



# The evaluation of citizen participation in policymaking: Insights from Portugal

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## ARTICLE INFO

### Keywords:

Citizen participation  
Evaluation  
Participatory procedures  
Participatory outputs  
Portugal

## ABSTRACT

While citizen participation in policymaking is on the rise worldwide, the scholarly debate centring around its evaluation has not developed to the same extent. The article discusses the methodology and findings of the evaluation of the project “Portugal Participa: Caminhos para a Inovação Societal” which started at the end of 2014, and was implemented in 2015 and 2016, in Portugal. As the project promoted actions at both national and local levels, the evaluation accounted for both layers with a major focus on the analysis of procedures and outputs to examine its success. Through the application of a multi-method approach – data collection and analysis, cost-effectiveness assessment, interviews, pre-post surveys, and counterfactual focus groups – involving a wide array of agents – political representatives, civil servants, NGOs, citizens, national academia, and the funding sponsor – findings have helped retrieve three main insights that aim to contribute to future research on the evaluation of citizen participation in policymaking, which should shed light on: the (re)connection of multiple agents; the role within the governance systems; and the pursuit of social inclusion.

## 1. Introduction

Citizen participation in the formulation and/or implementation of public policies defines a specific domain that differs from standard mechanisms of democratic representation (e.g. via political elections), direct democracy (e.g. via public petitions and referenda), and initiatives of public information exchange and/or consultation (Rowe & Frewer, 2005). Since the 1970s in the USA and after the first participatory budgeting initiative in the late 1980s in Latin America, participatory processes have been implemented across an extensive range of policy areas worldwide (Gaventa & Barret, 2010). Today, participatory processes are adopted mainly in the initial stages and/or in the implementation of policymaking and service delivery to enhance public provision in planning, health, education, social services, etc., as well as to recover the perceived slowing down of legitimacy toward political representatives and institutions (Avritzer & Navarro, 2003; Roberts, 2002).

The use of participatory processes to broaden the consensus on public policies in support of democratic goals was stressed early on by Arnstein (1971). The author highlighted the struggle of power between decision-makers and have-nots by discussing multiple ways through which citizen participation could be designed and implemented. Later

on, the international debate made a case in point about the need to make citizen participation an innovative contribution to democracy (Smith, 2009) and a driver for structural changes within the governance systems (Fung, 2006, 2015). Along with more enthusiastic views on participatory processes, however, the risk of political and economic elite capture was also pointed out (Rosener, 1978). More recently, concerns have arisen as to the promotion of market-friendly forms of public service provision that imply the unequal competition amongst citizens and private stakeholders, with little attention paid to the implementation of fair participatory procedures (Cooke & Kothari, 2001).

Against these types of risk and concern, providing evidence on the “success” of participatory processes becomes a key issue for scholars and practitioners. However, research on the methodology for evaluating citizen participation in policymaking has been limited, and until recently few findings have been reported and shared worldwide (Abelson & Gauvin, 2006; Yang & Pandey, 2011). In Southern Europe, where there has been extensive diffusion of participatory processes since the start of the twenty-first century (Font, della Porta, & Sintomer, 2014), only very few researchers have corroborated the need to foster the debate on its evaluation. In Spain, for example, the risk that citizen participation can prevent both transparency in decision-making and changes in structures of power has been identified (García Espín &

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Jimenez-Sanchez, 2014). Similarly, from the analysis of a large-N set of local participatory processes between 2007 and 2011, Font, Pasadas del Amo, and Smith (2016) have found that accountability is compromised whenever the outputs of participatory processes do not fulfil, either partially or totally, the promises of the political promoters.

The need to go beyond the limitations posited by place-based assessments and to pursue goals of transferability and replicability requires a clear definition of success based on the effectiveness of procedures for the engagement of citizens and outputs of the participatory processes (Fiorino, 1990; Rosener, 1978; Rowe & Frewer, 2004). Towards this aim, the article discusses methodology and findings of the evaluation of the project “Portugal Participa: caminhos para a inovação societal” (“Portugal Participates: paths for societal innovation”, hereinafter: PP project)<sup>1</sup>. The PP project was implemented at the beginning of 2014, and developed between 2015 and 2016, on both national and local scales. The article takes advantage of the experience of the authors as members of the external evaluation team contracted by the leading partnership for the overall duration of 10 months between 2015 and 2016.

The evaluation of the PP project builds on the international debate and the evidence provided on the methodologies of evaluation in this policy field. The evaluation can be considered the first comprehensive experiment of this kind in Portugal, as it retrieves substantive inputs from the main body of international literature, and applies to both national and local levels. At the national level, the evaluation of the PP project aimed at measuring the extent to which citizen participation was promoted through a wide range of products and events with political representatives, civil servants, NGOs and civil society. At the local level, the evaluation of the PP project was aimed at analysing the ways through which multiple agents were gathered around common policy issues to improve the service delivery in pivotal participatory processes.

Given the wide scope of this evaluation, its findings do not only provide information about whether and to what extent the PP project was successful, but also give a broader insight into the evaluation of citizen participation in policymaking at large. In addition, given the role of the authors as members of the evaluation team, the article is an occasion to self-reflect on the work conducted as evaluators, and hopefully enhance the transference of theoretical and methodological knowledge to scholars and practitioners in this field of study. Accordingly, the article first takes stock of the main contributions to the international debate on the evaluation of citizen participation in policymaking. It then describes the methodology designed and implemented for the evaluation of the national actions along with the four local Pilots, by contrasting criteria and methods of procedures and outputs with the main body of scientific literature. Finally, discussion around the findings of the evaluation summarises the evidence retrieved from participatory processes at both levels.

## 2. The evaluation of citizen participation in policymaking

Despite the great appeal that citizen participation has had for political promoters and international sponsors, a culture of evaluation in citizen participation seems far from being constituted worldwide. Rosener (1981) argues that what seems to hinder the establishment of this culture is the lack of agreement about the reasons for citizen participation in policymaking. Abelson and Gauvin (2006) say that beyond conceptual and practical limitations related to citizen participation, evaluation in this field is further challenged by the weak culture of policy evaluation within governments. However, these limitations expose participatory processes to higher risks of manipulation, as the creation of spaces for collective bargaining on policy issues may be captured by political and financial elites for the perpetuation of

market-friendly values (Arnstein, 1971; Cooke & Kothari, 2001). Against these risks, Rosener (1978) advocates the need for participation to “go public” through adequate evaluation models, which “[...] will mean that those mandating participation programs will need to clarify their expectations; public administrators will need to be honest about their intentions; and citizens will need to be reasonable in their demands.” (ibidem, pp. 462).

As evidence in this field continues to be scarce, the OECD (2005) advocates that “there is a striking imbalance between the amount of time, money and energy that governments in OECD countries invest in engaging citizens and civil society in public decision making and the amount of attention they pay to evaluating the effectiveness and impact of such efforts” (ibidem, 10). Despite general agreement on the need for evaluation to be methodologically equipped to judge problems and solutions deliberated within participatory processes (Bryson, Quick, Slotterback, & Crosby, 2012; Carr & Halvorsen, 2001), the proliferation of place-based assessments, seldom anchored in international contributions, seems to further impair wider categories of understanding and application (OECD, 2005: 35–36; IODP, 2006: 8). In this respect, Roberts (2002) says that “evaluation designs, especially given the competing perspectives on citizen participation, need to make clear which administrative model informs their analysis. Otherwise, results can be misinterpreted and the underlying tensions surrounding direct participation can obscure what is really going on” (ibidem, 333).

