

# Assessment of participatory budgets in a medium-sized city in Spain: reviewing models, building indicators and learning from the experience

**Evaluación de presupuestos participativos en una ciudad mediana de España: revisión de modelos, construcción de indicadores y aprendizajes de la experiencia**

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Recibido: 08/11/2022

Aceptado: 09/06/2023

DOI: 0.32457/riem27.2046

## Abstract:

After 30 years of Participatory Budgets (PBs) in cities around the world, there have been many experiments and few assessments. But, how to evaluate an experience of participatory budgeting without own assessment model? The purpose of this work is to assess the PB of the Spanish city of Zaragoza using a model developed by the researchers themselves. The method involved a synthetic model to assess the practical case with empirical information obtained through the techniques of direct observation, structured interview and analysis of secondary sources. The results bring significant innovations: the inclusion in the model of an area related to the design and planning of the participatory process, which allowed to incorporate contingent variables that demonstrated the dynamism of the process. The outcomes contribute the measuring of 105 indicators grouped into

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35 scopes, 15 criteria and four spheres. The result was a positive, medium-high, assessment of the experience. This model is simple and flexible, and could be used to evaluate other experiences in intermediate cities.

**Keywords:** participatory budgets; assessment; spheres; criteria; indicators; citizen participation; synthetic model.

### **Resumen:**

Después de 30 años de Presupuestos Participativos (PP), ha habido muchos experimentos y pocos diagnósticos. Pero, ¿cómo evaluar una experiencia de presupuesto participativo sin un modelo de evaluación propio? El objetivo de este trabajo es evaluar el PP de la ciudad española de Zaragoza utilizando un modelo desarrollado por los propios investigadores. El método implicó un modelo sintético para evaluar el caso práctico con información empírica obtenida mediante observación directa, entrevista estructurada y análisis de fuentes secundarias. Los resultados aportan una importante innovación: un área e indicadores relacionados con el diseño y la planificación. Los resultados aportan la medición de 105 indicadores agrupados en 35 alcances, 15 criterios y cuatro esferas. El resultado fue una valoración positiva, media-alta, de la experiencia.

**Palabras clave:** presupuestos participativos; evaluación; participación ciudadana; modelo sintético.

## **1. Introduction**

There are numerous definitions of participatory budgets; among them, it could be defined as a participatory process of citizens in decision-making of the public budget based on individual or collective participation (Goldfrank, 2006).

Public actors are constantly searching for new ways to promote public participation and achieve greater acceptance by citizens in budget decisions. In this sense, participatory budgets have been an innovative way to promote inclusive democracy and greater modernization and accountability in the public sphere (Sgueo, 2016).

Since the 1990s, many democratic societies have exponentially increased the number of experiences and innovations in citizen participation mechanisms led or promoted by public institutions (Gomá y Blanco, 2002; Brugué, 2018; Falanga, Werheij & Bina, 2021); with higher rates in Latin America and Europe (Dias, Enríquez & Júlio, 2019). The participatory budget (PB) is currently the most common participatory policy around the world (Suárez, 2020).

These citizen participation processes, understood as the act of taking part in the process of formulation, approval and implementation of a public policy (Parry, Moyser & Day, 1992) have a long and dense history, beginning to develop at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the rollout of the Participatory Budgets of Porto Alegre (Brazil), in 1989 (Galais, Navarro & Fontcubierta, 2013). However, some authors place the genesis of participatory budgets in the 70s, in Brazil itself and, simultaneously, in Venezuela and Uruguay (Goldfrank, 2006). Precisely this practice has become the most widespread procedure in the frame of the construction of participatory democracies from the local level (Calvo et al., 2017; Pineda, 2009). In Spain, these experimental programs began to

be carried out in 2001 in Cabezas de San Juan (Seville) and Córdoba (Ganuza y Gómez, 2008). It is not easy to know the exact number of participatory budgets developed, by depending on the rigor of their definition (Goldfrank, 2006). However, already in 2014, an approximate number of three thousand was estimated (Montecinos, 2014). In this context, it is crucial to consider the need to measure and assess the quality of these experiences (Fedozzi & Furtado, 2009; Parés, 2009; Pineda, 2009, Rowe & Frewer, 2000).

Assessment of public policies has a much longer trajectory than that relating to participation (Jorba y Anduiza, 2009). Even so, an insufficient incorporation of the evaluation instruments into the usual management and governance practices is detected, and 'there is also no accepted list of quality criteria' (Galais, Navarro y Fontcubierta, 2012, p. 68), which reveals an evident gap between the theoretical consensus that underlines the importance of evaluative procedures and real political-administrative practice (Subirats, 2005).

Several studies describe and analyse qualitative aspects of PB (Manfredi and Calvo, 2019; Pineda, Abellán-López, y Pardo, 2021; Suárez, 2020), as well as quantitative indicators (Correa y Hepp, 2021; González and Soler, 2021), without applying a specific analytical model in any case (Bernaciak y Kopczyński, 2019).

Assessments of PB have increased in number in recent decades, but not at the same rate as their implementation. This circumstance derives from the omission of this stage in the procedural cycles of public policies or, at least, from a subsidiary incorporation (Alegretti y Lopes Alvés, 2011; Pineda y Pires, 2012).

The aim of our research is to contribute to the debate of research on PB evaluations based on concrete experience at the municipal level.

