Participatory Frustration: The Unintended Cultural Effect of Local Democratic Innovations

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Participatory frustration: the unintended cultural effect of local democratic innovations.[1]

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Abstract:

Most research on participatory processes has stressed the positive effects that these institutions have in the relationships between public authorities and civil society. This article analyzes a more negative product that has received scant attention: participatory frustration. Departing from Hirschman's cycles of involvement and detachment, the article shows four paths towards frustration after engaging in institutional participatory processes: i) inflated expectations; ii) the failure of design and adjusting mechanisms, iii) poor results, and iv) abrupt discontinuations. Drawing on six cases in Spanish cities, this article proposes a reflection on how participatory reforms can contribute to feed frustration and political disenchantment.

Key words:

Participatory processes, Local politics, Participatory budgeting, Advisory councils, Civil society, Frustration

Democratic theorists have conceived the "participatory turn" of political systems (Barber, 1984; Pateman, 2012) as a way to address the growing disaffection and discontent among citizens (Torcal & Montero, 2006; Norris, 2011; Dalton & Welzel, 2015). The introduction of

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participatory processes[2] (henceforth PPs) has consistently been justified by the idea that expanding engagement opportunities for citizens and associations will decrease popular feelings of discontent and detachment (Pharr & Putnam, 2000; Nabatchi et al., 2012; Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2016; Holdo, 2016). However, is it possible that these policy instruments designed to confront political disaffection fail to reduce feelings of discontent and detachment.

The empirical research that focuses on the impacts of PPs is rather diverse in scope, and the results are far from clear-cut (Mazeaud et al., 2012, Mazeaud & Nonjon, 2015; Campbell et al., 2018). Overall, this literature suggests that the capacity of PPs to transform established patterns of interaction between citizens and political authorities is rather limited. On the positive side, researchers have stressed effects such as individual political learning (Pincock, 2012; Talpin, 2012; Funes et al., 2014), the promotion of social capital (Abers, 2007; Wampler, 2012 Bherer et al., 2016), the inclusion of previously excluded social groups (Baiocchi, 2005; Wampler, 2007; Hernández-Medina, 2010), and the enhancement of perceived responsiveness (Pogrebinschi & Ryan, 2017). On the negative side, other authors have observed resistance on the part of diverse actors (neighborhood associations, political representatives and public officials); the continuation of established power relations (Ganuza, et al., 2014; Walker, et al., 2015), exclusion of actors based on their politics (Navarro 1999; Parkinson, 2006), as well as the withdrawal of discontented individuals or groups (Font & Navarro 2013). Hanson (2017) has pointed out how poorly designed PPs can contribute to a negative public perception of participation. Negative effects have, however, received less attention in the literature on PPs. These negative effects most likely occur in contexts where participatory politics are not clearly institutionalized, and respond to political impulses or

[2] We define participatory processes as 'those minimally formalized activities intended to involve the public in the discussion or decision-making process on public policies' (Font et al., 2014: 11). These processes are created by State institutions at different levels (local, regional, State).

initiatives marked by short-term electoral logics or cooptation strategies (Bherer et al. 2018). As Hibbing and Theiss-Morse claimed, 'a proper reading of the evidence suggests that the consequences of popular participation are often neutral or negative; thus, we believe a key task of future research is determining those limited situations in which participation can be beneficial' (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002: 5).

This study aims to contribute to filling this empirical gap in the literature by focusing on participatory frustration as a set of feelings that may emerge among participants in the course of PPs. Both the conceptualization of participatory frustration and the identification of the pathways leading to it can make an analytical contribution to future empirical studies on the effects of PPs. Moreover, we claim that the results can also be interesting for practitioners designing and implementing PPs. Our approach is built on Albert O. Hirschman's (1982) insights into cycles of political engagement, disappointment, and withdrawal "*shifting involvements*" of citizens in public affairs. Participatory frustration is understood as the result of the imbalance between participants' initial expectations of achieving political influence, and their perception of the actual impact achieved. Our analysis rests on three cases of participatory budgeting (henceforth PB) and three advisory councils (henceforth AC) developed during the participatory wave which took place in in Spain in the 2000's. Our focus on participatory frustration emerged from the analysis of six cases carried out as part of a broader research into the effects of PPs. The identification of participatory frustration as a relevant effect became evident in participants' references to "frustration", "discouragement", "disappointment", "disenchantment" or "fatigue". These were central to the discourses of most participants, individual citizens and members of associations.

The paper proceeds as follows. Firstly, we outline the theoretical framework through which we interpret participatory frustration. Secondly, we present the methodological approach, describing the cases, the informants and our approach to data analysis. Thirdly, we present

the results describing the pathways that lead to participatory frustration, its consequences in practice, and we also analyze the institutional settings which may avoid or ameliorate negative effects.

PATHS TOWARDS PARTICIPATORY FRUSTRATION

Throughout the world new opportunities for citizens to have a say in policy-making are being offered at different levels of government (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2016; Fung & Wright, 2003; Smith, 2009). In most cases, the success of these initiatives depends on their capacity to attract a large and heterogeneous public (Wampler, 2007; Hernández-Medina, 2010) and mobilise high numbers and diverse citizens. The initial engagement of participants, sustained participation or disengagement depends on their perception of whether they are taking part in meaningful and worthy endeavor (Gomes, 1992). By *participatory frustration* we refer to a range of feelings that develop when the participatory experience is perceived by participants as falling short of the initial expectations of political influence.[3] These feelings may be manifested in temporary emotional reactions such as disillusionment, grief or anger, as well as in more permanent political sentiments (Jasper, 1998) such as distrust towards authorities or negative external political efficacy (Goodwing & Jasper, 2006). Participatory frustration may lead to alternative forms of engagement (for example, protests) or, conversely, to disengagement or political apathy (Hirschman, 1970; Van Stekelenburg & Klandermans. 2013).

