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Article

Opening the "black box" of failure: bureaucratic capacity and the implementation of participatory budgeting in Bogotá

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Abstract

Despite the global expansion of Participatory Budgeting (PB), many of these initiatives fail. Existing explanations for these outcomes emphasize factors such as political will and social capital. However, the impact of administrative capacity and intersectoral coordination on PB implementation remains underexplored. This article addresses that gap in the literature. Through a qualitative case study of PB in the city of Bogotá during the administration of Mayor Gustavo Petro (2012-2015), this study compares territorial PB and sectoral PB. The findings show that sectoral PB achieved relative success because it was implemented through existing administrative structures. In contrast, territorial PB failed due to bureaucratic rigidity, weak intersectoral coordination, and the absence of the intersectoral financial mechanisms necessary for its implementation. The case demonstrates that political will and social capital, although important, are insufficient: successful PB execution requires prior administrative transformations. The case of Bogotá illustrates how bureaucratic inertia can undermine participatory objectives. Furthermore, in the absence of such administrative reforms, sectoral PB may represent a viable alternative.

Keywords: participatory budgeting, citizen participation, policy implementation, bureaucratic capacity, policy failure.

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Abrindo a "Caixa-preta" do fracasso: capacidade burocrática e implementação do orçamento participativo em Bogotá

Resumo

Apesar da expansão global do Orçamento Participativo (OP), muitas dessas iniciativas fracassam. As explicações existentes para esses resultados enfatizam fatores como compromisso governamental e capital social. No entanto, o impacto da capacidade administrativa e da coordenação intersetorial na implementação do OP é um campo pouco estudado. Este artigo aborda esse vazio na literatura. Por meio de um estudo de caso qualitativo do OP na cidade de Bogotá durante a administração do prefeito Gustavo Petro, no período entre 2012 e 2015, este estudo compara o OP territorial e o OP setorial. Os resultados mostram que o OP setorial obteve relativo sucesso, devido a que foi implementado através das estruturas administrativas existentes. Em contraste, o OP territorial fracassou devido à rigidez burocrática, à fraca coordenação intersetorial e à ausência de mecanismos financeiros intersetoriais necessários para sua implementação. O caso é uma prova que o compromisso governamental e o capital social, ainda que importantes, são insuficientes: a execução bem-sucedida do OP exige transformações administrativas prévias. O caso da cidade de Bogotá ilustra como a inércia burocrática pode enfraquecer os objetivos participativos. Além disso, diante da ausência de tais reformas administrativas, o OP setorial pode representar uma alternativa viável.
Palavras-chave: orçamento participativo, participação cidadã, implementação, capacidade burocrática, fracasso das políticas.

Abriendo la "caja negra" del fracaso: capacidad burocrática e implementación del presupuesto participativo en Bogotá

Resumen

A pesar de la expansión global del Presupuesto Participativo (PP), muchas de estas iniciativas fracasan. Las explicaciones existentes sobre estos resultados enfatizan factores como la voluntad política y el capital social. Sin embargo, el impacto de la capacidad administrativa y la coordinación intersectorial en la implementación del PP sigue siendo un campo poco explorado. Este artículo aborda dicho vacío en la literatura. A través de un estudio de caso cualitativo del PP en la ciudad de Bogotá durante la administración del alcalde Gustavo Petro, en el período comprendido entre 2012 y 2015, este estudio compara el PP territorial y el PP sectorial. Los hallazgos muestran que el PP sectorial logró un éxito relativo debido a que fue implementado a través de las estructuras administrativas existentes. En contraste, el PP territorial fracasó debido a la rigidez burocrática, la débil coordinación intersectorial y la ausencia de mecanismos financieros intersectoriales necesarios para su implementación. El caso demuestra que la voluntad política y el capital social, aunque importantes, son insuficientes: la ejecución exitosa del PP requiere transformaciones administrativas previas. El caso de la ciudad de Bogotá ilustra cómo la inercia burocrática puede socavar los objetivos participativos. Asimismo, ante la ausencia de dichas reformas administrativas, el PP sectorial puede representar una alternativa viable.
Palabras clave: presupuesto participativo, participación ciudadana, implementación, capacidad burocrática, fracaso de políticas públicas.

1. INTRODUCTION

Participatory Budgeting (hereafter PB) has spread globally over the last three decades as one of the most promising democratic innovations (Dias et al., 2021; Wampler et al., 2021). According to the Global Participatory Budgeting Atlas 2020-2021, it is estimated that by 2019, more than 10,000 PB initiatives had been implemented worldwide at the local government level (Dias et al., 2021). As Fung and Wright (2003) note, PB initiatives represent a type of democratic mechanism designed to include citizens in solving public problems and deliberating on policies that affect them.

However, notwithstanding the enthusiasm and support from local governments and multilateral organizations, extant literature has documented persistent challenges in the implementation of these mechanisms (Goldfrank, 2006; Sintomer & Ganuza, 2011; Wampler & Goldfrank, 2022). A sizable number of PB initiatives face obstacles in achieving their objectives, which has led to a search for

variables that explain their divergent outcomes. Among the traditionally analyzed factors are social capital (Avritzer, 2010; Baiocchi et al., 2011), the ideology of the ruling party (Abers, 2000; Goldfrank, 2021; Heller, 2001), and political will (Lowndes & Pratchett, 2009; Wampler, 2007, 2008). Nevertheless, recent studies highlight that even with active civic engagement and favorable political leadership, less explored factors can hinder the success of these processes (Ryan, 2021).