Although scholars agree on the need for rigorous evaluation to increase accountability and transparency, debate on transferable and replicable methodologies is far from being at the core of scientific production (Papadopoulos & Warin, 2007; Jollymore, McFarlane, & Harris, 2017). The need to make evaluations responsive to specific social, economic, political, and ecological conditions gives rise to theoretical and methodological tensions on the identification of criteria that can be adequate for a large diversity of participatory processes. Nevertheless, as Rowe and Frewer (2004) put it: “Without typologies of mechanisms and contexts, and an attempt by researchers to adequately define the exercise(s) they are evaluating against these, little progress will be made in establishing a theory of ‘what works best when’” (ibidem, 551).

The conceptualisation and application of evaluation models that draw inspiration from the main corpus of literature and contribute to the identification of shared metrics is confirmed to be crucial to counter the excessive dispersion of knowledge (Chess & Purcell, 1999; Delli Carpini 2004). Scholars agree that transferability and replicability of evaluation methodologies could provide several advantages, such as the reinforcement of the validity of the processes, as well as financial benefits to sponsors (Brinkerhoff, 2002; Creighton, 2005; Rowe & Frewer, 2005).

The debate on methodologies of evaluation has taken into account a wide range of relevant issues, such as the role of the evaluators, be they the sponsors themselves, an external agency, or the citizens (Sewell & Phillips, 1979). Most importantly, scholars agree that the evaluation of citizen participation should account for a clear definition of “success” in participatory processes. As Webler (1999) put it, “one of the most commonly cited reasons for why there should be citizen participation is that it improves decisions. [...] But answering this question requires that we define what an ‘improved’ decision is” (ibidem, 64). Defining success means considering the normative goals of democratic enhancement and/or the instrumental goals of policy improvement pursued by the participatory processes (1981, Abelson & Gauvin, 2006; Creighton, 2005; Fiorino, 1990; Rosener, 1978). Bearing in mind the definition of success, the evaluation should identify the criteria and the methods adopted to prove whether, and to what extent, participatory processes are successful in pursuing either one goal or the other. Scholars point out the need to set out evaluation criteria and methods for both participatory procedures and outputs, which should orient the inquiry conducted through the evaluation (Chess & Purcell, 1999; Rowe & Frewer, 2004).

<sup>1</sup> Information about the project and its evaluation are available at: [www.portugalparticipa.pt](http://www.portugalparticipa.pt)

### 2.1. The evaluation of participatory procedures

Negotiating interests and values through participatory processes implies a struggle of power between different agents, as well as between policy areas and levels of administration (Delli Carpini, Cook, & Jacobs, 2004; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Criteria for evaluating participatory procedures generally aim to understand the role that the participatory arrangements play for the different agents engaged in the process. Webler, Kastenholz, and Renn, 1995 focus on the potential of social learning acquired by the agents through the cognitive enhancement and the moral development provided by their experience of participation. Echoing deliberative theories on participatory practices (Bobbio, 2010), learning processes are necessary for social change and collective action. To improve the evaluation of procedures, Webler, Tuler, and Krueger (2001) further argue the opportunity to capture expectations, needs, and desires of all the parties involved within the criteria of fairness (what people are permitted to do) and competence (construction of the “best” possible understanding and agreement among the agents) (cf. Webler & Tuler, 2002).

The theoretical framework of Webler and colleagues has inspired other scholars to expand categories of understanding on participatory procedures. Accordingly, Rowe and Frewer (2000) argue the need to evaluate both the acceptance of the process (provision of appropriate information on the scope of the process and adequate tools for decision-making) and the effectiveness of the procedures (selection and representativeness of participants throughout the policy process). Later, in 2004, these authors refined the criteria for the procedures by stressing the need for them to be operationalised with valid, reliable, and usable methods, overcoming universal definitions of fairness, and focussing instead on the ways in which all agents shape participatory processes. Recalling Webler and Tuler (2002), the authors finally argue that fair procedures engender, *inter alia*, public acceptability, equity, representativeness, and transparency; while competence is enacted by maximising relevant information and transferring it to other parties in efficient ways (Rowe & Frewer, 2005).

### 2.2. The evaluation of participatory outputs

The evaluation of the outputs of citizen participation builds on the identification of goals pursued through the participatory process. From a more normative side, Fiorino (1990) argues that citizen participation should be able to include lay people in decision-making; enable all participants to share in collective decisions; provide face-to-face discussions; and set an equal relationship with administrative officials and experts. Likewise, Beierle and Cayford (2002) advocate that participation should engender the incorporation of public values into decisions; the improvement of the substantive quality of decisions; the resolution of conflict amongst competing interests; and the building of trust in institutions, beyond educating and informing the public.

From a more instrumental and policy-oriented angle, while the evaluation of procedures mainly concerns the application of fair mechanisms of participation and their effects in terms of cognitive and moral improvement, the evaluation of the outputs requires criteria consistent with the covered policy area, capable of capturing the perception that participants have about expected and unexpected outcomes. Rowe and Frewer (2004) say that criteria for outputs entail a wide range of factors, from technical issues, such as time taken to develop regulations and the reduction of judicial challenges, to substantive issues, such as agency responsiveness to participant demands and the impact of the process on general thinking.

Evaluating the ways in which agents perceive the achievement of the goals is key according to Abelson and Gauvin (2006), as it requires the capacity to distinguish between perceived outcomes and policy outputs. In a continuum with procedure criteria, the first should aim for higher self-perceived competence and social knowledge (Webler et al., 1995), as well as competence in recognising the fulfilment of civic rights (Rowe

& Frewer, 2000). Rowe and Frewer (2004) add that perception should engender the normative achievement of democratic values (e.g. effective change of participants' values, resolution of conflict, restoration of citizen trust in public agencies) and success/failure of consultation by all the agents engaged. Finally, as the collection of agents' perceptions is argued to be key, some theorists argue that there exists the opportunity to challenge more conventional evaluations by directly involving participants throughout the entire design and implementation of the evaluation (Daigneault, Jacob, & Tremblay, 2012; Estrella & Gaventa, 1998; Murray, 2002). In this case, participatory methodologies of evaluation rely on new forms to collect, produce, manage, and use information with a wider range of agents.

## 3. Participatory processes in Portugal

Dissemination of participatory processes in Portugal, and mainly participatory budgets, that started in the early 2000s, continued to grow through the disruption of the global socio-political and financial crisis in 2008, and have recently reached two world records. According to available data, the country currently hosts one of the highest rates of local participatory budgets in the world<sup>2</sup>, while in 2017 the first participatory budgets ever implemented on the national scale took place in line with the political programme of the national government. The reasons behind the dissemination of citizen participation should be understood in light of a complex set of socio-political conditions.

The spread of participatory processes in the country drew great inspiration from the Porto Alegre participatory budget, which was shared at the World Social Forums held in Latin America in the 1990s. A first wave of participatory budgets in Portugal were mainly promoted by left-wing parties and focussed primarily on goals of social inclusion and economic redistribution, whereas from the mid-2000s the emphasis of citizen participation shifted towards the recovery of citizenry trust towards democratic institutions. Accordingly, both left and right-wing parties decided to give their support to participatory processes and opened up new mechanisms of collaborative policymaking (Falanga & Lüchmann, 2020). In the mid-2000s, after the initiation of the Lisbon participatory budget, the first ever implemented at the municipal level by a European capital city, diffusion in other municipalities grew extensively (Cabannes, 2009).

With the end of the austerity policy measures agreed between the national government and the Troika – the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund – in 2014, the political programme of the Socialist Party, heading the executive power with the support of the Communist Party and the Left Bloc from 2015, included the implementation of three participatory budgets at the national level, which started in 2017: (i) the participatory budget for youth, which relied on an amount of three hundred thousand euros; (ii) the participatory budget for schools, which provided specific budgets that were allocated to public primary and high schools in the country according to the number of students; and (iii) the national participatory budget, which provided the highest amount of public funds: three million euros in the first edition (2017/2018), and five million euros in the second edition (2018/2019) (Falanga, 2018b).

