The policy effects of participation: Cherry-picking among local policy proposals?

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Abstract: Participatory processes developed at the local level have received considerable attention. Surprisingly though, one of their potential main effects – their impact on public policies – has been the object of scant systematic research. While some of these participatory processes have only a loose connection to the policy process, even amongst those that are more policy oriented the general impression is that they have only limited impact on final policies. One of the possibilities is that politicians and officials cherry-pick from amongst the proposals emerging from these participatory processes, adopting only those more favourable to their own interests. The goal of the paper is twofold. First, we offer a theoretical model that aims to explain both the types of policies and the types of participatory processes that are more likely to be excluded and adopted as a result of a cherry-picking orientation. Second, we sketch a proposal on how to operationalize this model through a dataset of policy proposals emerging from a range of participatory processes developed in three Spanish regions.

Introduction[1]

What do we know about the extent to which proposals from participatory processes have had an impact on the decision making of political authorities? The evidence base is scant. As Baiocchi, Heller and Silva (2011: 1) recognise, this strand of research has suffered from at least two limitations: "It has been difficult to actually isolate the impact of participation and to determine how and why participation makes a difference".

Where large-scale studies exist, they have tended to find relatively limited impact. In the UK, Lowndes and her colleagues discovered that 'only one-third of local authorities felt that public participation had a significant outcome on final decision making' (Lowndes *et al.* 2001: 452). Evidence from the Audit Commission comes to similar conclusions finding that three-quarters of authorities surveyed had failed to effectively integrate the results of consultation with decision-making processes (Audit Commission 1999: 41). Investigating user involvement in health and local authorities in the UK, Crawford and his colleagues could find very few examples of where citizen participation has actually led to improvements in services or changes in policy (Crawford *et al.* 2003). A similar scenario of infrequent and problematic relationships between participation through interactive policy-making and final decisions also appears in the Dutch case (Klijn and Koppenjan, 2000; Tatenhove, Edelenbos and Klok, 2010).

It is through case studies of particularly celebrated cases where impact tends to be found. The case of Porto Alegre participatory budgeting is one such example where there is evidence of significant changes in the distribution of municipal budgetary resources (Baiocchi, 2005). However, even in this case, the clearest evidence points more to other kinds of results focused on civil society empowerment and new forms of more participatory policy styles (Baiocchi, Heller and Silva, 2011). While there are examples of the impact of participatory budgeting in other locations, some of the most rigorous comparative evidence points to less policy change (and other effects) than expected (Boulding and Wampler, 2009).

In an analysis of various mini-publics, Goodin and Dryzek (2006) found it extremely difficult to provide concrete examples of impact on decision-making beyond the oft-celebrated British Columbia Citizens' Assembly (BCCA). Even in Denmark where consensus conferences are organised by the Board of Technology there is no guarantee of influence: there is evidence that the recommendations of the consensus conference on genetic engineering in industry and agriculture led to the exclusion of transgenic animals from the first governmental biotechnology research and development program (Klüver 1995: 44); but plenty of other examples were proposals had little or no effect (Joss 1998). Claims abound that planning cells have had fairly significant effects at the local and regional level in Germany, although 'independent evaluations are scarce' (Hendriks 2005: 92). Again, Fishkin makes strong claims about the impact of

deliberative polling. One of his favoured examples is that results of deliberative polls run for Texas utilities 'led to further investments in natural gas (which was regarded as relatively clean) and in renewable energy. In fact, the decisions resulting from the Deliberative Polls made Texas a national leader in renewable energy' (Ackerman and Fishkin 2004: 46). However, a more cautious assessment states that 'it would be disingenuous to suggest that the results of the deliberative polling process alone were responsible for the regulatory and legislative changes that followed' (Lehr et al 2003 quoted in Goodin and Dryzek 2006: 9).

In a recent assessment of the policy impacts of forms of deliberative civic engagement, Barret et al (2012) highlight a small number of successful processes, including the long-term impact of the Keiki Caucus in Hawaii, before offering more detailed evidence of the policy impact of the Local Health Councils in São Paulo and the national public consultations on pandemic influenza planning in Canada. But this largely sympathetic overview acknowledges that systematic evidence is lacking and that the conditions that favour a larger policy effect are unclear. Other positive assessments of the policy impacts are mostly based on perceptions of politicians or local administration personnel (Blanco, 2011, Parés and Resende, 2009), which are likely to be overly optimistic. In sum, while there are a small number of exemplary examples of individual cases where policy effects are clear and unambiguous, attempts to provide a more inclusive analysis across the field suggest limited and unsystematic effects (Mazeaud et al, 2012). We are left with the general impression that we are a long way short of participation fulfilling its promise of policy transformation.

Why is this the case? What do we know about the reasons why many proposals never materialize as policies? Our aim is to help fill the gap in knowledge of the factors that help explain this lack of effect and its variation across different contexts. Thus, our theoretical contribution has two main goals. First, we discuss the relationship between proposals and policy outcomes, identifying the different potential fates of proposals in the policy process (section 2). Second, we review a number of the potential explanations of the fate of proposals: factors that may account for why some proposals are more successful than others (section 3). Finally, section 4 sketches an operationalization proposal to develop an empirical test of this model.