In Spain, some alternative civic platforms to traditional political parties won in 2015 the municipal elections of the main Spanish cities such as Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Zaragoza and A Coruña. This phenomenon was known as the "Ayuntamientos del cambio" and they intended to implement new mechanisms of citizen participation (Mérida y Tellería, 2021).

In 2016 the Municipal Government of the city of Zaragoza decided to allocate a total of 15 million euros from the investment chapter (construction of infrastructures and creation or acquisition of goods for the better functioning of services) for the three-year PB (2017-2019). The amount allocated to PB corresponds to 0.65 % of the annual budget.

This policy was conceived as a tool of participatory, direct and deliberative democracy, to improve the relationship between citizens and the administration, facilitate public transparency and enhance collective decision-making. All registered residents of the city, over 14 years of age, could present, in person or electronically, proposals to improve their neighborhoods and vote on those they considered most appropriate.

The municipal government supported the process on three structures: a). Budget Committees: coordinate the process in the neighborhoods, organize special sessions and monitor the proposals made by citizens. B). Municipal and Neighbourhood Councils<sup>5</sup>: receive information from the Budget Committees to transfer it to the Plenary Sessions of the Councils, ensure the functioning, offer the face-to-face space for sending proposals and voting in polls boxes. C). Open Government Platform: it is the Electronic Headquarters of the City Council as the place of digital citizen participation.

In 2017, the Council for Citizen Participation of the Zaragoza City Council commissioned a group of researchers (the authors) from the University of Zaragoza to assess the city's PBs. However, we did not have an evaluation model and it was the first time that our city implemented PB. So, the starting question was: how to evaluate an experience of participatory budgeting without having its own model for the city? How to evaluate budgets while building a model to evaluate?

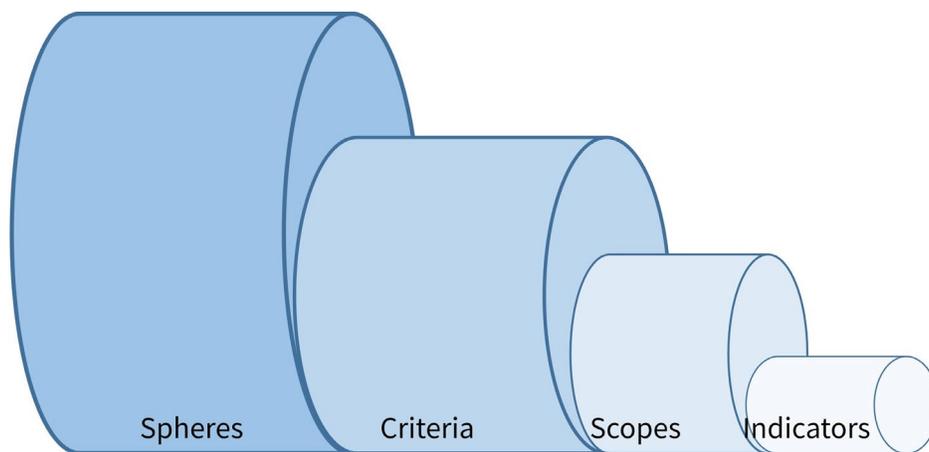
Next, a theoretical review of the main categories and variables of PB assessment is presented. Second, the design of the synthetic model is explained. Third, the information gathering and analysis techniques and the geographical context of the study are presented. Fourth, the research results. And finally, the main conclusions and discussion.

### 1.1. *Spheres, criteria and scopes of PB assessment on a global scale*

In the bibliographic search for the assessment models, we identified different measurement categories and variables, which according to their degree of extension or specificity, we classified them into four types: spheres, criteria, scopes and indicators. The spheres are specific areas or sections of influence of the PBs. The criteria are principles that guide the evaluation; the scopes, ranges that group a set of actions and, finally, the indicators are signals that show a certain behaviour (figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*Assessment model by spheres, criteria, scopes and indicators*



*Source: self-made*

<sup>5</sup> The Municipal and Neighbourhood Councils (or Boards) are organs of the Zaragoza City Council responsible for the decentralised management of matters that affect the territory and its neighbours.

Over time, there have been different conceptual models for the analysis of PB experiences. Many of these analyses, especially in Latin America (Chile, Argentina, Peru, the Dominican Republic or Uruguay) have been based on the study of five spheres: 1) participatory (local government); 2) participatory (citizens); 3) financial, fiscal and budgetary; 4) normative and legal; and 5) territorial proposed by Cabannes (2004).

Subsequently, Montecinos (2014), based on the contributions of several authors (Goldfrank, 2006; Ganuza y Gómez, 2008; Blanco, 2009; Da Rocha, 2012; Sintomer, 2009) and, in particular, Cabannes (2004), constructs an evaluation matrix with five dimensions: citizen participation; participation of the local executive; financial; normative and territorial.

Another analysis model applied in Argentine cities was drawn up by Schneider y Díaz (2016) who defined three spheres: 1) regulatory framework and institutional design; 2) themes, objectives and results; and 3) actors, organisations and invitation to participate.

In United States, the rise of the PB between 2011 and 2016 has also been a fact. Fung's research on the varieties of participation in complex governance in Chicago, Boston and San Francisco, defined three criteria for understanding participation mechanisms: who participates, how participants communicate with each other and reach joint decisions, and how discussions are linked with politics or public action (Fung, 2006).

