

Public deliberation and participation in the Madrid City Council budgets (2016-2018)

Deliberación pública y participación en los presupuestos del Ayuntamiento de Madrid (2016-2018)



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Abstract:

This paper analyzes the evolution of citizen participation in the preparation of municipal budgets in Madrid, as well as the role of public communication in the process. To this end, the three years in which citizen collaboration has been requested (2016, 2017 and 2018), have been compiled, and after analyzing the data, it has been concluded that there is growing interest by citizens in these

Resumen:

Se analiza la evolución de la participación ciudadana en la elaboración de los presupuestos municipales de Madrid y el papel que juega la comunicación política de las instituciones públicas en el proceso. Para ello, se han recopilado los datos de los tres ejercicios en los que se ha pedido la colaboración ciudadana (2016, 2017 y 2018) y tras su análisis se ha concluido que existe un creciente inte-

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participation mechanisms, although the figures are still quite small. Moreover, it has been shown that these organized groups play an important role in presenting proposals. Finally, it has been determined that participation requires a previous process of deliberation and a certain degree of expert knowledge in order for the results to be viable and sustainable, not only desirable.

Keywords:

Participatory budgets; participation; citizenship; public politics; governance.

rés ciudadanos en estos mecanismos de participación, aunque aún se mueve en cifras poco destacables, y que los grupos organizados tienen un papel relevante a la hora de presentar propuestas. Por último, se concluye que la participación requiere un proceso previo de deliberación y un cierto grado de conocimiento experto para que los resultados sean viables, sostenibles y no solo deseables.

Palabras clave:

Presupuestos participativos; participación; ciudadanía; políticas públicas; gobernanza.

1. Introduction and rationale

Citizen participation is one of the great issues of our time. In public opinion, culture, political communication, the party system and representation, as well as in numerous areas of research, interest in this topic has multiplied as an instrument for the citizen involvement in the management and administration of public policies.

Participation does not operate in isolation; rather, it needs public communication support to allow for a process of deliberation, for the organization of ideas, and for the encouragement of pluralism within the participation act itself.

The research question that has guided this work is the following: How has citizen participation evolved in the municipal budgets of the City of Madrid? In addition, what role has communication played in this process?

The research is based on the following hypotheses:

H1. Interest in participation has increased, but these are low figures (less than 10% of registered voters).

H2. The organized groups transfer their participation to the municipal budgets. Their political or social nature is not important. What is important is their previous organisation in the district (influence, activism, and involvement in associations).

H3. Participation requires a prior process of deliberation and a certain degree of expert knowledge in order for the results to be viable, sustainable, and not just desiderative. Access to information does not guarantee its intelligibility.

1.1. *The professionalization of political communication in public institutions and the restoration of social trust*

The communication of public institutions is a polysemy concept that adapts itself to different processes of a political nature such as institutional communication, electoral marketing, reputation, trust management and other items of public management (Canel and Sanders, 2012). It also structures public space (Castells, 2009), because that is where social actors, political parties, governments and citizens come together to make their demands and exchange arguments or emotions.

In this shared space, meanings are negotiated and the political culture of power and counter-power is created. Moreover, political communication has a “performative, or consequential effect” (López, Gamir and Valera, 2018: 56) because

narratives affect the results of political action. For this reason, this capacity has special interest in the study of political communication of a public nature. The participants involved (town councils, governments, and public law bodies have the express goal of modifying the environment that surrounds them and of affecting citizens' lives.

Political communication of public institutions is established as a preliminary step for transparency and accountability. Better understanding of public policies reduces complexity and opens spaces for deliberation (Brugué, 2014). Public information must be oriented toward the creation of knowledge, or in other words, the capacity to understand the consequences of decisions taken in a complex environment. The complexity of the design and implementation of public policies requires a transverse approach. Technology has modified the scope of common interests and their representation, and thereby affects political projects. Prats (2005) links public management with knowledge management and the deployment of networks, with citizen interaction and participation being outside of the bureaucratic circuit and political parties. Informed citizens make better decisions in the sense that they can guide the policies of administration with real, specific proposals. There is academic literature on the negative impact of the absence of information on decision-making. In this sense, Zafra, Plata, Pérez and López (2015) indicate that citizens who do not have access to updated municipal information are not able to evaluate public services. In a previous study, they had already pointed out the advantages of evaluating municipal management through the dissemination on digital platforms of comparable indicators (Zafra, López and Hernández, 2009). In the legal environment, public information improves the evaluation of political projects (Alfaro and Gómez, 2016), broadens the exercise of fundamental rights (Guichot, 2014), and hinders corruption (Villoria, 2016). Management of public information leads to professionalization in the dissemination of municipal information according to professional criteria, which is closer to journalism than to mere administrative language. Manfredi, Corcoy and Herranz (2017: 415) define this criterion as:

(...) the availability of real, tangible information on the behaviour of the municipal government, the degree of compliance with budgets, the management of collective resources, the provision of a government plan, among other items. In other words, the mayor's role is diminished, and the role of the opposition and civil society is renewed. Finally, there is the need to rethink the journalistic narrative in the sense of articulating messages, giving depth and context to the news, and explaining the background of the municipal news.