While a growing body of literature has documented persistent challenges and failures in PB implementation (Goldfrank, 2006; Ryan, 2021; Sintomer & Ganuza, 2011), empirical research has focused predominantly on successful cases like Porto Alegre. This article contributes to the emerging literature on PB failures by examining a 'negative case'. Following Porto de Oliveira (2017, p. 240), the next step in empirical research on PB diffusion is to address "negative cases" in which expected results were not achieved. The central question remains: what explains the failure of certain PB initiatives?

In this context, the implementation variable—specifically, administrative and bureaucratic capacity—has been one of the least addressed in studies on local participatory institutions. Research by scholars such as Abers (2000, 2009) and Baiocchi and Ganuza (2014, 2016) indicates that implementation problems often refer to the inability to mobilize public administration around participatory policies, where bureaucratic inertia and procedures hinder proposed objectives, even when political will exists. This perspective qualifies previous arguments that attributed success or failure to the support of elected officials.

The case of Bogotá (Colombia) provides a valuable context for examining these implementation challenges. It is particularly relevant as it enables an analysis of why cities that initiate PB processes may fail to meet their objectives, by identifying key factors omitted in previous studies. Specifically, the case illustrates a theoretical dimension requiring further empirical evidence: the role of administrative structure and intersectoral coordination. While sector-specific PB processes in Bogotá achieved greater success by operating within specific sectors, territorial PB initiatives—which required complex coordination between different administrative departments—faced significant challenges. Scholars such as Allegretti and Copello (2018), and Baiocchi and Ganuza (2014, 2016) have argued that successful PB initiatives often require administrative transformations that facilitate intersectoral coordination. The Bogotá case demonstrates that without this prior internal coordination capacity, the implementation of a territorial PB is severely compromised.

This article explores precisely this under-analyzed variable: how institutional and bureaucratic structure affects the PB process. To examine this question, the article conducts an in-depth investigation of PB implementation in Bogotá between 2012 and 2015. The research is structured into two main sections. The first presents a theoretical discussion of the factors explaining PB implementation, concluding that bureaucratic organization is a critical variable. The second section analyzes the case study, contrasting the territorial PB pilot project with sector-specific PB initiatives during the administration of Mayor Gustavo Petro. It examines—based on empirical and theoretical evidence—the failure of the territorial PB initiatives, which is fundamentally explained by bureaucratic rigidity, the lack of intersectoral coordination mechanisms, and the impossibility of creating cross-cutting financial instruments, such as a common fund, due to the limitations of the local budget statute. Meanwhile, sector-specific PB initiatives performed more effectively because they operated within established administrative and financial arrangements. The article concludes with reflections derived from this experience, aiming to contribute to improving the design and implementation of PB in local governments.

2. PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING: KEYS TO SUCCESS AND FAILURE

Academic research and practical interest in PB have been driven by their potential to deepen democracy. These mechanisms allow citizens to intervene in public investment decisions, allocate resources to marginalized areas, and foster social and institutional transformation, connecting proposals from deliberative spaces with public policies and increasing governmental legitimacy (Abers, 2000; Avritzer, 2010).

The empirical literature has identified multiple variables that condition PB success, including the political will of the governing authority, social capital and collective action (Abers, 2000; Avritzer, 2010; Sintomer & Ganuza, 2011; Wampler & Goldfrank, 2022). Wampler (2007, 2008) highlights mayoral support as decisive, but also emphasizes that organized civil society is crucial. According to Baiocchi et al. (2011), community involvement in participatory processes results in greater procedural plurality, increased participant numbers, and higher deliberative quality.

Similarly, McNulty (2011) shows that active engagement by regional leaders correlates with more successful processes. She also notes that supportive civil society organizations and favorable local contexts play significant roles. Thus, while political will and social capital are widely recognized as necessary, they are rarely presented as sufficient conditions.

Recent research suggests that political will and social capital, while necessary, are not sufficient to guarantee successful implementation (Goldfrank, 2006). This reveals a critical gap in the literature: the role of implementation, and in particular bureaucratic structure and institutional coordination, has been far less studied. Although the literature on citizen participation has paid little attention to this internal dimension of the state, a growing body of work in public management has begun to analyze the effects of bureaucratic organizational characteristics on participatory processes.

Therefore, it is crucial to develop empirical evidence that integrates these two fields of study (citizen participation and public management). A deeper examination is required of how the bureaucratic structures—through their organizations, procedures, practices, and rigidity—facilitate or obstruct the translation of citizen demands into concrete public policies. This article seeks to help close this theoretical and empirical gap.

3. IMPLEMENTING PARTICIPATORY INSTITUTIONS: OPENING THE "BLACK BOX"

Literature on the implementation of PB has traditionally indicated that successful implementation depends on factors such as political leadership and strong civil society. Bartocci et al. (2023) argue that administrative capacity is a key variable for success. Scholars such as Yang and Pandey (2011) argue that the implementation of citizen participation mechanisms is an organizational decision, not merely an executive one, in which "implementation reflects a process of organizational adaptation with organizational consequences" (Yang & Pandey, 2011, p. 881).

