Explaining the different fate of participatory policy proposals

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Abstract: One of the aspects of participatory processes that have rarely been the subject of systematic comparison is the fate of their outputs: their policy proposals. We know very little about the factors that affect whether these proposals are accepted, rejected or transformed. The goal of this paper is twofold. First, we offer a theoretical model that aims to explain which contextual or policy related factors affect the likelihood of proposals being implemented. Second, we explain the research design used to test these ideas on a diverse set of 611 policy proposals and show through multilevel analysis some of the variables that play a significant explanatory role. Some process related variables are important. Our main finding is that proposals coming out from strategic planning or from less deliberative processes have less chance of being adopted. Economic as well as political reasons (being a more challenging proposal or having less support among administrative and elected local personnel) are also important.

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1. 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). 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). 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 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). A similar picture emerges from Danish consensus conferences (Klüver 1995; Joss 1998), deliberative polls (Lehr et al 2003 quoted in Goodin and Dryzek 2006), Swiss participatory planning (Koch, 2013) or Spanish citizen juries (Font and Blanco, 2007). 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.

Our aim in this paper is to contribute to fill the gap in knowledge of the factors that help explain the different fates of policy proposals across different contexts and participatory processes. First, we discuss the relationship between proposals and policy outcomes, identifying the different potential fates of proposals in the policy process and, as a result, defining the dependent variable to be used in our research (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. Through the discussion of these factors we present our independent variables (section 3). Section 4 develops our research strategy and operationalization proposal to test this model in a set of 611 policy proposals coming out from participatory processes developed in

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three Spanish regions. Section 5 presents the results of a multilevel analysis conducted to test the ideas presented in sections 2 and 3, in the data presented in section 4. Finally, section 6 concludes with a final discussion of these preliminary results.

2. The proposal to policy process[2] - defining our dependent variable

Many ideas and proposals come out of a participatory process, but only a few are ever formally approved by the sponsoring authority. Explaining the fate of these different proposals is our central task. 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 the promotion of social justice), their number (from one to hundreds coming out from a single process) or the formality of the procedure of proposal approval 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.

(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 citizens' 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). 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.

[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, although in some cases these proposals may also appear during diagnosis or evaluation phases.

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)[3]. In sum, whereas some participatory processes employ what Baoicchi and Ganuza (2014: 36) have called an "exclusive conveyor belt", with minimum veto points where citizen proposals can be changed, others offer extensive scope for these changes to happen, including cherry-picking proposals by local authorities (Smith, 2001) or "selective listening" (Sintomer, Herzberg and Röcke, 2008).

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 and three different aspects have been considered.

1. **How far the proposal has gone** in the formal policy process, considering a scale (from low to high) of potential evidences of adoption: Rejected/ignored; Only formal acceptance of proposal; Appears in department's policy documentation; Appears in department's programme of work, Implementing (in process); Full implementation.
2. Where **the process of implementation stands in 2014**, when fieldwork was conducted. Thus, there were proposals that had been approved but had never been fully implemented or proposals that had a permanent character (e.g., have a specific planning meeting every six months), had been implemented for a couple of years and then abandoned.
3. Proposals are likely **to suffer significant changes** during the process of adoption by public authorities[4]. Partial adoption is also a likely outcome. To capture this possibility we distinguish between proposals that are adopted with no modification and those that are modified during adoption.[5]

To summarise this set of realities, we have adopted a final three category dependent variable that combines the information of these three aspects in three final categories: proposals adopted and implemented without changes, proposals partially adopted or adopted with changes and proposals basically abandoned by local authorities.

[3] Some participatory budgets would tend to be exceptions to this rule. For example, the detailed analysis of the proposals from the Seville participatory budgeting process exemplifies these different trajectories: according to an external 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 the official local budget, because they were already incorporated into the budget; and another 15% were general ideas that could not be translated into a specific policy with its own budget.

[4] Occasionally, policy proposals may take a quite detailed form that leaves little discretion when it comes to adoption. However, 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.

[5] We have also collected data on whether the public authority offered an explanation in those cases where proposals were either modified or abandoned. This is a critical element of accountability and transparency (Smith 2009) and will be the subject of analysis in a later paper.

In sum, 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, 2009: 93) among the proposals? In cases where they do, is there a clear 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.

3. Explanatory factors and independent variables

We distinguish two basic types of explanations: contextual and 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. local budget) or to the characteristics of the specific participatory devices (e.g. deliberative character). In comparison, policy related explanations are those that are specific to each of the policy proposals, including factors such as their cost or the degree of support within the authority for the proposal[6].

a. Contextual factors

A number of contextual variables could reasonably be proffered in an attempt to explain the fate of proposals. Of those that relate to the character of the municipality, there are good reasons to expect that the *culture* of the public authority will play a critical role. The significance of organisational culture is highlighted by Cooper and Smith (2012) in their analysis of public participation practitioners in Germany and the UK. Health authorities in the UK have been in the vanguard of engaging the public, with participation practitioners warmly recounting the pleasure of working with the Department of Health. This contrasts with a far less sympathetic attitude in the German case. In organisations with a less developed participation culture 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' (Newman et al 2004: 210). Those authorities that have a history of using participatory mechanisms are more likely to have developed a more accommodating administrative environment for the incorporation of proposals. Our proxy to capture organisational culture is the number of participatory processes employed during the previous years.

A second municipal-level contextual variable that is often highlighted in explaining the emergence and embedding of participatory processes is the *ideology* of governing parties. 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)[7]. However, this previous research tends to focus on the *creation* of participatory

[6] A similar approach using both contextual and proposal related variables to explain their final outcomes appears in Labone and Chase (2009).

[7] 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

spaces. It is an open question as to whether that apparent ideological bias affects the *uptake* and *selection* of proposals from participatory processes (our research question).

A third potential important explanatory variable at the contextual level is the *availability of resources* in the municipality. The successful story of Porto Alegre's participatory budget 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 rise 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. Income per capita and the existence of external funding for the participatory process are the variables capturing the potential explanatory role of resources.

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). Whether such integration leads to increased adoption and less cherry-picking remains an open question, but we might well expect that the *size of population* of a municipality more easily enables popular control over the fate of proposals.

