Expertise and participatory governance: the incorporation of technical knowledge in participatory processes[1]

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Abstract: Significant claims are made that the incorporation of participatory processes in local political decision-making signals the emergence of new modes of democratic governance. One element of these claims is the argument that participation leads to the 'democratization of expertise' in the sense that citizens and civil society organizations are able to oversee the application of technical knowledge by policy officials in the policy process. There is, however, little systematic understanding of how different participatory processes deal with technical imperatives in practice: are expert criteria incorporated at a specific moment that is transparent to participants; or in a diffuse way that renders accountability problematic? This paper analyses several participatory exercises developed in the Spanish regions of Andalusia, Catalonia and Madrid in 2007-2011 to answer a series of related questions: How does the design of participatory exercises affect the potential for democratic oversight of expertise? To what extent does the application of technical criteria explain the fate of policy proposals?

Keywords: citizen participation, public policy, local democracy, institutional design, democratic governance

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The incorporation of participatory processes in political decision-making is increasingly pervasive. Significant claims are made that this development signals the emergence of new models of democratic governance that represent a shift in the division of political power between citizens and civil society organizations on the one hand and public officials on the other. One element of these claims is the argument that participation can lead to the 'democratization of expertise' in the sense that citizens and civil society organizations are able to oversee and challenge the application of technical knowledge by policy officials in the policy process.

The normative case in favour of democratic oversight of technical interventions that affect the shape and fate of citizens' proposals in participatory processes is compelling. In essence, the legitimacy of proposals that emerge from these processes relies strongly on the consent manifested by participants. As such, expert interventions must be sufficiently controlled to ensure that the final outcome is still recognizably the will of participating citizens. Here, the key issue for democratic legitimacy is whether participants are in a position to oversee, discuss and challenge technical inputs.

While the democratization of expertise has generated fairly extensive theoretical discussion, there is a remarkable lack of attention to the ways in which different participatory processes deal with technical interventions in practice: are expert criteria incorporated in a manner that is transparent to participants, or in ways that make it difficult to hold technical experts to account? Here, the type of participatory process becomes a key factor. Participatory processes greatly vary in their nature, scope, sponsors and institutionalization, among other issues. Thus, for example, participatory budgeting generally realizes the integration of technical expertise and criteria during the process, with specific stages where experts and citizens or associations exchange information, arguments and criticisms. However, there are other processes – aimed at the development of strategic plans, the implementation of municipal councils or the one-off handling of sporadic conflicts – that incorporate a different logic.

Not all cases require the same degree of expertise, nor do they need to manage it in the same way. In addition, even if the process design is a key element to assess the nature of the relationship between technical experts and participants, there are often less obvious dynamics that can bias this interaction (Mansbridge et al, 2010; Moore

2012). This paper attempts to shed light on these issues by answering two related questions: first, what are the main factors that determine the degree of democratic oversight of the application of expertise in participatory processes? To what extent is such accountability realized in the everyday practices of these exercises? Second, beyond a concern for democratic legitimacy, how do different approaches to applying technical criteria affect the fate of proposals when they reach the public authority?

In order to address these questions, the paper draws on a mix of quantitative and qualitative data from the Spanish National Research Plan-funded project "Cherry-picking: the results of participatory processes" that details the fate of policy proposals from a diverse group of 39 initiatives developed in the Spanish regions of Andalusia, Catalonia and Madrid in 2007-2011. The paper initially draws out relevant insights from the literature on the democratization of policy expertise. Secondly, we offer an explanation of the adopted methodology. Thirdly, we distinguish three strategies to incorporating technical criteria in participatory processes, offering illustrative cases from our sample. A fourth section focuses on the quantitative analysis of variables that explain the differential impact of proposals across these three types of participatory process. Finally, we draw some conclusions as to the impact of different approaches to incorporating technical criteria within participatory forms of governance.

1. The democratization of expertise: what does it mean?

In his seminal article "Citizen Participation and the Democratization of Policy expertise", Frank Fischer (1993) advocates a democratization of the policy-making process. The traditional policy model of "command-and-control" is seen to have failed to deal with the "wicked" policy issues that characterise our complex world (Wagenaar, 2007). According to Fischer, the rise of "problems with no solutions, only temporary and imperfect solutions" (1993: 172) signifies the limits of professional experts. The traditional model of decision-making based on the professional-client hierarchy is one where clients are expected to respect expert authority. However, this kind of relationship works poorly in a time of uncertainty and wicked problems.