Therefore, professionalization of public information consists of the ability to organize and publish documents that affect citizens. With access to better quality public information, citizens can make decisions, evaluate policies and propose initiatives that affect them. This is in line with Bellver's suggestion (2007: 44) when he explains that "breaking the information monopoly empowers civil society", while Baack (2015: 4) connects data publication with a new paradigm of participation: "Open data sharing makes the process of data interpretation transparent and breaks the government's monopoly, which means that anyone can create their own interpretation of the data that the government uses to make and justify its own decisions".

Communication oriented toward increasing social participation in public decisions finds its place in the theories of Moore (1998) for the creation of public value. Citizens can propose the provision of specific services, according to their preferences,

and can assess the impact of their participation and the listening capacity of their municipal representatives. Moreover, they are able to regain trust if their expectations are met.

1.2. Participation and public deliberation

Participation is one of the preferred topics in recent academic literature on democratic renewal, active citizenship, and political processes, especially in cities (McLaverty, 2017; Ammassari, 2010; Harvey, 2013).

Participation offers opportunities for innovation at the municipal level in counteracting “the deficiencies of representative democracy” and pointing out “the difficulties in building an alternative” (Pierce, 2010: 23). Bauhr and Grimes (2014) emphasize the value of transparency and accountability as mechanisms to improve “informed participation” by citizens. Baack (2015) believes that open data is not accessible on its own, but requires the active mediation of both activists and journalists. Activism, through participation processes, allows for the introduction of innovative, anti-hegemonic ideas (Carroll and Hackett, 2006). This is not a closed question. Michels and De Graaf (2017) point out the difficulties in linking participation to executive capacity in order to transform public policies, although the ability of participants to advise local institutions is valued positively. For his part, Rafael Rubio (2018: 25) links communication with the right to be involved in the decision-making process: “This includes the commitment of authorities to provide information on the issues, open channels of participation, take into account the contribution of participants, and communicate how this translates into decisions”. The author considers that such techniques are the mechanisms to “guarantee and broaden the opportunities for participation by individuals, non-governmental organizations, and civil society in general in the exercise of public authority as a means of strengthening trust and credibility in democratic institutions” (ibid).

In the area of deliberation, the information available and organized in digital format must be accompanied by face-to-face deliberative processes to improve the quality of the discussions. The aim of the collective and face-to-face process is to find arguments, even if it does not guarantee a viable and sustainable proposal. As Manin (2005: 239) states, “the well-argued discussion does not necessarily produce satisfactory collective deliberation”. This concept of communication of a public nature requires a political environment open to criticism and the submission of social proposals through citizen participation. Open government, transparency, participation and collaboration are on the agenda of municipal strategic management, which is why we find a multitude of initiatives of various types among Spanish city councils (Campillo-Alhama, 2013).

In the opposite way, in the absence of such professionalization, the quality of information available in digital formats from municipalities, public information services and press offices, or on the website itself as a repository of files and documents of public interest, is reduced (Manfredi, Corcoy and Herranz, 2017). Professional malpractice leads to the elaboration of informative pieces without order, of an anecdotal nature, and that cannot be used as reliable documents. (Herrero, Martínez, Tapia, Rey and Cabezuelo, 2017; Fernández, Trabadela, Garcés and Ruano, 2017). This model impoverishes the quality of the information and hinders guaranteed participation. There can be no neighbourhood participatory development if the free provision of public information is not organized according to these principles of quality.

Communication in the public sector affects citizen participation around two central concepts. The first involves the concept of neo-institutionalism, which considers that quality government requires regulated, predictable, stable institutions that encourage the good behaviour of political actors. The new school of thought fits with a model of a political culture open to participation, in which the government is not the main actor in politics. Neo-institutionalism advocates the redistribution of resources and authority so that society and the market acquire more areas of power. It is a coordination challenge, which mainly affects local institutions in direct contact with the interested party (private companies NGOs, interest groups), and also with neighbours, who can organise themselves to defend their interests outside of the conventional unions and party structures.

From a communication point of view, cooperation and user contribution improves and creates a new type of product and service. In the so-called “economy of participation”, symbolic consumption consists of the need to share content, to recommend some initiatives to the detriment of others, or to promote specific ideas (Noguera, 2018).

The participation process is not free and finds some negative externalities. According to Manin (2005), participation leads to polarization and the reinforcement of majority tendencies that are capable of adding more people. Likewise, voluntary participation requires, by its very nature, an extraordinary effort that does not guarantee representation and social pluralism. Volunteers participate resolutely. In order to reduce this risk, Mañas (2012) proposes that the issues be organized after a period of deliberative polling that would guarantee equal opportunity and contribute to overcoming the dilemma between political equality and deliberation.

In addition, social participation must be explained within a historical perspective, or at least contextual. This idea maintains that public institutions have obligations of a documentary nature in order to improve accountability, to have information regarding the evolution of a political position, to document political activity, to make economic relations transparent (subsidies, aid, etc.) and to advance socially. In its digital dimension, an institutional report requires the creation of databases, the organization of information, and the generation and distribution of lists or access keys, among other measures.