Furthermore, these feelings may also reinforce dominant social representations concerning the futility of citizen participation and general perceptions of distrust towards PPs (García-Espín & Ganuza, 2017). Ultimately, these feelings can extend to the entire political system (Easton, 1975:436-7; Craig & Maggiotto, 1982; Hanson, 2017). In this sense, as in the case

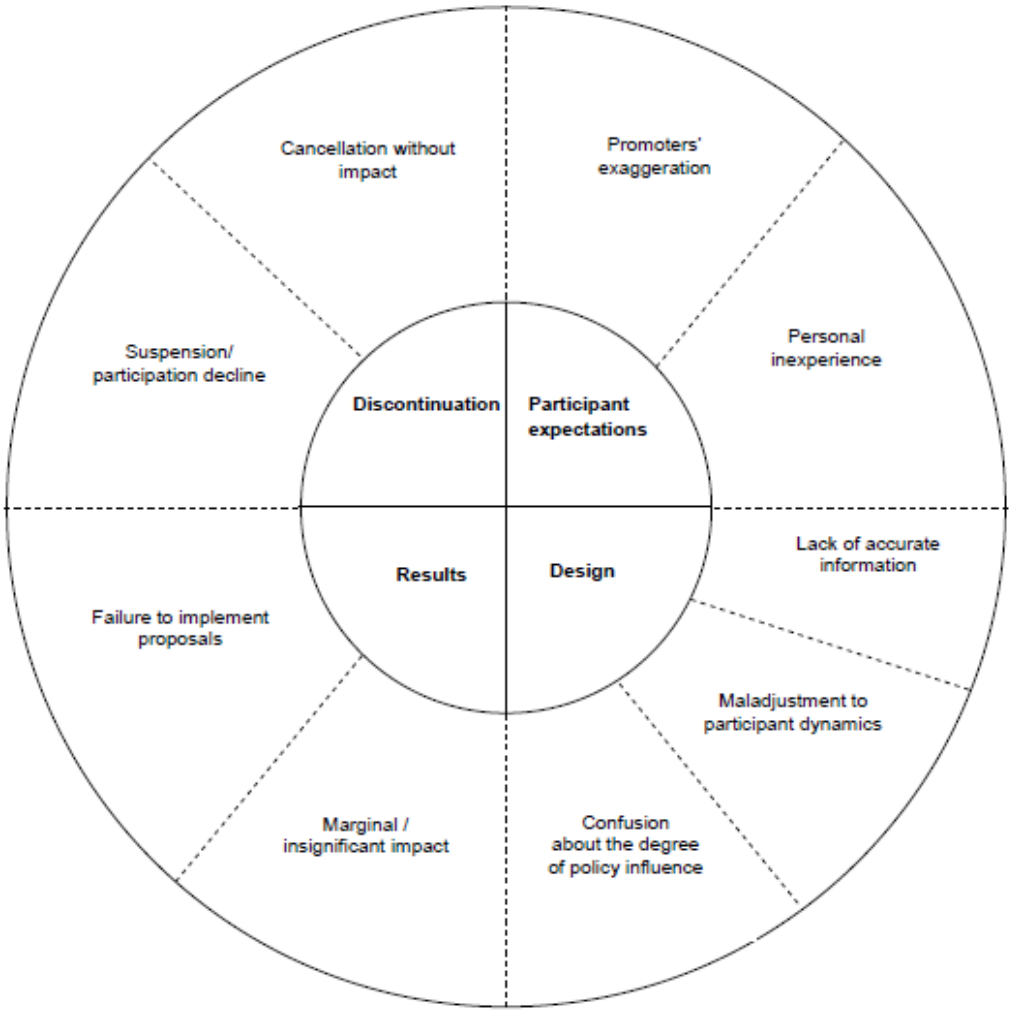
[3] According to the literature on political engagement, we can assume that influence is a key motivating factor (Olson, 1965; Verba et al., 1995).

of negative experiences with durables effects reported by Hirschman, participatory frustration could , "come to lead in independent existence and affect the social and cultural climate" (Hirschman, 1982:18). To the extent that PPs imply political learning, they can leave lasting marks on the political culture of participants.[4]

Participatory frustration may stem from gaps between expectations of influence prior to participation and the experience of participation in PPs as well as the outputs produced. We argue that these imbalances may originate at four points in the course of the PPs: i) in the initial development of inflated expectations; ii) in institutional design and the failure of adjustment mechanisms; iii) in the assessments of results; and iv) in the process discontinuation. As sources of participatory frustration these four points can be represented as forming a wheel of participatory frustration (see figure 1).

Figure 1. The wheel of participatory frustration

[4] To be sure these effects can also be positive. The fulfillment of expectations can generate feelings of pleasure and joy, which also feed into more lasting feelings regarding political efficacy and/or trust in the political system.



Source: Own elaboration

Firstly, as Hirschman (1982) argued, the trend towards unrealistic expectations is common to different domains of human activity and helps to understand people's engagement in social action[5]. It is usual for political engagement processes to generate high expectations. For example, the literature on vote and protest (Quattrone & Tversky, 1988; Verba et al., 1995) highlights that overestimating the possibilities of influence can be used as a motivational mechanism by activists and people engaged in social movements . In PPs, participants also

[5] Here, Hirschman follows the Durkheimian hypothesis that the increase in profit expectations (in our case of influence) can lead to a disarray of such expectations, and consequently, a growing frustration (see Boudon, 1981:28).

show a tendency to overestimate the possibilities of exerting influence. There can be an inflation of expectations as initial enthusiasm acts as a motivator for engagement (Graph 1, dimension 1). Further, promoters of PPs can exaggerate the future impacts of new PPs in order to attract more participants (Polletta, 2016). Usually facing contexts of distrust and apathy promoters need to "spice things up" in order to make the process attractive. As Polletta notes:

'[W]hat makes the situation even more complicated is that participatory exercises are usually animated by the desire to combat the public's alleged loss of trust in government [Irwin, 2006]. In other words, at the same time that government is, in some ways, less capable of acting on the will of the people, it must convince the people that it is more willing to do so'. (2016:232-4).

In some cases, lack of previous experience can also lead to the development of unrealistic expectations (Font & Navarro, 2013). PPs can be a novel experience for most participants (Gherghina & Geissel, 2017). The lack of accurate information can exacerbate the tendency to naively imagine the process in positive terms and thus spur expectations (Hirschman, 1982:49). Participants expect that their demands will be fully met. However, PP proposals tend to be only partially accepted, if not ignored, by authorities and their implementation is usually gradual and slow. In the same vein, participants may tend to idealize PPs and their dynamics. For example, by not taking into account the obstacles, setbacks and conflicts caused by the presence of heterogeneous actors with very different interests (Kaner, 2014). Moreover, some participatory methodologies may prove awkward or people may find them boring (Polletta, 2016). For example, Mansbridge (1973) warns that the lack of incentives based on relational goods (friendship) as well as the slowness of some PPs may lead to boredom and fatigue. Likewise, recent studies have pointed to the perception of certain participatory methodologies as repetitive and sometimes puerile (//…//, 2017) as a cause of disappointment. This gap between the participants' initial idealistic expectations and the actual experience of participation may lead to frustration.