The "crisis of the professions" (Fischer, 2003: 170) also challenges false assumptions about the nature of technical expertise, in particular the claim that expert-led and

value-free policy-making is possible and generates efficient and reliable decisions. This conventional approach to policy-making is based on a false image of the neutrality of the rational scientific approach to policy knowledge. Although scientists, professionals and civil servants do possess important technical knowledge, they have interests that shape their understanding of policy problems and choice of solutions:

> positivist social science has in large part functioned to serve managerial interests in the prediction and control of behaviour. What has evolved has largely been a set of technocratic research strategies employed – wittingly and unwittingly – for undemocratic ends (Fischer, 1993: 169).

The limits of neutrality indicate that there is rarely a single technical solution to a policy issue. The formulation also depends on the local context and on the status of the actors involved in the resolution of a policy issue. In other words, there can be several interpretations of a policy problem and relevant solutions. A second stream of argument suggests that for decision-makers who are looking for a comprehensive approach to policy problems, local or 'lay' understandings and experiential knowledge offer important contributions (Fischer and Gottweis, 2013).

In the wake of this democratization debate, critical public administration scholars have advocated for a transformation of bureaucracy. The Weberian model of public administration is taken to be marked by hierarchy, control and rigidity, leading to the insulation of public officials from citizens. Civil servants tend to understand responsiveness as respect for the authority of their superiors. For critics, the very public-ness of the profession (Pesch, 2008) ought to lead to an understanding of responsiveness as the process of realizing public interests.

In this context, Fischer and other scholars within the interpretive (or post-positivist) turn in public policy and administration have proposed the transformation of the professional ethic. Civil servants and other policy practitioners need to act not only as experts but also as facilitators of public learning and empowerment (Forester 1999, 2009, 2012). They need to be open to the different meanings of a policy issue in order to better understand the values, discourses and stories at stake. Thus practitioners need to open participatory spaces within which they can interact and deliberate with citizens, allowing for the articulation and contestation of different interpretations in the search for resolutions of policy issues. This does not mean that technical

knowledge is delegitimized in these participatory spaces. Rather, technical interventions are to be shared with and explained to citizens, who would be in a position to oversee expertise – as well as to offer insights based on lay or experiential knowledge. Policy professionals would move away from the image of insulated authority to a role where they practice responsiveness and transparency.

It is striking that while we can find myriad analyses of participatory arrangements, very few emphasize the practical dilemmas faced by policy professionals (Moynihan, 2003). Of these studies, most focus on their perception of public participation, highlighting how this new role is challenging to adopt and that some are better prepared than others to become "street-level bureaucrats" (Peters and Pierre, 2000). Administrative organizations or civil servants themselves (Kumar, Kant and Amburgey, 2007) tend to resist such a change, because it would require that they substantially alter the traditional self-understanding of the civil servants' role.

In this paper, we take a different approach to the "democratization of expertise" in participatory processes. Instead of focusing on the individual behaviour/reactions of policy professionals, we are interested instead in the degree of discretionary power afforded experts during participatory processes. Policy professionals -whether civil servants or external consultants- have privileged power in designing participatory processes, in particular making decisions as to how technical knowledge and criteria are to be incorporated. The timing of technical interventions has significant impact on the potential to democratize expertise: for experts to give account to citizens, and for citizens to hold them to account. We are also interested in the policy impact of technical intervention: how do changes in the mode of the application of technical criteria affect the fate of policy proposals that emerge from participatory processes?

The question of how participatory processes incorporate technical criteria has no simple answer. Technical knowledge in itself is not a problem: it is how it is introduced, discussed and overseen that is critical. A process that fails to attend to technical considerations is likely to produce unworkable proposals; applying technical criteria without citizen oversight will likely increase scepticism amongst citizens. The challenge is how to incorporate technical criteria without undermining the democratic character of participatory processes.

2. Methodology

The empirical analysis that we present in the next section draws on a mix of quantitative and qualitative data from the project "Cherry-picking: the results of participatory processes", that has tracked the fate of policy proposals from a group of 39 participatory experiences developed in the Spanish regions of Andalucía, Catalonia and Madrid. Our choice has been to limit our selection of cases to a single polity having a constant legal scenario (Spain) and to introduce contextual variation through the selection of diverse municipalities and regions. Given that a fully representative frame of participatory process does not exist and we want to ensure diversity, our initial sampling frame has been a quite diverse collection of participatory processes[2].

Since one of our goals 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. Thus, the universe for our study is participatory processes developed by municipalities in these three regions during the period 2007-2011 that end up in policy proposals[3]. We have selected a specific time frame, from one local election (2007) to the next (2011), trying to combine the possibility that there has been time enough for at least the initial implementation of these proposals, but also that memories and administrative records of the process are recent enough to be tracked.