The deliberative survey consists of a data collection technique with the main objective being to obtain information on the general state of opinion on a subject by the population, once the requirements for information and debate have been met (Fishkin, 1995). For Fishkin and Luskin (2005: 285), deliberation is a process of exchanging arguments that must meet five conditions. It must be “well-briefed”, as arguments must be supported by reasonably accurate and appropriate facts, and also “balanced”, offering different points of view. In addition, participants should speak and listen with civility and respect. Fourth, the authors speak of a necessary “foundation” in referring to the fact that arguments must be considered according to their content, not by the way they are expressed or by the person presenting them. Finally, deliberation must be comprehensive, accommodating all points of view that are held by a significant part of the population.

The procedure is composed of three phases (Cuesta, Font, Ganuza, Gómez and Pasadas, 2008). The first consists of conducting an opinion survey of a representative sample of the population of interest in an attempt to gather the concerns and needs of everyday life. The citizen, who is the real user of the infrastructure, knows the weaknesses, the demands and the small changes that could improve the urban environment.

The second stage involves organizing a period of participation reinforcement. Its purpose is to motivate neighbourhood participation, promote work groups, and ensure the validity of the values reflected in the surveys.

Finally, the third phase aims to ensure a heterogeneous presence of participants, a type of social diversity. To this end, meetings and deliberative forums are set up in which citizens can debate with municipal specialists, experts and stakeholder groups in order to learn about the different aspects and consequences of a decision. It concludes with a post-forum survey to assess and measure citizen satisfaction with the implementation of the decision.

This procedural mechanism is in line with the deliberative sessions in which a representative sample of the population contemplates, deliberates and delves into the issue in question with the participation of experts, politicians and/or representatives of social movements who put forward the different points of view on the issue. The provision of information, together with the facilitation of deliberation, are the main elements of this process.

The second dimension is the promotion of information transparency as a tool for improving the amount of reliable and trustworthy economic, managerial, political and social information available to all stakeholders. The merging of transparency and social participation “is an unavoidable element of democracy and the development of politically active, moral citizens, which at the same time contributes to guaranteeing the effectiveness and efficiency of policies and government intervention in the social realm. Trust, on the other hand, is presented as a fundamental factor in promoting collective action and counteracting uncertainty in scenarios of managing differences and dissent on which democracy must take action” (Güemes and Resina, 2018: 76).

This core idea is built on integrity, which is related to honesty in the management of information of a public nature. It is specified in the elaboration of a flow of information and knowledge through journalistic products and services oriented toward the exercise of citizenship. Integrity aims to “make information transparent through the unification of information, the connection with one’s own statistics, the elaboration of a catalogue of reusable and interoperable data, and the promotion of citizen participation initiatives” (Manfredi, Corcoy and Herranz, 2017).

The flow of data is placed at the service of citizen participation when it is transformed into intelligible products in a process of information and response, a sort of conversation between the executive and legislative branches, public employees and society. In this learning process (Manfredi, 2016), social groups inform, act, lobby and guide municipal action plans. This procedure is one of the most interesting assets in the recovery of institutional credibility, because it possesses and publicizes the mechanisms of good governance, and among others, social participation itself. Bright and Margetts (2016) consider that publicity of the processes of creation and management of public policies contributes to the social acceptance of such policies if they contribute actively, and not as a result of the aggregation of votes, tweets or “I Likes”. If this approach is taken, the citizen may not even be aware of this passive participation.

According to Professor Brugué (2014), the recovery of social trust is an urgent task: public policies are failing in their attempts to build societies as they imagine them to be. The crisis of credibility begins in the realm of politics, but extends to that of public policy. Thus, we are referring to a two-fold crisis of legitimacy of the political and administrative system: that which affects the inputs of the system and that which refers to the outputs. By its nature, this crisis creates a new category

of disaffection, a kind of “precarious citizen type” who shares “a sense of restitution with regard to changes, and mistrusts the ability of the political system to protect them” (Fernández-Albertos, 2018: 22).

However, it is worthy to note another range of negative externalities of the permanent subjection of political decisions to votes. For Bourdieu (2000: 303), opinion polls generate the “illusion that there is a public opinion as the pure additive sum of individual opinions”. Using the same logic of the market of ideas, surveys are used as a tool to learn the specific concerns of a segment of the population. Thus, they are presented as “instruments of political action” created to “strengthen the relations of force that sustain it or make it possible”. Each initiative is submitted to the public opinion market, because it must attract a flow of voters, which leads to the commercialisation of ideas, options and proposals. According to Arenilla (2003: 74), in government by survey “policy is relegated to the benefit of management, or at least there is a high risk of this happening, and the structural decisions of the society are postponed to the benefit of the predominance of the micro”. In “Audience Democracy”, (Manin, 1998) explains how the political system offers generalist solutions and flexible commitments for a “floating voter” (1998: 285) who is seduced by electoral marketing techniques. Critical thinking influences this idea of a permanent survey that allows the ruler to be absent from his or her planning obligations and long-term actions to concentrate on those activities that offer an immediate, short-term return.