Abers (2000, 2009) highlights two implementation problems faced in Porto Alegre: first, the flexibility required by participatory processes does not align with the uniform norms and standardized procedures of bureaucratic organizations; second, public policies involve intense internal negotiation and do not depend solely on the mayor. Thus, participatory policy may be designed with the executive's consent; however, entities responsible for its implementation may refuse to grant power to citizens on matters of public agenda definition, or even the officials in charge of execution may hinder the process.

Extending this line of research, King et al. (1998) ask why traditional citizen participation efforts often fail. Their answer points out that many initiatives fail due to administrative systems based on bureaucratic expertise and professionalism, rather than offering genuine spaces for citizen influence. Therefore, it is necessary to explore more deeply how these variables affect the performance of participatory processes, especially in the case of participatory budgeting.

Smith (2009) emphasizes that democratic innovations are institutions designed to strengthen citizen participation in government decision-making. However, precisely because of their innovative character, they challenge traditional forms of public administration. As Van Meter and Van Horn (1975, p. 461) underscore, "implementation will be more successful when only marginal change is required, and consensus on goals is high". In this context, the notion of marginal change can be interpreted as reflecting the degree of bureaucratic flexibility or inertia within public organizations. Osborne and Brown (2005) note that public innovation capacity depends on the institutional framework, organizational culture, and environment. Thus, citizen participation initiatives such as participatory budgeting pose a challenge to existing bureaucratic structures, operating rules, and institutional narratives (Pulkkinen et al., 2024). Following Ianniello et al. (2019), within public administration, there are factors such as the attitude of public officials toward participation, information asymmetries within organizations, and organizational arrangements that hinder or facilitate internal coordination. Deficiencies in interdepartmental communication can also negatively affect the implementation of these initiatives.

Within bureaucratic structures, elements such as hierarchical authority and administrative centralization can act as barriers to effective citizen participation (King et al., 1998; Yang & Pandey, 2011). Hierarchical authority, based on stable procedures and norms, resists change and hinders coordination. Similarly, organizational centralization prevents the flexibility that participatory processes require. Consequently, Castell (2016) recognizes that the institutional framework—understood as the way local governments shape the institutional conditions for participatory initiatives to succeed—is key to their implementation. Both formal and informal aspects of bureaucratic structure are fundamental to this process. Change, coordination, and decentralization are therefore necessary conditions for the effective implementation of participatory initiatives.

Allegretti and Copello (2018) highlight that citizen participation initiatives can shift decision-making authority away from elected politicians and powerful bureaucrats toward hybrid arrangements in which citizens play a significant role. This process generates resistance, as it involves redistributing political power and opens the political process to new voices. The authors note that in Brazil, the success of PB initiatives was possible thanks to efforts to deconstruct and build a new bureaucratic logic and to reorganize, among other things, financial departments.

Understanding the role of bureaucracy in the implementation of participatory processes implies opening the "Black Box". Buckwalter (2014) points to a theoretical gap between participatory structures and actual outcomes. Factors such as participant capacity (knowledge and skills) and administrative responsiveness are fundamental to "opening" this box. Similarly, jurisdictional structure plays a key role: participation is more effective when participatory spaces are aligned with clear administrative areas and specific agency leaders with whom to interact. This minimizes the diffusion of responsibility and ensures clear accountability for the implementation of the initiative.

As will be analyzed in the case of Bogotá, the institutional framework for participatory budgeting implementation was limited, especially in the case of the pilot PB initiatives. In this context,

organizational barriers such as difficulties in interorganizational coordination and cooperation were key to understanding how organizational actors interacted to achieve or constrain the proposed objectives. The necessary change within organizations—which involved challenging traditional forms of administration—did not materialize, evidencing significant bureaucratic inflexibility. In contrast, in the case of sectoral participatory budgeting, the jurisdictional structure (Buckwalter, 2014) played a fundamental role, as this participatory initiative was aligned with clear administrative areas and specific organizational leaders, thus allowing for greater implementation success.

4. CASE STUDY AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Based on the literature presented above and the identified empirical gap, this study is guided by the following research question: How do administrative structure and intersectoral coordination influence the successful implementation of participatory budgeting (PB)? Specifically, why do territorial PB face greater challenges than sector-specific PB? To answer this question, a qualitative case study design is adopted, focusing on the experience of Bogotá (Colombia) and the implementation of territorial and sector-specific PB from 2012 to 2015. This allows for an in-depth analysis of the organizational mechanisms that facilitate or hinder implementation.

A case study approach is particularly appropriate for "why" questions because they require a deep description of the phenomenon (Yin, 2003, p. 9), as well as for developing new hypotheses (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 19) that can be extended in future work. This article employs a qualitative methodology. The research includes a wide variety of data sources: 22 in-depth interviews, each lasting approximately two hours, with key political and governmental officials, who participated in the creation of the proposal and its implementation, as well as representatives of civic associations who participated in the assemblies. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Second, information was obtained from official Bogotá municipal government websites. Third, technical documents obtained during interviews that had not been published were used. Finally, additional information was obtained by monitoring the local press. Access to information was difficult because the administration largely downplayed the initiative after its failure and had effectively abandoned it by the end of its term.