1. The proposal to policy process[2]

Many ideas and proposals come out of a participatory event, but only a few are ever formally approved by the sponsoring authority. This set of approved proposals is the starting point of our journey. Such proposals may be extraordinarily diverse, in different aspects like the degree of specificity of the proposals (from paving a section of a road to promote social justice), the

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[2] We are aware that policy formulation is really a much more complicated process in constant redefinition. However, for the sake of simplicity (which is relatively realistic in the case of many of the specific policy proposals that come out from local participation processes) we will consider each policy decision as if they were independent and clearly distinguishable realities. Also, since our approach is based on proposals, it will mostly deal with the formulation or decision phases of public policies, even if in some cases these proposals may also appear during diagnosis or evaluation situations.

number (from one to hundreds coming out from a single process) or the formality of the procedure to "approve" them within the event (from voting to simply collecting within the minutes of the meeting all the ideas that have been formulated). This diversity by itself may be reason to comprehend their different fate: it is easy to understand that a single proposal supported by an overwhelming majority of the members of a community in a ballot has a much higher likelihood of being adopted that one of seventy ideas that emerged from a two hour meeting involving twenty participants.

However, there are many steps that need to be considered between the emergence of a set of proposals from a participatory event and the hoped for societal transformation. Figure 1 shows some of the possible trajectories that these proposals can follow. As the figure indicates, only one of the possible trajectories ends up producing social change. This paper concentrates on the left part of the figure – in other words, we will not discuss the many reasons why policy outputs may not result in certain policy outcomes, but the reasons why particular policy proposals are adopted by public authorities, whereas others are not.[3]

(Figure 1 about here)

Many participatory processes end up in a dead end once the participatory momentum finishes and participants go back home. This is the case, for example, with many of the citizen juries organised by Spanish local government, where lack of involvement (and thus oversight) of local associations and disinterest on the part of local media and opposition parties have often resulted in silence and lack of action by local authorities. Font and Blanco (2007) report on the fate of the recommendations from a number of Catalan juries: two sets of proposals abandoned by the new local government; three cases where there was no action because of apparent political and/or technical difficulties with the proposals; and three cases of policy proposals being implemented (in 2 cases partially, the other fully). In most of these cases, there are no obvious distinctions in terms of the types of proposals coming out from the processes; it is the whole package that is forgotten. Font (2003) suggests that institutional design matters and that some type of processes (e.g., referenda) may be better equipped than others to exercise real influence.

In other cases, some of the proposals end up converted into policies, whereas others are either explicitly rejected or simply abandoned, for reasons including those listed in Figure 1: the proposal openly contradicts previous decisions of the municipality; technical problems appear when the details are examined; or, simply, since the process had ended in a long list of proposals, the local government chooses only a few of them (Font, 2003: 139). The detailed analysis of the proposals from the Seville participatory budgeting process during the 2005-2009 period exemplifies these trajectories: according to the evaluation (Barragán et al, 2011) between 75% and 80% of the approximately 14,000 proposals had been executed in the years following their approval; 3% of the proposals were rejected because either they were technically inappropriate or the local administration was not in charge of this policy; 2% were not incorporated as such into

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[3] For a discussion of the factors in the right part of Figure 1 applied to participatory budgeting, see Boulding and Wampler (2009).

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the official local budget, because they were already planned and as such, somehow incorporated into the budget; and another 15% belonged to a group called "suggestions" since they were general ideas that could not be translated into a specific policy with its own budget.

This is an interesting case because it is rare to find so detailed a follow-up of a large number of proposals. It shares many characteristics of the paradigmatic cases, the "participatory elite" of engagement processes that have significant political support and funding and are therefore a poor representation of the "average" process (Font, Della Porta and Sintomer, forthcoming). For example, the Seville case has officially no proposals rejected for political reasons, which is likely to be a rare phenomenon in most other cases[4].

There is a tendency to assume that a policy proposal has a dichotomous fate: adopted or not. However, the reality is likely to be more complicated. First of all, we have to clarify what counts as adoption. There are a number of options that might be considered as (or at least an aspect of) adoption:

1. Immediate response by the organizing authority to the participatory process (for example at the conclusion of the participatory event)
2. Formal acceptance by the municipality of proposals (i.e. at an executive or legislative body meeting)
3. Appearance of proposal in the relevant department's policy documentation
4. Appearance of proposal in the relevant department's programme of work (if a specific project)
5. Actual implementation of proposal.

Secondly, many proposals are likely to suffer significant changes during the process of adoption by public authorities. Occasionally, policy proposals from a participatory process may take a quite detailed form that leaves little discretion when it comes to adoption. While there is no research confirming this hypothesis, most proposals are likely to be less detailed, such that their final adoption leaves plenty of room for incorporating changes that significantly alter the intentions of the proposal or allow for partial adoption.

Third, adoption is not the only way for a policy proposal to be successful. Agenda-setting has long been recognised as a powerful way to influence policy-making and societal outcomes. For example, there is plenty of evidence from Switzerland that unsuccessful initiatives have led to reactions from within the political elite. Further, Gamson's (1990) typology of protest outcomes includes recognition and voice as an important outcome that protest group may achieve. Policy proposals can be (at least partially) successful though recognition without being finally implemented. For example, the Citizens Assemblies' proposals of electoral reform in Canada and

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[4] The authors report that for 150 proposals it was impossible to find any documentation to know whether they had been followed up or not (Barragán et al, 2011). However, this remains a very small number (1% of the proposals). This does not mean that Seville is a participatory paradise: these proposals concern a relatively small amount of the local budget and the political goals of the governing left majority were probably represented through the large rate of participation in the process by its supporters (Talpin, 2011).

the Netherlands never converted into effective policies, but they received quite clear recognition from public administrations (Fournier et al, 2011)[5].