To construct the sampling frame we have drawn on two databases with information on different participatory experiences developed by subnational governments, constructed using two different approaches: a comparative database for Andalusia, Madrid and Catalonia collected by web content mining (N = 292); and a database for Andalusia only with a mix-mode survey design aimed at capturing information on smaller municipalities (up to 20,000 inhabitants). Before selecting the cases 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; elimination of cases

[2] 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).

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

lacking relevant information. 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 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 (two municipalities with three or more processes, taking three processes for each one and the remaining four cases in each region from municipalities with one or two experiences); 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, gender equality, etc), other permanent participatory mechanisms and other temporary processes. Whenever choice was possible after applying the stratification criteria, the final selection of cases was achieved through random selection. The combination of these criteria resulted in the theoretic sample distribution shown in Table 1.

Table 1. 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)[4]
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

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

In order to reach the highest possible response rate among the initially selected cases we adopted a rather strict substitution policy. A little less than one third of the cases considered were excluded from the sample and substituted by similar cases either due to their ineligibility for inclusion in the research (the process was not completed, it was out of the time frame of the study, or it did not have policy proposals) or to the lack of cooperation from the municipality officials. This means that we reached a response rate of 81,3%[5].

Table 2. 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

After selection of the processes to be included in the sample, 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[6]. 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

[5] 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).

[6] 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 have 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.

proposals was made through systematic random sample[7]. When the proposals coming out of a single process were 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 kinds of information included in the media, personal blogs of participants, etc. The data collection was designed as a sequential process aiming to generate as much information from secondary sources as possible, before proceeding with the most costly step of face to face interviewing. The fieldwork team included three doctoral students and lasted approximately six months.

The coding procedures for the quantitative information have been established in a codebook that collected more than 100 variables in three levels of analysis[8]: local context factors (e.g. size of municipality), process design factors (e.g., type of actors involved in the process) and policy related factors (e.g., the cost of the proposal).

To access relevant data on the role of technical expertise in our cases, the interviews with local officers and other relevant actors within each process included a specific question on how and when the process introduced technical criteria. This is the data from which the dependent variable was created for the exploratory analysis that follows. In addition, the fieldwork team produced fieldwork journals[9] for each participatory process in order to show the different steps that have been followed in the information retrieval process, any problems that emerged and the operational decisions that have been taken along the way. The illustrative case studies that

[7] Systematic sampling offered the advantage of respecting to a greater extent the structure of the listings of proposals. 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.

[8] The final codebook is available here https://cherrypickingproject.wordpress.com/project/codebook/. The variety of sources accessed and used to retrieve the information as well as the different degree of quality records and willingness to cooperate meant that there were important differences both in the depth and quality 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 these, the data includes a set of variables assessing the reliability of the information recorded for the main variables in the codebook. 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 has been used to weight the analysis of the results.

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

complement the quantitative analysis were drawn from these fieldwork notes, together with the qualitative data produced in the fieldwork surveys, the official process' documents and the interviews with local policy actors. They are the source for a qualitative description of the strategies of incorporation of technical criteria.

3. Results

This section develops in two steps. First, we draw out three different approaches to incorporating technical expertise within participatory processes, illustrating the dynamics of each strategy from cases within the Cherrypicking sample. Second, we offer a statistical analysis of our dataset to better understand how context and process characteristics impact on strategies towards the incorporation of technical criteria before exploring the relationship between such incorporation and output characteristics.

3.1 Three strategies for incorporating expert criteria

How are technical criteria that affect the formulation of proposals introduced into participatory processes? From our sample, we can distinguish three different strategies. The first possibility is simply that no technical criteria are considered: in 9 (out of 39 participatory processes) participants have suggested and possibly voted on proposals without any specific consideration to the feasibility of their ideas. At the other end of the spectrum we find 15 processes where the consideration of technical criteria are incorporated during the participatory process: participants are active in the weighting of these considerations or decisions on when and how to introduce technical criteria are clearly defined by the rules of the process. For the rest of cases (14), the technical considerations are introduced in a way that is not accountable to citizens, often after the participation process is finished.[10]

In sum, most processes introduced in one way or another technical considerations (29 out of 39) and almost half of them did it in a way that did not allow participants to

[10] There is a fourth possibility in which technical staff and participants communicate informally beyond the participatory stages of the process.

have oversight of the process, thus creating room for cherry-picking through the application of technical criteria.