Years later, Miller, Hildreth & Stewart (2019) applied Fung's criteria (2006) to assess the PB of Chicago, New York, Boston, and Vallejo (California). The assessment involved gauging the degree of compliance with the following requirements: a) selection of participants; b) communication must have some kind of deliberation and must be two-way; c) decisions should be taken collaboratively and driven by citizens; d) the citizens should have significant final authority over the results.

On the other hand, in the European context the Porto Alegre experience brought to light enormous differences (Sintomer, Herzberg & Röcke, 2008; Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2016). One of the largest comparative studies (Sintomer, Herzberg & Röcke, 2008) was based on the analysis of twenty European cities, defined six ideal types of PB: a) Porto Alegre adapted for Europe; b) Representation of organised interests (Spain); c) Community funds at the local and municipal level; d) Public/private negotiation table (Great Britain and Eastern countries); e) Consultation on public finances (France) and f) Proximity participation (Germany).

In the Spanish panorama, a large part of the works emphasizes the importance of two fundamental theoretical and methodological aspects: a common conceptual framework based on the plurality of related actors. And an effort to identify the assessable scopes present in any participation process (Anduiza & Maya, 2005; Jorba, Martí & Parés, 2007; Parés, Pomeroy y Díaz, 2007; Parés, 2009).

Specifically, the methodology used by Anduiza & Maya (2005) to define the quality of participation differentiates four levels of study: Scopes (definition of the different relevant aspects of the quality of participation); normative aspirations (referring to the identification of criteria for assessing the quality of participation); spheres (the aspects of each normative aspiration that are to be specified in indicators); and indicators (concrete and observable properties that reflect each sphere according

to the normative criteria). Specifically, their proposal is specified in 4 scopes and 29 indicators: who participates (8 indicators); what to participate in (9 indicators); how to participate (7 indicators); and what the consequences of the process are (5 indicators).

As can be inferred, there are as many evaluation models as there are PB experiences in the world. Nevertheless, following the presentation of these works, some spheres and variables that are reiterative, directly or indirectly, can easily be identified.

Regarding the procedural sphere, some constant criteria and scopes are found in the bibliography (Table 1). The different models propose to identify the participants (Schneider y Díaz, 2016), select them (Miller, Hildreth & Stewart, 2019), determine their inclusiveness (Navarro, 2008a; 2008b) or their extension, diversity and representativeness (Parés, Pomeroy, y Díaz, 2007). We also observe some criteria related to communication (Miller, Hildreth & Stewart, 2019; Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2016), deliberation (Cabannes, 2004; Navarro, 2008b), authority (Miller, Hildreth & Stewart, 2019), sovereignty (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2016) and influence (Navarro, 2008a).

Some models incorporate a sphere focused on the participatory process, i.e., on the mechanisms. In this sense, while some focus attention on the role of local government (Cabannes, 2004), others emphasise participation during different phases (Schneider y Díaz, 2016), such as decision-making (Miller, Hildreth & Stewart, 2019), or the degree of participation, on the quality of the information and the deliberative methods applied (Parés, Pomeroy y Díaz, 2007).

Other models give prominence to the regulatory framework and institutional design (Navarro 2008a; Schneider y Díaz 2016), or the financial and budgetary spheres (Cabannes, 2004; Schneider y Díaz, 2016). Finally, there are several models that incorporate a sphere focused on the results of the process (Navarro et al., 2010; Schneider y Díaz, 2016; Parés, Pomeroy, y Díaz, 2007).

However, the review of the literature has not identified a PB evaluation model that proposes carrying out said evaluation symmetrically to the construction of the model.

The main contribution of this work is to have created a 'living' evaluation model, developed in parallel to the participatory budgeting process itself. For this reason, this model has the advantage of adapting with flexibility to the changes that occur during the process, as well as a capacity to adapt to the requirements and realities of the evolution of the PB over time.

The main contribution of this work is to have created a 'living' evaluation model, developed in parallel to the participatory budgeting process itself. We propose a flexible use of the indicators, always within the model designed prior to the evaluation. This flexibility, within predefined margins, provides the advantage of adapting to the characteristics of the information collected during the process, as well as a capacity to adapt to the requirements and realities of the evolution of the PB over time.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This process evaluation incorporated an experiment, divided into two phases over the years 2017-2019. One of the assessment principles was the participation of the various actors in the process. The methodological design combined the gathering of both quantitative (financial balances of the budgets planned and executed) and qualitative information (from structured interviews and direct observation), as well as documentary techniques (analysis of official reports).

A multilevel work was proposed that facilitated the systemic evaluation of the PB process both globally and in its territorial development in urban districts, rural neighbourhoods and city projects.

Based on the exploration and comparative analysis presented, this research proposes a synthetic model applied to assessment of the PB of the city of Zaragoza during the years 2017 to 2019. The model includes four main spheres (see table 1). These spheres are assessed on the basis of different evaluation criteria. They are specified in scopes to be examined and are accompanied by a series of indicators that are empirically measured in the results of the research. This model has been built from analytical models of other authors (see table 1), incorporating indicators not included in them.

In general, as shown, the different evaluative proposals take into consideration, on the one hand, their procedural characteristics and, on the other, the outcomes that give meaning to the experience. The processual assessment thus tends to prioritise those criteria that allude to the design of the experiments, paying little or no attention to evaluation of their development. This is one of the main new features of the assessment model proposed: the sphere related to design and planning is distinguished from the one derived from deployment and development, in order to include in the assessment all those contingent areas that show the dynamic nature of each process.