The incorporation of these ideas into the analysis of the impact of individual proposals from participatory processes means that there could be a number of possible outcomes:

1. Proposal is accepted and adopted without major changes
2. Proposal is considered, but modified
   a) With no explanation / justification by public authority
   b) With explanation / justification by public authority
3. Proposal is considered, but rejected with explanation / justification by public authority
4. Proposal is not considered or it is rejected without explanation by public authority

While useful analytical distinctions, in reality, the differences between proposals considered or not and explained or not is likely to be blurred. In some cases, there may be more formalised procedures that put into practice these consideration and explanation procedures (official documents, press conferences), but in many cases this is likely to be an informal process which is difficult to indisputably identify.

In sum, all the processes described up to this point are ones where many policy proposals reach the local administration desk, but only a certain amount of them evolve into actual policies. Is there any logic in this selection process? Do politicians cherry-pick (Smith, 2001; 2009: 93) among the processes or among the proposals? In cases where they do, is there an obvious explanatory logic? The next section will discuss the factors that can facilitate or diminish the likelihood that a given policy proposal will end up becoming a policy finally adopted by the municipality.

2. Explanatory factors

The previous discussion has given some clues about the types of factors that may shape the fate of a policy proposal from a participatory process. We can distinguish two basic types of explanations: contextual or policy-related. Contextual explanations are those that have an effect on any proposal that emerges from a given participatory process, i.e. those explanations that would affect equally the sixteen proposals coming out from the Terrasa participatory budget of 2010. Such explanations could relate to the characteristics of the municipality (e.g., extremely constrained budget, local government extremely supportive to any participatory proposal) or to the characteristics of the specific participatory devices (e.g. highly visible or legally binding). In comparison, policy related explanations are those that are specific to each of the policy proposals, including factors such as their cost, the degree of social polarization that the proposal creates or the place of the issue on the local agenda.

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[5] In the Netherlands they were formally received by the Secretary of State. In Canada, they converted into referenda, where the proposals for change were defeated in all cases (Fournier et al, 2011).

2.1. Contextual factors

The first group of contextual factors relates to characteristics of the municipality. Among these we find the broader <u>organisational culture</u> of the institution and the way that this embeds a commitment to participation. Cooper and Smith offer the example of health authorities in the UK that have been in the vanguard of engaging the public. They found that more than one practitioner warmly recounts the pleasure of working with the Department of Health where experience of public participation 'transformed them… suddenly they stop designing policy in an ivory tower on behalf of people and they start designing it with real people, and their language is different' (Practitioner quoted in Cooper and Smith 2012: 26). Contrast this with the German experience where 'the Department of Health had a different attitude. They are professors and doctors of medicine, and it's one of the last parts of our culture where there is real hierarchy and where people think they know better' (ibid). The culture of different public authorities within a single country can vary widely in relation to public participation, an idea that Barrett et al (2012: 186) develop through their concept of embeddedness in the community of practice. These differences can even appear among different departments within the same authority, creating issue-specific organisational cultures. For example, in Spanish local government a participatory culture has more often been introduced in departments dealing with social issues, but only in a few cases into the central urban planning departments.

The German example of health authorities or the Dutch cases discussed in Tatenhove et al (2010) highlight the way in which public officials can be highly resistant to participation (Crawford et al 2003). While policies may promote participation, the attitude and practice of staff can be an obstacle for successful engagement. There is a commonly held belief in many agencies that citizen involvement is not suitable for strategic level decisions – these require, for example 'professional knowledge, managerial authority and political representation' rather than citizen participation (Newman et al 2006: 210). The public is too often viewed negatively as 'passive consumers; as a naïve, childlike and clamorous public; and/or as lacking skills, capacities or trust' (ibid). There is often a belief that participation will unrealistically raise expectations of citizens. However, it is more likely that citizens' low expectations of participation 'present a greater challenge for those pursuing democratic renewal' (Lowndes et al 2001: 453).

Another potentially important factor does not relate to the characteristics of the institution itself, but with the <u>timing</u> of the participatory process**.** Cooper and Smith highlight the impact of political change on the fate of proposals, in particular the effect of the electoral cycle: a change in political leadership means that public participation organized under a previous regime is viewed with suspicion and generally ignored. Ruing the fate of one project, a German practitioner recalls that 'after a report there was an election. The situation in a city changed. The new politicians distanced themselves from the report, and there was frustration on the side of the people working on it' (Cooper and Smith 2012: 27-28). While new elections that result in changes in government are very often a threat for on-going participatory processes, this risk becomes even larger when the attitude of the different parties towards the process has been confrontational. For example, in their analysis of outcomes of Spanish citizens' juries, Font and Blanco (2007) provide evidence that in the two cases where the proposals were completely abandoned, not

only was there a change in government, but also the opposition had overtly boycotted the participatory process from the very beginning. More generally, the idea that time matters has appeared elsewhere, indicating that the timing of the participatory process in the policy cycle can be highly influential in its final results (Barrett et al, 2012; Font and Blanco, 2006; Weiksner et al, 2012). Access to finances could be another timing related considerations that has an influence, especially if external public funding is available to be spent in a given area and in a given time period, so that some kind of decision has to be reached.

We have reasonably strong evidence that the <u>ideology</u> of governing parties can have an influence on the embedding of participatory processes. The most commonly cited example is from Brazil, where the emergence and sustenance of participatory budgeting has been strongly tied to the fate of the Left-wing Workers Party (PT) (Baiocchi 2005). But there is a general tendency to view participation as a left-of-centre practice, although this may relate to particular types of participation. Certainly in the UK, new public management (very much a creation of the Right) has led to increased public participation in relation to quality of service delivery. This research tends to focus on the *creation* of participatory spaces: whether that apparent ideological bias affects the *uptake* and *selection* of proposals from participatory processes is very much open to question.