No technical criteria are included

The first strategy is a participatory process that does not include technical criteria at all. Many diverse cases fit here but, broadly speaking, these are often processes put in place to deal with relatively simple issues through assembly meetings where anyone can make proposals spontaneously. Technical criteria do not seem to be necessary here, given the nature of the process and the priority conceded to the unrestricted expression of participants, by assuming their equal political competence. An example of this situation is the Council of Wise Women in Begues (Barcelona, Catalonia), a participatory local council that gathers old women to debate and make recommendations directed to the municipal authorities, the local entities and the neighbors (Consell de les Dones Sàvies, 2007: 41-43).

The Council, established in 2007 with the support of the local government, became a permanent mechanism of participation. Initially composed by 24 members, it is open to any woman from Begues aged sixty or older who wants to participate. It works as a discussion group aimed to improve the town's quality of life and includes a facilitator who handles the agenda of the meetings, distributes the speaking time and solves any doubts that may arise. Beyond this facilitating role, there is no expert intervention and the participants make their proposals without any external technical consideration[11]. The Council is not formally integrated within the municipal policy process; neither are its recommendations compulsory for the local authorities.

Since the formal incorporation of expertise is absent from this participatory mechanism[12], some Council's proposals are very generic, go beyond the boundaries of what local governments can do, or simply lack specialized information. The local

[11] The minutes of the Council's meetings show the recommendations addressed to the local authorities. The Cherry-picking fieldwork focused on the proposals from a civic plan issued by the Council in 2010.

[12] As we will see in the quantitative analysis regarding participatory mechanisms formed by associations, in this case the name of the mechanism itself assumes that there is some degree of expertise ("wise women") among the participants.

authority will often offer technical considerations in its response to the Council's recommendations, but this is not a formal stage of the participatory process.

Technical criteria are accountable

The second possibility is that technical intervention is democratically accountable because it has been included as an explicit stage of the process, with participants being active in its weighting, and/or because the scope for technical amendment is clearly defined in process rules that have themselves been produced in a participatory manner. This is usual for participatory budgeting, which is typically a stable mechanism that works with explicit and detailed procedures[13]. Here, expertise is present and its role has been clarified and understood by participants through democratic means.

The Santa Cristina d'Aro participatory budgeting illustrates this dynamic. This process, started in 2003[14], has engaged a significant part of the population of this Catalan town in deciding around 50% of its total budget (Bou, 2011: 183). Thus, the municipal budgets from 2003 until 2011 included citizens' binding proposals in matters as diverse as environment, education, culture, health, social welfare, urban planning, sports or local festivities.

In broad terms, the process was established around eight neighborhood and ten thematic assemblies open to any person beyond sixteen years who was already registered in the municipality (Rules of the Participatory Budget, arts. 3 and 13). These assemblies were constituted every year between October and November to debate local needs and generate up to ten prioritized proposals. Additionally, each assembly selected two representatives for the Council of Citizens, the highest institution of the process: a representative of each political group in the City Council is present, able to speak but, unlike the citizen representative, not to vote. Between November and

[13] It is the self-regulation of several participatory budgeting what usually determines the type of proposals that citizens can make and the specific opportunities for technical intervention. This dynamic makes it easier for each actor to understand the scope and boundaries of their contribution.

[14] This year the new local government encouraged a debate with citizenry and the political groups to discuss the rules of the participatory budgeting. The rules finally approved regulate the process cycle, its entities and operating procedures, and their modification need the previous approval of the Council of Citizens which happened in February of 2006 (Bou, 2011: 176). The PB process ended after the change of municipal government in May of 2011. The Rules of the Participatory Budget are available online at: http://santacristina.cat/documents/contingut/contingut34.pdf [last accessed 3-06-2015].

December, the Council of Citizens evaluated the proposals coming from the assemblies and decided –with consensus or majority vote when needed- the final list of items to be included within the municipal budget. Although the Council could change the proposals coming from the assemblies or add new ones, it usually adopted them without amendments.

Expertise was introduced at two specific stages of the process that enable citizen oversight. Firstly, a new element, the Thematic Councils, was added in 2007 to the budget cycle. In essence, these councils worked as consultative bodies where the actors involved in a specific field – city councilmen and technical staff, representatives from the corresponding assembly and from the local associations and specialized organizations – could debate in depth and provide more detailed recommendations to the assemblies. In this sense, they were bodies for indirect participation that offered a shared space for cooperation and mutual communication among technical staff and politicians, on the one hand, and associated citizenry, on the other hand. Their aim was to increase the level of analysis and the quality of strategic policies, which was difficult to achieve in assemblies composed of hundreds of individual participants (Bou, 2011: 163-164). However, this technical intervention was merely consultative and the assemblies retained the final decision concerning the ten proposals that should be elevated to the Council of Citizens.