Secondly, participatory frustration may also be the result of inadequate design, which does not adapt to the organizational forms and practices of the associations, which frequently provide the main sources of support for PPs (Graph 1, dimension 2). For example, the design may not adapt to the associations' operating practices (e.g. calendar, human resources and internal procedures) or, in the case of individuals, might not take into account the necessary conditions for participants to fully understand the PPs. This path to frustration can be avoided by what we call adjusting mechanisms: design features of PPs intended to adapt to the context of participation as well as the characteristics of participants. Elements such as the quality of the information provided, including its transparency and accuracy[6], as well as the inclusion of process evaluation tools may be crucial. This information may prevent uncertainty by clarifying the process schedule (phases and *times)* as well as explaining the degree of influence that is likely to be achieved.[7] All this information offsets the tendency to incorrectly estimate the costs and benefits of participation, thus preventing the frustration induced by misinformation. Adjustment mechanisms can be also useful to tailor the process to the needs of participants by *evaluating the process* and modifying it accordingly.

Thirdly, frustration can be activated by the scarce production of outputs (Graph 1, 3). The literature points to outputs and benefits as one of the principal drivers for engagement (Olson, 1965; Verba et al., 1995). Lasting engagement depends on results through policy outputs (Parkinson, 2006:174). Participants' perseverance or withdrawal may depend on their perception of taking part in a meaningful and useful engagement process (Gomes, 1992). Even when PPs have been carefully designed and implemented, the lack of impact may feed participatory frustration. According to this view, participant disappointment may depend on the extent to which policy proposals are implemented or, conversely, on the time they are

[6] Abers (2007:1455) points at the establishment of realistic and intermediate objectives as a determining factor for the continuation of PPs.
[7] We follow Fung here (2006:69-70) understanding the level of authority as the influence of policy outputs upon decision making.

'left on the shelf'. A recent study in Spain has shown that almost two thirds of the proposals emerging from local PPs ended up being partially or totally implemented. However, the proposals that require the largest degrees of policy or institutional change are less likely to be implemented (Font et al., 2018).[8] It is reasonable to think that these kinds of proposals may be highly motivating for participants, and therefore increase the potential for their disappointment if not implemented.

Lastly, an additional element may affect the assessment of PPs in their latter phases: discontinuity or cancellation (Graph 1, 4). Many PPs are weakly institutionalized since they are often conceived as 'episodic experiments' (Russon-Gilman, 2016:119), and they are highly vulnerable to electoral changes (Alves & Allegretti, 2012; Cooper & Smith, 2012). If a participatory process is not appropriately closed (including abiding by previous agreements and the implementation of approved proposals), participants will feel disappointed at seeing their efforts and compromise betrayed by political authorities.

In summary, there are different possible paths towards participatory frustration, all of which end up eroding the initial enthusiasm, provoking practical consequences such as abandonment and political dissatisfaction. In the following section, we introduce the methods and the cases in which we have explored these hypothetical pathways to participatory frustration.

METHODS

In Spain the development of PPs runs parallel to the participatory wave in Southern Europe in the last two decades (Navarro, 1999; Font et al., 2014): international influences, decentralization, and the expansion of local services constituted a favorable context for the introduction of PPs. During the 2000s, Spain registered an extraordinary development of PPs

[8] Font et al. (2018) analyzed the fate of more than 600 proposals arising from 39 local participatory processes developed by local municipalities in Spain during 2007 and 2011. The PPs analyzed were participatory budgeting, advisory councils, strategic plans and other temporal processes.

and was the European country where participatory budgeting spread the most (Ganuza & Francés, 2012). However, by the year 2010, austerity measures and the rise of local conservative governments entailed the cancellation of many PPs (Blanco, 2013; Alarcón et al., forthcoming). This work is part of broader research conducted during 2013-2015 focusing on the effects of PPs upon the relationships between public administration and civil society.

In order to study these change processes in depth we adopted a qualitative research strategy. Case-studies are an appropriate method for inquiry into transformations of processes and actors (Coller, 2000: 32). Prior to the selection of cases, an analytical framework was established (//…//) and exploratory fieldwork was conducted in order to test our preliminary conceptualisation, and to construct the interview script.[9]

In terms of case selection, we adopted a multiple case over a single case design, and, more specifically, a *diverse case approach* (Coller, 2000: 44; Seawright & Gerring, 2008: 300). We limited the degree of diversity to the two contrasting and representative types of PP in Spain (Della Porta, et, al., 2014): participatory budgeting (representing a new generation of PPs) and advisory councils (representing a traditional process implemented since the 80's). PB usually refers to processes whereby citizens' assemblies make proposals for the municipal budget. ACs are permanent committees formed by a mix of officials from local administration, political representatives and representatives of civil society. They collaborate to make recommendations in specific public policy areas. PBs are part of a new generation of PPs, while consultative councils have been present in Spain since the 1980s. Smith (2009) points out that the main difference in the design of participatory processes is the audience trargetted. While the former (PBs) seek to involve individual citizens, the ACs have been traditionally oriented towards the participation of representatives of organized groups or

[9] As seen in (//…//, 2017), exploratory work consisted of two nominal groups (focus groups with experts) and eight interviews with academics.

associations (2009: 2). However, in the Spanish experience of PBs, organized groups (such as neighborhood associations) have had a dominant role in their development (Ganuza, et al., 2014).

Among the broad number of potential cases, we aimed to cover a set of *typical cases*[10] of the two types of PPs (instead of exemplary, exceptional or deviant cases). As a sample frame, we used an existing database[11] which included more than 800 PPs developed during the 2000's (see Font, et al., 2014). A number of eligibility criteria were established to select cases, PPs had to: i) endure over time for a minimum of 2 years, ii) include interactions between authorities and actors from associations, iii) offer opportunities for face-to-face deliberation; and, iv) conclude with policy proposals or recommendations. These criteria were developed to ensure a selection of cases which were intensive enough as to significantly impact upon associations and their members.

We also included control criteria related to contextual aspects. Firstly, our cases-studies should be located in similar urban contexts. We selected six medium-sized post-industrial cities, located in the belt of larger metropolitan areas.[12] Secondly, in order to ensure diversity within the Spanish socio-political context, we focused on the regions of Andalusia, Catalonia and Madrid,[13] selecting a PB and an AC in each region. In the end, among the few resulting eligible cases, and after checking basic information on them, we selected three PBs and three ACs, which could be potentially productive for our topic of study. Table 1 shows the final sample of cases.

[12] We assume that middle size cities have a more diverse civil society than small cities and villages.
[13] These three regions grasp a good deal of the Spanish social and political territorial diversity, see Sintomer & del Pino (2014).