The Bogotá case study is interesting because it allows us to examine how administrative structure and intersectoral coordination influence the success of PB outcomes. Sector-specific PB was more successful because it involved projects in specific sectors that were easier to implement than territorial PB, which required coordination between teams of the administration, which proved challenging. The Bogotá case study shows that territorial PB requires prior coordination between parts of the administration. Without this, implementation will face challenges. In contrast, the implementation of sector-specific PB avoids this process.

Bogotá shares characteristics with many large cities in middle-income countries, and its experience can be applied to many cities in Latin America and around the world. A thorough examination of both successes (such as Porto Alegre, which has attracted most academic interest) and failures (Bogotá) is essential to understand what works and what does not work, and to capture a wide range of variation. This article presents empirical insights into how the implementation stage and the bureaucratic-administrative structure affect the outcomes of PB processes. The research employed qualitative methodologies, primarily semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders (including politicians, public officials, and social leaders), alongside document analysis, and direct observation.

5. BOGOTÁ AND PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING: THE BEGINNING OF THE PROCESS DURING GUSTAVO PETRO'S TENURE AS THE MAYOR OF BOGOTÁ

In Bogotá, Agreements 12 and 13 (2000) regulated participatory planning and established the District Territorial Planning Council (CTPD), the Local Planning Councils (LPCs), and Citizen Assemblies. However, Mayor Gustavo Petro (2012-2015) viewed these spaces as ineffective and clientelist, preferring massive mobilization and a new PB proposal (Martínez, 2019, p. 19). Up until 2015, PB was not mandatory and depended on mayoral political will[1].

When Gustavo Petro, representing a progressive political movement, was elected Mayor of Bogotá for the 2012–2015 term, many social sectors had high expectations regarding the implementation of participatory budgeting. During his campaign, he had emphasized citizen participation as a central component of social policy and as a key mechanism for addressing problems affecting local communities: "The districts and neighborhood environments will be essential for building social fabric and giving participation to vulnerable populations. Citizens will influence participatory budgets" (Medina, 2011, p. 25). Petro viewed existing participation spaces—Citizen Assemblies and LPCs—with skepticism, criticizing them as ineffective and clientelist.

According to a report by the Bogotá District Institute for Participation and Community Action, in Spanish, *Instituto Distrital de la Participación y Acción Comunal* (IDPAC) (October 2015):

> A first stage sought to convene one million people from the twenty city districts to participate in Citizen Meetings aimed at formulating local development plans. This exercise had many drawbacks, so it was agreed to carry out eight pilot participatory budgets and some thematic/sectoral meetings: water governance, road network, and youth. That way the goal of the development plan could be achieved (IDPAC, 2015a, p. 8).

During Petro's tenure PB was conceived as a tool to mobilize the population at the neighborhood level, creating its own territorial subdivisions (172 urban and 14 rural territories) called Basic Participation Units (BPU), instead of using the existing official demarcations (localities and Local Planning Units-*Unidades de Planificación Local* - UPZs[2]). Eight pilot PB exercises were carried out at the territorial level. Territories where the pilots would take place were determined according to the following criteria: socioeconomic level (low and middle sectors), neighborhoods characterized primarily by single-family housing, apartment buildings, and rural areas. With this information, eight territories were established for the pilots, and each territory had a characterization document (population, socioeconomic data, etc.). These territories had a total approximate population of 400,000 inhabitants, representing approximately 5% of Bogotá's population, according to the Bogotá District Planning Department, in Spanish *Secretaría Distrital de Planeación* (SDP) (2015).

[1] Law 1757 of 2015 established that Participatory Budgets are participatory mechanisms with binding effects. Territorial governments may allocate a portion of their budget for this purpose. Each municipality defines the rules of participatory budgeting through its own regulations.

[2] The existing territorial circumscriptions in Bogotá at that time—the 20 Localities and the 114 Zonal Planning Units (UPZs)—were not used. To determine the BPUs (Basic Participation Units), a Geographic Commission was formed, headed by the District Planning Secretariat and the District Institute for Participation and Community Action (IDPAC). Other entities supported the process: the Secretariats of Government, Education, Habitat, Health, Social Integration, Environment, and Mobility.