Another important contextual factor will be the <u>availability of resources</u>, mostly economic ones (although also human resources to support the process). The successful story of the Porto Alegre case and its distinctiveness from other Brazilian cases has often been attributed to the availability of funding: the city was wealthier than others and the process started with a significant tax raise that provided additional resources (Baiocchi, 2005). More recently, Boulding and Wampler (2009) have explained the limited effects of participatory budgeting in other cities by pointing precisely to the limited funds that many of them had available for these programs.

A final consideration relates to the general claim within democratic theory that size matters: that participation is easier to organise and is more effective at smaller scales (Dahl 1998: 110). Numerous studies of urban politics, for example, highlight how it is easier to incorporate citizens into more decentralised structures of governance. Whether such integration leads to increased adoption and less cherry-picking remains an open question, but we might well expect the size of <u>population</u> of a municipality to have an effect on the fate of proposals.

The second set of important contextual variables in explaining outcomes, relates to the design of the participatory process. Several aspects of this design may be strongly influential. The first is the <u>relationship between the participatory process and formal decision-making</u>. Fung (2006) has distinguished between 5 categories of potential influence, from those processes that have direct authority to those where citizen's role is purely symbolic since their link to policy-making is not established. For example, a series of deliberative experiments funded by the European Commission following the failure to agree a new constitution were not integrated into any specific decision process – it was not clear who was to act on proposals (Smith 2013). A similar scenario appears in many of the processes that are mostly developed for academic research and

where public authorities have often no direct linkage to the process[6]. At the other end of the spectrum are a limited number of processes where direct effect (or authority) is built into the design: the public authority has accepted that whatever proposal emerges from the process will be implemented. Examples include:

- Direct legislation that allows citizens to challenge existing policy (typically known as popular referendum, abrogative initiative or facultative referendum) or put forward a new policy proposal (typically known as an initiative). In both cases a specified number of citizens are required to support a proposal that is then is put to a binding popular vote (Smith 2009: 112-13; Papadopoulos, 1998).
- Variants of participatory budgeting in which decisions about the distribution of the budget are made by the citizens participating in the process themselves (Smith 2009: 33-39; Baiocchi et al , 2011).
- Municipalities that are governed through a New England town meeting assembly incorporate direct decision making on a range of issues beyond the local budget (Bryan, 2003).

Such designs that offer popular control to citizens and thus have direct effect on the decision-making process are relatively rare in the ecology of participatory processes. Most designs provide public authorities with discretion to decide whether they will accept proposals. In that sense, most designs tend to be some form of consultation. An intermediate situation appears in cases where a requirement for public explanation by public authorities is designed into participatory processes. In Germany, Dienel (the creative force behind planning cells) developed the practice of drawing up a contract between the commissioning body, the organisers and the participants of planning cells, requiring the former to explain within a certain time frame how it has responded to the recommendations of the citizens' report. Such contracts were developed to lessen the possibility that public authorities respond selectively to proposals: to 'cherry-pick' those recommendations or trends in opinions that support their perspective while ignoring those that are uncomfortable. The use of contracts has been picked up by the organisers of other participatory innovations, in particular citizens' juries, although in reality it still leaves a great deal of room for manoeuvre on the part of sponsors (Smith 2009: 93).

Another process related factor that is likely to have an effect is whether the process is the exclusive result of political will of the authority or whether this has been constrained by a varied set of external forces. One of them is the extent to which the local administration is organising participatory processes as a matter of choice or whether it is the result of external pressures. For example, within the UK, there is plenty of evidence that the outputs of participatory processes were not seriously considered because they were organising under duress; because there is a requirement for public participation rather than a desire on the part of public officials. In many

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[6] This is the case of many Deliberative Opinion Polls or of other participatory experiments developed mostly with academic goals (e.g., Cuesta et al, 2008; Grönlund, Setala and Herne, 2010). In this paper we are assuming that proposals coming out from participatory processes have decision-makers as their final audience, but in the case of Deliberative Opinion Polls (Fishkin, 1995) connected to referenda or in other processes like the Oregon Citizen's initiative review (Gastil and Knobloch, 2011), the messages are addressed to the general electorate.

policy areas there is a climate of compulsion, where authorities are required to consult in particular areas of competence. Here 'public bodies are required to engage in public participation exercises, but do so reluctantly – they are, if you like, dragged kicking and screaming to the deliberative table' (Barnes et al 2007: 192).

Theoretically speaking, something similar could happen if the pressure to organise the process comes from civil society or as a result of an open and visible conflict that has to be solved: a reluctant government would have organised an engagement process, but may well later ignore its proposals. However it is also likely that if civil society has the power to affect the establishment of a participatory process, it will also have sufficient influence to at least pressurise the authority to provide some response to the proposals. The empirical results of Font and Galais (2011) based on local initiatives developed in Catalonia offer evidence that those processes that have been jointly organised by authorities and civil society tend to be, at the very least, more connected to the policy making process. We do not know which is the specific mechanism that links this role of civil society with the potential larger influence on policy, but one of the alternatives is that when a government is not the single actor organising a participatory process, there would be an enlarged need to take things seriously, to be transparent about goals and objectives of the project. If this was the case, this co-operation effect could extend beyond civil society and appear in any process jointly organised by several political actors.