The second set of contextual variables in explaining outcomes relates to the design of the participatory process. We highlight two elements that capture different aspects of design. The first is the broad *type of participatory process*. As Fung (2006) notes, participatory processes vary in the extent to which they are empowered – the extent to which they are explicitly designed to impact on formal decision making processes (Smith 2009). Returning to the classic example of participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, the structure of the process makes it difficult for the authorities to selectively respond to proposals as there is continual oversight by participants[8]. In our analysis we distinguish between four broad types of participatory process: participatory budgeting, strategic planning, other permanent mechanisms and other temporary mechanisms.

Within the literature on participatory mechanisms, theories of deliberative democracy have been in ascendency. As such, the role of deliberation amongst participants has been the object of much analysis. But the relationship between the presence of deliberation and the impact of proposals that emerge from such a context has not been interrogated to the same extent. There is a growing recognition (both theoretically and empirically) that 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). Of particularly interest here is the claim that there is a *trade-off between deliberative and participatory goals* (Mutz, 2006; Pateman

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increased public participation in relation to quality of service delivery. Even for Participatory Budgeting, Baiocchi and Ganuza (2014) make clear that the most recent wave of diffusion has clearly gone beyond ideological boundaries.

[8] Generalising from this case may be hazardous however, as the term participatory budgeting has been used to designate processes that are far less empowering than the early Brazilian models (Baocchi and Ganuza 2014; Sintomer, Herzberg and Röcke, 2008).

2012)[9]. To capture the deliberative qualities of the processes in our study, we create an index of deliberative qualities based on proxies such as the presence of facilitators and/or consultants, the presence of experts and the extent to which participants were provided with information (see section four).

b. Policy related factors

The second set of potentially important explanatory factors differentiates between proposals that have been produced in the same context (municipality and participatory process). The emphasis of most of the research mentioned in the previous section 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 content of the proposals and the degree of support for the proposal.

Proposals do not appear in a vacuum and as such sit in a relationship with the existing policy and practices of the public authority. It is a reasonable assumption that the willingness to adopt a proposal will be affected by the extent to which it conforms with or challenges existing policy. There is an extensive 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; Fiorino 1990: 230-31). Such a sceptical perspective does not entail that all proposals will be ignored by public authorities; rather only those that reinforce existing prejudices of the body in question will be adopted. As such we have collected data that captures the *degree to which proposals challenge existing* policies and practices.

The substantive content of the proposal will also have *cost* implications: the higher the cost, arguably the greater the impediment for implementation. In other words, the cheaper the proposal the more likely it is to be adopted. This may be mitigated where other sources of funding are available for the implementation of that specific proposal, for example from a higher level of government. To this end, we have included variables that capture both the cost of proposals and whether external sources of funding were available.

The final proposal-level variable that we include is the presence or absence of support that a particular proposal garners. While the degree of support from participants and broader civil society may have some effect, it is reasonable to assume that *support within the authority* will be more critical for the fate of proposals. While there are always complex rationalities and power

[9] Gilman (2013), exploring the case of the New York participatory budgeting, suggests that whereas some neighbourhood groups are better at deliberation at the expense of efficiency, others are more goal-oriented (and less deliberative) and tend to produce outcomes that move more easily into policy-making. Recent work on the participedia dataset indicates a lack of a relationship between deliberative characteristics and policy impact (Smith, Richards and Gastil 2015).

constellations within public bodies, we simplify the dynamics by analysing the extent to which there is support for particular proposals across politicians and local civil servants.

Table 1 summarizes the main explanatory factors and specific variables developed through this section and section 4 provides further operationalization details.

Table 1 about here

4. From theory to operationalization

This section presents the data collection and operationalization strategy to test the ideas developed in the previous sections. To test the explanatory power of the different factors mentioned we need variation at the three levels that appear in Table 1: local context, participatory process and policy proposal. This is especially important, since most of the literature mentioned in the previous sections 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 and regions. Since a fully representative frame of participatory process does not exist and our goal is more to ensure diversity, our initial sampling frame is 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 (a minimum of three years between the proposals and the fieldwork), but also that memories and administrative records are recent enough to be tracked (maximum of seven years). Since our goal is to analyse what happens to policy proposals we focus only on those participatory processes that produce some kind of recommendation that is specific enough so that it becomes possible to follow whether it has been adopted[11]. Thus, **the universe for our**

[10] The details of the original data collection process appear in Font, Della Porta and Sintomer (2014). The three regions selected introduce substantial contextual variation since they include quite different levels of development as well as very different regional participation policies (Sintomer and Del Pino, 2014).

[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 are made. They cannot be pure complains pointing a problem, but identify either a general or specific policy action or strategy".

study is participatory processes developed by municipalities in these three regions during the period 2007-2011[12] that end up in policy proposals.

Our final unit of analysis will be policy proposals. Since it is likely 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 these proposals to see whether there are factors systematically associated with their different fate.

4.1. Choosing participatory processes

To construct the sampling frame we have departed from two databases with information on different participatory experiences developed by subnational governments collected following two different approaches. On the one hand, we used a comparative database for Andalusia, Madrid and Catalonia collected by web content mining (N = 292). On the other hand, another process of data collection was developed in Andalusia with a double mix-mode survey design aimed to capture information on smaller municipalities. In order to guarantee the presence of smaller municipalities (up to 20,000 inhabitants), we have selected cases from both databases[13].

Before selecting the cases and in order to adjust our initial databases to the scope of our research, we have undertaken the following data cleaning operations: Elimination of non-eligible cases that were out of the temporal or territorial scope of our research[14] and elimination of cases lacking relevant information (e.g., a minimal description of the process or not having policy proposals).

Among the remaining cases and in order to have a good representation of diverse types of participatory processes we used a stratified sampling design. This way, we ensured a good representation of potentially important independent variables through the different strata. Each stratum was represented through a small number of cases that have been randomly selected.

Three variables have been chosen to create the strata for case selection: 1) Region and Municipality Size (10 cases from each of the three regions with a similar data collection process plus 10 additional cases from smaller Andalusian municipalities); 2) Experience with participatory practices[15] ; 3) Process Design: at least two processes in each region from of each of the following type of processes: Participatory budgeting, Strategic planning (agenda 21, education, economy), other permanent participatory mechanisms and other temporary processes.