Secondly, the process rules established a Technical Office[15] with the task of advising the Council of Citizens during the preparation of its budgetary proposals. Here, the key point is that this office could recommend changes and technical improvements to the Council's initial proposal, but the final binding decision remains in the Council of Citizens' hands. Hence, expertise was integrated in two successive steps in the Santa Cristina d'Aro design: prior to the formulation of proposals by the assemblies, and prior to the final budgetary proposals adopted by the Council of Citizens. In both cases the intervention of specialists was transparent to ensure that the final decision remained in the hands of citizens. Additionally, each annual cycle of a participatory budget started with a review of the implementation of the previous budget. This

[15] Integrated by the councilman at the head of the area of economy and participatory budget, the municipal auditor and technical staff of citizen participation and budget management (Bou, 2011: 183-185).

allowed citizens to monitor the compliance of their proposals and, when needed, raise criticisms to municipal authorities[16]. The overall structure of the PB process has established communication channels between citizens and experts that encourages the exchange of information and viewpoints.

In other cases within our sample, expertise is explicilty incorporated into the process through the rules of composition of the participatory mechanism, which selects its members on account of their professional experience. An example is the Municipal Health Council of Villanueva de la Cañada (Madrid), an advisory council who makes proposals on health issues to the local authorities. Its specific task and the profile of its members – mostly professionals from fields related to health[17] – means that there is no need for subsequent technical supervision. In this sense, expertise is introduced into the Municipal Health Council by the initial selection of its members: participants are experts and the experts are participants. This design comes at a price however: according to the interviews held during the fieldwork, the technocratic character of this body – despite the presence of some individual citizens –appears to weaken its links with the associations and neighbourhoods of the municipality.

Technical criteria are not accountable

The third category of participatory process is one in which the introduction of technical criteria lacks oversight by participants. The consequence is an opaque intervention by experts, which means the link between process outcomes and participants' will is problematic.

[16] Participatory budgeting in Santa Cristina d'Aro established several stages for accountability: Annual assembly of return; an annual meeting of the Council of Citizens, councilmen and municipal associations to evaluate the process; a meeting of each assembly at the beginning of the budget cycle to supervise the implementation of the previous budget; bi-monthly and biannual monitoring meetings of the Council of Citizens and the Thematic Councils, respectively. In addition, the City Council edited a newsletter with the annual results of the participatory budget (Bou, 2011: 180-181).

[17] The Rules of the Municipal Health Council (art.6) establishes its composition, including the mayor and the councilman at the head of the health department, academics on health and sports fields, medical staff from the local health center, representatives of the town's private health services and three neighbors with recognized experience in the area of health, among others. They meet in person at least once a year. The Rules are available at http://ayto-villacanada.es/sites/default/files/files/BOCM-20130209-43.pdf [last accessed 15-06-2015].

Strategic planning is an example of where the application of technical criteria leads to cherrypicking of proposals: its participatory stages are usually considered merely a source of ideas that can be freely filtered by those with technical expertise during the final writing of the planning document. An example is the Plan for Gender Equality in Fuente Vaqueros (Granada, Andalusia), born from a participatory process developed between October and December of 2010 with the technical and financial support of the Granada Provincial Government. Over three months, two hired consultants launched a series of initiatives -questionnaires to neighbors and local institutions, workshops, interviews with women's associations and municipal staff, discussion groups – seeking inputs for the drafting of the final document. As a result, the Plan was approved in December of 2010, containing 24 recommendations for the local administration in the field of gender equality.

Similar to other strategic plans analyzed in our dataset, this participatory process sought, in the first place, to provide the technical staff with an accurate diagnosis of the situation and, secondly, to legitimize their drafting of the final document under the guidance of a specialist on gender issues from the funding institution. Hence, the process design does not include a specific stage for oversight of the application of technical criteria used in drafting the plan, since it was assumed from the beginning that the specialists should work with a degree of flexibility. Although the plan is presented as the outcome of a participatory process, it is not possible to make a clear and direct connection between its 24 measures and the proposals generated by the participants[18].

The accountability of expert intervention is often a matter of degree. There are intermediate situations in which the participatory process enables a collaborative elaboration of proposals among participants and specialists but, ultimately, there is a final moment in which technical staff can make changes and remove proposals without oversight. Here, expertise is introduced both during the participatory stages and at the end of the process, but the final outcome gets closer to the “no accountability” category, because there is room for technical cherry-picking to exist.