**Table 1**

Spheres, criteria and scopes of evaluation according to bibliography

Sphere	Criteria	Scopes
1. Design and planning	Process relevance	Initial context: Political will; active social networks; training actors process (Montecinos, 2014; Allegretti, García y Paño, 2011).
		Elaboration of the design process (participated or not).
		Consensus degree around the model (Parés, Pomeroy y Díaz, 2007).
		Capacity to intervene. Regulatory framework and institutional design (Schneider y Díaz Rosaenz, 2016; Wamplerly and Hartz-Karp, 2012; Parés, Pomeroy y Díaz, 2007).
		Relevance. Type of projects being financed (Montecinos, 2014; Parés, Pomeroy y Díaz, 2007; Anduiza & Maya, 2005).
		Clarity of objectives (Schneider y Díaz Rosaenz, 2016; Wamplerly and Hartz-Karp, 2012; Parés, Pomeroy y Díaz, 2007; Pineda y Pires, 2012).
	Coherence of design	Scope of participation. Communicative dimension (Arnstein, 1969; Schneider y Díaz Rosaenz, 2016; Wamplerly & Hartz-Karp, 2012; Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2016).
		Sequence of stages (Pineda y Pires, 2012).
		Participation channels.
		Techniques deliberation (Parés, Pomeroy y Díaz, 2007; Anduiza & Maya, 2005).
	Feasible of the design and its planning	Human and economic resources (Parés, Pomeroy y Díaz, 2007).
		Adaptation to deadlines. Planning/compliance.
	Quality of design	Planned coordination spaces (Parés, Pomeroy y Díaz, 2007).
		System for accessing and dissemination information. Process and deliberation (Cabannes, 2004; Anduiza & Maya, 2005; Navarro, 2008b; Parés, Pomeroy y Díaz, 2007).
		Training (Allegretti, García y Paño, 2011).
		Traceability and transparency (Schneider y Díaz, 2007; Wamplerly & Hartz-Karp, 2012).

<b>Sphere</b>	<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Scopes</b>
2. Process deployment and development	Proposal capacity	Proposals by channel, agency, destination, and topic (Parés, Pomeroy y Díaz, 2007; Pineda y Pires, 2012).
		Proposals by evolution.
	Degree of implementation	City process, districts and rural neighbourhoods.
	Process execution quality	Transversally execution. Process influence: decisions. Proposals included in the agenda. (Navarro, 2008b).
		Integration into the participatory system (Parés, Pomeroy y Díaz, 2007).
		Information and communication strategy (Cabannes, 2004; Parés, Pomeroy y Díaz, 2007).
Adequacy of face-to-face spaces for deliberation.		
Recognition of participation (Cabannes, 2004).		
3. Mobilised participants	Degree of openness	Open to all citizens (Parés, Pomeroy y Díaz, 2007).
	Number of participants	Number of participants. Actors, organizations and call. Dynamic of participation. Objectives, scope and intensity. Form of participation (Parés, Pomeroy y Díaz, 2007; Anduiza & Maya, 2005; Francés y Carrillo, 2005).
		Participants by stages.
	Diversity	Gender (Parés, Pomeroy y Díaz, 2007; Pomeroy, Jurado, López and Rosende, 2009; Anduiza & Maya, 2005).
		Age (Parés, Pomeroy y Díaz, 2007; Anduiza & Maya, 2005).
Representativeness	Collective participants. Opening of the process (Navarro, 2008b; Parés, Pomeroy y Díaz, 2007; Anduiza & Maya, 2005).	
4. Execution of proposals	Proposals capacity	Proposals to be implemented. Substantive results (Parés, Pomeroy y Díaz, 2007).
		More actives proponents.
	Effectiveness of the budget execution	Efficiency and control of budget execution (Montecinos, 2014).
	Management of the remainder	Proposals tailored to remnants (Montecinos, 2014).
Final execution of the proposals	Degree of final execution of the proposals (Montecinos, 2014; Parés, Pomeroy y Díaz, 2007; Signorelli, 2016; Anduiza & Maya, 2005).	

*Source: self-made*

Although they are not shown in this table, in the results section, the indicators constructed for the assessment can be observed, adjusting the criteria and the evaluated areas to the minimum measurable, observable and available units according to the theoretical framework and the assessment objectives.

### **2.1. *The city of Zaragoza: test bench and political studies***

The current research is a case study, but its outcomes can serve to validate and extrapolate the synthetic model proposed to other intermediate cities in the Spanish, Mediterranean and Latin American context.

Zaragoza is the fifth city in Spain in population (716,040 inhabitants according to data from the municipal register of January 1, 2020) and is sometimes considered a national benchmark from which to analyse certain social transformations. Zaragoza represents the characteristics of urban Spain, which is why it is considered a test bed for social and demoscopic research. Some researchers (Fernández Albertos et al. 2015) consider the city of Zaragoza as 'the Spanish Ohio', due to its similarities with the socio-economic average for Spain.

In 2020, Zaragoza had a demographic comparable to the average city in Spain: average age (45 years for Zaragoza and 43.6 years in Spain); population aged 65 and over (20.9 % in Zaragoza and 19.5 % in Spain); population under 15 years of age (13.6 % in Zaragoza and 14.4% in Spain) and foreign population (15.3 % in Zaragoza and 11.4 % in Spain).