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

[13] Since the Andalusian database was included to cover the reality of smaller municipalities, in this dataset we only considered municipalities with less than 20,000 inhabitants.

[14] 108 processes were out of the temporal scope of this research (in most cases, developed before 2007) and 28 processes were out of scope because they had been developed by supra-local administrations.

[15] Two municipalities with three or more processes (selecting three processes for each one) and the remaining four cases in each region from municipalities with one or two experiences. Since in Catalonia there were only two municipalities with three or more experiences, there we have selected three municipalities with two experiences each.

Whenever choice was possible after applying the stratification criteria, the final selection of cases has been done through random selection. The combination of these criteria resulted in the theoretic sample distribution shown in table 2 and in the final selection represented in table 3.

(Tables 2 and 3 around here)

In order to reach the highest possible response rate among the initially selected cases we adopted a rather strict substitution policy[16]. A little less than one third of the cases considered were excluded[17]. This means that we reached an excellent response rate of 81,3%[18].

4.2 Selecting policy proposals and fieldwork

The next step was finding the listings of proposals derived from each process. In some cases, this step was quite straightforward as there was a clearly identifiable document that represented the final outcome of the process and listed the final proposals, but this was not always the case[19].

Given that certain processes had more than two hundred proposals there was a need to find a balance between capturing a diversity of proposals from each process to observe the potential cherry-picking process and the need to limit the effort of the team as well as of the local interviewees. With this goal in mind, we limited the number of proposals for which to collect information to 20 per process, for those cases where the total number of proposals were higher. The selection of proposals was made through systematic random sample[20]. When the total number of proposals coming out of a single process was less than 20, all of them were selected.

In our information gathering processes we have accessed a variety of sources, from official documents on the participatory process, publicly available or not, to interviews with municipal officers, participants, government and opposition politicians and other informants, through all

[16] Initially sampled cases were substituted by similar cases only in two cases: either when the fieldwork showed that, contrary to our initial data and expectations, they were not eligible (processes not producing policy proposals, out of temporal scope, etc.) or when it became clear that we were not going to have enough cooperation to collect most of the information we were interested in (refusals).

[17] Lack of collaboration accounts for a little more than half the number of reasons for substitution, but seven out of the nine processes substituted for this motive had been developed in just two municipalities.

[18] The response rate has been calculated by dividing the total number of cases included in the final sample (39) by the total number of eligible cases (48).

[19] In other cases we have found more than one document, as a result for example of the use of different participatory procedures or the same procedure applied to different groups of participants. We also found documents that represent ideas coming out from different steps of the same participatory process. In those ambiguous cases we have kept whatever was closest to be considered a final document collecting policy proposals coming out from the participatory process. Finally, when the process had ended without producing any list of proposals, we abandoned the case and replaced it by another similar one.

[20] Systematic sampling offered the advantage of respecting to a greater extent the structure of the listings of proposals, assuring a better representation for the different groups of proposals established as a consequence of the order followed in the documentation of the process (e.g., by thematic areas). For those cases where the proposals were recorded in different independent documents we previously determined the number of proposals to be selected from each document by way of proportional allocation.

kinds of information included in the media, personal blogs of participants, etc. The data collection was designed as a sequential process aiming to get as much information from secondary sources as possible, before proceeding with the most costly step of face to face interviewing (Figure 2). The fieldwork team included three doctoral students and lasted approximately six months.

(Figure 2 about here)

The codebook[21] includes the coding procedures for the quantitative information collected and captures more than 100 variables that belong to the three levels of analysis mentioned above: Polity factors (e.g., size of municipality); Process design factors (e.g., type of actors involved in the process); and policy related factors (e.g., cost of proposals).

The first version of the codebook[22] was tested and improved thanks to the evidence obtained from its implementation in a pilot case study. To homogenise the data collection process there were formal team meetings every two weeks (plus more frequent discussions and interactions among the fieldwork team members) during the fieldwork period to discuss common problems faced and make any necessary decision to adapt the data collection protocol. In addition, the fieldwork team produced a fieldwork journal[23] for each participatory process[24].

The variety of sources accessed to retrieve the information as well as their different degree of quality and willingness to cooperate meant that there were important differences in the information collected. Also, some of the information was based on official records and other on more subjective personal assessments. In order to be able to account for this factor, the data includes a set of variables assessing the reliability of the information recorded for the main variables in the codebook[25]. Out of these specific variable level reliability data we have developed a synthetical index allowing the assessment of general quality of results for each policy proposal as well as for each case (participatory process), which have been used to weight the analysis of the results that we present in the next section.

4.3. Variables, operationalization and analytical strategy

[21] The final version of the codebook is available here https://cherrypickingproject.wordpress.com/project/codebook/

[22] A first draft of this codebook was built from the operationalization of the research hypothesis established after the review of the theoretical and empirical evidence available in the literature on the adoption of public policies proposals arising from participatory processes and their inclusion in the local political agenda.

[23] Some examples of the anonymized fieldwork journals are available here https://cherrypickingproject.wordpress.com/project/samplejournal/

[24] These documents show the different steps that have been followed in the information retrieval process for each participatory process, problems found and the operational decisions that have been taken along the way. Together with the qualitative information registered in the fieldwork forms and the recordings of the interviews, they have allowed us to move back in the process at the final coding stage in the cases where we had to complete the coding scheme.

[25] These variables code the reliability of the information recorded in one variable according to the quality of the information source (written source or oral report; number of sources and/or mastery of the key informant) and the degree of agreement or disagreement among different sources as an indicator of objectivity of information. The categorisation of reliability ranges from 1 'No reason to have doubts' up to 4 'Maximum uncertainty'. For more information on this variable and reliability coding directions see https://cherrypickingproject.wordpress.com/project/codebook/

In order to test our hypotheses, we have operationalized the **dependent variable** as a three-category variable with values 1, 2 and 3. Value 1 identifies all the proposals that have been rejected or only sparely developed. Value 2 identifies all the proposals that have been partially developed, as well as those that were identified as fully implemented but which were significantly modified by the local government. Finally, the value 3 gathers all the proposals that were fully implemented[26].