Table 1. Case studies features

Participatory process[14]	Origin	Who participates?	How participation takes place?	For what purpose?
PBAndalusia 100,000inh. 2008–2010 (2processes)	As an initiative of local councilors Coalition governments (Socialist Party and Left Party) Supported by the minority (Left) party	Open to everyone Nº:100–200	Intense and short interaction Voting, bargaining and deliberation Assemblies, motion groups, city councils	Direct decision-making over the allocation of resources Proposition, implementation, follow-up and evaluation €230,000
PBMadrid 150,000inh. 2004–2010 (5processes)	As an initiative of local councilors Coalition governments (Socialist Party and Left Party) Supported by the main (Socialist) party	Open to everyone Nº:1004(2004);3939(2010)	Intense and extended interaction Voting, bargaining, deliberation and online participation Territorial roundtables, assemblies, council and coordinating commission	Direct decision-making over the allocation of resources Proposition, programming, implementation and follow-up. 1.2M(2004);3M(2010)
PBCatalonia 200,000inh. 2008–2011 (1process)	As an initiative of local councilors Coalition governments (Socialist Party and Left Party) Supported by the main (Socialist) party	Open to everyone Partial randomly selection Nº:7640 (voters)	Intense and short interaction Voting, deliberation, online participation and follow-up Territorial roundtables, and city council	Direct decision-making over allocation of resources Proposition, prioritization and follow-up. 4M(2009)
ACAndalusia 200,000inh. Volunteering Council 2007–present	As the request of an association There was a year-long pre-participatory process	Mayor, councillors, parties, trade unions, citizens randomly chosen, representatives of associations and experts Nº:19–35	Moderate interaction over eleven years Several meetings per year Bargaining, deliberation (consensus logic) Plenary and temporary Commissions	Specific advisory function, co-designing strategies, diagnosis, decision-making, implementation and evaluation
ACMadrid 45,000inh. Associations Council 2002–present	As an initiative of a Left government within a plan to renew the program of citizen participation	Mayor, councillors, parties, representatives of neighbours' Associations, others associations Nº:13–19	Moderate interaction over sixteen years Two and five meetings per year Plenary and permanent commissions	General advisory function on broad issues and development of recommendations
ACCatalonia 45,000inh. Council of the City 2006–2011	As a personal initiative of a Socialist Mayor	Mayor, councillors, parties, trade unions, randomly chosen citizens, neighbours' associations, other associations, representatives of sectoral councils; experts chosen by Mayor Nº:40–50	Low interaction over five years One meeting per year and two special events Information exchange, deliberation Plenary and permanent commissions	General advisory function on broad issues and development of recommendations

Source: own elaboration.

[14] We use acronyms to anonymize the names of the cities and PPs. A confidentiality commitment existed. Using real names (in middle size cities) could make it easy to identify informants.

Interviewees were selected from a structural sample of informants, intended to capture a diverse typology of participants and to ensure a dialogic approach (Callejo & Vallejos, 1996; Coller, 2000). We interviewed political representatives, public officials, political opposition members and members of associations. Table 2 shows the distribution of the informants' profiles in each of our six cases[15].

Table 2. Interviewees' profiles

	Madrid		**Andalusia**		**Catalonia**		**Total profiles**
	PB	AC	PB	AC	PB	AC	
Political representatives	1	2		1	1	2	**7**
Public officials	1	2	2	2	2	2	**11**
Political opposition	1	1	1	1	1	2	**7**
Members of citizen associations	5	4	5	3	5	3	**25**[16]
Nº of interviews	**8**	**9**	**8**	**7**	**9**	**9**	**50**
Nº of informants	**9**	**11**	**8**	**7**	**9**	**9**	**53**

Note: Some interviews took place with more than one respondent (e.g. members of the same group).
[1]The number of interviews among associative groups is more numerous than others. This is because our research is focused on the effects of PPs on civil society and, on the other hand, it seems obvious to think that there is a greater diversity of positions among associations than among administrative personnel or members of the government.

Regarding the data, 50 interviews (45–60 minutes in length) were conducted in 2015 by the researchers. Each interview was recorded, transcribed and coded using Nvivo® software. This coding process had two phases. Firstly, the initial analytical framework (//…//) was transformed into a scheme of codes, and two researchers coded half of the dataset each, subsequently reviewing each other's coding to homogenize criteria. Secondly, open coding was carried out to identify concepts not included in the initial scheme (Strauss and Corbin,

[15] The exact profile of each of the informants can be consulted in Table 3 in the appendix.

1998: 120). The identification of participatory frustration as a relevant effect was a consequence of *open coding*. It is composed of codes such as "frustration", "discouragement", "disappointment", "disenchantment" or "fatigue", which were developed inductively from the discourses of participants (see Table 3 in the annex).

Finally, regarding the process of analysis, descriptive reports (*memos)* were written on each case. Based on these reports, researchers conducted microanalysis to identify the factors leading to participatory frustration. This process went beyond analyzing each unit of information (the interviews) in isolation to connecting them with the rest of informants' discourses both within the same case and across cases. Four main axes or factors of frustration were identified. In the next section, we present the results by ordering them according to these four axes. Each axis represents a factor of frustration that will be illustrated with one or two selected case studies. Interviewee quotes are used as exemplars of factors and effects.

RESULTS: PARTICIPATORY FRUSTRATION AS AN EFFECT UPON PARTICIPANTS

When analyzing the discourses of our interviewees on the consequences of participants' experience, we found that frustration emerged recurrently as a negative effect of PPs. Only in one case (an AC in Andalusia) references to frustration were limited (see table 3 annex). The discussion of the factors of frustration was contextualized by the interviewees at different points (or stages) of the PPs and followed diverse, often intersecting paths. We illustrate each factor through one or two cases which we have deemed to best depict the process of participatory frustration. Our focus on frustration does not mean that positive impacts were not identified in our case studies. In fact, the broader research mentioned above addresses

some positive impacts for participants such as access to new information, networking with other groups and also new community identifications (see Bherer et al., 2016).

Initial Inflated Expectations

At the initial stage of PPs, a set of circumstances often combine to excessively increase expectations. In our cases, the most relevant cause of expectation inflation was related to the aggrandizement of the PPs by promoters and interested parties. In this sense, promoters presented them as democratic transformations, overstating the potential outcomes and the political influence which could be achieved by participants. Specifically, leaders of political parties use these announcements to increase their electoral support. Two of our cases illustrate how promoters built an idealized image of the PPs that generated frustration.