The municipality is administratively divided into 15 districts, 14 urban and one rural, which is subdivided, in turn, into 14 rural neighbourhoods. The districts are governed by the Municipal Councils, while the rural neighbourhoods are governed by the Neighbourhood Councils.

### **2.2. *Documentary analysis and exploitation of the data resulting from follow-up***

The development of the participatory process generated a large number of documents and data that represent the physical footprint of the experiment carried out (Ispizua y Lavia, 2016). These data make up an information bank whose analysis is an essential starting point to proceed with the assessment.

We identified twelve secondary sources and classified them into two groups: basic documentation (seven previously prepared documents, encoded Bd1, Bd2...) and the documentation on the development of the process (eight documents: follow-up reports, minutes and diagnoses, encoded Pdd1, Pdd2...).

### **2.3. *Direct observation***

The participatory process is supported by some stable participation bodies, but it has also meant the creation of spaces created *ad hoc*. This is the case of the PB Committees that were in charge of coordinating and revitalising the process in urban districts and rural neighbourhoods. The remit of the committees was to prioritise the proposals received that went on to the technical feasibility study phase. This space for face-to-face participation was the setting chosen to collect information by observation (Guasch, 2002). Observations were carried out in four urban districts, two hours by session, selected according to accessibility and representativeness criteria (encoded Do1, Do2...).

## **2.4. *Focus interviews***

It was necessary to complement and enrich the analysis of the observations and documents with the opinions of various agents linked to this experience. The focused interviews (encoded Fi1, Fi2...) were face-to-face and a flexible script was used (Ballestín y Fábregues, 2018). The script included the main spheres of the model (table 1).

Fourteen interviews were held with people involved in the process. The heterogeneity of informants was considered, attempting to weight the different political, administrative and citizen positions. The interviewees corresponded to three profiles: informants with political and management responsibilities (2); municipal management and technical organisation professionals (8); and representatives of civic organisations with participation in the process (4).

## **3. Results**

Next, and following the synthetic model described, we proceed to assess the indicators with the information collected during the field work. Assessment of the scopes depends on the measurements expressed by the indicators. The model includes 105 indicators because they correspond to the assessment of the observable units of the 35 areas multiplied by the three assessment possibilities on a basic scale of: high, medium and low, according to the level of achievement of the indicator (the tables have the degrees of achievement reached marked in colours). Likewise, the reference to the source used for its measurement is included.

### **3.1. *Sphere 1. Design and planning***

This sphere includes the analysis of four criteria: process relevance, coherence of the design, the feasibility of the design and its planning, and its quality.

Of the 48 indicators selected, 24 have a high performance, 24 an average performance and none have a low result. Among the high scores, the criterion regarding the coherence of design stands out, and in the average scores, the relevance of the process implemented.

#### **3.1.1. *Process relevance***

The result of the evaluation of these elements shows an intermediate level of achievement. The initial context was favourable to the experience, although it has not been rated optimal for several reasons. In the first place, due to the discrepancies between the different political actors. Secondly, because the general training of technicians, politicians and citizens is part of a political culture that is no stranger to disaffection. However, it should be noted that the social fabric has been favourable and involved in the process, especially the neighbourhood associations (Do1, Do2, Do3 and Do4).

The process of preparing the normative bases incorporated contributions from different agents but did not reach the level of co-creation. Along the same lines, the level of consensus around the

model also achieves an intermediate score: all agents positively rated the incorporation in the 2018 design of suggested substantive changes compared to 2017, such as the inclusion of city proposals and the expansion to rural neighbourhoods. However, there are some discrepancies that lead to a polarisation around the assessments that are made of it. In some cases, the permeability, flexibility, and adaptability of the model is highlighted, while in others, it is labelled as excessively complex and prone to generating confusion (Bd1; FI1, FI2, FI3, FI9, FI10, FI11, FI12 and FI13).

Regarding the evaluation of its relevance, 1.3 % of the total municipal budget was opened for debate (Bd1). In total, approval was given to allocate 5 million euros in 2017 and 10 million euros in 2018-20.

The only one of the scopes assessed that achieved an optimal score is the one related to intervention capacity. The City Council, as the process leader, has the capacity to intervene in the matter open to participation, as it plans, finances and manages the public investments of the city, its urban districts and rural neighbourhoods (Bd1 and Bd2).

### *3.1.2. Design coherence*

This criterion achieved more satisfactory outcomes than the previous one. The design assessed ensures that the participants, in addition to proposing and deliberating proposals, have decision-making capacity by enabling a voting mechanism (Bd1 and Bd2). In addition, the channels of citizen participation, both face-to-face and digital, are transversal in all phases (Bd1-Bd2-Bd3).

Finally, it should be noted that deliberation methods and techniques open to all participants are included in the design, through the PB Tables. Specifically, two deliberative spaces are incorporated: one of a diagnostic nature and another for the purpose of prioritising the proposals received that should proceed to the technical feasibility study phase (Bd1-Pdd3-Pdd4-Pdd5; Do1-Do2-Do3 and Do4).

### *3.1.3. Design feasibility and planning*

The viability of the design involved evaluating both the planning of sufficient resources for its implementation and the adequacy of the times allocated to carry it out. The provision of bodies with defined functions for cross-phase coordination, resource planning and the design of a system to guarantee traceability and transparency are highlighted (Technical Office for Participation, Transparency and Open Government). In addition, the face-to-face sessions were accompanied by municipal staff and volunteers (Bd1, Bd2 and Bd7; FI1 to FI8).