As for our main **independent variables**[27], we consider four variables describing the policies' character, three variables referring to the processes they stem from and a variable measured at the municipal level.

Regarding the variables measured at the policy level, our multivariate models includes its challenging character[28], its estimated or final cost[29], the existence of external funding for its implementation[30] and the presence of internal support[31].

Among the processes level variables, three have been selected. In the first place, we have created a deliberation index[32]. We have also considered the type of process, paying special attention to the two which could present more specific patterns, participatory budgeting and strategic planning (leaving as reference category all the other experiences). Finally, we have created an index that taps the organisational culture of the municipality[33].

Given that our dependent variable was measured at a lower level (policy proposals) than some of our explanations (process or municipality level), we decided to estimate the adoption of policy proposals using a series of **multilevel models**. These models allow considering dependent and independent variables measured at different levels and, although they are quite computationally demanding and its interpretation not always straightforward, they yield robust coefficients

[26] They include 6 proposals that were modified to improve them.

[27] We describe here the variables included in the final model. Previous analyses have included all variables listed in table 1, as well as other independent variables (from types of participants in the participatory process to degree of support to the proposal in the participatory process), which did not have significant effects.

[28] The continuity character is a dichotomous variable which takes the value 1 when the policy challenges the existing situation in the municipality, and zero otherwise.

[29] This variable takes the final quantity expended when the policy has already been implemented or the budgeted cost, when the policy is not yet concluded. In both cases, the variable has four possible values: no cost, low (less than 50.000€), intermediate (50.000 to 200.000€) and high (more than 200.000 €).

[30] The existence of external funding for policy proposal implementation is also a dichotomous variable which takes the value 1 if that is the case, zero otherwise.

[31] The internal support indicator gathers information about how much the city council politicians agree on the implementation of the policy proposal, along with the degree of agreement among the city council public servants. Both variables ranged from 0 (totally disagreed) to 3 (totally agreed). They were added (Cronbach's alpha 0.7) suggested, generating a quite skewed variable probably overstating the agreement of the local actors. Finally, the index was collapsed into a dichotomous indicator, signaling with the value one only those observations in which both politicians and technicians totally agreed about the implementation of policy proposals.

[32] It includes the existence of a consultant agency or facilitator, the degree of information (low, medium or high) provided and the presence of experts. The three variables have been added generating a new indicator which ranges between 0 and 3, the maximum value implying that the process features the three deliberative aspects.

[33] Measuring the previous participatory experience of the municipality. The variable takes the value 1 if the municipality had developed only 1 experience; the value 2 if the municipality held between 2 and 3 experiences and value 3 if 4 or more experiences had been developed

ensuring that the effect of all proposal-level and contextual-level variables will not be overstated due to the similarities of proposals within a process or a municipality, which is equivalent to grouping standard errors by contextual-level units. More precisely, we estimate our dependent variable by means of a series of linear multilevel models.

A crucial decision to make was choosing between a two-level and a three-level analysis. We have finally chosen a two-level model for several reasons. First, although the data are undeniably arranged in a multilevel structure, they are not perfectly pyramidal. Put in other words, our data do not comply with the rule of thumb regarding the minimum, safe, number of units at each level of the analyses, which should ideally be 30 or higher (Maas & Hox, 2004 & 2005). We have 25 municipalities, 40 participatory processes and about 611 policy proposals. Therefore, the aforementioned rule of thumb is violated when considering processes nested within municipalities. Finally, a likelihood ratio test comparing identical models with two or three levels yield no significant differences, suggesting that specifying a third level was not necessary. As a result, we have considered two levels: policy-level and contextual level, considering that processes and municipalities are both aspects of such policy context.

5. Results

This section develops in two steps. First, we have a preliminary look at our dependent variable, to show which have been the policy outcomes of the 611 policy proposals considered and examine its bilateral relationship with the independent variables. Next, we develop and discuss the multilevel model.

The landscape of policy proposals coming from participatory mechanisms offer plausibility to the idea of cherry-picking (i.e., for accepting some of the proposals but not all of them). Referenda with a clear, single and straightforward outcome are a clear exception. Most participatory mechanisms generate a significant number of policy proposals. Table 4 shows the number of proposals that appear in a preliminary search of the original universe of 249 participatory processes. The large majority of the processes that had precise proposals have more than 25 proposals. Several had more than 100 or even 200 proposals. In some of these cases, the proposals are organized and coherent list of ideas where the logic is that all of them should be implemented as a full policy package. In others, the list of proposals is closer to a wish list that includes all sorts of independent ideas from which cherry-picking a few is a real (and tempting) possibility.

Table 4 about here

Figure 3 summarizes the fate of participatory proposals. The first conclusion is that, even though cherry-picking exists, the outputs of participatory mechanisms have a significant impact in public policies: most of the policy proposals end being adopted (68.3%), and more than three quarters of them are implemented without modification. The other side of the story is the lack of feedback

from public authorities when a proposal is rejected or substantially modified: in more than half of these cases participants do not receive any explanation from local government. That is, local governments seem to be responsive regarding proposals coming from participatory mechanisms, but less accountable or transparent when these proposals are rejected or modified.

(Figure 3 about here)

If cherry-picking exists and some proposals are accepted, other modified and others rejected, the next step consists in determine what explanatory factors are associated with this degree of implementation of proposals. Regarding the impact of some characteristics of policy proposals on their implementation degree, figure 4 shows that proposals that do not challenge previous policies and practices are more likely to be adopted. The same is true for policies that have the support of local politicians and public servants and for those having external funding for their implementation: when this external support is not present, more than one third of proposals end not being implemented. Cost has also an effect on the degree of implementation, although this relation is not statistically significant as in the previous cases.

Figure 5 captures the bilateral relationship between contextual factors and policy implementation. The clearest relationship is with process design: participatory budgeting generates proposals that are fully implemented without modifications in more than half of the cases. Mechanisms with a high level of information provided to participants, the participation of experts and the presence of facilitator or external consultant also imply that less proposals are rejected (but only relations are statistically significant for the two first variables).