Evidence suggests that participatory budgets implemented on the local and national scales endorse the participation of lay people who lack any formal connection with organised groups and/or social

<sup>2</sup> Rate is considered by contrasting the number of processes with the number of municipalities (=308) and parish governments (=3091). In a recent search conducted by the authors in 2018 through the National Observatory of Participation ([www.portualparticipa.pt/monitoring](http://www.portualparticipa.pt/monitoring)), 186 ongoing local participatory budgets were identified, around 80% implemented by municipalities and 20% by parishes. The rate is considered the highest in the world (Sgueo, 2016), although no international comparative study exists concerning Portugal.

**Table 1**  
The four local Pilots.

Local Pilots	Description	Geographic location	Political promoter (local council)	Participatory policy area	Agenda
Pilot 1	Forum for the promotion of health	Cascais, centre of Portugal	Centre/right coalition led by Social-democrat Party	Health	One year
Pilot 2	Participatory budget	Funchal, Madeira (island of Portugal)	Independent civic coalition (left-oriented)	Allocation of municipal budget	One year
Pilot 3	Revision of master plan	Odemira, south of Portugal	Left-wing party (Socialist Party)	Urban planning	More than one year (around 4 years)
Pilot 4	Neighbourhood regeneration	Porto, north of Portugal	Independent civic coalition (right-oriented)	Urban regeneration	More than one year (not specified)

Source: Authors' own work.

movements. Citizens are invited to get involved as individuals by submitting their ideas first, and voting afterwards on the basis of their interests, aspirations, and goals. Empirical knowledge confirms that the self-organisation of citizens around these processes is strong, which is likely to improve their ownership over decision-making, as well as to exacerbate biases in the equal access for all. In fact, while some citizens easily constitute informal networks of people around their ideas, improving the chance to see them funded, others keep being impaired by weaker cognitive, economic, and social conditions (Falanga, 2018a).

While both NGOs and sectors of national academia have been strongly vocal about and have supported participatory processes in Portugal, the claims posited by movements and grassroots mobilisations during and in the aftermath of the austerity (Baumgarten, 2013) have had a lower impact on the participatory agenda. In all likelihood, the emphasis on the recovery of citizenry trust towards elected representatives and democratic institutions sought by political promoters was not perceived as the ultimate goal of activists in times of (democratic) crisis. In this vein, the public debate on participatory budgeting has shed light on the rise of controversial outputs that carry the weight of well-organised citizen groups than not the social movements<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, not only has this debate barely covered grassroots claims on emerging needs related, for example, to health, education, and housing (Falanga et al., 2019), as it has barely caught the attention of scholars and practitioners.

### 3.1. The project "Portugal Participa: Caminhos para a Inovação Societal" (PP project)

Within a context of growing interest in participatory processes, the PP project offered, at the end of 2014 and throughout 2015 and 2016, the occasion to experiment with an exemplar evaluation methodology. The PP project was led by the NGO "In Loco" in partnership with the Centre for Social Studies (CES University of Coimbra), and funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (through the "European Economic Area" grants) with a total amount of approximately 143 thousand euros. The purpose of the PP project was to promote the value of citizen participation as an empowering tool to improve quality of life and social inclusion. At the national level, these goals have been pursued through the provision of multiple products, such as toolkits and reports, along with the organisation of 28 events including project meetings, conferences, forums, workshops and training sessions all around the country with elected and public officials, researchers, and a wider public audience (see Annex A).

In parallel, the PP project was built on the design and

<sup>3</sup> For example, in the 2018 edition of the national participatory budget, the two most voted proposals to be implemented at the national level regarded both the promotion and the campaigning against bullfighting. Blogs and media perceived this result as the evidence of a problem with participatory budgeting (see for example: <https://www.publico.pt/2018/11/05/p3/cronica/orcamento-participativo-anulacao-touradas-110-1849935>).

implementation of four Pilots on a wide spectrum of policy areas in medium-size municipalities selected from four different regions of the country, aimed at empowering local authorities and communities to provide better services in multiple policy areas towards higher standards of life quality and social inclusion. The four Pilots relied on the support of different executive powers elected in the 2013 local elections and promoting participatory processes with specific institutional designs and agendas as described in the table below (Table 1).

Pilot 1 concerned the creation of the municipal forum for the promotion of health in Cascais, a small city close to Lisbon, composed of one executive committee (with representatives from local organisations), one coordinating committee (two permanent and five rotating local organisations), and thematic working groups related to the promotion of health with a focus on education, environment, social equality, and citizenship. The Forum started in September 2014 with the goal of setting up the coordinating committee that went through the creation of a new local strategy for the promotion of health, eventually discussed in four open meetings with the wider community in the four parishes of Cascais in January 2016.

Pilot 2 consisted of the initiation of a participatory budget with citizens in the city of Funchal. This process was part of the political agenda of the independent civic coalition in the executive power and became one of the main symbols of political discontinuity from the past. The participatory budget allocated 300 thousand euros for the implementation of citizen proposals collected through eight open meetings, and without the support of online participation (e.g. via website or SMS).

Pilot 3 aimed at engaging NGOs, neighbourhood associations, and citizens in the revision of the master plan of the municipality of Odemira. Due to the multi-year revision scheduling, the first year – which coincided with the beginning of the project – was dedicated to the design of the participatory process, which was expected to involve citizens in the identification of problems, formulation of a preliminary version of the plan, and issuing of the final master plan. Citizens were involved through existing local associations and groups, as the inter-parish committees ("Comissões Sociais Inter-Freguesias"), sport clubs, and the neighbourhood groups, and with the support of the municipal councils. Citizen participation relied on face-to-face and online mechanisms in order to maximise the channels of two-way communication between the municipality and the wider community, and boost civic interest in the long-term.

Finally, Pilot 4 concerned the initiation of a process of urban regeneration in the Campanhã neighbourhood (in the city of Porto) through the direct participation of local NGOs and citizens. Similar to Pilot 3, as this process was expected to exceed the timing of the evaluation, the first year was aimed at setting up the design of the participatory process. This process was built on the first state-led plans for urban regeneration in the 2000s, and the national programme Critical Neighbourhood Initiative, which was based on the promotion of local partnerships in deprived neighbourhoods in the metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Porto. Citizens were involved through existing local associations, such as the "Associação Campanhã XXI" and the "Associação

**Table 2**  
The evaluation of procedures and outputs.

Level	Evaluation	Criteria	Methods	Agents
National	Procedures	Workplan; project development	PP project surveys	Collection and analysis of surveys conducted by the PP project promoter
			“Pre” surveys	PP project promoter, partner, and funding sponsor
	Outputs	Project outputs; perceived expected/ unexpected outcomes	Semi-structured interviews	PP project promoter, partner, and funding sponsor
			“Pre/post” surveys	PP project promoter, partner, and funding sponsor
Local	Procedures	Institutional design; usage patterns and perception; competence and learning process	Semi-structured interviews	Participating agents (political representatives, civil servants, NGOs, citizens)
			“Pre” surveys	Political / administrative team (local promoter)
	Outputs	Policy outputs; perceived expected/ unexpected outcomes in social, economic and inter-institutional fields; satisfaction	“Pre/post” surveys	Political / administrative team (local promoter)
			Counterfactual evaluation (focus groups)	Participating and non-participating agents (political representatives, civil servants, NGOs, citizens)

Source: Authors’ own work.

**Table 3**  
The agents involved in the evaluation of the project.

Level of the project	Political representatives	Civil servants	NGOs	Citizens	Academia	Foundation	TOTAL
National			1 (promoter)		1 (partner)	1 (funding sponsor)	3
Local	Pilot 1	1	1	3	2	–	7
	Pilot 2	1	1	2	2	–	6
	Pilot 3	1	4	–	–	–	5
	Pilot 4	1	3	2	–	–	6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>27</b>

Source: Authors’ own work.

para o Desenvolvimento de Campanhã”. The goal of the participatory process was to set out an integrated approach to urban regeneration which would likely enable local communities to improve the quality of life and the sense of ownership of the area.

