more intensive the participation involved in the participatory mechanism the broader the external support of the policy (support coming from outside the participatory process).*

There is no correlation between policies issued from more intense participatory mechanisms and the incorporation of previous demands of citizens and/or civil society. Although this result may lead to discard the hypothesis stating that local policy decision making is more responsive to extended or visible social demands when participatory mechanisms involve higher intensity of participation, however we should not disregard the possibility that this kind of citizen participation contribute in a different way to the agenda setting: a larger and more accurate knowledge of community problems and citizen preferences could give rise to new policy issues disregarded till then. This alternative hypothesis cannot be tested with our data but it requires further empirical research.

*H5 The more intensive the participation involved in the participatory mechanism lesser the modifications made by authorities to citizens’ policy proposals*.

We have also collected information about the conversion function from input to output, it means, the extent to which the citizen policy proposal coming from a participatory mechanism keeps being the same during the design and implementation processes. In our view, this information too provides a measurement of the degree of local authorities’ responsiveness since it shows a more or less direct translation of citizen preferences into public policy. Nevertheless, only 3 proposals were described as modified. These modified proposals indeed come from less participated processes, although the numbers are not high enough to yield significant statistical relationships.

*Accountability*

H6 *The more intensive the participation involved in the participatory mechanism more probably monitoring and/ or evaluation mechanisms have been incorporated in the implementation phase of the policy*.

We sustain that a key indicator of public policy quality is the presence of formal mechanisms for holding policy implementers accountable for their activities. Perhaps the most usual monitoring mechanism is the presence of a monitoring committee composed by representatives of the various policy stakeholders (public and private) which monitor the actions of the bureaucratic agents who implement and enforce the policy. Likewise, policy evaluation mechanisms allow policy stakeholders to check the effects of the policy implementation in such a way that, for example, unforeseen consequences may be managed through subsequent changes to be made in the policy implementation program. However, we do not find statistical evidence supporting this hypothesis, that is to say, there is no significant relationship between the index of intensity and the presence of policy monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Consequently we cannot assert that public authorities are more accountable when participatory mechanisms involve a more intense citizen participation.

*H7 The more intensive the participation involved in the participatory mechanism more the transparency and public diffusion of the whole policy process.*

Closely related with mechanisms of policy accountability are two aspects of public policy decision making and implementation: information transparency and diffusion. There are at least two reasons why we might expect more transparency and diffusion of public policies elaborated through participatory mechanisms with high participation intensity: firstly, when citizens are compelled to spend more time and to pay more attention in a participatory mechanism, in turn they will ask for the maximum information availability concerning the policy at stake; secondly, public authorities themselves are supposed to have a bigger compromise with citizens in exchange of their higher involvement in public decision making.

In fact we do find a positive and statistically significant relationship between a dichotomous version of our participatory intensity index and the availability of any public document about the policy on the web.[[15]](#footnote-15) Actually we have taken into account how difficult or easy it is to obtain this kind of information in the internet (see Table 6 below). More specifically, policies stemming from less participatory mechanisms are more likely to produce no documentation. Likewise, the degree of public diffusion is also related to the level of participation intensity index so that the higher the intensity the higher the diffusion of the public policy (not only online but also through open public events, local media and so on) (see Table 7 below).

**Table 6. Documentation and intensity (high/low)**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Low intensity** | **High intensity** | **Total** |
| **Public documentation exists, available online** | 4  (26.4) | 4  (23.5) | 8  (28.6) |
| **Public documentation, not available online** | 1  (9.1) | 13  (76.5) | 14  (50) |
| **Public documentation not available** | 6  (54.6) | 0 | 6  (21.4) |
| **Total** | 11  (100) | 17  (100) | 28  (100) |

Chi2: 15.7, Pr=0.000. Cell numbers are observed frequencies. Column percentages shown in parentheses.

**Table 7. Diffusion and intensity (high/low)**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Low intensity** | **High intensity** | **Total** |
| **Diffusion** | 6  (54.6) | 17  (100) | 23  (82.1) |
| **No diffusion** | 5  (45.5) | 0 | 5  (17.9) |
| **Total** | 11  (100) | 17  (100) | 28  (100) |

Chi2: 9.41, Pr=0.000. Cell numbers are observed frequencies. Column percentages shown in parentheses.

In sum, the preliminary statistical analysis allow us to assert that the intensity of citizen participation in any participatory mechanism makes a difference in the public policy output. In particular, a more intensive involvement give rise to public policies more plural and inclusive - more policy actors involved in the policy design and implementation-, with more responsiveness - more direct translation of citizen proposal into policy output- and more transparency and diffusion of information.