The inflation of expectations by promoters takes place during the initial presentation of the PPs. Politicians need to distinguish themselves in the electoral arena with innovative measures. This was, for example, the case of an AC in a middle size city of Madrid: in July 2001, a national newspaper published a report about a municipality of 30,000 inhabitants, where a new system of participatory channels was going to be implemented. The new "participatory plan"[17] signified an important challenge for the *United Left* (Izquierda Unida) local government, which had been in power since 1979 in an increasingly conservative region. The plan included several PPs, with a C*onsultative Council of Associations* (the AC) amongst them. This AC did indeed have a novel ingredient, since participant associations will have a voice in the elaboration of the municipal budget. Further, in a book chapter dedicated to participation the mayor stated that: "It's going to be a fundamental body for discussion when it comes to implementing our next challenge of participatory budgeting". The AC was promoted as the precursor and

[17] Quote from a Major's interview in press. The Mayor herself explained that the former regulation on participation had not been implemented effectively: 'We have all known regulations of Citizen Participation that constitute an obstacle and limit rather than an encouragement of participation, provoking the opposite effect to the desired one: the demotivation of the associations' (official report signed by the Mayor).

incubator of more comprehensive participation in future local budgets, following the "Porto Alegre model" of participatory budgeting.

In the first year the AC hosted a debate on the municipal budget. Proposals regarding major public works and investments (i.e. revamping roads or squares) were admitted. In the following years, AC participants expected a more ambitious process that would address other local issues. However, this never happened. Moreover, later on in 2008 participation in the municipal budget was frozen because of the economic crisis and the cuts in the local budget. In 2011, the Mayor explained that the proposals could not be implemented because of this "freezing" of economic resources: "next year, there will be no investment; if there are no changes… there will be no investment [in public works]"[18]. Thus, the AC ended up being deprived of its main aim of "incubating" participatory budgeting.

Frustration was the result of an unmet promise to develop a more ambitious participatory process. The AC did not live up to the initial expectations. Members of associations realized that it was not the "incubator" of a genuine PB process. As a representative of a neighborhood association (nº11)[19] argued,

> "I have noticed that expectations are raised but are never fulfilled. When it [the AC] started, it was 2000 [sic] and now it is 2015, 15 years later. We thought that our possibilities of making a difference as an association would be greater, let's say, that we would have more opportunities to make proposals, and that they would be implemented. Later, you see that there are too many constraints on the municipal budget, and the issue of participatory budgeting is still *an unfinished business*…"

The members of associations interviewed recall being really enthusiastic about the idea of engaging in the AC as a test for a (future) more comprehensive process. But this initial enthusiasm progressively deflated when they realized that the council's power was more limited than expected: first, limited to a very specific part of the budget (only investments), and

[18] Information drawn from the Council's minutes, 27 October 2011.
[19] Table 3 in the annex offers the list of interviews. Quotes have been anonymized, for informers would be easily identified by their names and locations. In interviews, there was a compromise of confidentiality.

later cancelled due to the economic crisis. Thus, members of associations became less committed to the AC, some retained their membership while others abandoned it.

The aggrandizement of PPs can be also the consequence of the lack of experience of many participants. Many of them idealize new PPs, and develop unrealistic and inflated expectations of influence. This is the case of a PB in a post-industrial city in the South of Andalusia, where an assembly-based model of PB was implemented. In 2007 a newly elected local government coalition launched this participatory process. In contrast to the previous case, it was the first process of this type in the city, so the participants took it as a new extraordinary opportunity. Its origin was the core of the agreement between the two coalition parties (*Socialist Party* and *United Left*). In fact, the minority partner (United Left) adopted this measure as its own flagship policy, and the majority party (*Socialist Party*) deemed the PB to be the project of its coalition partner, leaving it to handle its administration.

In this case, promoters also overstated the opportunities for influence which the process was going to offer. The leftist *Participation Councilor* presented the participatory process as a groundbreaking initiative, and also signed agreements with different associations in order to pave the way for the PB initiative and also with a university to undertake a prior diagnostic, social and political analysis. Before implementing the PB, several meetings with neighborhood associations were held to explain the idea, an open conference was convened at which prestigious experts spoke about similar projects in other Spanish cities. The previous campaign generated a lively debate in the local media around the PB as well as around questions of legitimacy relating to ordinary citizens making political decisions instead of elected representatives. In fact, the right-wing party (*Partido Popular*) opposed the PB on these grounds, questioning the legitimacy of the new process. This controversy contributed to increasing the visibility of the project and to creating high expectations of political influence amongst members of associations.

The activists perceived the new PB as a new and extraordinary opportunity to boost their influence, in comparison with previous informal channels of participation, or in contrast to existing ACs. For example, the representative of an association (nº18) dedicated to voluntary service provision in a deprived area (food bank, school tutoring, housing assistance, etc.), explains how the PB project was really appreciated by them at the beginning. It was a "joy" to have a more "direct say" in decision-making and to take advantage of this opportunity to submit "historical demands" about basic facilities for their community. Despite the initial joy, they realized that central policy issues were excluded from the discussion in the PB assemblies:

> "It [PB] triggered demotivation. Many of us were really excited, we thought that it was an extremely interesting project; it was an opportunity for neighbors to have an opinion for the first time… Later on, we saw that all the work and time we had invested in the PB [*was useless*]… The first year was so long, many of us were volunteering for it. But there came a moment when some local government departments decided not to engage. They had said the opposite before: that they were going to engage in the process. So to the Departments that rejected PB, you could not make any proposals…"

The representative of this association argues that the project was never what had been "sold" at the beginning, because central areas of the government such as urban planning were not part of the PB. The rest of members of this same association became frustrated because they were not properly informed during the presentation of the original project. They also recognized that they were too idealistic in their initial expectations regarding the political scope of the new PB.

Other members of associations share this interpretation regarding naïve expectations of influence on behalf of participants, creating frustration afterwards. For example, the president of a long-standing association in a peripheral neighborhood (nº20) underlined how the initial project was aggrandized, "so that it seemed a fairy tale, a dream, they [the promoters] wanted to sell that idea, probably because it was an innovative proposal, but in our association… we did not quite see how it was going to be implemented. We did not see the mise-en-scène".

Their greater realism arising from longstanding experience in local politics prevented them from aggrandizing the original project.

These cases show that in the initiation of PPs promoters of PPs and less experienced participants can contribute to aggrandizing the virtues of these projects and to downplaying the real limitations. The public presentation of these projects also greatly raised expectations. However, these rapidly deflated. Authorities contributed to raising expectations either because they really believed that the PP would be more ambitious, because they wanted to attract new participants, or perhaps because they wanted to gain visibility as political innovators. In any case, unrealistic presentations created *expectations bubbles*: this especially impacted on participants that were less experienced in local politics who felt deluded when they understood the scope of the participatory process in practice.

Implementation: the (dis) adjustment of the institutional design.

In other cases participatory frustration originates from institutional design. Institutional design matters both for the types of actors and the interactions among them, as well as for the decision-making procedures (Fung, 2009). This process of frustration by design is well illustrated by an AC, the *Council of Associations,* in a middle-size city in Catalonia, where the design did not manage to adapt to the organizational forms, practices and constraints of associational actors. This AC was created in 2007. A wide selection of associations and citizens were selected by drawing lots and were called upon to participate (see Table 1). The AC was set up to assess the annual municipal budget and relevant local regulations in order to make proposals prior to their submission to the city chamber of representatives. As in the two previous cases, this participatory process attracted the attention of association members, who saw the institution as a new opportunity to voice their demands.