The temporal planning was adjusted to the schedule of the phases. Despite the efforts to rationalise the times, the unsuitability of the dates chosen for holding the final vote (carried out in the summer period, with a negative impact on participation) made optimal assessment of this scope impossible.

### *3.1.4. Design quality*

Coordination spaces were anticipated in the model design. Notably, the Follow-up Commission, the Technical Commission (Bd1 and Bd2) and the Budget Committees (Do1, Do2, Do3 and Do4), which are key parts in coordination of the experience, were also planned transversely in all phases.

The system for access to and dissemination of information and communication designed incorporated several strategies. In addition to the media, face-to-face channels have been set up, through information sessions and the establishing of a network of information points (civic centres, district councils and rural neighbourhoods). In addition, dissemination on social networks and through the electronic headquarters of the process (Open Government Platform) has been reinforced. However, the reach of the strategy has been limited, which shows that its design characteristics must be studied in depth to achieve greater penetration. (FI1-FI5-FI9-FI10 and FI11).

Traceability and transparency were positively evaluated, as the actions to make them effective were considered in the design. The web portal was the support to access all the key information for monitoring and participation: the proposals presented, the support received and the comments elicited; the assessment reports (of the viable proposals and those rejected); and the outcomes of the final vote (Bd1-Pdd1-Pdd2-Pdd6-Pdd7 and Pdd8).

## *3.2. Sphere 2. Process deployment and development*

Sphere 2 includes the analysis of three criteria: proposal capacity, degree of implementation (modifications planned/executed) and quality of the process in execution.

This sphere gets an average score, as it reaches six medium level indicators (Proposals by topic, by evolution; city process, urban and rural districts; transversally in execution; integration in the participatory system; adequacy of face-to-face deliberation spaces), one high (proposals submitted) and two negatives. The negative indicator were acknowledgment of participation and the communication and information strategy. According to interviews (Fi5 and Fi11) and some documents (Pdd6 and Pdd7), the feedback to participants and communication strategy were low.

### *3.2.1. Proposal capacity*

The number of initiatives presented was evaluated satisfactorily, reaching 2,099 in 2018 (41.44 % more than in 2017), although the addition in 2018 of rural neighbourhoods and city proposals to the process must be taken into account. Of these, 82.1 % were submitted online and 17.9 % physically.

In relation to the proposals by themes, it is considered that an average level was reached, as there has been relative diversity in terms of the topics addressed: Facilities and equipment (27 %), public roads (27 %), mobility (19 %), sports (8 %), education and youth (7 %), environment (5 %), accessibility (4 %), culture (2 %) and others not categorised (1 %).

As for the evolution of the proposals, 75 % were accepted, surpassing the support gathering phase. The reasons for the withdrawal of proposals were diverse: not corresponding to a municipal jurisdiction (29 %), not corresponding to the proposing district (22 %), duplications (20 %), mergers with other proposals put forward (13 %) and exceeding the budget (6 %), in addition to those corresponding to outside contracts or works already planned. On the other hand, in terms of the percentage of viable proposals, it stands at 58.1 % of the total of 596 proposals that were finally submitted to the scrutiny of a legal, technical and economic feasibility report. Therefore, it is considered that an average result was achieved in relation to the proposals according to evolution.

### *3.2.2. Degree of implementation*

Regarding the degree of implementation, the processes of the three levels that make up this initiative were assessed separately: city (cross-cutting proposals to various districts), urban districts and rural neighbourhoods.

Despite having tried to develop improvements in 2018 compared to 2017, some with a wide potential of scope and penetration in the process, certain limitations have meant that their implementation did not turn out as expected, giving rise to discrepancies in the levels of satisfaction achieved.

The non-ratification by the Municipal Plenary (representation of the elected councillors) of some of the 335 city proposals sent by citizens put the outcome of this part of the process to the test. In the urban districts, the technical evaluation process of some of the 1,348 proposals made was widely criticised and even not ratified, leading to a report by the municipal legal services, after which the citizen voting phase continued. This suffered a significant decrease in 2018 compared to the 2017 edition, possibly because the vote was held in the summer. Finally, the process in rural neighbourhoods was delayed for four months compared to the city and urban districts, which could be due to the need to adapt the general criteria of the PB to the specific features of rural neighbourhoods, in which a total of 384 proposals were submitted.

### *2.2.3. Process execution quality*

To establish the quality in rollout and execution of the process, the transversality of the execution, its integration into a participatory system, the information-communication strategy, the spaces for deliberation and the recognition of participation were taken into consideration.

Regarding mainstreaming, the process required the involvement of several municipal departments and services, which is a key indicator in assessment of the process. In total, 78 municipal technicians drafted 570 legal, technical and economic assessment reports on the proposals. However, beyond the number, the quality of the transversality requires greater consistency in the results, which is why it was rated with an average score.

Regarding integration into the municipal participatory system, the fact that this process has been supported by existing participation bodies was rated positively, in addition to building *ad hoc* spaces. It also highlights the link between the process with two European projects in which the Zaragoza

City Council already takes part through the Technical Office for Participation, Transparency and Open Government: *Mobile Age* (inclusion of older people in the use of digital services), and the incorporation of the open material generated in *SlideWiki*, to facilitate access and reuse. Despite these advances, the indicator is rated with an average score, as it is necessary to build more bridges between the PB and other city processes.