1. **Preliminary conclusions**

Does participation make any difference in the quality of local public policies? The findings of this research allows us to answer it does. On the one hand, we have found that participatory mechanisms involving a higher degree of citizen participation (due to their attendance to expert sessions and consultant hearings, the burden of information received, the number of policy stages in which they get involved and the number of specific tools applied such as questionnaire, workshops, jury, etcetera) have an effect on different aspects of the policy output: stakeholders' plurality and inclusiveness, local authorities responsiveness and information transparency. Therefore we may expect better public policies coming from more intensive participatory mechanisms. It must be highlighted that this results support Fung’s thesis about the requirement of a high degree's citizen involvement in order to overcome limitations of traditional public administration apparatus in dealing with new and more complex social problems and demands (Fung 2006). Larger diversity of policy stakeholders and several local government departments get involved in this kind of policies. Moreover, the function of policy assessment is more often carried out by all kind of actors involved in the implementation phase (even though particularly by civic associations, employer organizations, participatory organs and non-local public administration). It is also very remarkable that participated policies produced by the most intense participatory mechanisms make a more direct or accurate translation of citizen proposals into policy output, which may be regarded as an evidence of greater public authorities responsiveness. Lastly, public transparency in the access to and diffusion of information about the public policy are necessary conditions for citizens to keep public authorities accountable.

On the other hand, however, we obtain some paradoxical results, especially that participated policies coming from the most intense participatory mechanisms do not incorporate particular mechanisms of monitoring nor evaluation. It brings into question the alleged direct effect of participation upon accountability. It could also be that formal procedures of monitoring and evaluation are not put in place but some informal procedures may be working. We do not have empirical evidence to test this hypothesis that would require further empirical research. In the same line, we have found that policies drawn from the most intense participatory mechanisms cost less than the others, that is, the public spending is less. This could be either an evidence of greater public efficiency (as many empirical researches on the effects of citizen participation have assured) or simply a proof of local government low investment in citizen policy proposals which are not largely supported outside the participatory mechanism. Once more we lack empirical evidence to test this new hypothesis.

Consequently this research contributes to support empirically some basic claims of the literature on the effects of citizen participation upon public policies meanwhile it arises new questions and hypotheses for further research.

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1. In that paper details of sample selection are provided in relation to 30 cases belonging to a 3-region database with participatory mechanisms collected through Internet data mining. A similar selection for the other 10 cases was carried out to select the 10 cases coming out of an Andalusian database. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The inclusion of these mechanisms could imply an important bias for our research. Because of their idiosyncrasy, Strategic Planning mechanisms are elaborated with more technical instruments and means than any other policy, and participation in implementation is often inherently incorporated as an objective of the plans themselves. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The stages are diagnosis, programming, decision, implementation and evaluation. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The participatory tools are the use of focus groups, specific convention, workshops, forum/convention, open meeting, citizen jury, participatory diagnose, brainstorming, ICTs, questionnaires, interviews and others. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The information for the participatory processes (areas of management, as well as participatory mechanisms or participatory intensity indicators) comes from previous MECPALO research. Information was obtained by means of online questionnaires, personal interviewing and Internet data mining to the responsible of more than 300 local participatory experiences between 2008 and 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. If no information is available for both variables, it is considered as a missing value. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. 0 and 5 values are not computing for the index because any of the 40 cases have those values. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The initial Catalonia database only allowed a maximum of 2 participatory tools, so we have grouped this category for the rest of regions. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. For the sake of simplicity we consider each decision adopted by citizens and implemented afterwards as policies, and as if they were independent and clearly distinguishable realities even if they come out from the same local participation processes (Font and Smith, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. This information was collected through a specific questionnaire that was applied to 611 policy proposals that came out of 39 participatory processes taking place in 25 localities. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. 1 Social Welfare, 2 Education, 3 Health, 4 International Relations, 5 Culture, 6 Sports, Youth and Leisure, 7 Economy and Tourism , 8 Public Administration, 9 Environment, 10 Citizen Participation, 11 Transportation, 12 Security, 13 Information and communications technology (ICT), 14 Urbanism. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. This yields a maximum of (10\*14) 140 proposals to analyze. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Pilot studies revealed that some of our initial 10 participatory processes only had proposals belonging to 1 to 4 areas. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. An OLS regression estimating the number of actors involved in the proposal implementation (recoded from 0, none, to 1, the maximum number) with robust standard errors (clustered by participatory mechanism) yields a coefficient for the effect of the participatory index of 1.03 significant at p<0.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. To create this collapsed version we have simply split the original index, ranging from 0 to 1, in two. Values under 0,5 are coded as low participation, value 0.5 and below are coded as high participatory intensity. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)