1.3. Consultation and participation in the design of public policy

Digital transformation and digital participation options offer opportunities for innovation in public management (Criado, 2016). Arenilla and García (2013: 30-31) conclude that public innovation involves “the development of innovative products or processes that are aimed at solving peoples’ most pressing problems and satisfying their main needs; these represent an improvement in the previous conditions as well as a transformation of the social environment and human relations”. These innovations are aimed at improving the quality of life of citizens in any of its dimensions: design and implementation of public services, quality of the environment, relationships with neighbours, economic and territorial development, control of public finances, accountability, or evaluation of municipal decisions. The catalogue is extensive, although it tends to focus on the idea of increasing citizen participation in activities and political life as a mechanism for restoring the credibility of institutions, social leaders and political parties. However, there are some possible gaps. Innovation through technology carries the risk of pre-selecting what types of citizens are willing to take part in participation processes (Lidén, 2016).

The consultation is an active principle of the open design of public policies through deliberation in the public sphere (Fishkin, 2009). By means of this consultation, an information and participation process is opened, which pursues a decision-making procedure more in line with the interests of society. Social pluralism broadens the base of representation to unions, universities, associations and collectives affected by some cause, parents of schoolchildren, professional associations and NGOs, to mention the most common groups. This is compatible with the neo-institutionalism trend mentioned earlier.

Public consultation is a procedure used in the design of policies that affect citizens in order to have knowledge regarding the opinion of citizens and other interest groups on a specific issue or measure. The design affects the outcome: “The result of a public policy decision-making process depends on the interaction of different types of actors with different objectives and roles. Within a network or framework that may have distinct characteristics, these actors exchange resources, using

different modes of interaction for the purpose of achieving an agreement within a given decision-making context” (Dente and Subirats, 2014: 70).

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2001) establishes some basic principles so that the consultation is effective and its design is aligned with good governance: it should offer alternative solutions to a common problem, be defined within a time frame, facilitate the exchange of quality public information, and be part of successive public policy drafts.

In the multi-dimensional typology of Diamond and Morlino (2004), the procedures secure the quality of democracy and institutions together with the content of the measures and the results obtained. At the procedural level, it requires the publication of participation rules, selection criteria, governance mechanisms, and all measures that lead to a lessening of arbitrary decisions. The content aspect is specified in the cognitive and budgetary capacity of the proposals. These have to be ordered and qualified in a framework of a strategic development plan of public policies in order to avoid their becoming mere enumerations of actions.

Finally, the results are measured according to the metrics and variables used to evaluate public policies. There can be no aseptic measurement without a prior study of what the objectives were, the cost of the action, and the consequence on the life of citizens.

In the case of citizen consultation on budgets, according to Bellver (2007: 20), value is created for the citizen when the consultation scrutinizes public money and focuses on “monitoring the process through which they make their budgetary decisions and spend their income. As a major element of economic policy, transparency and participation in budgeting are particularly important in assessing the extent to which a government is financially accountable”.

1.4. Participatory budgets, a proving ground

In Spain, participatory budgets have become a standard for the development of active citizenship and the restoration of social trust (Planchuelo, 2018). At the municipal level, consultation and participation has a more practical purpose that is more linked to the action and repertoire of activities of the municipality or subsequent unit (district or neighbourhood). Compared to the European or national levels, municipal consultation does not focus on interest groups, citizens, lobbies, organisations and civil society, experts, think tanks or universities. Neither the legislative process nor a model of binary participation (Yes/No) is at stake. In a municipality, the flow of data is fed, ideas are shaped, and alliances are forged. The genuine interests represented have an impact on the closest political activity.

The aim is for the citizen to participate in the municipal accounts and determine the way in which certain, very limited budget allocations are spent. These are small sums, which do not affect the general budgetary orientation. The rules are publicized, explained in municipally-owned spaces, and made available to interested parties with the aim of making administrative procedures transparent at pre-established intervals. *Ex post*, this process is held accountable through the same means.

According to Ganuza and Gómez (2008), participatory budgets were created with two objectives in mind: The first goal is the rationalization of public expenditure in a more equitable way, oriented toward favouring those who are most in need.

The second is the aim of providing more transparent public management. With these premises, the methodology was based on four pillars: a process formalized through regulation, the application of distributive justice criteria for decision making, universal participation in public assemblies, and annual accountability by government leaders.

The Brazilian city of Porto Alegre is often cited as the pioneer in this type of consultation. In 1988, Lula Da Silva proposed participatory initiatives that allowed citizens to become involved in budgetary decisions as a way of counteracting a municipal assembly in which he did not have an elected majority. The Porto Alegre proposal is organized at three levels: neighbourhoods, districts and the municipal council. The decisions of Porto Alegre have been incorporated into the ideals of participation as a reference of neighbourhood political action that has direct consequences on the life of the city. Since then, studies on citizen participation in local political processes have multiplied. These are seen as milestones in the improvement of democratic quality and as transformation factors of public management (Michels and De Graaf, 2017). However, many authors conclude that there is no direct correlation between participation and overall institutional improvement. The degree of success should be measured by specific results and not by radical institutional changes. Artificial barriers to prevent participation from obtaining conclusive results are of a different nature, as these include clientelism and the inability to deliberate in public (Pierce, 2010). Bright and Margetts (2016: 220) state that “poor political leadership and inadequate citizen demand play a negative role” at the crossroads of technology, democracy and participation.