(Figures 4 and 5 about here)

These preliminary analyses suggest that the fate of policy proposals is strongly related with different characteristics of proposals and participatory contexts. In order to clarify the role of each of them we develop a multilevel analysis. The first estimation does not consider any independent variable. This null model is meant to find out how much variation is due to features and phenomena that stem from the contextual level. The intraclass correlation points to an 11% of the variation of the phenomenon under study due to second-level variables. It is therefore justified to go on with the multilevel analysis as this exceeds the threshold of 5%, usually considered the minimum variation proportion worth a multilevel analysis (Hox 2010).

The next model includes only variables measured at the proposal level. All of them have a significant impact on the implementation stage of the proposals. Therefore, challenging and costly proposals are less prone to be implemented, while those that count on external funding for their implementation and those that enjoyed a high degree of internal support from both politicians and technicians make their way more easily towards implementation.

Two contextual variables turn out to be significant. The first refers to the deliberative character of the processes, pointing that the more deliberative they were, the more likely it is that the proposals resulting from such process end in implemented policies. The second is the type of

participatory processes. Particularly, strategic planning generates proposals that are less likely to be implemented. It is also remarkable that the effect of having external funding for implementation almost disappears, and that the fact of being challenging sees its coefficient diminished, probably tapped by some of the process-level variables. Probably deliberative processes and strategic planning are responsible for such effect reduction, which would point to an indirect effect of participatory processes on the implementation of proposals. The last model adds to the former explanatory variables a municipality's feature, the local organizational culture, which has a negative significant effect. The effect of deliberation and strategic planning increase, as it happens with external funding and internal support.

(Table 5 about here)

How good is this last model? All model fit measures point that it is the best model of the table. The two pseudo-r squares show that we are able to explain about 28% of the phenomenon at the proposal level and about 50% of the variation due to contextual variables, with only 8 variables, which we can consider quite parsimonious. The AIC (Akaike Information Criterion) and the BIC (Bayesian Information Criterion) measures confirm this[34]. A final clue is provided by the intraclass correlation value, which is close to disappear in the last model, meaning that we have captured almost the totality of the variation due to context-level factors. On the basis of these models we can safely assume that the last estimation is the best one.

6. Discussion

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 resulting from participatory processes effectively evolve into actual policies. The degree to which this happens in reality has been the object of scant attention, especially if we move beyond individual case studies or research focusing in a single type of participatory process or covering a more limited set of policies (Drakiewicz, Challies and Newig, 2015). Our goal in this paper has been to present preliminary results of a project that addresses this gap. With this goal in mind we tracked the fate of 611 policy proposals emerging from 39 different participatory processes developed in municipalities of three Spanish regions between 2007 and 2011.

The set of suggestive results need a more detailed analysis and a careful discussion of their meaning and implications. Additionally, future data collection processes that introduce larger contextual diversity (including results in other countries and economic contexts) would be highly valuable to understand whether the same factors affect policy adoption in different environments.

[34] These measures are often used to compare non-nested models, as they simultaneously consider error and parsimony (Singer and Willett 2003). The last model achieves the lower of the AIC indicator, although the BIC points to the previous column model as the best one.

In the first part of the paper we have identified some of the reasons that explain why policy proposals fail to evolve into actual policies and have discussed what policy adoption means. Next, we 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 exploratory character of the research has meant that rather than specifying a limited set of strong hypotheses, we have chosen to develop a longer list of potentially important variables. In fact, we have collected data on a wider range of factors, even if our final models only include a few, selected after preliminary analysis for the sake of parsimony.

The scope for politicians to cherry-pick proposals exists, since most of the processes end with a substantial list of proposals. However, the extent of discretion and selective listening is more limited than we expected, with a majority of proposals being implemented. It may be the case that our descriptive results may be overstating the level of government compliance with proposals: certainly there are some extremely poorly designed and organised processes that are so poorly documented that they were not visible when we built our datasets; and the important role of local council personnel as informants may have slightly biased the results in a positive direction. These caveats aside, we claim that most of this surprisingly optimistic result is not down to methodological challenges, but relates to the limited character of many of the proposals: most of them are small projects and ideas that can be implemented without facing a tremendous economic or political challenge.

This is probably related to the explanatory factors that have not emerged as significant in our analysis. Rich and poor municipalities, left and right wing governments, large and small municipalities, processes developed with or without civil society – all have similar implementation levels. However, other contextual variables play an important role, sometimes a surprising one. The type of participatory process matters. This is particularly true for strategic planning, whose proposals have a significantly smaller chance of being implemented, a characteristic which is particularly distressing precisely because this is the type of mechanism where proposals are more often a coherent package aimed at generating strategic change. Which are the causal mechanisms that produce this outcome is an important issue that requires further discussion. The apparently larger capacity for proposals from participatory budgeting to be implemented (figure 5) disappears once we control for other relevant variables, showing that the existence of the process in itself is not a guarantee of more extensive implementation.

The results for other contextual variables are partially surprising. This is especially the case for organizational culture: municipalities with a larger participatory experience have a slightly smaller capacity to convert their proposals into (unchanged) policies. Are municipalities that develop many processes overwhelmed by the number of proposals such that they cannot convert them all? Or, putting it the other way around, do they have a longer list of proposals from which to cherry-pick? More deliberative qualities of the participatory process appear to contribute to larger implementation, a results at odds with some previous research that seemed to suggest a trade-off between deliberation and effective implementation (Goodin and Dryzek, 2006; Smith, Richards and Gastil, 2015). Two possible explanations emerge here. One, is the very different character of what “deliberation” means in Southern Europe or in most of the English speaking

world (Alarcón and Font, 2014): in our sample, “deliberative” experiences are not citizen juries, but processes that incorporate better information and facilitation than others. In fact, the alternative explanation is that our deliberative variable is mostly measuring the general quality and seriousness of the process, which may positively influence the attentiveness of local government to its results.

Finally, economic and political contents of the proposals are also very important. Proposals which do not challenge the current policy position and especially those that have the simultaneous support of political and technical voices within the local government have a much larger chance of being cherry-picked: ending up adopted and implemented without changes. If they also happen to be less costly (or to have their own external sources of funding), such proposals are simply too attractive for any local authority to hesitate to adopt.