[18] This diffuse participation may have had something to do with the plan's failure: it was completely abandoned after the change of local government in May of 2011.

The Córdoba Participation Plan illustrates this situation. Between October of 2009 and the first quarter of 2010, the local government of Córdoba (Andalusia) launched a participatory process aimed to approve a Citizen Participation Plan. This process developed through separate stages to diagnose the current situation and collect proposals for the new plan. There were inputs coming from different forums and actors: interviews with municipal officials and technical staff, on the one hand, and members of municipal bodies that support citizen participation, on the other; work tables with politicians, technical staff and citizens associated and non-associated; a deliberative forum with citizens selected through stratified random sampling; a specific website to collect citizens' suggestions (Citizen Participation Plan, 2010: Annex II).

Thus, this was a complex process that incorporated different stages, methodologies and participants, including citizens, associations, technical staff and politicians. As a result, it is difficult to precisely analyze each group's particular influence on the approved Plan, since the final stage of writing was undertaken internally by the local technical services (Citizen Participation Plan, 2010: 30). Consequently, the 95 measures included in the final document could respond either to citizen proposals or to technical and political imperatives.

The need to reconcile inputs from different participatory methodologies is a common situation in participatory governance. The difficulty arises when, for the sake of accountability, we want to differentiate between the citizens' proposals and the suggestions coming from other actors. The plan itself includes a substantial number of technical modifications to citizen proposals as well as additional proposals by other actors (including technical experts) incorporated in the final document[19]. It is difficult to track why proposals have been rejected – whether they are too generic, technically challenging or politically unacceptable. There is no accountability to citizens in the filtering process[20].

[19] An exploratory analysis of the process' documentation shows that a considerable number of measures at the Plan are not directly attributable to the specific stages of consultation with the citizenry.

[20] However, this does not seem to have been the case of Cordoba, since the technical staff interviewed reported an effort to make the participants aware of the final drafting of the Plan, also keeping an open space for their reviews and suggestions.

In some cases, focusing attention on the process rules and explicit design may lead us to miss more discrete dynamics that nonetheless exert an important influence on the final outcome. An example is the "Rivas Participa" Program, developed in Rivas Vaciamadrid (Madrid) during the 2008-2011 legislature. This process consisted in the incorporation of citizens' proposals into the municipal budget through an open participation of individual citizens (it was also possible for local associations to participate in the face-to-face meetings). The annual cycle of the program had two major moments: spring meetings and autumn meetings[21]. In the first phase there was a massive collection of citizen proposals coming from channels as diverse as a specific website, email, postal mailing or ballots distributed during citizen meetings and local festivals. The suggestions were coded, grouped and sent for technical and economic assessment in the corresponding municipal departments, which generated a reduced list of proposals to be prioritized by citizens in the autumn meetings.

The key point is that this filtering of the "raw" proposals by the municipal staff was undertaken without any monitoring by the proponents, so that they remained unaware of the specific reasons for the removal of their suggestions from the final list presented to the citizens' vote. For example, the 900 proposals submitted by citizens in the spring of 2010 were filtered to a list of 81 proposals in November of 2010, without an explanation of how this filtering had been done[22]. Moreover, even after the public vote there was a second moment for a discreet intervention of experts, again without citizen oversight, to generate the final proposals: the public votes were balanced against cost, a degree of territorial equity and a further study of feasibility.

3.2. Quantitative analysis

Are there systematic characteristics that help to explain the specific approach taken towards the incorporation of expert knowledge and the impact of such choices on the outcome of participation? Most of the characteristics we associate with the character

[21] Although the experience was launched in 2008, actually there were only two complete cycles of proposals: the suggestions made to the 2010 budget, raised during the participatory process of 2009, and the proposals made to the 2011 budget, originated during the participatory process of 2010 (analyzed in the Cherry-picking fieldwork).

[22] As stated in a press release from the Rivas Vaciamadrid City Council. Available at http://www.estedemadrid.com/noticia/19631/Antiguo/Los-vecinos-y-vecinas-deciden-que-inversiones-quieren-que-el-Ayuntamiento-haga-en-sus-barrios.html [last accessed 3-06-2015].

of a municipality or the process itself do not have a clear relationship with the strategy adopted. Given the number of cases is small, we will focus on those variables and categories where this relationship is clearer[23].The first relevant contextual characteristic is the region where processes have been developed: there are more accountable experiences in Catalonia (up to 60%) and a substantial number in Madrid that do not incorporate technical criteria at all. This connects to previous knowledge about regional differences in participatory practices: Catalonia has a longer history of organizing participatory initiatives (Del Pino and Colino, 2008) and local authorities are given more external (regional) support (Font, 2011). As a result these regions arguably have more democratic qualities (Della Porta, Reiter and Alarcón, 2014).