Bellver (2007: 36) speaks of second-generation transparency that identifies progress in economic transparency and the social control of political activity. Thus, he points out the following:

Strategies that are top-down in nature need to be complemented with bottom-up mechanisms in order to improve government accountability. In recent years, a growing number of initiatives have been based on participation by civil society in order to strengthen accountability in the public sector. Initiatives such as participatory budgeting, administrative reform laws, social audits, citizen and community management control, and reporting programmes, are all endeavours that involve citizen monitoring of government, and can be considered “social accountability” campaigns.

For this reason, the present work considers that the participatory budget is a reflection of the performative political communication mentioned above. Participatory budgeting facilitates the improvement of relations with the citizen through a specific government programme, requires the creation of communication campaigns in the public sphere in order to stimulate participation, and establishes control mechanisms to ensure equal opportunity for all neighbours, with these being some of the main motivations (De Blasio and Selva, 2016).

2. Methodology

This study uses data from the Madrid City Council municipal website, which details public information on plenary sessions, budgets, agreements, and other keys to participation. References to the municipal census for 2016, 2017 and 2018 have also been used. The case of Madrid is interesting for several reasons. Firstly, because it is the largest municipality in Spain; secondly, because it is one of the city councils run by the political party *Podemos*, which is among the political parties that arose during the political and financial crisis. Finally, *Podemos* presents a political profile open to citizen participation,

accountability and transparency (Planchuelo, 2018). For this reason, it is a case of reference. The information is available in digital format with free access.

Qualitative data on the amount of money allocated to participatory budgets during their three years of existence (2016, 2017 and 2018) have been taken from the website; the number of projects approved, proposals submitted, those that have reached the final phase, and those considered unfeasible. This same source has provided us with reviews of the number of citizens who have participated, classifying them by gender and age group. This information has been sufficient for the purpose of analyzing citizen interest in this process and its evolution over time.

On the other hand, in order to determine the participation of organised groups, all the projects approved in the three years have been coded and placed in a table, including as variables their area of action, the number of votes received, the amount of money allocated, and whether they were presented individually or by a group.

This last fact is undoubtedly the most important one for the objective we are pursuing, but it is also the most subjective as it depends on the discretion of the person submitting it to indicate whether it is being done on his or her own behalf or on behalf of a group. In an attempt to minimize errors, we have considered that the following are collective proposals: all of those indicated as such in the corresponding section; those that refer to Local Forums; and those that include some reference to a support group in their text.

The rest have been coded as individual proposals. As for the selection of the sample, it is composed of a total of 865 items, which as mentioned, correspond to the total number of projects selected to be part of the budgets. These represent 10.66% of the total number of proposals submitted that were considered feasible.

3. Results

3.1. *Set of rules governing the process*

As you can see on the Madrid City Council website, participatory budgets are “democratic processes through which residents can decide directly as to where a part of the municipal budget will be allocated”. To this end, over the last three years, the City Council has allocated 260 million Euros (60m in 2016, and 100m in 2017 and 2018), a figure that is between 1.3% and 2% of the annual budget”.

Annually, the amount allocated to this initiative is divided into two parts: one for proposals located in a given district (36 million in 2016, 70 million in 2017 and 2018), and another for initiatives covering the entire municipality (24 million in 2016, 30 million in 2017 and 2018). The amount allocated to each district is directly proportional to the population of each district, and inversely proportional to the per capita income of each district. The development of this initiative is divided into four phases: collection of proposals, support for proposals, feasibility reports, and final vote. At the end of the process, the City Council makes a commitment to include the most-voted proposals in the municipal budgets for the next fiscal year.

During the gathering of suggestions, any person registered in Madrid has the option of presenting their investment¹ ideas through the Decide Madrid website or in the 26 Citizen Services Offices distributed throughout the city, as well as in local forums. To make a proposal through the website –and also to vote in the following phases– it is necessary to verify the user account, providing census information and furnishing the system with a means of communication -telephone number or postal mailing address - in order to be able to receive a code that will have to be introduced later in the website to validate the account. This process can also be carried out in any of the 26 Citizen Services Offices.

During this period, face-to-face debates are convened to present and discuss proposals. According to the operating rules of the participatory budgets, each district is allowed to choose how to organize these “spaces for face-to-face public discussion and proposals”. These internal rules have been utilised for similar processes in smaller territories using self-regulation guides, such as those of the districts of Arganzuela, Latina, Tetuán and Usera, which the City Council of Madrid itself sets as an example “in the event that they might serve as an inspiration for other areas”.

Table 1. Main participatory budget sizes for 2016, 2017 and 2018.

	2016	2017	2018
BUDGET	60,000,000	100,000,000	100,000,000
FUNDED PROJECTS	206	311	328
PARTICIPANTS	45,533	67,133	91,032
PROPOSALS	5184	3215	3323
PROPOSALS IN THE FINAL PHASE	623	720	702
NON-VIABLE PROPOSALS	1658	925	1027

Source: www.decide.madrid.es. Prepared by the authors.

These regulations, which are offered as a sample, limit the proposals that can be submitted by each neighbour to three. In addition, the creation of different bodies to encourage participation and debate are established. Thus, the districts of Arganzuela and Tetuán constitute what are known as the *Grupo Motor abierto* (Open Motor Group), which anyone can join for the purpose of promoting the activities. In the latter district, there is also an Evaluation Committee composed of specialists and citizens who evaluate the proposals.