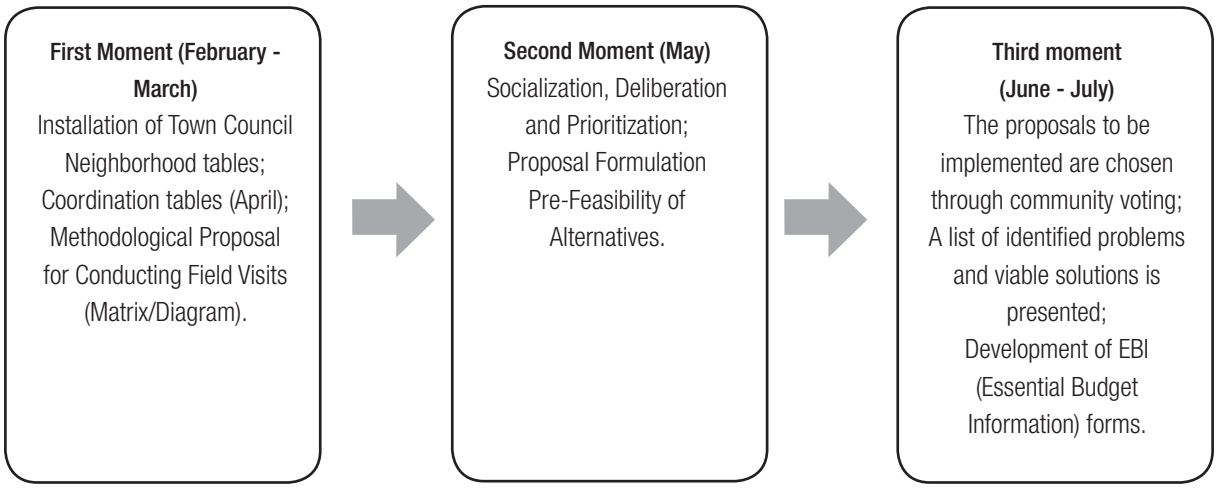
Simultaneously, a debate emerged about whether PB should be open to the general needs of the population or be limited to specific sectors according to the government's interests. Finally, it was decided to implement two types of Participatory Budgeting (PB): territorial PB, through which citizen needs would be identified, discussed, and prioritized through deliberative processes; and sectoral PB, organized around specific policy sectors. The corresponding budgets were allocated by the Finance Department (SDP, 2012b).

During the second half of 2012, the Participatory Budgeting Councils were approved: sector-specific PB focused on road infrastructure, youth, and water (Secretaría Distrital de Gobierno, 2012), linked to specific city government secretariats depending on the topic. These three topics were prioritized by thousands of citizens during the formulation of the district development and local development plans. Funding for each sector-specific PB initiative came from district departments and district-level funds.

According to interviewees with the PB policy makers, three premises were considered when formulating the PB exercises, both sectoral and territorial. The first was to avoid operating under old participatory instances, especially the Local Planning Councils and the Citizen Assemblies. Second, related to the above, the goal was to break with clientelist behavior. It was considered that much of the functioning of the city's political system was rooted in clientelism. In the opinion of the Petro government, within this framework citizen participation and participatory bodies such as the Local Planning Councils and Citizen Assemblies, rather than disrupting this dynamic, contributed to its reproduction in the districts. Third, they sought to operate at the territorial level. In the case of territorial PB, BPUs were created, while for sector-specific PB, Local Planning Units (UPZs) were maintained. Territory was seen as one of the main components of citizen participation (Secretaría Distrital de Integración Social, 2012).

The methodology for territorial PB involved some actions. First, citizens in the different territories were asked to hold participatory budget meetings so that they could define investment priorities in their territories. Second, each working group would debate territorial needs. This exercise generated extensive discussions around competing proposals aimed at building consensus. The mechanism design included three stages, as illustrated in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1 STAGES OF PILOT PARTICIPATORY BUDGETS IN BOGOTÁ, 2012



Source: Elaborated by the author based on SDP (2012a).

Before the first phase, a preparatory phase was carried out in which the work plan and technical and logistical support were defined in working groups with local managers and community leaders. Subsequently, meetings were held with various city government entities to establish a roadmap for the implementation of the initiatives. Institutional coordination was planned to respond to citizens' demands in a coordinated manner. The management roadmap had five stages: first, reconciling the citizen proposal with the technical vision; second, the contracting process; third, implementation; followed by monitoring; and finally, dissemination and accountability of the process.

Regarding sector-specific PB, decisions were made by consensus, based on the will of the community and what was agreed in each council. These decisions were organized in a list of priorities from highest to lowest importance, within the budget allocated to each UPZ. The methodologies applied were flexible. Each meeting was held in general sessions, the details of which depended on the topic addressed and the conditions of each territory.

The process consisted of five stages: (1) pre-council (*pre- cabildos*), involving the call and awareness-raising of citizens; (2) deliberation and decision-making councils (*cabildos de deliberación*); (3) election of social control committees for project execution; (4) execution, monitoring, and evaluation; and (5) systematization of experiences.

Table 1 summarizes the main differences between the territorial and sector-specific PB processes implemented during the Petro administration.

TABLE 1 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TERRITORIAL AND SECTOR-SPECIFIC PB IMPLEMENTATION IN BOGOTÁ (2012-2015)

Phase	Territorial PB	Sector-specific PB
1. Call and awareness-raising	New BPU divisions	Existing UPZ divisions
2. Deliberation and decision-making	Priorities through consensus-building. 8 pilot territories; ~18,498 participants	Decisions made by consensus in sectoral councils. 30,000+ participants
3. Election of social control committees	Committees were elected to oversee project execution	Committees were elected to oversee project execution
4. Execution, monitoring, and evaluation	**Failed:** Only 1 of 32 initiatives implemented due to bureaucratic rigidity, a lack of intersectoral coordination, and inability to establish a cross-sectoral financial fund	**Relative success:** 403 youth initiatives; 324 water initiatives; 2,652 road segments repaired. Clear responsible entities and funding
5. Systematization of experiences	Not completed. Gradually disappeared from official reports after 2012.	Documented in city budget documents.