**4. Methodology of the evaluation**

The evaluation was built on the formal requirements of the sponsor to provide data on the working model adopted by the PP project at the national level, as well as on the four local Pilots. As the evaluation team was contracted through public bidding, the sponsor required the delivery of one mid-term report and one final report, with no binding prescriptions as to the methodology of evaluation to be adopted. Consistent with the goals of the PP project, the evaluation team was expected to design an evaluation methodology capable of grasping new evidence produced in the field while relying on the main lessons learned from scientific and grey literature on the topic (Abelson & Gauvin, 2006;

Yang & Pandey, 2011; Garcia Espín & Jimenez-Sanchez, 2014).

Emphasis was placed on the possibility of setting out, through the evaluation, new learning processes among the multiple agents involved in the implementation of the PP project on both scales. Did the PP project make the difference in the national debate about the value of citizen participation to improve quality of life and social inclusion? Did the four local Pilots, according to their institutional designs and agendas, provide better conditions for public services? Bearing in mind these questions, the evaluation was expected to provide robust results in line with parameters of validity, reliability, and usability (Rowe & Frewer, 2004).

A common methodological structure of analysis was proposed for both national and local levels, spanning a period of 10 months. This structure was based on the following stages: (i) understanding of the background pre-conditions of citizen participation in both national and local contexts; (ii) accounting for the costs of the PP project at the national and local levels; (iii) defining what sort of success was expected by the PP project at both levels; (iv) identifying the criteria for the evaluation of procedures and outputs at both levels; (v) operationalising the methods for the evaluation of procedures and outputs at both levels. According to this structure, information was retrieved through a multi-method approach, which included the design and application of individual interviews, pre-post surveys, and counterfactual focus groups, along with the analysis of official documents provided by the agents involved in the implementation of the PP project at both levels, and the assessment of the costs based on the reports provided by the promoter. Given the necessity to take forward a more in-depth examination on the evaluation of participatory procedures and outputs, as pointed out by scholars and practitioners, the article sheds light on the criteria and methods of these two key components of the evaluation as shown in the table below (Table 2).

At the national level, criteria for the procedures included the way in which the work plan of the PP project was structured and developed, whereas criteria for the outputs incorporated perceived outcomes of promoter, partner, and funding sponsor. At the local level, the criteria identified for the evaluation of procedures regarded the institutional

design of the participatory processes, the ways they were used and perceived by participants, as well as competences and learning processes achieved through the four Pilots. Like the national level, the criteria for the outputs concerned both policy outputs and perceived expected/unexpected outcomes, and added the satisfaction of the participants. However, considering the different agendas of the four Pilots, the achievement of the policy outputs was not considered as a primary source of knowledge for this evaluation.

The multi-method approach adopted on both levels was consistent with the criteria identified for procedures and outputs. Overall, methods consisted of: pre-post surveys (cf. Martin & Sanderson, 1999), as shown in Annex B<sup>4</sup>; semi-structured interviews, with an indicative script

<sup>4</sup> Annex B shows a shortened version of the survey provided to agencies (national level) and local councils (local level). The extended version is available in the Final Report on the website: [www.portugalparticipa.pt](http://www.portugalparticipa.pt)

shown in Annex C; and counter-factual focus groups (cf. Murray, 2002; White, 2010), with an indicative script shown in Annex D. Whenever possible, methods were adopted to provide the largest set of information to be used, as in the case of the pre-post survey, for both procedures and outputs. As shown in Table 2, each method was applied with specific groups of agents.

The pre-post survey was conducted online by the evaluation team with representatives from the promoter, partner, and funding sponsor of the PP project at the national level; and with the political/administrative (local promoters) of the four Pilots. The semi-structured interviews were conducted locally with representatives from the promoter, partner, and funding sponsor at the national level; and with participants in the four Pilots on the local scale. The focus groups were conducted locally by the evaluation team with groups of participants and non-participants in the four local Pilots. The table below shows types and number of agents involved in the evaluation<sup>5</sup> (Table 3).

The inclusion of the agents, although not homogeneous in their distribution due to the specific characteristics of the actions implemented at national and local levels, was consistent with the promoter's requirements and the team's approach to the evaluation. Although agents were not directly involved in the evaluation design, as suggested for participatory evaluation methodologies (Estrella & Gaventa, 1998; Murray, 2002), their support was invaluable in the provision of key information. In fact, methods for the evaluation of procedures and outputs were selected in order to capture the most valid, reliable, and usable information within the 10 months agreed for the evaluation, which would not have allowed for a more participatory approach at the two levels (Rowe & Frewer, 2004).

Considering the combination of quantitative and qualitative information gathered through the evaluation, the evaluation team built on the existing scientific literature for their analysis and interpretation. In particular, qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews and focus groups were analysed by referring to main contributions on discourse analysis developed in social sciences (Crawford, 2004; Kaplan, 2002), political studies (Heracleous & Marshak, 2004), and interpretive theories on policy analysis (Fischer, 2003; Yanow, 2000). Against this backdrop, the main topics emerging from the discourses produced by the agents were organised thematically in order to map the points of view of multiple agents – political representatives, civil servants, NGOs, citizens, and the funding sponsor – on the factual development of citizen participation, along with their prevailing perceptions of the expected and unexpected outcomes at both levels.

#### 4.1. The evaluation methodology at the national level

The evaluation aimed to define the type of success pursued by the PP project on the national scale by considering the main goal of promoting the value of citizen participation in empowering local communities through a wide range of products and events. As Falanga and Lüchmann (2020) put it, the action of agents that are external to the political party spectrum is fundamental to understanding the patterns of dissemination of participatory processes in the country. "An important role was played by NGOs and national academia, and their support of PBs through nationally and internationally funded research projects" (ibidem, 9). In light of this, the actions carried out at the national level were considered as a paramount component of the PP project and, more broadly, of the development of a participatory agenda in the country.

The success at the national level was conceived as normative-oriented in that it aimed to enhance and reinforce citizen participation as a practice of democracy and boost new forms of collective decision-

<sup>5</sup> The number of agents in Table 3 does not necessarily match the number of agents involved in the evaluation of the project at the national and local scales (see Tables 4 and 5), because, in some cases, the same agents participated in multiple methods (e.g. interview and focus group).

**Table 4**

The agents involved in the evaluation of the PP project at the national level.

	Semi-structured interviews	Pre-post survey	TOTAL
NGO In Loco (promoter)	1	1	2
CES University of Coimbra (partner)	1	1	2
Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (funding sponsor)	1	1	2
TOTAL	3	3	6

Source: Authors' own work.

making for better living conditions and social inclusion (Beierle & Cayford, 2002; Fiorino, 1990). Notably, the success of the PP project at this level was only indirectly associated with outputs in specific processes of policymaking, as the promoter provided training tools and workshops for the implementation of participatory processes, which eventually depended on the decisions made at the local level.

Focussing on the procedures, information was collected on the plan and development of the PP project, along with information about the expectations, needs and desires of all the parties involved. The three agencies – the promoter NGO "In Loco", the academic partner CES University of Coimbra, and the funding sponsor Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation – were invited to take part in "pre-post" surveys at the beginning and at the end of the evaluation to collect information about the work plan of the project, and the way it was developed with other agents (cf. Regens & Hobson, 1978). While the information provided by the pre-surveys was used for the evaluation of procedures, the evaluation of the outputs relied on post-surveys. The three agencies were invited to express their points of view on what they believed to be the outputs and perceived success/failure of the PP project (Rowe & Frewer, 2004). Semi-structured interviews were further conducted with the three agencies at the end of the evaluation to collect information about the outputs. More pointedly, the evaluation included contrasting outputs with the objectives set out in the work plan; and interviewing the three agencies about their perceptions of the project in the long run (Table 4).