Any citizen can present his or her ideas to both the city as well as to any number of districts he or she wishes. In the former case, they must meet one of three requirements: they must not be located in a specific district, they must affect several districts in an equal manner, and they must affect elements that are considered relevant to the majority of the inhabitants. Of the proposals submitted, the City Council eliminates those that do not meet the feasibility criteria of the open call. Municipal specialists estimate the costs of each initiative and exclude those that exceed the amount allocated to the city or district in question, as well as those that are not investment expenditures. They also check that each measure falls within

¹ According to the Madrid City Council itself in the participatory budget website, an investment proposal is “basically anything that the City Council can build or acquire and that is expected to last more than a year”.

the competence of the municipality and does not contravene any regulations. Finally, they analyse their technical feasibility before accepting them.

In the next phase, residents who are registered in Madrid over the age of 16 have the option of supporting up to a maximum of 10 proposals in the entire city, and 10 from a district of their choice.

As in the case of the presentation of proposals, voting can be carried out either through the website or in Citizen Services Offices. Each citizen can vote only once. In order to control this restriction, the National Identity Card (*DNI*) is requested in the case of face-to-face voting, while for electronic suffrage, the same system we have already mentioned is used for the proposals: a personal verification code.

The third phase of participatory budgeting consists of an evaluation by municipal specialists of the projects that have received the most support. The City Council studies the requirements of legality and viability and the costs of the projects. It also reviews similar ventures and chooses those that have received more support in the case of identical propositions.

Finally, the proposals reach the final vote, and those that have not passed the technical filters are published on the web decide.madrid.es, indicating the reason for their rejection.

Once again, all people registered in Madrid over the age of 16 have the opportunity of selecting projects for the entire city and for a specific district of their choice. The method chosen to collect the votes in this last phase is explained in the following way on the participative budgets website:

Each person may participate in the vote on proposals for the entire city and in the voting of a specific district of their choice. Both voting areas will work in the same way: the budget available in each vote and all proposals with their estimated cost will be published; Furthermore, proposals may be selected until the budget has been consumed (although it is not necessary to deplete it completely) by giving each one a vote.

As we vote on proposals, the bar at the top that shows the amount of budget available will be reduced. We will be allowed to vote on as many proposals as desired as long as we have a budget available (although it will not be necessary to consume the entire budget, and in fact, we can even vote on a single proposal). The proposals voted will be displayed on the sidebar. There we can cancel our votes at any time until the end of the voting phase. If we cancel all votes from the elected district, we can vote in another district. There is no need to confirm the vote at any time.

At the end of the voting period, the proposals for the city as a whole and for each district are arranged by the number of votes obtained. Once this procedure has been completed, the proposals are selected from each list starting from the most-voted until the last one, provided that the total budget allocated to each district or to the city as a whole is not exceeded. In the event that the limit is exceeded when a proposal is included, this proposal will be ignored and we will move on to the next, assuming that there is one.

3.2. Data regarding participation

In the three years of existence of the Madrid City Council's participative budgets, 203,698 Madrid citizens have participated in this initiative, demonstrating a constant increase in participation year after year. While in 2016, 45,533 people from Madrid took part in the process, in 2017 the number rose to 67,133. In 2018, the number reached 91,032. This means that interest in the process has grown by 100% in three years.

In 2016, a total of 5,184 proposals were received, of which 1,658 were considered unfeasible by municipal specialists. Non-viability is usually related to four possible factors: the lack of administrative authority, an insufficient budget, the negative externality that it generates, or a shortage of specific development of the proposal. In the final phase, there were 623 proposals, of which 206 were selected.

The following year, 3,215 proposals were submitted, of which 925 were classified as non-viable. The 311 that finally obtained an economic endowment were selected from among the 720 that managed to reach the final stage.

In 2018, 100 million Euros were distributed among 328 projects that received the most votes in the last phase in which 702 proposals participated. In total, 3,323 ideas were submitted, although 1,027 were rejected by the specialists.

Comparing the participation data to the census of Madrid's residents over 16 years of age as of January 1st in each of the years, we can see that participation has gone from 1.68% to 3.30% in the years from 2016 to 2018 (Table 2).

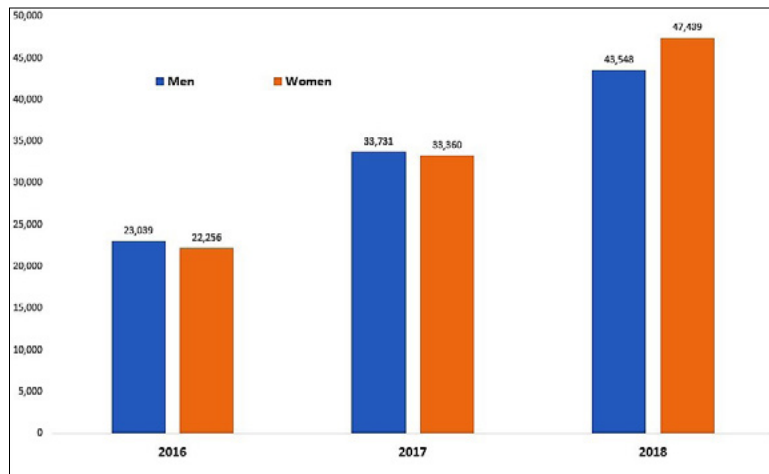
Table 2. Evolution of the participation in relation to the census of Madrid's citizens over 16 years of age.