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Table 1. The explanatory factors of policy proposals' success

Types of factors		Variables	Operationalization: response categories
Contextual factors	Context/[35] polity factors	Organisational culture	1 (only one experience) to 3 (five or more)
		Ideology of mayor's party[36]	1 (left), 2 (social-democrats); 3 (other); 4 right
		Resources available: Local budget	1 (up to 800€/inhabitant) to 6 (more than 1200€)
		Resources available: external funding	1 (yes); 2 (no)
		Size of municipality	1 (less than 5.000 inhabitants) to 5 (more than 50.000)
	Process design	Type of participatory process	1 (Participatory budgeting); 2 (strategic planning); 3 (others)
		Deliberative style (information, experts and facilitation)	0 to 3
Policy related factors	Content of proposals	Challenging or not challenging	0 (not challenging); 1 (challenging)
		Implementation cost	0 to 4 (section 4 for details)
		Availability of external funding for implementation	0 (no); 1 (yes)
	Degree of support	In local institution	1 (both politicians and local public servants support it); 0 (none or only one of them support it)

Source: own elaboration

[35] Underlined variables are those included in the final model shown in table 5.
[36] When the participatory processes was developed.

Table 2. Designed sample

Sampling Frame	Mix-mode Survey n= 187	Web mining database n= 214		
		Region / Municipality size		
	Andalusia (up to 20,000)	**Andalusia (all)**	**Madrid (all)**	**Catalonia (all)**
Total number of cases	n= 10	n= 10	n= 10	n= 10
Strata				
Nº of experiences				
Three or more	6 processes (in 2 municipalities)	6 processes (in 2 municipalities)	6 processes (in 2 municipalities)	6 processes (in 3 municipalities)[37]
Less than three	4 processes	4 processes	4 processes	4 processes
Process Design				
Participatory budget	2 processes	2 processes	2 processes	2 processes
Strategic planning	3 processes	3 processes	2 processes	3 processes
Other permanent	3 processes	3 processes	4 processes	3 processes
Other temporary	2 processes	2 processes	2 processes	2 processes

Source: Own elaboration

Table 3. Accomplished sample composition

	Participatory Processes		**Policy Proposals**	
	N	**%**	**n**	**%**
Nº of experiences				
Three or more	24	61.5%	398	65.1%
Less than three	13	33.3%	192	31.4%
No info	2	5.2%	21	3.5%
Process Design				
Participatory budget	8	20.5%	158	25.9%
Strategic planning	14	35.9%	269	44.0%
Other permanent	8	20.5%	88	14.4%
Other temporary	9	23.1%	96	15.7%
Municipality Size				
Less than 5,000 inh.	3	7.7%	49	8.0%
5,000 to 10,000 inh.	8	20.5%	129	21.1%
10,001 to 20,000 inh.	6	15.4%	87	14.2%
20,001 to 50,000 inh.	6	15.4%	101	16.5%
More than 50,000 inh.	16	41.0%	245	40.1%

Source: Cherry-picking Project Datafile

[37] In Catalonia we have selected among municipalities with two or more cases as just two of them had three experiences.

Table 4. Policy proposals from 249 participatory processes

CHERRYPICKING´S DATABASE					
Experiences without proposals		**Experiences with proposals**		Experiences without info about proposals	
23	9%	**192**	**77%**	34	14%

Number of experiences according to the potential implementation		
All implementable	68	35%
A majority implementable	14	7%
Both	3	2%
A majority generic	2	1%
All generic	5	3%
Not enough information to permit proposal classification	100	52%

Number of proposals per experience (excluding no info)		
1-5 proposals	14	16%
6-10 proposals	9	11%
11-15 proposals	10	12%
16-20 proposals	4	5%
21-24 proposals	3	3%
25 or more proposals	46	53%

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 5. Multilevel estimation of the implementation of proposals

	(1) b/se	(2) b/se	(3) b/se	(4) b/se
Proposal level				
Challenging		-.337**	-.276*	-0.271*
		(.105)	(0.117)	(.113)
Cost		-.162***	-.164***	-0.158***
		(.044)	(.044)	(.043)
External funding		.351*	.332~	0.338*
		(.172)	(.170)	(.172)
Internal Support (High)		.560***	.580***	0.593***
		(.117)	(.120)	(.117)
Contextual (Process and Municipality) level				
Deliberation Index			.190***	.213**
			(.042)	(.041)
Type: participatory budget			-.060	.051
			(.121)	(.117)
Type: strategic planning			-.433***	-.502***
			(.105)	(.106)
Municipal density of participation				-.136*
				(.065)
N	569	460	400	400
Var-L1	.078	.042	.001	.000
Var-R	.608	.492	.511	.503
ICC-L1	.114	.078	.003	.000
-2LL	-45.043	-321.811	-293	-290
df	0	4	7	8
AIC	906.1	657.6	606.9	603.9
BIC	919.118	686.5	646.803	647.8
sb_rsq_l1		.219	.265	.279
sb_rsq_l2		.293	.481	.496

Standard errors in parentheses. Method: Maximum Likelihood.
*+ p<.10 * p<.05** p<.01, *** p<.001*
N (first-level number of observations), N2 (second –level number of observations), Var-L1 (variance of the intercept), Var-R (residual variance), -2LL (deviance -2 log likelihood), df (degrees of freedom), AIC (Akaike Information Criterion), BIC (Schwarz's Bayesian Information Criterion), sb_rsq_l1 (first-level pseudo R-squared), sb_rsq_l2 (second-level pseudo R-squared).
Weighted results