Other general aspects of the process design may also be influential. For example, the <u>visibility</u> of a participatory process can increase its policy impact. We discussed above the influence of binding referenda, but even those that are legally consultative in character end up being more influential than many other participatory processes (Papadopoulos, 1998). Their high visibility and the legitimacy[7] that using rules and rituals similar to those of electoral processes (e.g., universal suffrage or secret vote) provide are likely to have an influence, so that the more public and well-known the process, the more difficult it is to ignore its policy recommendations.

From this point of view the media are very important. There is plenty of research that displays a frustration that the media shows little interest in participation exercises. News values are typically very different from the virtues associated with participation (Smith 2009: 102-105; Parkinson 2006). However, we would expect media attention to affect the capacity of authorities to ignore proposals and be required to give an account of their decisions. There are at least two relevant factors here. First, the extent of media diffusion on the part of public authorities: those bodies that have been more active in raising the profile of participation exercises (through, for example, press releases, press conferences, social media activity, etc.) are arguably likely to be more committed to considering and responding to proposals. Second, the degree of media publicity achieved: the amount of reporting that actually appears in various media outlets is again likely to affect the orientation of public bodies towards proposals. Visibility could also be related to the type of participatory process, for example, whether the participatory process is on-going or one-off. As the citizens' jury examples suggest, one-off exercises may be easier to ignore (except if well publicised) compared to those, such as participatory budgeting, which provide

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[7] The role of legitimacy is also discussed by Font and Blanco (2007) and Barret et al (2012).

opportunities for citizens and/or civil society organisations to return to issues on a regular cycle of engagement.

There is a growing literature that suggests that the different goods or virtues a participatory process embodies are likely to have an effect on its reception. Both theoretically and empirically it is difficult (if not impossible) for any process to simultaneously maximise all the desired qualities we associate with democratic institutions (Fung, 2006; Font and Galais, 2011; Smith 2009). One particular distinction often drawn is the trade-offs between deliberative and participatory goals (Mutz, 2006; Pateman 2012). Similarly Gilman (2013), exploring the case of the New York participatory budgeting, shows that whereas some neighbourhood groups are better at deliberation at the expense of efficiency, others are more goal oriented (at the expense of deliberation) and tend to produce outcomes that move easier into policy-making. Barrett et al (2012: 193) report on evidence from Local Health Councils (LHCs) in Sao Paolo suggesting that 'those that were less deliberative, marked by more conflict and confrontation and greater resistance to changes in the procedures of participation' resulted in better outcomes in areas such as 'monitoring health care services and raised health expenditures'.

This result may be related to a third aspect of the process design: the types of participants. Whatever the additional advantages of having participatory processes based primarily on the involvement of lay citizens or organised civil society groups, one of the main criticisms that citizens' juries have received is that once the process is completed, participants go back home and no one is there to constantly remind the public administration about the process recommendations (De Maya and Font, 2004). The claim that many associations make, and some academic work supports (Barnes et al, 2007), is that associational participation is often avoided by politicians precisely because it produces more controversial proposals. In summarising a couple of exemplary cases of policy impact, Barrett et al highlight that the strong impact on policy around public funding on children's welfare that emerged from the Keiki Caucus in the Hawaii state legislature occurred where 'the majority of the non-legislative participants came from professional civil society organizations rather than the public at large' (2012: 189); similarly in the LHC example discussed earlier, it was in those localities with strong histories of social mobilizations where successful co-governance between civil society organisations, service providers and public officials resulted in positive health policy outcomes (193).

2.2. Policy related factors

The second set of potentially important factors differentiates between proposals that have been produced in the same context. The emphasis of most of the research mentioned in the previous section on the relevance of contextual factors including process design overlooks the fact that the same processes often produce many proposals which have different fates: some are ignored whereas others become policy. Which are the factors that help to explain these different outcomes? Previous research has pointed to at least two major sets of factors: the substantive contents of the proposals and the degree of support that the proposal has.

The first obvious factor is the <u>nature of proposals</u>. One reason why a significant number of proposals are not given serious consideration is because they are highly generic in character (e.g. the public authority should promote social justice / environmental sustainability / etc.): vague recommendations, value statements and/or aggregation of opinions too general to offer useful guidance for policy makers. Again, many of the participatory processes sponsored by the EU in the mid-2000s had just such outputs – a further explanation for their lack of impact (Smith 2013).

For those proposals that are more focused, we can distinguish a continuum related to the <u>degree to which proposals challenge existing policy</u>: from proposals that reinforce existing policy positions, those that recommend marginal changes, through to proposals that bring into question existing policies and practices. There is a strong sceptical literature on public participation that suggests that processes tend to be nothing more than forms of co-option: proposals will be ignored or the design and results of participation will be manipulated by political authorities to suit their own interests (Cooke and Kothari 2001). Critics contend that citizens are not given any meaningful role in the decision-making process: public participation can be organized to 'give at least the appearance of individual and community involvement, legitimate decisions already made, warn the agency of potential political and legal obstacles, satisfy legal or procedural requirements, and defuse the opposition' (Fiorino 1990: 230-31). Dryzek argues that extra-constitutional imperatives of the state (e.g. protection of capital accumulation) limit the potential for authentic citizen engagement and deliberation in political decision-making (Dryzek 2000). Such a sceptical perspective does not entail that proposals will simply be ignored by public authorities; rather only those proposals that confirm or reinforce existing prejudices of the body in question will be adopted. Here participation is taken to be purely symbolic and highly instrumental on the part of public authorities. It is important to entertain such a sceptical analysis, but also to recognise that a more nuanced account of constraining and enabling factors is possible. As Barnes and colleagues argue: 'this concept of capture is too blunt an instrument… institutional power may constrain, or enable, the possibilities of social agency' (Barnes et al 2006: 185). They offer evidence of cases in which 'citizens modified or restricted their claims as a result of their closer engagement with officials' (Barnes et al 2007: 191). Elsewhere the same authors have argued that participation processes can end up 'enabling the public to operate within the norms set by the bureaucracy, rather than enabling bureaucrats to hear and respect the experience that participants bring to the process of participation. That is, it suggests a process of possible *incorporation* of the lay public into official institutions' (Newman *et al.* 2004: 211-12).