	2016	2017	2018
PARTICIPATION	45,533	67,133	91,032
CENSUS >16 YEARS	2,706,401	2,721,150	2,758,813
% PARTICIPATION	1.68%	2.47%	3.30%

Source: www.decide.madrid.es and the Municipal Register Prepared by the authors.

The data collected also provides us with knowledge regarding participation according to gender. However, it should be noted that not all profiles include this information, although this is the case among the vast majority: of the 203,698 participants in the cumulative total of the three years, information based on gender is available for a total of 203,373; in other words, 99.84%. These figures provide evidence of equal participation in the first two years, which was interrupted in favour of women in the last year with a difference of more than 4 percentage points (Table 3).

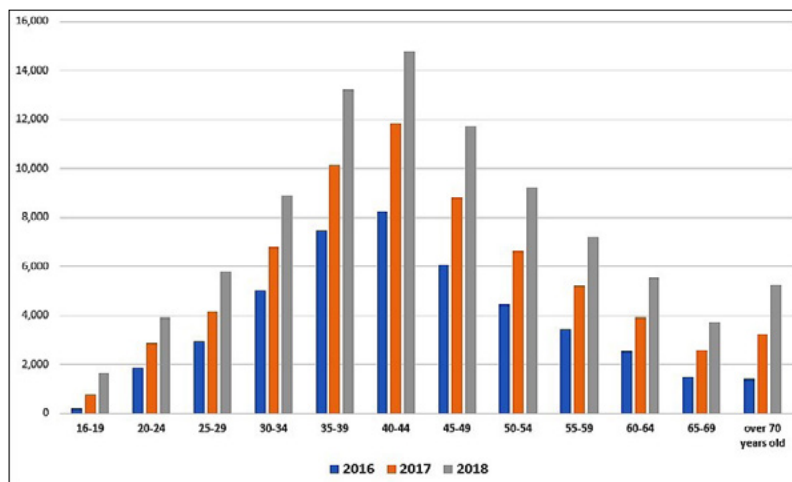
Table 3. Evolution of participation in participatory budgets based on gender during 2016, 2017 and 2018.



Source: www.decide.madrid.es. Prepared by the authors.

By age group, participants from Madrid between 35 and 49 years of age are the most participative, with no significant variations along the time line (Table 4).

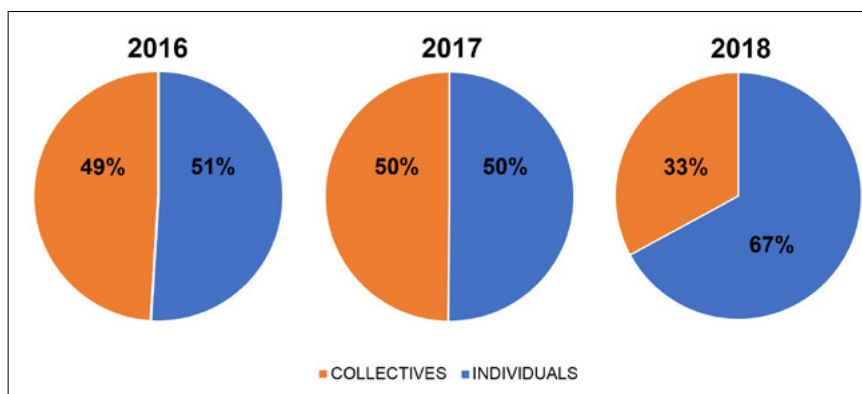
Table 4. Evolution of participation in participatory budgets by age group during 2016, 2017 and 2018.



Source: www.decide.madrid.es. Prepared by the authors.

The study of information related to each of the projects selected in the final phase has allowed us to gain knowledge as to whether the proposals have been made on an individual basis or as a group. During the first two years studied, the percentage of the former and the latter was nearly equal, as can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5. Percentage of proposals selected that were submitted by groups or individual citizens during the 2016, 2017 and 2018 participatory budgets.



Source: www.decide.madrid.es. Prepared by the authors.

In 2016, individual proposals represented 51%, compared to 49% for collective proposals. In the latter group, more than half (51%) came from spaces and participative forums of the various districts. The rest came from a wide range of organisations: neighbourhood associations, sports entities, cultural associations, support groups, parent associations, and associations of local governments or political groups.

In 2017, the similarity between selected projects submitted by individual citizens (50%) and those supported by a group (50%) continued. In this case, proposals arising from the participation spaces of the districts accounted for 49% of the collective projects. Once again, behind the remainder were associations from different fields, sports clubs, schools, etc.

However, in 2018 there was a considerable increase in the number of individual proposals: while 33% were endorsed by a group, 67% came from individual citizens. Of the former, 53% were from different participation bodies promoted in each district (citizen participation roundtables, forums, etc.).

4. Conclusions

The Madrid City Council's participatory budgets were launched in 2016 following similar initiatives in Europe to encourage citizen participation in the distribution of limited public resources.