#### 4.2. The evaluation methodology at the local level

Considering the agreement between the promoter, the partner, and the funding sponsor of the PP project with the four local authorities invited to conduct pivotal participatory processes, success of the local Pilots was considered as both normative and policy-oriented, due to the combination between the need to enhance democratic values and the effectiveness of local governance with new public measures on specific policy issues. Procedures were evaluated to understand whether participants had the opportunity to enhance social learning and competences (Webler, 1999; Webler & Tuler, 2002), and found the mechanisms provided for participation to be acceptable and effective (Rowe & Frewer, 2004; 2005). Criteria included: analysis of the institutional design, enactment of enabling measures for social learning and competence enhancement, and usage patterns and perception of the process. Concerning the criteria for the evaluation of the outputs, the methodology focussed on final results; perceived expected/unexpected outcomes of the participatory processes in social, economic, and inter-institutional fields; and participants' satisfaction with the process.

Methods were applied with four political representatives (one per municipality); nine civil servants (one in Pilots 1 and 2; four in Pilot 3; three in Pilot 4); six NGOs (three in Pilot 1, two in Pilots 2 and 4); and four citizens (two in Pilots 1 and 2). More specifically, as shown in the table below, eighteen semi-structured interviews (four in Pilot 1 and 3, five in Pilot 2 and 4) were conducted *in situ* in the middle of the evaluation and provided an exclusive source of information about the perception of the agents regarding the fairness and effectiveness of the Pilots' procedures. Four pre-post surveys were applied online at the

**Table 5**

The agents involved in the evaluation of the local Pilots.

	Semi-structured interviews ( <i>in situ</i> )	Pre-post survey (online)	Counter-factual focus groups ( <i>in situ</i> )	TOTAL
Pilot 1	4	1	8	13
Pilot 2	5	1	8	14
Pilot 3	4	1	–	5
Pilot 4	5	1	–	6
TOTAL	18	4	16	38

Source: Authors' own work.

beginning (September 2015) and at the end of the evaluation (March 2016) with political/administrative teams in the four Pilots, collecting information about the changes perceived by the agents (cf. [Regens & Hobson, 1978](#)). Finally, four counterfactual focus groups with four agents each were run *in situ* in Pilots 1 and 2 (two per Pilot), and requested to select at least one agent for each typology identified in the evaluation: political representatives, civil servants, NGOs, and citizens. In both Pilots, the first focus group included participating agents, whereas the second focus group (the “group of control”) mirrored the same typology of agents that did not take part in the participatory process (Table 5).

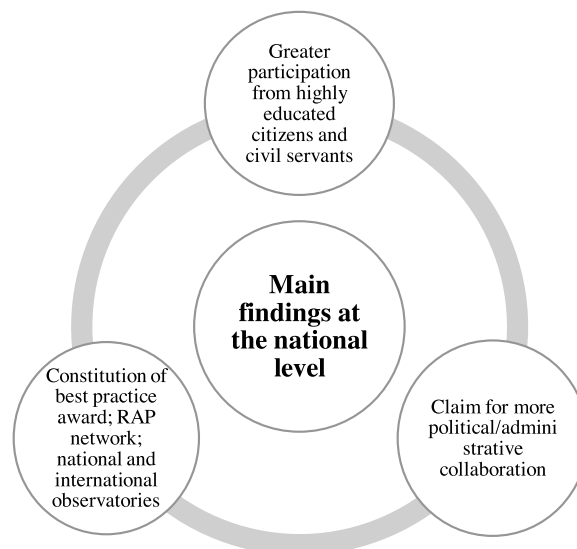
The asymmetrical distribution of actors involved in the evaluation of the four Pilots is due to their specific institutional designs and agendas (cf. also Table 2). Considering Pilots 3 and 4 as initiatives designed and implemented in support of longer-term strategies, their agendas purposely exceeded the time boundaries of the PP project. Accordingly, the promoter agreed with the evaluation team that the policy outputs should not be considered as a primary source of knowledge in those cases. The agreement relied on the acknowledgement that the success of citizen participation in policymaking depends on a wide combination of factors and not merely the assessment of final results. However, consistent with the approach to the evaluation of both procedures and outputs, the team decided not to organise the counter-factual groups in Pilots 3 and 4, which prevented them from providing a more complete assessment of these two practices.

## 5. Findings from the evaluation

At the national level, key information on the work plan and the development of the PP project is drawn from the analysis of the 20 surveys produced by the project team with participants in the events (seminars, conferences, and training workshops)<sup>6</sup>. While gender and age were normally distributed, with half the participants being women and half men, and almost 40 % of the participants falling between the ages of 36 and 50, the overall level of education was high, with 42 % of the participants being post-graduates. Another interesting feature is the high percentage of civil servants taking parts in the events (36.1 %), followed by civic groups (12.2 %) and citizens (8.7 %). A look at these data shows that, on the one hand, procedures appealed to higher-profile participation while, on the other, political representatives showed less interest in the PP project.

Findings from the evaluation of the outputs and perceived expected/unexpected outcomes of the PP project at the national level accounts for the interviews conducted with one representative per agency – the NGO “In Loco” as the promoter, CES -University of Coimbra, as the partner, and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation as the funding sponsor – along with the application of the pre-post surveys. The arguments posited by the three agencies contend the need for greater political and

<sup>6</sup> The number of surveys does not cover the total number of events as shown in Annex A. The decision to conduct the surveys was taken autonomously from the evaluation team by the promoter of the project. More information is available in the website: [www.portugalparticipa.pt](http://www.portugalparticipa.pt)



**Fig. 1.** Main findings on the procedures and outputs at the national level. Source: Authors' own work.

administrative commitment toward effective citizen participation in policymaking. As acknowledged by the representative of the academia, who advocates that “while great response arrived from civil servants, we know that the best results are achieved when politicians are engaged too. The point is that civil servants cannot take final decisions and so we frequently need to get in touch with politicians”. The combination of elected and public officials should be nurtured through a more constant dialogue with lay citizens and other stakeholders. As the academic representative added later, “in a period of crisis, authorities that feel lonelier are often the ones that want to test something new”. Testing participation, however, should challenge all the parties involved to change the values of public service delivery. This point is echoed by the promoter, who sees the achievement of normative goals as strictly dependent on the effectiveness of the actions implemented. The dissemination of products and the promotion of a wide array of events has aimed to accomplish this in search of wider synergy between political and administrative actors on the one hand, and to boost a multi-level dialogue between governmental agencies on the other.

Looking at the results produced by the PP project and their potential impacts in the long run, three main outputs are considered as outstanding. First, the creation of a new national competition of best practices in citizen participation that facilitates national and international visibility of these experiments<sup>7</sup>. Second, the constitution of a national network of local and parish councils promoting participatory processes (“RAP - Rede de Autarquias Participativas”), which allows for greater transference of knowledge and experience among the approximately 60 members and creates new opportunities for national and international exploitation of the practices<sup>8</sup>. This output further points out that an effort was made by the promoter to ensure the active engagement of political representatives in the sustainability of the outputs of the PP project. Third, the updated system of data collection on participatory processes, which is visualised through the national and international observatory hosted on the project website. In addition to this,

<sup>7</sup> The first competition was run in 2015 with 14 applications that were analysed and evaluated by a jury composed of the promoter and partner of the project, together with the national agency for administrative modernization (AMA) and the International Observatory of Participatory Democracy (IOPD). The first prize was given to the participatory budget implemented in Águeda, a small city in the centre of Portugal. More information at: <http://www.portugalparticipa.pt/Home/Prizes/>

<sup>8</sup> More information at: <http://www.portugalparticipa.pt/Home/Network/>