In principle, one would expect that those proposals that do not challenge the status quo are more likely to be adopted, whereas this likelihood would decrease as we approach the other side of the continuum (challenging policies). However, we must also consider how this factor interacts with others: in a context of governmental change (or of desired policy change by the government for whatever other reason), the emergence of proposals that support the desired change of direction are likely to be publicly supported by authorities. One example is Porto Alegre participatory

budgeting, where the main objective was to facilitate re-distributional policies that fulfilled the PT's objective of institutionalising social justice (Baiocchi, 2005)[8].

Again, we can expect interaction between particular design characteristics and the form of policy proposals. For example, based on their study of participation processes in two UK cities, Barnes et al (2007; 187) suggest that proposals are more likely to challenge or disrupt established norms, policies and practices when they emerge from participatory processes that have a short life span which 'prevents lay members from becoming institutionalised' and where participation processes engage already active publics (rather than enacting new publics): those processes that engage publics 'that have their roots in voluntary organisations, grass-roots bodies or some form of social agency' are more likely to resist bureaucratic norms.

Another aspect of the substantive content of proposals that may be crucial to explain their fate is related to the complexity of contemporary forms of governance. Proposals from participation processes do not necessarily respect the <u>boundaries of political competence</u> within and between public authorities. Proposals may emerge on issues where the sponsoring body does not have competence to respond. Cooper and Smith give the example of GM Nation?, a consultation exercise sponsored by the UK environment ministry. Issues related to genetic modification cut across government and as such many of the proposals related to the policies and practices of departments that had no interest in the consultation exercise (Cooper and Smith 2012: 27)[9]. Similarly they offer evidence that the federal nature of the German state and the demarcation of competences between different levels can be problematic given that the proposals that emerge from participatory exercises rarely respect such formal distinctions.

The second broad type of policy-related factors is the <u>degree of support</u> for each proposal. This raises the question as to which kind of support is more important? At least three may have a potential role. The first is the degree of support among <u>participants</u> themselves. In many cases, this is unknown since final reports may not include votes or other measures of support. However, when these data are known and even more when they are publicly available, they may have an influence. This is especially clear in the case of referenda. Would it have been so easy to force the repetition of the Irish referenda on the Treaty of Nice (2001) and the Treaty of Lisbon (2008) if the No vote would have been 65% instead of 53% (with limited turnout) achieved in both cases? The example of the French and Dutch referenda on the EU Constitution and their effect on EU politics with their 55% (with high turnout) and 61.5% of rejections respectively suggests that (at least when they are widely publicised) clear majorities are more difficult to be ignored.

The second type of important support comes from outside the participatory process. The proposals of participatory processes are rarely, if ever, the only input into the policy process.

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[8] Barnes et al (2007) also provide an example of where a public official drew on participatory processes to legitimate her argument for policy reform within the public authority: the alignment of the proposals with the views of a reform-minded champion within the public authority led to their further consideration.

[9] Similarly Crawford and colleagues highlight the way in which national policy can limit the impact of proposals: 'Implementing changes that require reallocation of resources becomes more difficult, especially if these conflict with nationally defined service priorities' (Crawford et al 2003).

Proposals are likely to have more chance of acceptance if <u>other stakeholders</u> are offering similar recommendations or if there is some other form of <u>social pressure</u>. This generates even more complexity for understanding impact: how to untangle the particular effect of the proposals from other inputs? As Carolyn Hendriks argues:

> Citizens' reports are conceived as advisory, and their recommendations invariably compete with other forms of advice from political parties, expert committees, and interest groups, for example. Moreover, when some of these other sources of policy advice happen to recommend the same policies and celebrate the same values articulated in the citizens' reports, it can be difficult to determine which recommendation held more sway. (Hendriks 2005: 91)

Finally, support <u>within the public authority</u> may be especially crucial. In their comparative study of 17 participation processes in the UK, Barnes and her colleagues found evidence to suggest that the fate of proposals is tied to the expectations of public officials sponsoring the process, in particular their willingness to consider major change in existing policy and practices (Barnes et al 2007: 191). The attitude of the public authority should not be considered as a single entity with a single interest, but rather we need to recognise the competing rationalities and interests that make up any institution. The fate of proposals from participation processes is thus related to their position within this constellation of rationalities and interests. This is especially clear in the case of coalition governments, where the mayor and the councillor that leads the participatory process may be from different parties, as Ganuza and Francés (2012) show for the Córdoba participatory budget. These different positions towards every policy proposal can equally appear among factions or persons of the same party and between politicians and bureaucrats within the same department.

Table 1 summarizes the main explanatory factors developed through this section. Section 4 will discuss the operationalization of these ideas in a set of real participatory processes.

Table 1 about here

3. From theory to operationalization

This section takes a first step towards an operationalization strategy to test the ideas developed in the previous sections. To test the hypothesis included in table 1 we have a first crucial requirement: we need variation at the three levels that appear on the table: polity, process and policy. This is especially important, since most of the literature mentioned in the previous section tends to show variation at only one of the levels, examining sets of policy proposals emerging from a small set of fairly homogeneous participatory processes (Barrett, Wyman and Schattan, 2012, Fournier et al, 2011; Olken, 2010).