Source: IDPAC (2012, 2015b); SDP (2013, 2014, 2015) and author interviews.

To understand the implementation challenges faced by these PB initiatives in Bogotá, it is necessary to consider several key contextual factors: the recall referendum process that Gustavo Petro faced during his term. Gustavo Petro's *Bogotá Humana* program prioritized social investment and implemented measures that caused controversy, one of the most important being the change in the waste collection model, shifting from a private model to a mixed model. This generated significant opposition from political and business actors. In January 2013, only one year after his inauguration, opposition politician Miguel Gómez began collecting signatures to request a recall referendum. The course of the recall changed when, in December 2013, the Attorney General's Office (*Procuraduría General*) removed and disqualified Gustavo Petro for 15 years due to the chaos generated by the change in the waste collection model. Public attention then focused on the removal, relegating the recall. After a series of judicial and administrative rulings (a second instance that confirmed the removal, then a legal protection order that suspended it), the recall was reactivated (Mendoza, 2016). Although Petro was able to complete his term, this event undoubtedly affected the implementation of the administration's policy agenda and, of course, the PB.

Having outlined the design and context of these PB initiatives, the next section examines the factors that hindered their implementation.

6. IMPLEMENTATION OBSTACLES: FROM WORDS TO ACTION

During the first months of the territorial PB pilots in Bogotá, citizen attendance at assemblies and expectations were promising. According to Martínez (2019, p. 12), using information from the Bogotá Finance Department, an approximate budget of US$5,475,000 was allocated to develop the 8 pilot projects for the entire four-year government term. The District Institute of Participation and Community Action and the Government Secretariat played a significant role in implementation, providing human resources to make this initiative possible. Territorial PB engaged 18,498 participants across eight pilot territories over the study period; 211 priority issues were identified, and 32 projects were prioritized for implementation over the four years, with an approximate value of US$4,206,000, representing 76.8% of the allocated budget.

TABLE 2 PILOT PARTICIPATORY BUDGETS / TERRITORIAL PB

Social Territory	Locality	Identified Issues	Validated Initiatives	Prioritized Initiatives
Rurality	Usme	14	3	3
Lisboa-Santa Cecilia	Suba	54	9	5
Bonanza – Ferias	Engativá	12	3	3
Muzú	Puente Aranda	20	15	3
Lourdes – Las Cruces	Santa Fé	35	9	7
Pablo VI	Teusaquillo	55	15	5
Chucua de la Vaca	Kennedy	12	6	1
Vista Hermosa	Ciudad Bolivar	9	6	5
Total		**211**	**66**	**32**

Source: IDPAC (2015a).

One community participant recalled:

> The Pilot Participatory Budgets (territorial PB) were the best experience I have had. Santa Fé filled a theater with 1,000 people. It was extraordinary. We organized ourselves, issued calls for participation, and held meetings twice a week from 6 to 10 at night, where everyone attended, debated, and took part. People came; people really do participate.

This testimony illustrates high levels of civic engagement and social capital at work: citizens organized, deliberated intensively, and invested time and hope in the process. Yet this promising start was met with institutional failure.

Although it was a priority project for Mayor Petro's administration, it is worth noting that the 2012 Accountability Report (SDP, 2013, p. 66) refers to participatory budgets, explicitly mentioning

the pilot participatory budgets. The report indicates that 32 initiatives were prioritized "with the corresponding allocated budget". However, in the accountability reports for 2013, 2014, and 2015 (SDP, 2013, 2014, 2015), references to territorial PB disappeared. The reports mention the sector-specific PB initiatives, which will be discussed later, but not the territorial PB initiatives. Interviews with IDPAC officials confirmed that the pilot participatory budgeting initiative gradually disappeared:

> It was a shame what happened to *Bogotá Humana*. In what terms? In fact, the *Bogotá Humana* Development Plan did include a series of central participatory proposals; those were not developed... If you analyze it, there is a large gap between what was said and what was done (Interview with a former IDPAC official, September 25, 2018).

Although it was an exciting proposal aimed at creating a new model of participation in the city, neither the objectives nor the commitment to citizens were fulfilled. As one community leader explained in an interview:

> So, we prioritized projects on youth, culture, employment, and the environment. We were all involved; there were meetings twice a week, from 6:00 PM to 9:00 PM or even 10:00 PM. In these processes, everyone attended, and debates and discussions were held; it was remarkably interesting. And then the government allocated a lot of money that was never given to us; it was never executed; it was just a dream (Personal communication, March 13, 2018).

A central objective of territorial PB, following the logic of participatory budgeting, is for people to come together, address the problems and concerns of their community, exchange ideas with other citizens, learn about various aspects of the territory, and ultimately achieve the implementation of the works and projects discussed. This objective was not achieved in Bogotá. As Stiefel and Wolfe (1994) highlighted, even when reformers within the state genuinely seek to introduce transformative participatory policies for socially excluded sectors into the public policy process, they are likely to encounter problems that prevent the implementation of reforms, leading to their failure. Indeed, the emergence of contingencies and issues during the process limited the outcomes of participatory budgeting policy in Bogotá. Empirical evidence shows that Petro's government initiative in Bogotá encountered bureaucratic inertia.