Two other contextual variables also appear to facilitate accountability. There are more accountable processes in richer municipalities and in those municipalities with a stronger participatory tradition: accountability appears to be the result of a learning process developed through years of participatory practice.

Taking together various municipality variables as well as process-related variables, we can develop this line of argument further: is it the institutionalization of a participatory culture that is important or the presence of strong political will? The results point clearly in the second direction (with some relevant exceptions): having a participation plan or a participation department does not make a huge difference. Some of the traditional political variables (like the ideology of party in government) do not make a difference either. However, those processes that have incorporated in their rules and procedures that it is compulsory for governments to follow citizens' recommendations tend to be more accountable in their incorporation of technical criteria. Thus, there does not appear to be a trade-off between democratic empowerment and incorporation of expertise: processes that are backed by strong government commitment to citizen participation are those that more often carefully incorporate technical considerations in the democratic process.

[23] Here we are not using regular significance tests. With 39 cases it is very difficult to find significant differences. However, the last set of variables, measured at the proposal level, often reach statistical significance. For process variables we use differences above 15 points (in categories with at least 7 cases) and for proposal level variables differences of at least 10 points (always significant).

Beyond the institutionalization of participatory policies in general, how does design tend to affect incorporation? Stable, ongoing mechanisms appear to be more associated with accountable incorporation of technical criteria. However, this is not a broad general pattern, but probably the result of the strong weight that participatory budgeting has among this category of processes. Participatory budgeting is typically designed explicitly to enable citizens to participate in the discussion of the technical aspects of proposals: in most cases of participatory budgeting (88%) technical criteria are applied in an accountable manner, showing the sharpest difference among all the variables considered. By contrast, 86% of Strategic Plans incorporate technical criteria without the oversight of participants in the process. The remaining permanent mechanisms are quite different, since very often they do not incorporate technical considerations, but if they do, there is oversight by participants.

Other process-related variables indicate important differences in three areas that point overall in a similar direction: participants, cost and level of information. Participatory processes that do not incorporate technical expertise have also low levels of information provided to participants and a much lower cost. Thus, there does not appear to be a trade-off between different forms of incorporating expertise (Nez, 2010; Sintomer, 2008), but processes where there is concern for technical aspects, where information is provided and openly incorporated into discussion and other processes where both elements are absent from the field. The only important exception to this picture comes through the types of participants: participatory processes that do not incorporate expertise (or information) are those that are basically dominated by associations. This may be because associations often claim they already have the necessary information to participate in decision-making (Ganuza and Francés, 2008; Hendricks, 2006). On the other side of the spectrum, processes incorporating only citizens are those more likely to have technical criteria incorporated in an accountable way. Only as the number of participants increases does the introduction of accountability become more difficult, with expertise introduced through less open procedures.

Finally, does the introduction of expertise in one way or another exert a potential influence on the types of proposals and their fate? Possibly, yes. For example, having

no technical criteria incorporated tends to produce a larger number of generic proposals and, often, a smaller number of proposals. In fact, avoiding technical discussion in the processes tends to produce (in 6 out of 9 of the cases) proposals that are not clearly identifiable but mixed up in less precise documents. In most cases, this pattern probably reflects processes that are less crafted, detailed and resourced and this shows in both their organization and outcomes.

These different expertise trajectories have also an apparent impact on government's responses. Regarding final implementation, the typical story is quite different for our three types of processes. Those which had an accountable process of incorporation of technical criteria are those more successful in achieving a larger level of implementation of their proposals. This does not mean that these are perfect processes always performing better than others since, for example, the degree to which explanations are provided when governments modify proposals is similar to that present in other processes. The more technocratic group (where technical criteria are introduced in a non accountable process) presents a very different pattern: one of the results of the more expert character of their proposals is that they have lower levels of external societal support, but also lower levels of implementation (27% fully implemented compared to an average of 58% for the other two groups). This may be a result of the lack of broader support, but may also highlight that lack of expert incorporation within the process generates less feasible proposals.

That said, one of the surprising results is that the degree of success in implementation for the processes where no kind of technical criteria are introduced at any point is also above average, and this often happens even if politicians and local administration staff acknowledge they did not like these proposals. This is one of the puzzles that these results offer and which deserves further analyses, even if the simplicity of these processes (and their proposals) may be a relevant part of the answer.