However, elements of institutional design, such as the kind of participant selection, did not fit with the dynamism of local associational membership. According to the formal rules of the AC, participants were chosen for a period of four years, acting as permanent representatives of their associations. They could neither send a delegate in case of not being available to attend a meeting, nor be substituted in case of dropouts. Many participants left the Council without being replaced, thereby reducing both the number and diversity of participants. As the Councilor of Social Services (nº46), stated: "the Participatory Council was a straitjacket because if one could not go, sending a delegate from the same organization was not allowed, new members and other associations could not gain admission".

Secondly, the formal objectives of the *Council of Associations* also failed to meet the expectations and needs of the members of associations. The Council's virtue, apparently, was that it could deliberate and make decisions on a wide range of municipal policy areas. However, this thematic breadth was, in practice, its greatest weakness. Members of associations state that the Council did not have a well-defined scope and decisions were not binding. In fact, the agenda was controlled by the municipal government and the decisions adopted were not subjected to a transparent monitoring process. The discussion about agenda-setting was a permanent cause of controversy. An ordinary citizen, selected by lot, pointed out this problem during one of those meetings:

> I feel that this Council is a mere perfunctory initiative possibly because of its short life. So, I think that, in this new mandate [2007-2011], participants must be made to feel hopeful (...) This is why a meeting calendar is proposed, with a clear work agenda that would help motivate participants and make them see that the Council is useful for the city (Council minutes 12 June 2008 session).

A representative of a women's association (nº42) also showed her dissatisfaction with the issues dealt with: "Quite honestly I am pretty disappointed… only matters which have already been decided are included in the agenda, 'you have to do this and that', and that is it".

As other authors have shown (Parkinson, 2006:34), participants in these kinds of PPs often have the perception that the discussion topics set from above by sponsoring bodies, and there is not much room to intervene. This perception is even more acute when decisions are not binding and they lack any monitoring mechanisms.

These limitations in institutional design led to the fatigue of many members of associations, many of whom stopped participating. Thus, in order to improve the performance the local government developed an *adjustment mechanism* aiming at increasing the influence of participants on specific local policies. Between 2009 and 2010, two deliberative processes on culture and commerce were held by the Council. Participants discussed these issues in the presence of facilitators, and they compiled a list of recommendations for future local regulations. This list was supposed to be submitted to the local Chamber of Representatives. However, these deliberations were an isolated experience and they did not change the formal rules of the AC.

From the start in 2007 to 2011, the AC's institutional design remained unchanged and therefore its dysfunctional qualities were maintained. Participants lost their interest in the AC and the number of participants declined to the extent that in 2011 the advisory council was "frozen" and remains so to date, pending redesign. The adaptation of PPs to the dynamics and thematic interests of associational actors seems crucial in generating satisfaction. Adjustment mechanisms are relevant in order to respond to, and ameliorate, frustration, reshaping design in response to local political dynamics and actors.

Results: The Distance Between what is Agreed and what is Implemented.

The negative feelings that feed participatory frustration seem to be more intense and lasting when engagement does not produce results. Frustration frequently arises from the failure to implement approved policy proposals. An example of this process of frustration was a case of

a PB in the periphery of Barcelona. It involved a budget of € 4 million and had a clear procedure for the formulation and election of binding proposals on major public works. In 2009, more than 220 participants were involved in the drafting of proposals, and 7,600 people voted. Of the final 16 proposals selected, the two most voted projects were rejected or substantially changed by the municipal government.

The failure to implement these proposals was mentioned by all the actors involved as a cause of anger and deep frustration. The most significant case was a group of young skaters who had submitted a skate-park project (budgeted at € 380,000). This project pointed out the lack of spaces for youth leisure, while responding to the neighbors' complaints about the practice of skateboarding in public spaces. To raise support, the group of skaters mobilized and succeeded in gaining a substantial presence in local media and in associational networks. For example, they organized an event to present their project and they relied on a group of professional architects to elaborate the draft of the new skate-park. As in most cases of PB, the success of the proposal depended on a substantial amount of voluntary work. Rejection or the failure to implement these proposals by authorities therefore caused considerable disappointment in participants. Despite being the second most voted project in the PB, in 2011 the Mayor announced that the skate-park would not be constructed. When interviewed, the skaters' spokesman (nº33) said: "Everything that has been promised and what we have done has been useless, we dedicated many hours of our life, as did the architect who helped us, the neighbors who voted for us, the hopes of many people". Three years later, the skaters refused to collaborate with local authorities, despite the Mayor's public explanation for discontinuing the skate-park project (the budget cutbacks and the economic crisis meant there were other priorities). This non-implementation of one of the most voted projects left an enduring sense of arbitrariness, lack of responsiveness on the part of local authorities and of impotence amongst participants.

In the same PB another source of frustration resulted from the substantial modification of the most voted project, without the consent of proposers. A group of NGOs had proposed building a shelter for the homeless. The original project entailed the rehabilitation of a set of disused facilities in a peripheral neighborhood of the city. However, the authorities decided to relocate the shelter elsewhere due to protests led by the neighbourhood associations of the area. Once the new location was chosen, the neighborhood associations of the new area also opposed. The process became mired in a NIMBY conflict,[20] and as one of the Councilors (nº37) put it, a "loss of credibility", which translated into feelings of disappointment among association members. This politician interprets these feelings of disappointment as contributing to a widespread culture of disaffection towards local institutions:

> That [noncompliance] makes the process itself lose credibility. You feel deceived. If in the end you do not see the project through to the implementation phase, all the previous process is called into question, right? The government may end up endlessly saying how bad political disaffection is…

Non-compliance or substantial modification of proposals was an important factor of disappointment in most cases. As in the case of the skate-park and the shelter, this led to withdrawal from PPs as well as a deep disaffection towards local institutions.

Discontinuation

Of the six PPs studied, four were terminated by 2011 (see Table 1). By discontinuation we refer to the unexpected cancellation of the process, which in some instances may also entail non-compliance of previously agreed decisions. Discontinuations clearly led to participatory frustration in some of our cases. Frustration due to unexpected cancellation can be illustrated by a case of PB analyzed in a city within the urban belt of Madrid. In that process, the

[20] Kraft & Clary (1991: 300) definition is as follows: "NIMBY (*Not in my back yard*) refers to intense, sometimes emotional, and often clamorous local opposition to siting proposals that residents believe will result in adverse impacts".".

frustration was caused by the interruption and discontinuation of the PB process after the change of government following local elections. In 2011, after running for five years, the new party in the local government (*Partido Popular*) decided to cancel the PB, failing to implement many of the projects it had inherited from the PB. This discontinuation crystallized in a deep feeling of disappointment among participants. Interviewees bitterly complained about the new governments' lack of interest in participation. An elder participant claimed (nº6), "At first there was a serious effort to see if it could continue [PB], but there was a Mayor's letter saying "what is all this PB thing? Budgets are budgets and they have to be decided by representative Councilors'".