After three years, the figures show growing citizen interest in participating in this process, as the number of people taking part in them has nearly doubled. However, despite this significant increase, we see that in absolute percentages,

the mobilization includes only 3.3% of Madrid's citizens among those who are allowed to participate according to the established rules. As we suggested in our first hypothesis, interest in participation is growing, but with very low numbers. If one uses only the level of participation as a measure, the situation cannot be seen as positive.

Analysis of the data we have collected also validates our second hypothesis, as we have seen that organized groups participate in municipal budgets in the form of proposals. About half of the projects that have received funding in the three years analysed had their origin in social collectives. In some cases, the district forums or their participation roundtables are the ones that debated the proposals and presented them to the city council; in others, organizations of a different nature were those that proposed improvements for the city or their district. This large group includes neighbourhood associations, sports entities, groups promoting bicycle transportation, political groups, parents of students, or schools. Organised collectives achieve better results with fewer proposals.

Throughout this work, we have detected various specific instruments of participation and deliberation on which participatory budgets are based. In the first place, we have found the possibility open to citizens to present proposals. The only condition for participation is age, and as such it would be a process which, *a priori*, would enable equal opportunities for involvement. The possibility of submitting proposals by Internet and at Citizen Services Offices promotes this idea by eliminating the technological barrier that could result from opting for an exclusively telematic delivery. On the other hand, the process is very simple and does not require specific knowledge of any subject in order to propose a project; it is sufficient for the projects to conform to clearly defined rules.

We have also seen how the methodology included voting on proposals in different phases, either online, or in person at Citizen Services Offices. It is a simple, quantitative process for determining the opinions of citizens. It is an open procedure, although one of dubious representation, because despite the publicity given to the initiative, the decision to participate rests with the citizen, and as we have seen, not many people decide to become involved. This weakness in the system reinforces the votes of organised groups (see Hypothesis 2), and calls into question the very idea of individual participation. A comparison of individuals and collectives in presenting proposals shows a regular distribution (Table 5), but not the capacity of social mobilization (practical exercise of voting), which is stronger among the collectives than among individuals.

On the page dedicated to each of the projects, which includes a brief description of the project and its cost, registered users can make comments and respond to those left by other citizens, which is also a tool for asynchronous participation supported by new technologies that are commonly found on blogs and media pages. In this case, the participatory instrument is limited to those who have the tools and skills needed to access Internet. During the study, we did not find any basic information on how access occurs, and whether processes are facilitated through media literacy programmes as well as other actions that lead to a narrowing of the digital divide. Special mention should be made of the population between the ages of 50 and 69 (Table 4), who seem to be less interested in this option of digital participation.

However, the instrument of greatest interest from the point of view of the qualitative study of public opinion has been the implementation of face-to-face debates in the various districts, thanks to which we can speak of the existence of a collective deliberative process. The procedure is structured (the 'what' or 'how' is discussed), and institutionalized (through municipal processes). This is where organized groups can best transfer their proposals, as we pointed out in H2. This issue

is of interest in the sense that citizen participation is not so different from conventional participation. Interest groups (neighbourhood associations, shopkeepers and NGOs) are complementary instruments of participation in the political systems of representative democracies. Thus, it has been confirmed that the opening of such systems to other ways of participation is not a direct symptom of neighbours being more integrated, as individuals, in municipal decisions.

It should be noted that meetings proposed in the participatory budgets have focused on the exchange of opinions among citizens, or at least this is what has been stated, since given the characteristics of this work we have not attended any of them nor have we been able to find information on their development. In most cases, due to the fact that citizens are not generally experts in the subjects being debated, there is a situation in which certain points of view that may be of great relevance to the discussion are prevented from entering the process. This point deserves a substantial critique of the process, insofar as neighbours have the right to know the extent of their own initiative within the municipal legal framework, budgetary constraints, or the priorities of elected officials.

While it is true that the specialists evaluate the proposals once they have been presented, it has not been observed that they participate in the deliberation phase. This situation could be avoided with the presence of experts in the subjects of the debates in such a way that these meetings would serve both as debates as well as learning sessions, which would undoubtedly result in higher quality opinions, or in other words, opinions that are more well-informed. This could reduce the percentage of proposals that the specialists consider unfeasible, which was 28.77% in 2017 and 32% in 2016.

Therefore, as we stated in H3, participation requires a previous process of deliberation and a certain degree of expert knowledge in order for the results to be viable and sustainable, not just what is desired.

In summary, this work aims to contribute to the study of political communication at the municipal level in order to create a solid correlation between political participation, organized groups of neighbours who demand openness and transparency in the decision-making process, and the use of information technology. We should guard against falling into the trap of optimism, because access to information or the opening of participation processes based on the dissemination of public information does not guarantee *per se* a qualitative increase in participation. The results are in line with those identified by Liden (2016) and Baack (2015).

The experience of the Madrid City Council confirms that unfeasible initiatives might be promoted, others may not fall within the legal jurisdiction of the Madrid City Council, and others may generate undesirable external effects. For this reason, the function of public information, managed by the institution itself, has to explore ways to guide neighbourhood dialogue, predefine the topics and public issues that can truly be affected by participatory budgets, and diversify the channels through which real participation can be carried out. Only in this way can participation be united with substantial improvements in municipal policy.

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