



A City by People?

Public Participation in the
Urban Planning of Leon,
Mexico

Master Thesis
Master of Science Urban Agglomerations

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“Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody”
(Jacobs, 1992, p.238)

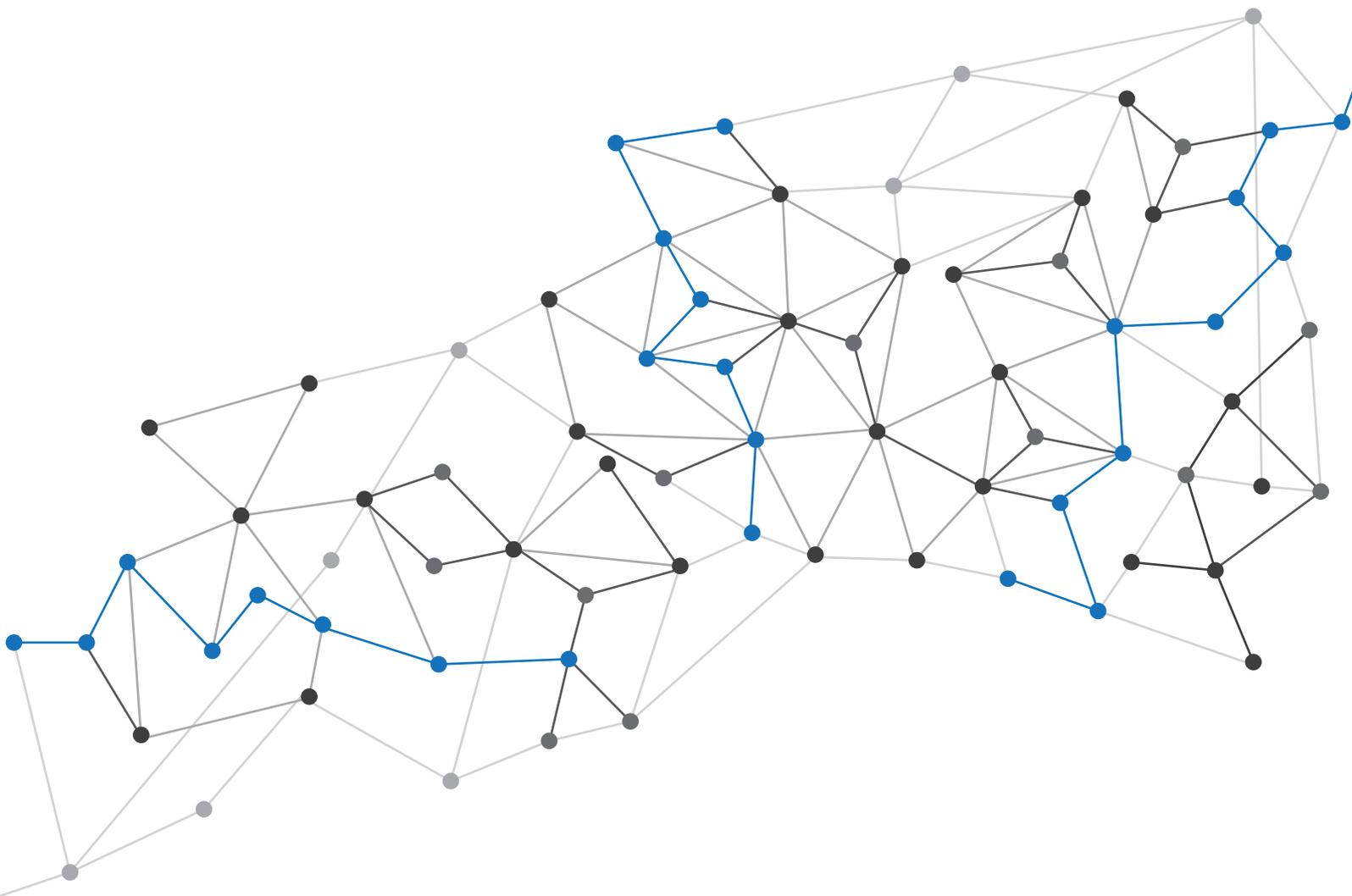


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Abstract

Urban planning has gone through several and deep changes during the last decades. From a technical scope, it has move towards a more strategic and integrated approach, responsive to social and environmental issues. As part of these changes, the inclusion of a wider range of stakeholders into urban planning decision-making processes is an ongoing task for many cities. Such is the case of Leon, a Mexican city that has sought to integrate different sectors of civil society into urban planning processes. This work accounts for the formal participation mechanisms of the city and analyses them in order to understand how they work, who are the stakeholders involved in them, and which are the challenges these mechanisms currently face. Therefore, this thesis creates a framework for discussion based on which the failures in the instrumentalisation of the participation mechanisms can be pointed out and their causes and consequences revised. Lessons learned from initiatives of local organized civil society groups are also integrated into the discussion, as their methodologies and experiences may help to improve the existing formal participatory mechanisms. As part of the analysis, four filters that hinder public participation are proposed, namely the technocratic, economic, communicative, and political filters. This new analytical framework could help to more clearly visualize the distortion that occurs within decision-making processes and it could be applied to other contexts.

The analysis gave as a result a better understanding on which are the factors hindering formal public participation mechanisms by observing how challenges and filters distort decision-making processes, deriving into an inconsistency between the initial inputs and the final result and diminishing the capacity of people to take part in the transformation of their urban environment. General recommendations are given, which emphasize the importance of creation, improvement and democratization of formal participatory mechanisms, including the experiences and knowledge of external parties, and supporting initiatives from civil society with more flexible and open structures.

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Prüfungsordnung 2013

Declaration – Master Thesis

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I hereby declare that the Master Thesis, which I am handing in today, is my own work, produced independently, using no other sources, appliances and other means of support, than those specified.

Frankfurt am Main, **28.08.2019**
(Date)


.....
(Students signature)

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Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nat". The letters are fluid and connected, with a long tail on the 't'.