Simultaneously, we want to have a controlled amount of contextual variation, since extremely diverse levels of socioeconomic development and very large differences in political and administration rules and routines could create too challenging a scenario where alternative explanations would be impossible to control. Trying to balance these two concerns, our choice has been to limit our selection to a single polity having a constant legal scenario (Spain) and to introduce contextual variation through the selection of diverse municipalities. Since a fully representative frame of participatory process does not exist and our goal is more to have diversity than to perfectly represent reality we have used as our initial sampling frame a quite diverse collection of participatory processes developed in three Spanish regions (Andalucía, Catalonia and Madrid)[10].

We have selected a specific time frame, from one local election (2007) to the next (2011), trying to combine the possibility that there has been time enough for at least the initial implementation of these proposals, but also that memories and administrative records are recent enough to be tracked. Since our goal is to analyse what happens to policy proposals we have to focus only on those participatory processes that end up producing some kind of recommendation that is specific enough so that it becomes possible to follow whether it has been put into practice[11]. Thus, **the universe for our research is participatory processes developed by municipalities in these three regions during the period 2007-2011[12] that end up in specific policy proposals**.

Our final unit of analysis will be policy proposals. Since it is quite likely (see section 3) that different policy proposals emerging from the same participatory process are treated differently by local governments, we need to follow the evolution of each (or a sample) of them to see whether there are factors systematically associated with the fate of different policy proposals.

3.1. Choosing participatory processes

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[10] The details of the data collection process appear in Galais et al (2012) or in Font, Della Porta and Sintomer (forthcoming).

[11] We will consider the following definition of Policy proposal for the final selection of cases: "A participatory process has policy proposals when specific recommendations of policies are made. They should be made in a way that they can be audited and falsified and imply a specific action or strategy. Thus, a very general recommendation/social goal like "Develop a more egalitarian city" would not be considered, it is too unspecific and there are many possible policies to move in this direction".

[12] When checking information about permanent mechanisms (i.e. participatory budgeting) we will select proposals related to 2010 edition or the last edition when the mechanism has ended before that time.

We have two different databases as starting points. On the one hand, we have a database for Andalusia, Madrid and Catalonia collected by web content mining (N = 292). On the other hand, extra information was collected for Andalusia with a double survey strategy: an on-line questionnaire addressed to municipalities (CASI) and a follow-up (CATI) for those municipalities that had not answered our first online approach (N = 517). The most important difference for us was that data mining produced a picture where processes developed in large cities were largely over-represented. We will use processes from both of these databases for the final case selection (see below)[13].

We have undertaken some depuration operations in order to adjust our initial databases to the criteria set out above.

1. Elimination of cases not ending in policy proposals[14].
2. Elimination of non-eligible cases that are out of the temporal or territorial scope of our research[15]
3. Elimination of cases lacking relevant information (for instance name of the process or a minimal description of the process).

We aim to have a good representation of diverse types of participatory processes. We cannot make claims that we perfectly represent reality (the universe from which we start is not a representative sample), but that we analyze policy proposals in a quite varied setting of populations and processes. To guarantee the best approach is stratified sampling, we ensure a good representation of potentially important independent variables through the different strata and where each stratum is represented through a small number of cases, whose final selection will be random.

To guarantee representation of crucial independent variables, we have selected three variables to create the strata for case selection:

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[13] In this paper we provide sample selection details using only the comparative 3 region database. A similar selection procedure will be used to select the 10 cases coming out of the Andalusía survey.

[14] For the web-mining comparative database we have checked the information about policy proposals available on the internet. Of the 236 experiences, 214 have proposals (in many cases we are certain; in some, the process design expected proposals even if we have not found specific information about them). Less than 10 processes have less than 24 proposals, 47 have more than 25, and for the rest the information available does not clarify the number of proposals.

[15] 108 cases out of the temporal scope (in most cases, developed prior to 2007) and 28 developed by supra-local administrations.

1. We take region/database as the first stratum: 10 processes from each of them. This ensures 10 cases from each of the three regions with a similar data collection process plus an additional 10 Andalusía cases and 10 from small municipalities (survey database)[16].
2. Process design: we create a new variable based with these categories[17]:
    a. Participatory budgeting
    b. Strategic planning (agenda 21, education, economy, participation…)
    c. Other permanent mechanisms
    d. Other temporary processes
3. As a proxy for organizational culture (but also to see whether the same municipality has a similar approach to different processes) we use number of participatory experiences developed by the municipality as the next stratum. In each region we include two municipalities with three or more processes, taking three processes for each one[18]. The remaining four cases will come from the residual categories (one/two experiences)

Whenever choice is possible[19], the final selection of municipalities will be done through random selection. In the case that we will not be able to guarantee cooperation with these municipalities, we will substitute them for similar processes on each region.

Table 2 shows the distribution of process types in our initial three region sampling frame and among the cases selected after applying these criteria and table 3 shows the specific cases selected[20].

Tables 2 and 3 about here

3.2.   Selecting and coding policy proposals

The number of policy proposals coming out from these processes is extremely diverse. An initial exploration using the information available on the local web sites showed variation ranging from a couple of proposals to hundreds. Since we want to have as much proposal variation as possible but only limited resources, we will code each policy proposal when they are no more than 25

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[16] In the Andalusia survey database we will use only the processes developed in the municipalities not well represented in the internet databases (below 20.000 inhabitants).

[17] In each region we will have representation of at least two processes of each category of this typology. This means that for the municipalities having several processes our selection will take (if possible) a maximum of one for each typology category. After incorporating the remaining municipalities, in case each category was perfectly represented by two processes, we would select the remaining two processes at random.