Figure 1. From policy proposals to policy outcomes

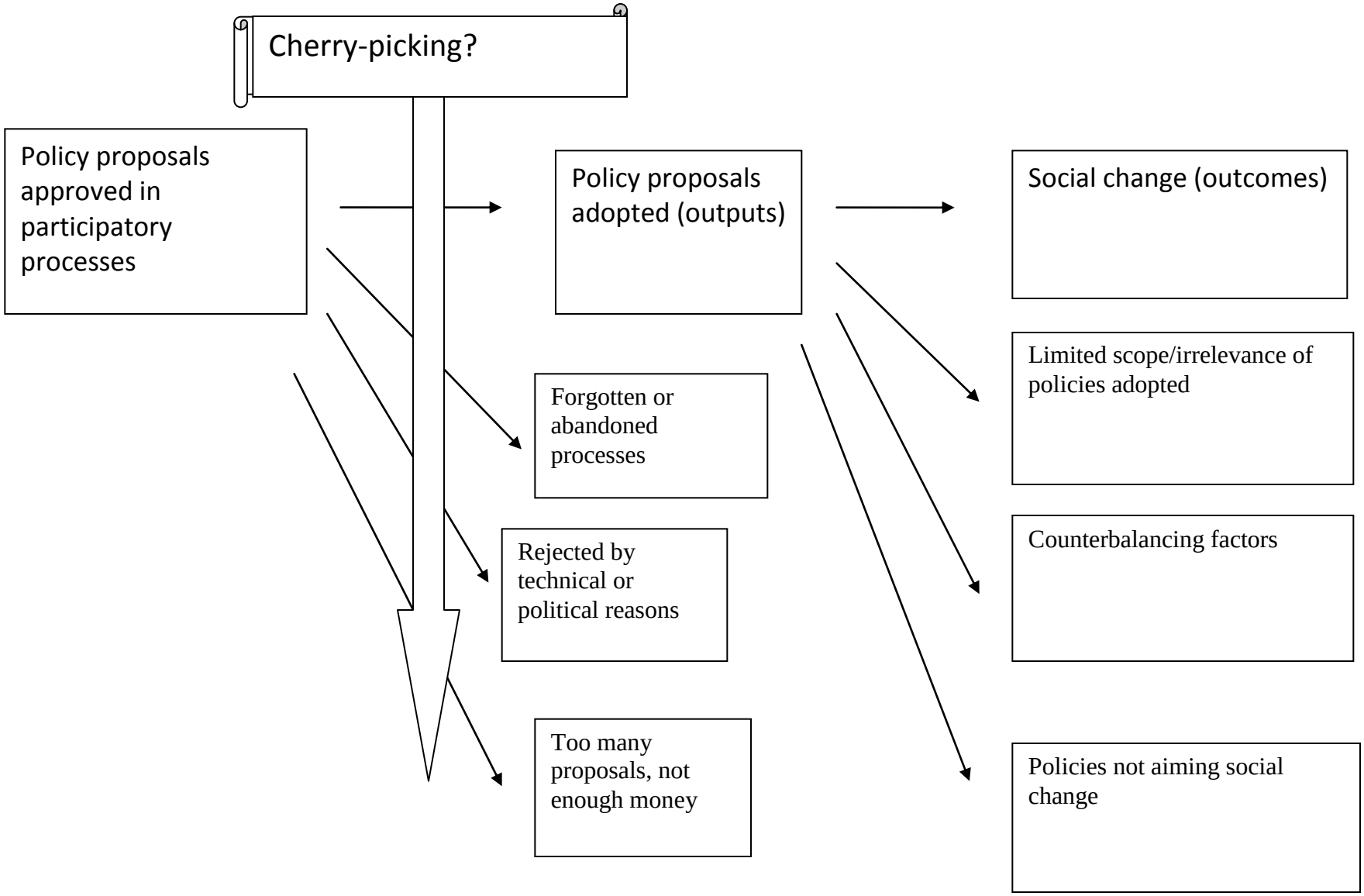


Figure 2. Methodological design: main steps

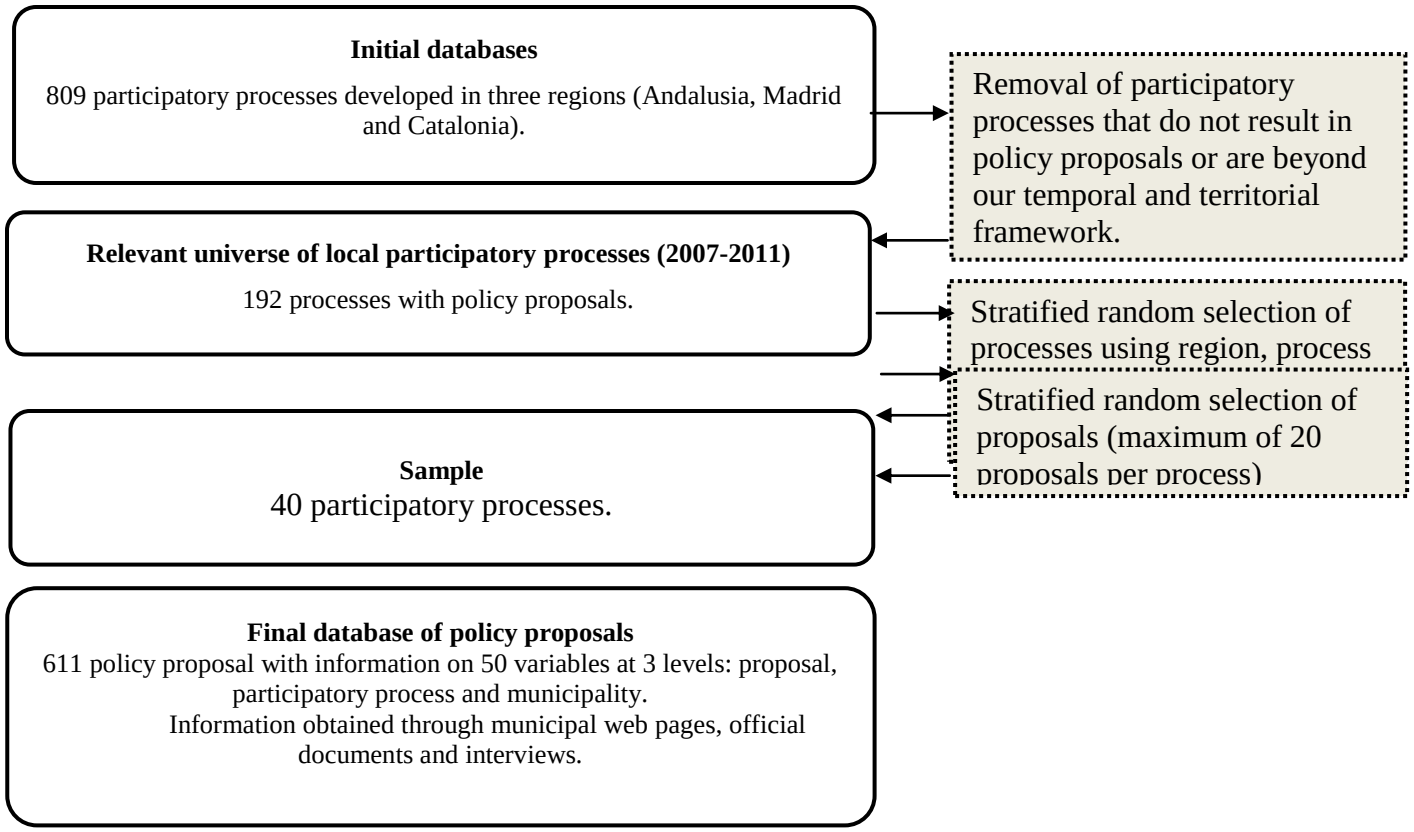
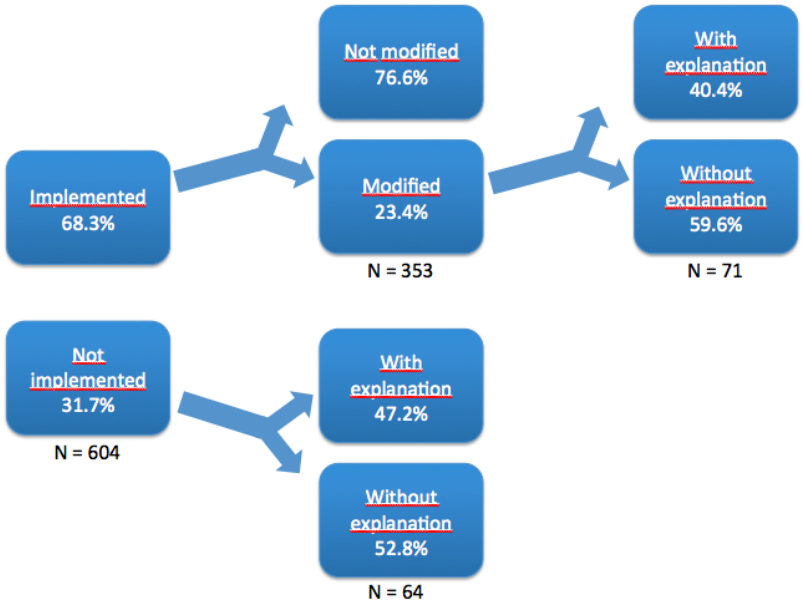
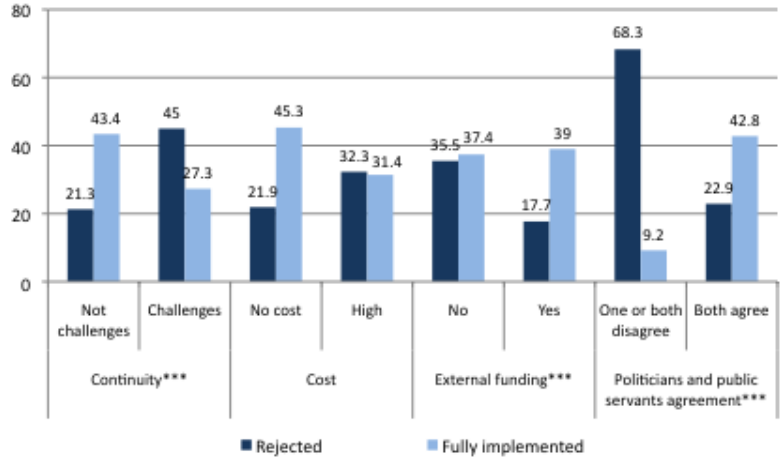


Figure 3. Percentage of policy proposals being implemented, modified and explained



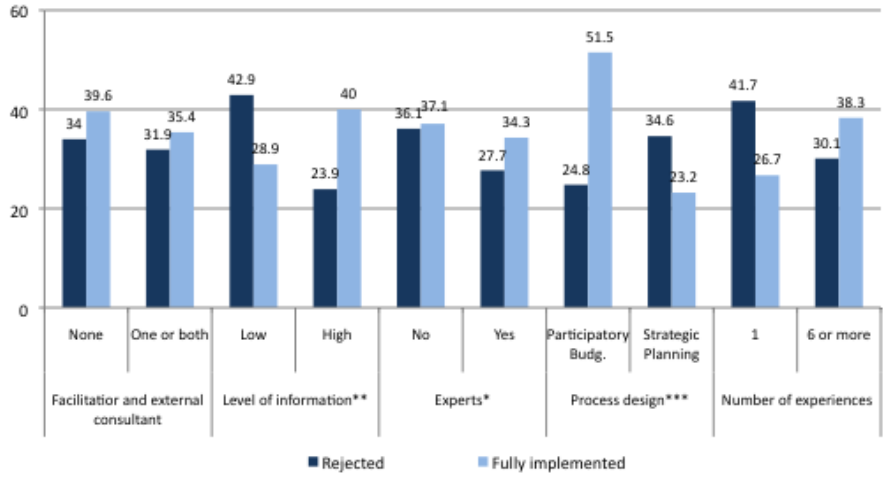
Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 4. Degree of implementation of proposals by policy proposal' variables (simplified distributions)



N = 587 (Continuity), 520 (Cost), 511 (External funding), 522 (Politicians and public servants agreement).***: Differences statistically significant at 0.01 level.

Figure 5. Degree of implementation of proposals by participatory mechanism' and municipality' variables (simplified distributions)



N = 611 (Facilitator and external consultant), 534 (Level of information), 592 (Experts), 611 (Process design), 590 (Number of experiences).
*: Differences are statistically significant at 0.1 level.**: Differences are statistically significant at 0.05 level.***: Differences are statistically significant at 0.01 level.