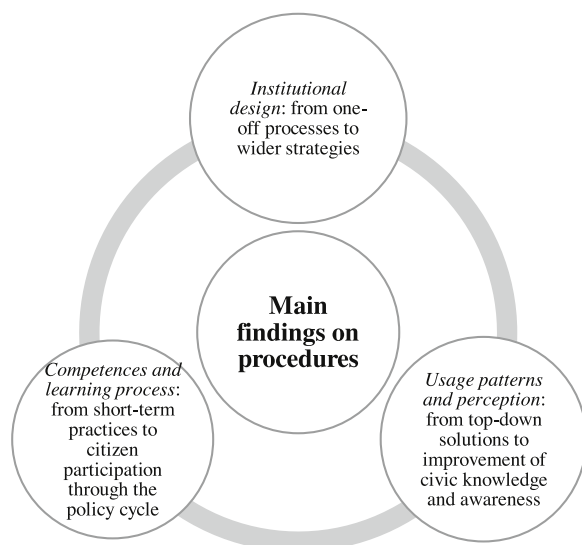


Fig. 2. Main findings on the procedures in the four local Pilots.  
Source: Authors' own work.

along with new public-public and public-private partnerships generated among multiple agents taking part in the PP project, the liaison between the NGO “In Loco” and CES University of Coimbra, has confirmed its strength in the country, as proved by their numerous collaborations<sup>9</sup> (Fig. 1).

With regard to the four local Pilots, findings from the evaluation of the procedures have been drawn from interviews with elected and public officials, NGOs, and citizens, along with pre-post surveys. Both methods were conducted using criteria such as: institutional design; usage patterns and perception; competence and learning process. With the transcription of all interviews and the data collection from discourse and survey analysis on emerging key themes, procedures were evaluated positively inasmuch as they were able to inspire wider strategies of citizen participation in the local political agenda. Focussing on the institutional design of the four participatory processes, the arrangements were diversely characterised as being either one-off (Pilots 1 and 2) or in-progress initiatives in support of longer-term strategies (Pilots 3 and 4). Civil servants and NGOs understood the need for shifting from single processes toward wider strategies aimed at incorporating participation into models of local governance, in which elected and non-elected individuals can target problems, negotiate interests, and re-define solutions. Toward this aim, citizen participation should be encouraged from the beginning of the policy cycle.

Citizens and NGOs claim that effective use of participatory processes depends on the commitment of local authorities to contrast international trends of easy packaging of “innovative” initiatives. As one of the NGOs engaged in Pilot 4 said, “there is no real need to be innovative, since we can more easily adopt well-known methods and be equally effective”. Civil servants further ask for procedures that would enable them to reduce the distance between political institutions and citizens in sharing knowledge. Their perception was that distances have been produced and reproduced by top-down mechanisms of policymaking, which could be reversed by adequate tools for people to add their voices to decision-making. As one of the citizens engaged in Pilot 2 said, “it is important to reach people living everywhere and help them to voice out their ideas,

<sup>9</sup> Examples are the “Participatory Budgeting Portugal” project (“Orçamento Participativo Portugal”), funded by the Equal Initiative promoted by the European Commission in 2008 (see: [www.op-portugal.org](http://www.op-portugal.org)), and the recent European Union-funded international project “Empatia” (see: [www.empatia-project.eu](http://www.empatia-project.eu)) focussed on the creation of new digital platforms for participatory processes.

with no shame”. Participatory processes should improve civic knowledge and awareness for a better understanding of public problems, while enabling all citizens to control political action.

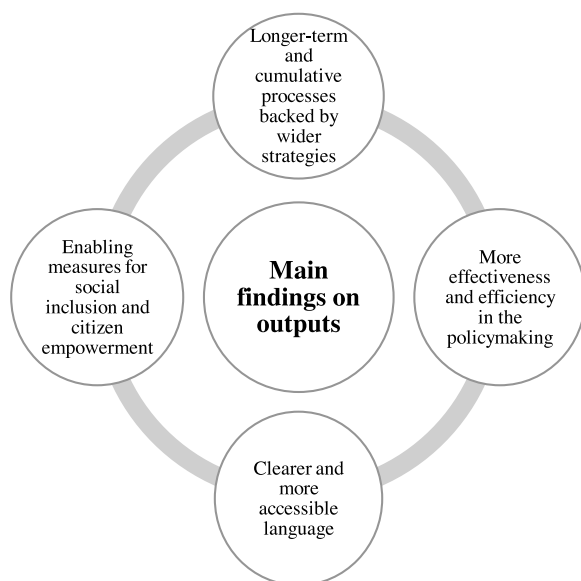
Regarding competences and learning processes that are enabled by the participatory processes, citizens and NGOs demand cultural changes engendering the ways local administrations work both within and with civil society. A major hurdle to learning is the reversibility of changes whenever these rely on short-term practices. The opportunity to create longer-term strategies that engage all citizens through policymaking is echoed by the need for effective enabling measures. One of the civil servants engaged in Pilot 3 affirmed: “strategies are not created from the inside to the outside, rather they need civil society’s contribution to have real impacts”. Political strategies should improve the efficiency of the bureaucratic machine, as well as reduce the scepticism of elected officials towards citizen participation. These pre-conditions can favour the emergence of broader knowledge and awareness in participants, and improve the collective social learning of participants (Fig. 2).

At the time the evaluation was conducted, findings about the policy outputs in Pilot 1 showed a total number of around 70 participants in the four public meetings, with 18 new citizen proposals and recommendations included in the strategy for the promotion of health. Overall, participants rated this initiative positively and demonstrated great expectations with the final results, as shown by the results of the surveys conducted autonomously by the municipality of Cascais in the meetings<sup>10</sup>. While the practice was pivotal and pioneering in Portugal, the participation rate can be considered in light of context-dependent factors that help understand this output as positive. In particular, the participatory budget of Cascais, which started in 2011 and currently surpasses the national average of allocated money and participating citizens of local participatory budgets in Portugal (Falanga, Lüchmann, Nicoletti, & Domingos, 2020), could be taken as an indirect driver of success. With regard to the outputs in Pilot 2, against a total number of 972 participants in the participatory budget<sup>11</sup>, 42 proposals were submitted and 8480 votes were collected for six winning projects. The selection was based on the amount of public funding needed for their implementation, considering that each project could not exceed 100 thousand euros. Overall, the participation rate was one of the highest ever recorded in the public meetings organised in local participatory budgeting in Portugal.

Data from surveys and counterfactual evaluation allow for the drawing of findings from the perceived expected/unexpected outcomes in social, economic, and inter-institutional fields from the four local Pilots. Overall, political representatives argued that there is a gain in efficiency through citizen participation, as confirmed by civil servants in the focus group (counterfactual evaluation) of Pilot 1: “participation permits testing the other way around for better policies: first collecting ideas and then improving policies rather than predetermining top-down responses without knowing the real demands”. Civil servants further argued that citizen participation helps to pinpoint the best way to merge individual and collective interests within a socio-political context of scarce resources. Illiteracy, disenchantment with political life, and territorial dispersion in Portugal need to be directly tackled as the main goals of these processes to prevent risks of further social marginalisation. Likewise, according to NGOs, citizen participation should fight social exclusion and stigmas by enabling lay people to voice their needs

<sup>10</sup> The average of participant answers to the survey are presented in sub-themes: satisfaction with the forum (75%); trust in the implementation of the local strategy (68%); transparency in the way the local strategy is created (50%); and availability to monitor the implementation of the local strategy (75%)

<sup>11</sup> According to the data collected autonomously by the Municipality of Funchal, around 55% of the participants were women and 45% were men. Looking at the age, 18% were 15–25 years old, 31% were 26–45 years old, 35% were 46–65 years old, and 16% were more than 65 years old.