The discontinuance of the PB was not the only cause of frustration. Adding to this was the non-compliance with projects which had already been agreed to in the course of previous PBs. The interviewees perceive that there was a "negative ending" in which the government shirked its responsibility for implementing the proposals approved in earlier PBs. Both parties in the opposition and neighborhood associations put forward a motion requesting that the chamber of representatives implement all the approved proposals. The vote was positive and the new incumbent authorities committed to carry them out. Despite all these efforts, most projects remained unfinished. According to a representative of a youth association who acted also as PB delegate (nº3):

> Many associations from different neighborhoods united to submit an identical proposal, to enquire how the building work was going, because we understood that if there was a prior commitment, and it had been agreed to proceed and there were budgetary funds earmarked for the project, then it should go ahead. We never got an answer (…) well, yes, we got one in a plenary [Chamber of Representatives]. We never heard any more about it.

The members of the associations felt frustrated and betrayed not only because of the cancellation of the process, but also because of the lack of commitment to previous

projects developed through participation. This resulted in protests and the distancing of many participants from the new government.

Avoiding paths towards political frustration

It was in just one out of our six cases that frustration did not appear as a significant effect of participation in PPs. This exception was a *Local Volunteers' Council* in a medium-size city in Andalusia. The reasons for which frustration was avoided in this PP included moderate expectations, a well-suited design (developed during a previous participatory process), the full implementation of agreements, and the stability of the process which has operated since 2007 and could thus be said to be more strongly institutionalised.

Firstly, the expectations of members of associations were moderate from the beginning. There was no aggrandizement of the original project. One of the factors that helps to understand this moderation was the participatory origin of this AC. Welfare associations working in the *Municipal Office for Volunteerism* demanded an institutional space to make decisions regarding public policies on volunteering. The technical staff of the *Participation Department*, in collaboration with an external agency, accepted that demand and conducted a participatory diagnosis of the situation with a view to creating the new council. During this one-year participatory process, members of associations worked with the local government to set the rules that would guide the work of the *Volunteers' Council*. This allowed members of associations to have prior and accurate information about the characteristics of the AC and the influence they could expect to effectively exercise. Expectations were therefore tempered.

Secondly, participants highly valued the institutional design and they felt comfortable with the way in which participation was organized and facilitated. In this respect, the *Andalusian Volunteerism Law* promotes the principle of equality in the composition of councils in this policy area. Half the participants are members of associations and half are administrative staff

(including supra local administration) and politicians. This enables the *Local Volunteers' Council* to work with a degree of autonomy, with a strong and stable presence of associations, despite changes in political representation[21]. An ex councilor who was in charge of the *Volunteers' Council* highlighted its political independence (nº32): "It is very different from other councils where it is easier to politicize issues, where the political parties predominate. On this topic of volunteerism and social issues, it is difficult to have that monopoly". Equality in the composition of the AC makes members of associations feel that they have a prominent voice.

Thirdly, the *Volunteers' Council* has very concrete aims which favor feasible decisions, meaning that projects and campaigns are effectively undertaken and implanted. The powers of the AC are well-defined: overseeing municipal volunteering policy and awareness-raising campaigns. The scope, procedures and resources available are clear to participants from the beginning. The former Participation Councilor (nº32) emphasizes this widespread awareness of the specific role of the *Local Volunteers' Council*: "No frustration ensued because nothing special was ever called for". The current Participation Councilor (nº31) also highlights: "It is the most down to earth Council". Participants feel satisfied with the performance, even if it is not the forum to discuss broader political issues like cutbacks in social services and welfare. Members of associations accept and take on board its limited scope because agreements are accomplished, even if they are relatively small.

This case shows how some PPs can avoid participatory frustration. It is realistic, since satisfaction is derived from a clear awareness of the aims pursued; the process is designed in accordance with the expectations of equality amongst associations; and it is effective, since the implementation of proposals and agreements is achieved. It might not be the PP that

[21] Since 2003, there have been four changes in the Government and three different Mayors and Cabinets.

associations' dream about, but it has worked and has been able to maintain a sustained engagement since 2007.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we have looked into the paths leading to frustration in local PPs in Spain. Building on Hirschman's reflections on the cycles of public involvement, we have identified four moments in which these feelings make headway: the inflation of expectations at the outset of PPs; poor design and lack of adjustment mechanisms to correct dysfunctionalities as they arise; the lack of impact upon public policy; and discontinuation. Similar dynamics have been identified as commonly leading to frustration in other engagement activities (Corrigall-Brown, 2012). Our main contribution has been to disentangle the causal processes and factors through which participatory frustration takes place as well as its practical consequences in the context of institutionalized participation processes. PPs can activate a spiral of participatory frustration.

Various factors leading to frustration converge in our cases. In the first two cases, promoters exaggerated the scope of PPs. The search for political salience, for innovation and for differentiation from electoral competitors, led promoters to exaggerate the transformative potential of PPs, concealing their limited scope and formal authority. In the second case, a leftist party governing as a minority sought to increase its visibility through the publicity afforded by its PB. In this case, many actors were involved without being fully aware of the potential costs, benefits and constraints. Members of associations were therefore too optimistic in forecasting their potential influence. The lack of awareness regarding the real scope of the PP was the main cause of disillusionment. As a result, a legacy of frustration was left that may jeopardize future promotion of other PPs in these municipalities.

Second, our cases also illustrate how inadequate institutional design can lead to frustration. Particularly in the third case we saw how the rigidity of participant selection mechanisms (nominated appointments on a permanent basis and non-replaceable representatives) failed to take full advantage of the more flexible dynamics of participation in local associations. The PP was alien to these. This case also illustrates the importance of adjustment mechanisms. Specifically, the implementation of additional issue-specific forums, participatory evaluations, diagnostic workshops and revision periods may be crucial in order to increase the adaptability and complementarity of institutional design to the dynamics of associations.

Thirdly, the cases analyzed also illustrate feelings of frustration arising from lack of impact and abrupt discontinuations. In the context of a PB in which proposals are binding (where there is a political commitment to implement them at the least), the failure to accomplish formal commitments to implementation, and / or the substantial modification of the proposals caused much resentment. Moreover, if PPs are cancelled and previous agreements are not implemented the dynamics of frustration increase in a spiral of distrust towards local institutions. The lack of continuity and impact has a devastating effect on the trust that participants have in political institutions.