One of the most significant challenges in monitoring this experience is finding documentary evidence explaining the outcomes. Although information is available in official documents from 2012, documentation became increasingly scarce after 2013. A 2013 IDPAC management report (IDPAC, 2014) offers important clues about what happened. Of the 32 prioritized initiatives, only one was implemented. The information provided indicates that there were delays with the others, and meetings between various secretariats and citizens were promoted to find solutions and implement the projects. The 2015 IDPAC management report mentions the territorial PB but does not show the project's progress (IDPAC, 2015a). The same IDPAC report (IDPAC, 2015b) acknowledges implementation challenges, including: (i) limited agreement among departments regarding the execution of the pilots; (ii) the execution of initiatives was managed in isolation by some entities, but given that cross-cutting initiatives often require coordination across multiple departments, making progress was complicated; (iii) lack of timely and clear information among entities to establish initiative execution; (iv) the hiring

of human resources for initiative execution faced significant challenges and delays; (v) difficulties in clearly establishing the corresponding budgetary commitment of departments.

As summarized by one interviewee:

> The serious problem was that the Municipal Government could not execute what citizens voted for and decided in the participatory budgets... They could not get the departments to fulfill their commitments to invest in the initiatives (Interview with a former IDPAC official, March 13, 2020).

As can be seen, the lack of comprehensive commitment from the municipal government contributed to the disintegration of the efforts. Despite Mayor Petro's interest in participatory budgeting, there was no central coordination to integrate the efforts of each department and achieve the implementation of the initiatives. Following Abers (2000) and Baiocchi and Ganuza (2016), although political will is essential, it does not guarantee the success of participatory budgeting policies; implementation problems can lead to the failure of the initiative. According to these authors, significant implementation challenges include generating agreements, seeking allies within the government and bureaucracy, negotiating with different government entities to create a unified project, and obtaining the necessary technical, financial, and operational capacity to implement it. These challenges were undoubtedly among the main obstacles Petro's proposal faced. Although there was initially a tacit agreement to implement participatory budgets with the support of the mayor and senior government officials, this backing progressively eroded. As Castell (2016) pointed out, it is necessary to create an institutional framework that allows participatory initiatives to move forward; otherwise, they are likely to collide with bureaucratic inertia. Organizational flexibility and effective coordination are necessary conditions for successful implementation.

Indeed, according to interviews, the technical design process, especially the creation of the BPUs (Basic Participation Units), had the approval of several entities. When this stage concluded, those responsible for developing the proposal discussed the need for dedicated financial resources to fund the proposal with the mayor and other senior government officials. According to interviewees, it was initially determined that resources were available for this purpose. Based on this agreement, pilot participatory budgeting exercises were carried out in eight territories. Citizens were enthusiastic about the proposal. Although the exercises continued to develop in the territories, challenges arose in financing the projects. As noted in the previous section, the government implemented a model that responded to the needs of the population, meaning it was not restricted by administrative departments (e.g., health and education). However, this design proved difficult to reconcile with the administration's existing budgetary procedures, which ultimately hindered implementation.

According to interviews, since many of the priorities defined by citizens in participatory budgets involved cross-cutting issues spanning multiple administrative departments, there was initial discussion about creating a "shared funding mechanism" among the different entities to facilitate financing for these cross-cutting problems. However, proponents of this measure later realized it was impossible to implement, since Bogotá has a Budget Statute that establishes a series of procedures for budget management and prohibits, among other things, the creation of a shared fund. In other words, while citizens fulfilled their role and attended assemblies according to the methodology, the government encountered institutional and budgetary constraints that prevented it from continuing the process as initially promised.

In the case of Youth PB, 469 initiatives were approved, which were technically adjusted by the entities to 403 initiatives, prioritized in 98 decision-making councils. Implementation took place in 2013, 2014, and 2015. A total of 20,100 young people participated in both discussion and prioritization. The prioritized topics included the environment, local parks, road networks, audio and video studios, and sports and cultural training schools, among others. A total of 34 billion pesos was invested. The Secretariats of Government, Education, Social Integration, Culture, and Economic Development participated in this case.

In the Water Governance PB program, more than 12,000 citizens participated, and 324 initiatives were prioritized, in rural areas. Water governance for the Petro government sought to promote new forms of relationship between the state and citizens for environmental management of the city, recycling, and sanitation. The Secretariats of Environment, Education, and Habitat, among others, participated in this case.

Finally, the Local Roads PB was the theme with the highest participation (more than 30,000 people). Citizens prioritized the repair of 2,652 road segments, with an investment of more than 254 billion pesos. This was the PB with the highest percentage of successful implementation.

In all three councils, it was possible to find information more clearly, particularly in the city budget documents detailing the distribution of resources and the contributing entities (Secretaría Distrital de Hacienda & Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá D.C., 2013). Likewise, there was coordination led by local mayors, and a work scheme was created, convened by the Government Secretariat. The working groups were composed of delegates from each sector and from the local mayors. Since specific sectors were involved, implementation was facilitated; likewise, the person responsible was the mayor of each locality, which allowed the process to be articulated.