In relation to the information-communication strategy, some deficiencies were evidenced. The significant difference between the number of people who presented support for proposals and those who have finally took part in the voting phase shows that this strategy has not been adequate. This indicator was rated with a low score.

Regarding the suitability of the face-to-face spaces for deliberation, despite considering the effort, its assessment is also at a medium-low level. The first committees had an average of only 19 participants. The second, focused on prioritising proposals, also failed to improve involvement and deliberation. (Do1, Do2, Do3 y Do4). Finally, acknowledgement of citizen participation was not included, so it is rated with a low score.

### **3.3. Sphere 3. Participants**

The evaluation of the indicators of the third area dedicated to the participants reveals a medium-high performance. In relation to the degree of openness, the PB of the city of Zaragoza is rated with a high score, as it was open to all citizens (Bd1, Bd2). All people over 14 years of age were able to participate, membership in associations or entities was not required and there were no restrictions on the participation of neighbours (except in those set aside for technical assessment).

As for the number of participants, 6,810 people took part in the final vote (5,425 in urban districts, and 1,385 in rural neighbourhoods), which represents 1.12 % of the census of people with the right to vote. In this sense, it is considered that the PB of the city of Zaragoza are at an average level in relation to other territories in which similar initiatives have been developed. However, the PB process consists of different phases with different participation rates. It should be noted that participation in the final voting phase was proportionally higher in rural neighbourhoods: 5.54 % of the total population, compared to only 0.93 % in urban districts (Pdd7-Pdd8).

The data obtained do not allow us to assess the diversity criterion in full, although some considerations can be made in this regard. There are no data by origin, nationality, sexual identity or functional diversity, so the participation of these people could not be assessed. Only two social groups requiring special attention (women and young people) were made explicit in the study. In the case of women, their participation, in some of the phases of the process, is similar to and even higher than the percentage they represent for the city as a whole. However, in the case of young people, the participation percentage (final vote) did not exceed 10 % (Pdd6 to Pdd8). That means getting a low grade.

The degree of openness is closely linked to representativeness. The PB model of the city of Zaragoza allowed the participation of citizens individually, as well as under organised entities. In this case, a

high level of representativeness is presented, as the associative fabric and interest groups (collective participants) played a very productive role, at least in relation to the number of proposals put forward, especially by the parents' associations of students (AMPAS) and neighbourhood groupings (Pdd6 to Pdd8; FI11 to FI14).

### **3.4. Sphere 4. Execution of proposals**

Execution of the proposals includes the number of initiatives presented, homogeneity of the proponents, effectiveness of the budget execution, its oversight, management of the remainder and the degree of final execution of the proposals.

This sphere was rated with an average score, as most of the indicators are at these levels. The number of proposals presented stands out positively, whereas the inefficiency in management of the remainder was rated negatively.

Of the 596 proposals that were submitted to the scrutiny of a legal and economic feasibility report, 58.1 %, that is, 346 proposals were accepted. They were then subjected to a technical feasibility assessment and the number reduced to 139 proposals. This variation is due to the technical infeasibility of some proposals, the disposition of the remainder, or the lower costs of proposals for which a higher budget had been estimated.

By the end of 2018, the degree of execution of the proposals was 12.97 % (Pdd7 and Pdd8). In March 2020, the execution level reached 53 %. The execution levels is grouped into three sets: a) pending proposals, which indicates an ineffective execution (19.41 % of the proposals); b) the proposals that are in tender, contracting or that have been started, incomplete or partial (27.32 % of the proposals); c) The proposals effectively completed (53 % of the total).

Regarding the 27 % of proposals that are in tender, contracting or initiated, we must clarify that the City Council's own reports state that in the actions in the 'contracting process' there are different phases that range from processing of the contracting file, through publication of the tender notice, to the award.

Proposals that are 'in management' have undergone some budgetary modification, are in the phase of formalising the credit reserve, the drafting of projects or technical reports has begun, an order of execution has been given to the ordinary contractor, or the supply has been ordered, but its placement is pending.

Regarding the finalised proposals, there is a certain disparity by urban districts. However, if the 74 proposals completed by the different municipal action areas are disaggregated and compared with the proposals accepted in 2018, the execution levels by areas are obtained. This way, the proposals in the public thoroughfare area reached an execution of 100%, achieving an outstanding rating. Proposals on accessibility achieved a notable degree of execution with 87 %. Those related to mobility, facilities/equipment and sport, passed with 58.8 %, 59.4 and 66.7 %, respectively. Those with an insufficient performance were the areas of environment (33.3 %) and education/youth (0 %).

Regarding the typology of the proponents, we can point out the existence of two types: citizens who have participated individually and associations or platforms that have done so on behalf of a group. Although in the count of the total volume of proposals the associations and collective initiatives stand out, the separation of the collective proposals by type of organisation leaves us a clear balance: the citizens who participated individually have led the number of proposals approved with the 41 % of the total, followed, at a considerable distance, by neighbourhood associations (28.2 %) and AMPAS (16.2 %) and other civic actors (14.6 %) (Pdd6, Pdd7, Pdd8).

If the main proposals approved are related to the most active proponents, it is concluded that private individuals, neighbourhood associations and AMPAS made proposals related to facilities and equipment, improvements in public roads and mobility, as well as initiatives in the field of education and youth.