[18] Since in Catalonia we have only two municipalities with three or more experiences, we will use there three municipalities with two experiences each.

[19] The Madrid (and practically also the Catalan cases) offer no choice between processes: the number of actual processes in some of the strata is the same as the number we require.

[20] The final selection in the Andalusia' small municipalities database is being made at the time of writing this paper.

from a single process and select 25 when the number is larger. Following the same logic of the previous section, whenever these proposals appear in a stratified format (e.g., by thematic issue packages as is often the case in Agenda 21 processes), we will choose proposals from each of the strata. The final selection of proposals will always be made randomly.

To proceed with the analysis we need information about our dependent variable (how and up to which point the proposal has been adopted) and quite diverse data that capture the ideas presented in section 3, as well as some additional control variables. With this goal in mind, we need information about three different levels of analysis: municipality, participatory process and policy proposal. Most of the information on the first two levels is already available in the previously existing database that we used as the sampling frame or in other publically available sources (e.g., municipal budget information, electoral results). The result will be a database where each policy proposal is a case, including about 15 variables at the municipality level (e.g., population, budget, party of the mayor), about 20 variables at the process level (from issues covered to types of participants) and about 15 variables about the policy proposal itself and its outcomes.

To complete the coding the first step is to get as much information as possible through the municipal web pages, where we have found extremely diverse levels of information. The second step will be to make an initial contact with the municipality, trying to obtain as many official documents and records that could provide relevant written official details. The third more costly step will be to proceed with interviews, starting with employees of the local administration and continuing with other informants from civil society or the local political world. The reliability of the answers will be measured according to the source where the information has been obtained (i.e., official records, idea appearing in more than one interview, idea appearing in one interview).

4. Final remarks

Producing different (better?) policies is one of the important alleged goals of many participatory processes. However, to achieve these policy consequences, the first necessary step is that policy proposals coming out from participatory process effectively evolve into actual policies. The degree to which this happens in reality has been the object of very scant attention, especially beyond individual case studies or research focusing in a single type of participatory process. Our goal in this paper has been to present an on-going project that addresses this gap. In the first part of the paper we have identified some of the reasons that explain why many policy proposals never evolve into actual policies and have developed a list of potential explanations of why some participatory processes and some specific proposals are more likely to be adopted than others. The final part of the paper has sketched the next steps needed to operationalize such a project in a specific empirical setting (local participatory processes developed by municipalities of three Spanish regions during 2007-2011).

The steps ahead entail quite clear difficulties, from completing a reliable coding of the remaining variables, gaining cooperation from municipalities, establishing what is sufficient evidence of a proposal being adopted and so on. To date, we have undertaken a couple of preliminary pilot cases to get an idea of the difficulties involved in this data collection process. These pilots provide evidence of the many challenges ahead.

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Table 1. The explanatory factors of policy proposals' success

Contextual factors	Context/ polity factors	Organisational culture
		Timing (electoral cycle and others)
		Ideology
		Resources available
		Size of municipality
	Process design	Link to policy making
		Organised under pressure/in co-operation
		Visibility
		Participation or deliberation oriented
		Type of participants
Policy related factors	Content of proposals	Generic or specific
		Challenging or not challenging
		Boundaries of political competence
	Degree of support	In the participation process
		In society/stakeholders
		In local institution

Source: own elaboration

Table 2. Types of participatory processes in the comparative three region sampling frame and among cases selected

	Universe		Selected cases	
	n	%	n	%
Participatory budgeting	26	12,1	6	20,0
Strategic planning	101	47,2	8	26,7
Other Permanent mechanism	50	23,4	10	33,3
Other temporary experiences	36	16,8	6	20,0
DK/NA	1	,5	-	-
Total	214	100,0	30	100,0

Source: Cherry-picking 3 region database

Table 3. Participatory processes selected in the comparative three regions data by type of process

Process Design	Andalusia	Madrid	Catalonia	N
Participatory budget	• PB Jerez • PB Córdoba	• PB Algete • PB Torres de la Alhameda	• PB Santa Cristina • Child PB Santa Cristina	6
Strategic planning	• Participation Plan Córdoba • Agenda 21 Córdoba • Strategic Plan 2010-2015 Alcaudete	• Strategic Plan Móstoles • Mobility Plan Parla	• Education Plan Cambrils • Neigborhood Plan Cambrils • Participatory process for the design of the urban park (Cunit)	8
Other permanent	• Sectorial council Security Jerez • Local Forum for immigration Cúllar Vega • Citizen Assembly Urban Initiative Málaga	• Sectorial councils Móstoles • Children councils Móstoles • Sectorial council women Parla • Neighborhood council Parla	• Municipal Council creation (Bescanó) • Permanent Creation of a territorial working groups structure (Arbúcies) • Council of wise Women (Begues)	10
Other temporary	• Forum for creation of sectorial council Jerez • Forum for energy saving Moguer	• Citizen meetings 2010 (San Martín de la Vega) • Participation in landscape interpretation handbook (Talamanca de Jarama)	• Workshop public works Barberà • Workshop Neigborbood issues Barberà	6
N	10	10	10	30

Figure 1. From policy proposals to policy outcomes

Cherry-picking?

Policy proposals approved in participatory processes

Policy proposals adopted (outputs)

Social change (outcomes)

Forgotten or abandoned processes

Rejected by technical or political reasons

Too many proposals, not enough money

Limited scope/irrelevance of policies adopted

Counterbalancing factors

Policies not aiming social change