In the case of sector-specific PB, it was not necessary to create a shared funding fund, as was the case with territorial PB. Each entity was able to finance the projects for which it was responsible, according to the priorities established by citizens. This explains the difference in terms of outcomes between territorial and sector-specific PB initiatives. While the former shows a PB failure, the latter was able to achieve more results, derived, among other things, from a responsible entity and clear financing. In line with Baiocchi and Ganuza (2016), it is observed that the Porto Alegre case also had to face bureaucratic rigidities and the compartmentalized division of administrative sectors, leading to the creation of GAPLAN (Planning and Management Group). This allowed for the integrated management of municipal budgets, not divided by government sectors as currently occurs in Bogotá. Therefore, in the case of cross-cutting citizen demands that do not fit into specific sectors, if there is no entity that allows intersectoral coordination, it will be more difficult to carry them out. In the case of sector-specific PB, it was possible to give prominence to municipal departments and local mayors' offices, which allowed project implementation to move forward.

The research findings illustrate that, on the one hand, despite the mayor's interest in the matter, many senior government officials did not effectively support participatory budgets, and on the other hand, bureaucratic rigidities, such as those related to the budget, practically limited the initiative's achievements. Moreover, the intense political uncertainty surrounding Petro's administration may have reduced bureaucratic incentives to invest in an innovative and politically contentious initiative, particularly among officials who opposed the mayor's agenda.

7. DISCUSSION

This article addresses a central question: why do some Participatory Budgeting (PB) initiatives fail despite strong political support and active civic engagement? Through a qualitative case study of Bogotá between 2012 and 2015, under the administration of Gustavo Petro, it compares territorial and sector-specific PB models. The findings provide both empirical and theoretical contributions to literature on democratic innovations and on the implementation of participatory institutions such as PB.

The Bogotá case illustrates a case of participatory budgeting failure (Porto de Oliveira, 2017) in which initial participatory expectations collided with administrative realities. Although the territorial PB pilots involved approximately 18,500 citizens, prioritized 32 projects, and allocated US$4.2 million, only one project was ultimately implemented. By contrast, the sector-specific PB initiative focused on youth, water governance, and local roads—achieved relative success, leading to the implementation of hundreds of initiatives and the repair of more than 2,600 road segments. This contrast demonstrates that political will, while necessary, is far from sufficient to ensure effective implementation.

This study contributes to the emerging literature on PB failures by opening the "Black Box" of bureaucratic implementation. Its findings highlight a relatively understudied variable: intersectoral coordination capacity. Territorial PB initiatives failed because they required sustained coordination across multiple administrative departments—a capacity that proved unfeasible within Bogotá's bureaucratic structure. The city's Budget Statute prohibited the creation of a cross-cutting financial fund, and no mechanism existed to coordinate the budgets and actions of the different secretariats responsible for project delivery. By contrast, sector-specific PB initiatives were aligned with existing jurisdictional structures (Buckwalter, 2014), with clearly assigned implementing entities and defined funding sources. This finding suggests that the design of participatory institutions must be aligned with existing bureaucratic capabilities or, alternatively, that administrative transformations must precede participatory innovations (Allegretti & Copello, 2018).

The Bogotá experience offers three lessons for local governments seeking to implement PB. First, political will alone cannot overcome bureaucratic inertia. Mayors must promote administrative reform alongside participatory design, or, as Castell (2016) argues, create an adequate institutional framework that enables participatory initiatives to advance. Second, territorial PB initiatives—which allow citizens to define cross-cutting priorities—are more demanding than sector-specific PB initiatives and, in the absence of prior intersectoral coordination mechanisms, are likely to fail. In line with Baiocchi and Ganuza (2016), negotiation and coordination among different government entities to build a unified project are essential. Third, in contexts where administrative transformation is not feasible, sector-specific or thematic PB initiatives may represent a viable alternative, as they align more closely with departmental structures and clearly defined funding sources. Although PB is often cross-cutting by nature, the aim is not to discourage these initiatives, but rather to ensure that the bureaucratic context is taken into account in their design and implementation.

Although this study analyzes a particular case, which limits the generalizability of its findings, it seeks to provide theoretical and empirical analytical depth. At the same time, it does not systematically examine the role of civil society or the strength of partisan opposition in Bogotá, factors those other scholars have identified as relevant to the success or failure of PB. Future comparative research could examine these variables in greater depth. Future research could also explore how the political crisis

surrounding Gustavo Petro's recall referendum may have exacerbated bureaucratic resistance and, more broadly, how political instability influences administrative capacity and PB outcomes in other contexts.

Participatory budgeting is not merely a specific institutional design for citizen participation, but a broader effort to transform state-society relations and, consequently, administrative logic. Achieving this objective requires more than political will; it also requires a clear understanding of how the state functions, which in turn entails opening the "Black Box" of bureaucracy to understand the coordination mechanisms and administrative rigidities that can either enable or obstruct citizen voice.

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Yessika Lorena Vásquez-González: Conceptualization (Lead); Data curation (Lead); Formal analysis (Lead); Investigation (Lead); Methodology (Lead); Project administration (Lead); Validation (Lead); Visualization (Lead); Writing - original draft (Lead); Writing - review & editing (Lead).

RESEARCH DATA AVAILABILITY

The complete dataset supporting the findings of this study is available upon request from the author.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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