**Fig. 3.** Main findings on the outputs in the four local Pilots.  
Source: Authors' own work.

and claims in policymaking. On the one hand, NGOs tend to defend citizen empowerment through participation, while on the other they question their role of intermediation in these practices as downgrading the potentials of self-representation. Finally, citizens in Pilots 1 and 2 say that participatory processes should be cumulative and engage the greatest number of people. For this reason, citizen participation should more thoroughly work on, and act in accordance with, the identification of enabling measures for the participation of all.

Expected and unexpected outcomes partly emerge from the arguments above: political representatives see the potential for citizen participation to strengthen democratic life beyond political elections. Toward this end, citizen participation needs to be framed within the political agenda and be supported by strategies able to overcome temporary covenants. This requires political commitment and acknowledgment of the added value that citizen participation brings to policymaking in pre-testing the potential efficacy of policy solutions before taking action with their potential beneficiaries. Likewise, civil servants advocate the need for new habits of democratic life through long-term strategies against the proliferation of short-term funding schemes. The lack of long-term strategies for the engagement of lay people from the beginning of the policy cycles is a major hurdle of participation according to NGOs. In Pilot 4, one NGO firmly stated in the interview that “institutions live under the new tyranny of short-term projects. We are oppressed by this kind of policy and, so, we cannot ensure the continuity of our actions”. Finally, citizens say that unexpected outcomes should result in the enabling of measures to supervise the accomplishment of the goals agreed upon in participatory practices. These measures should be equally distributed amongst citizens and include those at the margins of decision-making. One of the citizens in Pilot 2 echoed this point in the focus group: “often the upper class participates with great awareness about how the process works. Against this, middle and lower classes less often participate”.

With regard to the satisfaction of political representatives and civil servants, a general need to fight against the scepticism of political institutions regarding participation is claimed. This scepticism should be contrasted by making public statements on the reasons for participation

before starting a participatory process. Clarifying the terms of citizen participation, as one of the civil servants in Pilot 3 said in the interview: “helps acknowledging the limitations of technical language for the public... it is too time-consuming for citizens to decrypt bureaucratic codes and concepts”. In empowering lay people, expectations should be carefully managed by promoters as their fulfilment is key for present accountability and future initiatives. One of the NGOs in Pilot 4 said in the interview: “I fear that participation can leave people worse than before, because they create expectations that are barely accomplished”. Facilitating participation with clearer language matches part of the element of citizen satisfaction, which regards the great challenges that participation posits to standard ways of planning and enacting governance. Changes are likely to be effective whenever the outputs of participatory practices are immediately visible and provide a higher quality of life (Fig. 3).

## 6. Discussion

Considering the characteristics of the evaluation methodology, findings can be positively analysed in light of the main body of scientific literature. With regard to participatory procedures, Fung (2006) makes clear how citizen participation needs to be sustained by greater government commitment and more responsive governance structures in order to incorporate views that were previously excluded (cf. also Fung, 2015). Likewise, Bherer (2011) advocates the need for extensive change in political action towards a more effective incorporation of citizen participation within the policymaking processes. Accordingly, citizen participation should be integrated at every step of the policy cycle, from the first phase of the agenda-setting to the delivery of public services (Creighton, 2005; Farrington et al., 1993). Overall, findings on participatory procedures at both local and national levels show that the insulation of citizen participation within the governance system is likely to reduce long-term strategies, which should rely on the collaboration of elected and public officials, and prevent participants from increasing their competences and knowledge.

Findings about the outputs corroborate and expand upon some of the scholarly contributions regarding citizen participation in the innovation of democracy. Some scholars argue that the scope of citizen participation in policymaking should not only engender the quality of governance, but also the achievement of “social goals” (Beierle & Cayford, 2002). Quality is constrained whenever participation is designed as a one-off practice, which limits the achievement of wider scopes (Farrington et al., 1993). Furthermore, social goals are reduced whenever citizens are not effectively enabled to participate, which feeds scepticism back toward these practices and, more pointedly, political representatives and institutions (Fiorino, 1990; Yang & Pandey, 2011). The risk is that the results appear to be merely cosmetic and captured during either political or financial elite participation (Rosener, 1978). At both local and national levels, what the findings on outputs, including perceived expected/unexpected outcomes, help to reinforce is that there is a common necessity for effective measures to enable the participation of all the citizens than not only the highly educated ones, through a more accessible language, which is likely to help pursue goals of policy effectiveness and social inclusion.

## 7. Conclusions

The article acknowledges that the culture of evaluation of citizen participation in policymaking is weak and that evidence on methodologies and findings in this field of study continues to be scarce on a worldwide basis. Although the conceptual complexity of citizen

participation, reflected in the great variety of processes implemented in the world, may be a major hurdle to finding common metrics of evaluation, the multiplication of place-based assessments is likely to undermine the debate on methodologies of evaluation whenever it is not possible to critically discuss the main body of literature. In an attempt to problematise and overcome the limitations set by path-evident approaches, which are often unable to break the ceiling of replicability and transferability, the methodology designed and implemented for the evaluation of the PP project has aimed to contribute to the current international debate in the policy field.

Against this backdrop, the article discusses the methodology of evaluation of the PP project by focussing on the definition of the criteria for the evaluation of procedures and outputs, and their operationalisation through a multi-method approach. Findings about procedures at the national level reveal greater participation of high-profile social actors, and of civil servants compared to political representatives. Looking at the purpose of broader participation of local communities in policymaking, the PP project stresses significant distance between elected officials and citizens, as well as between elected and public officials in local administrations, as an obstacle to the full achievement of goals. Critical results should convince scholars and practitioners to debate on the need to capture the multiple meanings behind biased citizen participation and distances within local administrations to reflect upon the ways in which participatory processes can actually help reconnect multiple agents around common purposes.

At the local level, the evaluation of the four Pilots highlights the need for longer-term strategies and the development of citizen participation throughout the entire policy cycle. These strategies would challenge standard politics, as well as those “innovative” actions which appear to reduce the focus on life quality and social inclusion. As shifting from short to longer-term practices is likely to improve citizen participation, the evaluation should be able to go beyond the observation of the processes per se, and rather provide new elements of understanding about their role within the governance system. Likewise, the pursuit of social inclusion should be approached as an asset which would reduce the risk of political and economic elite capture. Accordingly, the evaluation should ensure the production of critical information about the ways citizen participation contributes to enabling all the citizens, especially those that lack voice, to influence decision-making in the long term.

While the evaluation was not required to assess the sustainability of the outputs produced through the PP project, it is worth acknowledging some key impacts of the current debate and promotion of participatory processes in Portugal. At the national level, the website of the PP project will continue to provide public information and data about the dissemination of participatory practices through the national observatory and its activities – including the annual best practice awards – supported by the network of local councils promoting participatory processes (RAP), with more than 60 local councils as members. Notably, at the end of the PP project, a set of recommendations was produced and delivered to the national government, which should, arguably, have inspired the government in setting out the first national participatory budgets in 2017 with the lessons learnt on the combination of multiple scales for citizen participation.

At the local level, the new 2016–2020 strategy for the promotion of health in Cascais was built on the original outputs of the Pilot 1. The strategy was being reviewed at the time this article was written in order to ensure its sustainability for the upcoming political mandate. With regard to Pilot 2, the information available suggests that the participatory budget has been suspended in Funchal with no clear explanation of the reasons behind this political decision. The participatory approach to the revision of the master plan in Odemira is currently being implemented with no evident interruptions from Pilot 3. Lastly, with regard to Pilot 4, little information has been made available on the regeneration of

Campanhã as the city council of Porto, unlike the other cities involved in the local Pilots, decided not to be included in the RAP network.

Beyond aiming to fuel the international debate with new theoretical and empirical knowledge, this article further contributes to the self-reflection of the work conducted by the authors as members of the evaluation team. Whereas the most challenging task for the evaluation team was to design a common methodology to collect information on such a diverse set of participatory processes, a clearer definition of goals and institutional designs to be adopted at the local level, as well as greater collaboration of elected and public officials in the provision of data could have been beneficial, especially in Pilots 3 and 4. This insight corroborates the necessity to build up a stronger culture for the evaluation of participatory processes in Portugal, capable of effectively supporting its implementation at multiple levels.