Table 3. Context, process and outcome characteristics associated to three types of incorporation of technical criteria

	Technical criteria accountable[24]	Technical criteria not accountable	No technical criteria
Context characteristics	Catalonia		Madrid
	Richer municipalities		
	Strong participatory tradition	Weak participatory tradition	
Process characteristics	Compulsory to respond		No obligation at all to respond
	Stable mechanisms		
	Participatory budgeting	Strategic Planning	Other permanent and temporary mechanisms
	Only citizens as participants	High number of participants	Only associations as participants
			Less costly processes
	Level of information is high		Level of information is low
Output characteristics		Larger number of proposals	Lower number of proposals
		Implementable, detailed and clearly identified proposals	Proposals generic and not clearly identified
	Larger level of implementation	Lower level of implementation	
		Authority does not explain rejection or transformations of policy proposals	
			Politicians (and officers) disagree more with proposal implementation
		Less external support	More external support

Source: Own elaboration

4. Discussion

We need to be cautious when generalizing from this exploratory analysis, particularly given that there is little existing research with which to draw comparisons. That said, our analysis offers some intriguing insights. Firstly, as described in the qualitative case descriptions and confirmed by the statistical analysis, there is a clear connection between process' design and the manner in which technical expertise is incorporated. There is a particularly sharp contrast between participatory budgeting and strategic planning, with the former process typically being an example of accountable

[24] Technical criteria are accountable either because they have been considered during the participatory phase of the process, i.e. with participants being active in the weighting of these considerations, or because the criteria are clearly defined in the rules of the process and these rules have been produced with the participation of citizens.

incorporation that encourages transparency and meaningful interaction among experts and citizens. By contrast, strategic planning frames the participatory stages of a process as a source of ideas that are then filtered by technical experts when crafting the final plan. Beyond these two poles, there is room for further research that teases out the dynamics of other process designs.

The statistical analysis suggests that in municipalities with a more established participatory tradition, the stability and continuity of a participatory process emerges as an important factor. For participatory budgeting in such environments, the existence of specific stages at the beginning of each annual cycle when the performance of the previous year is reviewed by citizens is likely to encourage a dynamic of learning and improvement and also increase the accountability of technical interventions.

Secondly, the Cherry-picking fieldwork has also shown that assessing transparency and accountability in the incorporation of technical expertise can be a complex task. Thus, for example, the Cordoba Citizen Participation Plan illustrates a common situation in which technical intervention happens at different stages of the process with different degrees of interaction with participants. In this case, the final document summarizing proposals is drawn from a variety of sources with different levels of participatory oversight. The Villanueva de la Cañada Health Council offers a completely different possibility: expertise is an explicit criteria in the selection of participants. As such, oversight is not an issue, but the distance between participants and the general population generates different challenges of accountability.

Thirdly, the empirical analysis suggests that there are other explanatory factors beyond process design. For example, the statistical analysis highlights the influence of the specific region where the participatory experience is organized: Catalonia clearly has a more developed practice of embedding transparency and accountability of technical expertise than Madrid.

Turning our attention to process outcomes, we can confirm previous intuitions: processes without the application of technical criteria tend to produce a higher number of generic proposals collected in less identifiable documents. This is important when considering the efficacy of these instruments. However, other findings are more

puzzling. It seems surprising, for example, that the proposals coming from processes that introduce technical criteria without participant oversight have a lower level of implementation. Even if their more technocratic design and lack of accountability might explain the lower levels of societal support when compared to other processes, it is striking that the wide scope for professional intervention and discretion beyond citizens' oversight does not lead to higher success of their proposals. There may be a number of explanations for this association that must be explored: for example, such processes tend to be developed in locations with a less established participatory tradition –thus the connection between participation and decision making may simply be poorly established.

Finally, another issue that demands further analysis is the not too low implementation of proposals coming from processes that do not incorporate technical criteria. Such processes also tend to generate proposals that have stronger opposition from civil servants and local politicians, although this is balanced by a higher degree of external support. We have already suggested that the proposals that emerge from such participatory processes tend to be less specific and simple in their demands. Perhaps it is this generality that explains their relatively positive fate?

While exploratory in nature, this paper has offered insights into how the design, practice and outcomes of participatory processes are affected to a significant degree by the incorporation of technical expertise. The literature on the democratization of expertise makes compelling arguments for developing more participatory and deliberative policy processes. Our analysis makes it clear that such a generic call needs to be more nuanced: there are effective approaches to embedding citizen oversight of and engagement with technical expertise and criteria; equally there are participatory processes that simply reinforce the existing political division of labour.

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