The significance of participatory frustration goes beyond the success or failure of PPs in deepening democracy and increasing transparency in the interactions between citizens and authorities (Bherer et al., 2016). Participatory frustration has long term effects upon participant attitudes and as such it is reasonable to argue that it can have an impact upon local political culture. For participants these events are socializing experiences (Pincock, 2012; Funes, Talpin and Rull, 2014) in which learning may occur leading to the reinforcement or revision political values and attitudes (Eder, 1999). Although this study does not address this connection, one can reasonably argue that the effects among participants may also influence the local political culture. Part of the process of learning entails contrasting individual

experience with broader public discourses and / or social representations about participation. For instance, as seen in public opinion studies (García-Espín & Ganuza, 2017), participants may end up questioning the efficacy of engagement and their trust in institutions might be affected. Participants' confidence or distrust towards PPs may contribute to reinforcing or weakening trust towards local institutions. Hence, failed PPs may influence the political environment, generating negative views towards engagement in politics as well as distrust and detachment from broader political institutions. In this sense, negative attitudinal impacts upon members of associations are critical as these are a central group in institutional participation and community politics. They normally play the role of mediators (formal or informal) among different stakeholders in their communities (Baiocchi, 2005; Ganuza et al., 2014; //…//, 2016). Moreover, they arguably have a higher degree of access to the public sphere and means to reinforce (or contest) dominant social representations about PPs (Howarth, 2006). If our cases are representative of PPs in Spain, then these processes may contribute to the reinforcement of the negative representation of institutionalized forms of participation. PPs which fail in the four dimensions we already developed might contribute to the spread of feelings of political inefficacy, and, in a broader sense, to the overwhelming dissatisfaction with the functioning of democracy (Klingemann, 2014:116).

Nonetheless, and bearing in mind the limits of our study, the spiral of frustration mentioned above does not affect all types of participants equally. Font and Navarro (2013) argue that more active participants, those who are more engaged in associations or political groups, make the most negative evaluations of PPs. Similarly, Talpin (2012: 168-170) concludes that while beginners find that these institutions are too partisan, the more experienced participants see that these processes are too limited. The role of the profile of participants should be taken into account in future studies to gauge with greater precision how participatory frustration affects different types of participants.

Our results also suggest that participatory frustration is not inevitable. Although it was a modest experience in terms of its scope, the *Local Volunteers' Council* (AC-Andalusia) illustrates how PPs can be implemented in ways that temper frustration. The involvement of participants from the very outset made them aware of the degree of influence they could expect. It also helped to establish clear aims and decision-making procedures, which favored the effective implementation of agreements and campaigns. From a practical point of view, these are the minimum requirements to avoid frustration in institutionalised PPs: self-regulation, clarity in rules and aims from the outset, adjustment mechanism for the management of expectations, and the achievement of policy outputs. We may still not know to what extent PPs are the most effective antidote against political disaffection. However, as a recommendation for practitioners, we can say that the above conditions are to be met in order to avoid participatory frustration.

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ANNEX

Table 3. Interview code, profile and references to frustration

		Code	Interviews	Profile	Frustration references
Madrid	Participatory Budgeting	1	Two members of a social movement, currently in a local party	MA	Yes
		2	Member of new left party with representation	PR	Yes
		3	Representative of a youth leisure association and PB delegate	MA	Yes
		4	Representative of local development association and PB delegate	MA	Yes
		5	Participation councilor and member of the government (*Socialist Party*)	PR	Yes
		6	Ordinary citizen and former member of the Socialist Party	MA	Yes
		7	Member of women association and PB delegate	MA	Yes
		8	PB coordinator and municipal employee	PO	No
	Advisory Council	9	Representative of a neighborhood association	MA	Yes
		10	Representative of an environmental association	MA	Yes
		11	Two representatives of a neighborhood association	MA	Yes
		12	Member of opposition party *(Popular Party)*	PR	Yes
		13	Councilor and member of the main opposition party *(Socialist Party)*	PR	Yes
		14	Director of the local Health care Centre	PO	Yes
		15	Two members of a women association	MA	No
		16	Participation Councilor and member of the government (*United Left*)	PR	No
		17	Municipal employee in *Participation Department*	PO	No
Andalusia	Participatory Budgeting	18	Representative of a neighborhood association	MA	Yes
		19	PB facilitator	PO	Yes
		20	Representative of a neighborhood association	MA	Yes
		21	Municipal employee in *Participation Department*	PO	Yes
		22	Social worker employed in a NGO	MA	Yes
		23	Representative of a neighborhood association	MA	Yes
		24	Councilor and member of the main opposition party *(Popular Party)*	PR	Yes
		25	Representative of a neighborhood association	MA	Yes
	Advisory Council	26	Representative of an Alzheimer Patients' Association and President of the Adv. Council	MA	Yes
		27	Representative of a NGO dedicated to assist minors under guardianship	MA	No
		28	Representative of a HIV Association	MA	No
		29	Municipal employee in participation department	PO	No
		30	Director of the Participation Area	PO	No
		31	Participation councilor and member of the government party *(Popular Party)*	PR	No
		32	Former particip. councilor and member of the oppos. party during fieldwork *(Socialist Party)*	PR	No
Catalonia	Participatory Budgeting	33	Representative of a skaters' association	MA	Yes
		34	Representative of a neighborhood association	MA	Yes
		35	Representative of a neighborhood association	MA	Yes
		36	Head of the *Participation Department*	PO	Yes
		37	Councilor and Deputy Mayor (*Coalition Socialist and United Left of Catalonia*)	PR	Yes
		38	Opposition Councilor *(Nationalist Right Wing Party)*	PR	Yes
		39	Representative of a neighborhood association	MA	No
		40	Representative of the Social Rights Observatory	MA	Yes
		41	Temporal PB coordinator	PO	Yes
	Adviso	42	Representative of a women association	MA	Yes
		43	Representative of a neighborhood association	MA	Yes
		44	Opposition party (*Citizens, center-right wing party*)	PR	Yes
		45	Head of the *Participation Department*	PO	Yes

46	Councilor of Social Services (*Socialist Party*)	PR	No
47	Municipal employee in the area of local trade	PO	No
48	Former councilor and ex-president of the Council *(Socialist Party)*	PR	No
49	Councilor of Equality (*United Left*)	PR	Yes
50	Representative of a craftsmen association	MA	No

Note: MA (member of association); PR (political representative); PO (Public Official)

Source: own elaboration

Notes

[i] The authors have contributed equally to this article; the order of authors is alphabetical.