Finally, despite being geographically and historically limited to Portugal, the study covers a multiplicity of participatory processes implemented under different socio-political conditions that allow for the drawing of some main insights for future debate at the international level. First, the evaluation of citizen participation in policymaking should more attentively account for the ways in which multiple agents are (re)connected by shedding light on matches and mismatches among different roles and interests at stake. Second, participatory processes should be more closely evaluated within the wider governance systems by covering the ways in which they are set through the policy cycle, at either local or supra-local levels. Third, the evaluation should more critically examine how goals of social inclusion are pursued through citizen participation by considering the public statements and the enabling tools provided by the promoters.

#### Author statement

Personal data about the agents involved in the evaluation is suppressed from the manuscript according to relevant ethical standards for human subjects protections.

We certify that the underlying analysis is in compliance with the governing IRB standards at the Instituto de Ciências Sociais, Universidade de Lisboa.

#### Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

#### CRediT authorship contribution statement

**Roberto Falanga:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Data curation, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing, Visualization. **João Ferrão:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Writing - review & editing, Supervision, Project administration.

#### Acknowledgments

This work was supported by the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia [SFRH/BPD/109406/2015], and by the project “Portugal Participa: Caminhos para a Inovação Societal”.

#### Appendix A

Table A1

**Table A1**  
Events promoted at the national level.

Date	City	Event	N° respondents to surveys
24-09-2014	Cascais	Preparatory project meeting	/
14-10-2014	Odemira	First project meeting	/
19-11-2014	Lisbon	Workshop "Participatory Strategic Planning"	11
03-12-2014	Cascais	First project conference	42
14-01-2015	Lisbon	Second project meeting	/
16-01-2015	Porto	Workshop "Participatory Architecture and Urban Planning"	15
17-01-2015	Porto	Workshop "Ethics: finding out social, environmental, and economic impacts of financial activities"	10
17-01-2015	Porto	Workshop "Coopoly – gaming to learn collaborative and democratic values associated to the management and participation of social enterprises"	/
22-01-2015	Cascais	Workshop "Public Debate "	7
23-01-2015	Lisbon	Workshop "Planning citizen participation on a supralocal scale: lessons and challenges from experiments on big infrastructures"	18
04-03-2015	Lisbon	Workshop "New technological solutions for participatory processes"	15
18-03-2015	Lisbon	Third project meeting	/
05-05-2015	Ponta Delgada (Azores)	Training for the participatory budget in Ponta Delgada	/
11-05-2015	Lousã	Training for the participatory budget in Lousã	/
14-05-2015	Águeda	Training for the participatory budget in Águeda	/
29-05-2015	Lisbon	Fourth project meeting	/
09-07-2015	Ponta Delgada (Azores)	Regional Forum in Azores	24
17/18-09-2015	Loulé	Summer School 2015 – Regional Forum	17
21/22-09-2015	Funchal (Madeira)	Regional Forum in Madeira	9
28-09-2015	Lisbon	Workshop "Citizen Participation in Civil Protection Policies"	16
09-10-2015	Águeda	Regional Forum in Central Portugal	5
30-10-2015	Alfândega da Fé	Regional Forum in Northern Portugal	9
13-11-2015	Alenquer	Regional Forum in Lisbon	12
04-12-2015	Lisbon	Workshop "Participatory Processes in Nicarágua"	5
21/22-01-2016	Lisbon	Second project conference	9
20/21-02-2016	Faro	Workshops included in the second Forum "Finances, Ethics and Solidarity"	44
15-03-2016	Porto	Third project conference	29
12/13-04-2016	Lisbon	International Final Conference	64

Source: Authors' own work.

**Appendix B**

Table B1

**Table B1**  
Main topics of the pre-post survey (national and local levels).

Availability to take part in the participatory process			
Very low	Low	High	Very high
Impact that citizen participation could have in your city/Portugal			
Very low	Low	High	Very high
<b>Section 1</b>			
Pre-conditions for citizen participation in your city/Portugal			
Yes		No	
Formal and informal groups before the participatory process/project			
Yes		No	
Existing inter-institutional networks in your city/Portugal			
Yes		No	
Other significant processes of participation and innovation in your city/Portugal			
Yes		No	
Participation of your organisation in the participatory process / project			
Very low	Low	High	Very high
Cost-effectiveness			
Very low	Low	High	Very high
<b>Section 2</b>			
Consistency of the institutional design			
Very low	Low	High	Very high
Quality of the service delivery			
Very low	Low	High	Very high
Sustainability of the service delivery			
Very low	Low	High	Very high
Strengths of the participatory process/project			
Very low	Low	High	Very high
Difficulties of the participatory process/project			
Very low	Low	High	Very high
<b>Section 3</b>			
Consistency of the participatory process/project in the socio-political context			
Very low	Low	High	Very high
Responsiveness of the participatory process/project			

(continued on next page)

Table B1 (continued)

	Very low	Low	High	Very high
Solutions to problems				
	Very low	Low	High	Very high
Long-term view on outputs				
	Very low	Low	High	Very high
Reinforcement of citizen participation through the outcomes				
	Very low	Low	High	Very high
Users from associated and non-associated groups of civil society				
	Very low	Low	High	Very high
Unexpected users				
	Very low	Low	High	Very high
Uses in the future				
	Very low	Low	High	Very high
<b>Section 4</b>				
Expected outcomes				
	Very low	Low	High	Very high
Unexpected outcomes				
	Very low	Low	High	Very high
Sustainability of the outcomes				
	Very low	Low	High	Very high
<b>Section 5</b>				
Citizen participation				
	Very low	Low	High	Very high
Formal and informal groups				
	Very low	Low	High	Very high
Inter-institutional network				
	Very low	Low	High	Very high
Outputs				
	Very low	Low	High	Very high
Outputs against the socio-economic conditions				
	Very low	Low	High	Very high
Impacts				
	Very low	Low	High	Very high
Sustainability				
	Very low	Low	High	Very high

## Appendix C. Script of the semi-structured interview

### National level (around 120 min each)

Goal: to collect information on the impacts of the project from your point of view as representative of the promoter/partner/funding agency.

Evaluation team: We would like you to share your opinion about the project, and the following items:

- Work plan of the project;
- The four pilots;
- The inter-institutional framework of the project;
- The provision of enabling tools for multiple agents to participate in the project;
- Expected and unexpected outcomes of the project;
- Recommendations for the exploitation of the outputs of the project;
- Financial resources and cost/effectiveness of the project

### Local level (around 45 min each)

Goal: to collect information on the implementation of the participatory process in your city as part of the project.

Evaluation team: We would like you to share your opinion about the project, and the following items:

- Pre-conditions for citizen participation;
- Existing and new inter-institutional networks;
- Procedures and goals of the participatory process;
- Financial resources;
- Agents and users;
- Achievements and challenges;
- Other participatory processes.

## Appendix D. Script of the focus and control groups (around 60 min each).

Goal: to understand the outputs and perceived outcomes of the participatory process in evaluation.

Evaluation team: We would like you to share your opinion on the outputs achieved, as well as those that are expected to be achieved through the participatory process.

Key topics to bear in mind (focus group):

- Expected and unexpected outcomes;
- Participation (characterisation);
- Non-participation (characterisation);
- Integration between the participatory process and other public policies;
- Cost-effectiveness of the participatory process.

Key topics to bear in mind (control group):

- Non-participation (characterisation);
- Integration between the participatory process and other public policies;
- Cost-effectiveness of the participatory process.

## Appendix E. Supplementary data

Supplementary material related to this article can be found, in the online version, at doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2020.101895>.

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