The budget execution of the District Councils is barely acceptable. However, the balance of budgetary execution is more negative than that of the execution of the proposals. While the finalised proposals exceeded 53 % of those approved, the budget executed only reached 36 % of the budget (Pdd7).

Comparison of the completed proposals and the executed budget suggests that the cheaper, and presumably simpler, proposals were executed with greater diligence than the larger and more expensive ones. Even so, it must be borne in mind that there are 27 % of works started, tendered or under contract, with which it is foreseeable that in 2020 the level of budget execution will improve by some percentage points.

#### **4. Conclusions and Discussion**

Based on the literature review and comparative analysis of existing models (see table 1), this research adapted and applied a synthetic model for PB assessment of the Spanish Zaragoza city. The empirical and documental information collected and analysed of 35 scopes and 105 indicators, we concluded the experience garnered a medium-high score.

Setting out all the scopes and indicators would be very extensive and detailed, but our modular model allows us to summarise the results of the evaluation in four spheres and 15 criteria. In addition, to facilitate its understanding, we accompany each criterion with a colour according to 'traffic light' simile: green for successful achievement, amber for partial achievement and red for failures (table 2).

**Table 2**

Assessment of the criteria and dimensions according to the synthetic model developed for the city of Zaragoza

Sphere	Criteria	Results
Design and planning	Process relevance	●
	Coherence of design	●
	Feasible of the design and its planning	●
	Quality of design	●
Process deployment and development	Proposal capacity	●
	Degree of implementation	●
	Process execution quality	●
3. Mobilized participants	Degree of openness	●
	Number of participants	●
	Diversity	●
	Representativeness	●
Execution of proposals	Proposals capacity	●
	Effectiveness of the budget execution	●
	Management of the remainder	●
	Final execution of the proposals	●

Source: self-made

We have found that the four spheres and criteria documented by the classical theorists (Cabannes 2004; Goldfrank, 2006; Ganuza y Gómez, 2008; Blanco, 2009; Sintomer, 2009; Da Rocha, 2012; and Montecinos 2014) of the evaluation of budgets remain valid. However, we also consider that scopes and indicators must be adapted to political, social and cultural contexts; as well as the availability of information offered by official sources and the research techniques used. An observable case is the diversity criterion of mobilised participants sphere. Many evaluation models measure the diversity of participants. However, there are cultural and political contexts in which diversity reflects age, gender, functional autonomy or ethnicity. In such a way that the flexible use of the scopes and indicators would involve adapting the measurement values to the context and sources. In our case, we only had age and gender because the evaluation designers did not ask about other expressions of diversity.

The importance of incorporating this differentiation by dimensions of the model is evident in the assessment results: the design planning and the mobilised participants have a high average score, the results receive a medium score and the sphere of development a low average score.

There is no doubt that the implementation of these mechanisms is no stranger to the contextual situations that can vary and generate gaps between what is planned and what is developed. Events such as strong opposition from opposing political parties, ignorance and demotivation of a part of the citizenry, and some calls for votes in summer periods, posed an enormous obstacle to achieving a more successful result.

One of the principles of the assessment was the inclusion of the various actors in the process. The research team considered it essential to include the perspective of all political groups with representation in the City Council. However, some declined to participate in this assessment, so their opinions and impressions of the process were not collected as planned. In this way, a large part of the documentary information analysed (Pdd1-Pdd8) was collected directly by the technicians of the City Council and, although it was reliable and contrasted information by the researchers, the absence of the opinions of the opposition political parties, limited the analysis of the data and the inclusion of critical opinions.

Therefore, it was necessary to put forward an analytical proposal capable of anticipating the possibility of capturing and measuring the unforeseen, overcoming the limitations of other models that prioritise the static aspects of the design.

The main new feature of the synthetic model lies, as suggested by Navarro (2008a) and Schneider y Díaz (2016), in the sphere related to design and planning. This new item allowed the project to be assessed separately from its execution. The design and planning of the PB is pertinent and coherent, but this research detected failures in the communication between social actors, and the implementation and execution of some environmental, education and youth proposals.

Much of the existing literature has focused on evaluating the implementation of actions, the execution of budgets, participants and results. Our work contributes to the existing literature, in addition to measuring those dimensions, in proposing a dimension, criteria and building indicators to evaluate the quality of design and planning.

The synthetic model is modular, which means that it can be decomposed into spheres and criteria in such a way that it adjusts to the corresponding political, administrative and cultural contexts, although we believe that it would better fit the Mediterranean and Ibero-American countries, in agreement with Sintomer, Herzberg & Röcke (2008). They pointed out that the Spanish experiences conform to the ideal types of Porto Alegre adapted for Europe and representing organised interests, due to the high prominence of the participatory process and the degree of democratic deliberation. This research has confirmed it.

Another methodological virtue has been the proposal of indicators, with the combination of information sources and methodological approaches. Our assessment has proposed measurable, observable and available indicators that other studies could consider. The use of a quantitative and, according to recent research (Pineda, Abellán-López, and Pardo, 2021;

Suárez, 2020), qualitative approach, and of secondary and primary sources of information, allows better adaptation to a complex reality and identifies those outcomes that only one type of approach and source could not capture and measure.

As stated by Miller, Hildreth & Stewart (2019) not all experiences designated PB meet the standards necessary for their effective recognition as such. In its family of similarities, we can affirm that the Zaragoza experience meets all the standards for its designation, although the results can be assessed in a different way according to the spheres.

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