Introduction

Background Information

Urban planning affects all dimensions of urban life: it has the potential of building and transforming relations and discourses at all levels, from different geographical scales to different institutional levels (UN Habitat, 2016). It becomes hence indispensable that urban planning reflects and works for the cities that all urban dwellers need and want. Before, urban planning was viewed principally as a technical activity, with a limited scope that biased strongly the social, ecological and economic realities of cities. This planning style often derived in proposals and solutions that did not take into account the costs and benefits they would bring to different sections of population (Davidoff, 1965).

Nonetheless, during the last decades, cities have experienced several shifts in their social, political and economic sectors. Traditional models have evolved, resulting in increasing pluralistic and multicultural cities (Calderón, 2013). Governments have had to adapt to these changes, as it has been reflected in the shift from government to governance. By its part, these new governance models influenced as well the mindset of urban planning, which has become more multi-faceted, inclusive, politically engaged, strategic, integrated, and responsive to equity and environmental quality. One of the main characteristics of new planning models is their opening up to a much wider range of stakeholders, along with their needs and aspirations. Therefore, they seek to bring the public, private and third sectors together to build a collective vision for the city (UN Habitat, 2016).

Public participation is thus regarded as key to sustainable urban development, as it gives an opportunity to create legitimate planning interventions by reaching consensus among different sectors of society in complex municipal environments (Irazábal, 2009). But moving from top-down decision-making models to more collaborative approaches has been a challenge in many countries. Bringing up more people into the discussion table entails more perspectives to be taken into account and, therefore, more difficulty to reach consensus. Participation thus may highlight conflict, rather than resolve it. Despite these challenges, significant progress has been made in the involvement of historically under-represented urban groups in the preparation of plans and urban planning decision-making processes (UN Habitat, 2016). However, it is important to ask whether the results of participation in urban and regional planning has been done in a proper manner and if it has achieved its targeted goals.

Problem and Hypothesis

Several authors (García, 1984; Pradilla, 1993; Iracheta, 1997; López, 2001) have already outlined that lack of efficiency of urban development plans and programmes in Mexico comes from a centralized and totalitarian management of governmental institutions, unable to involve different social actors in decision-making processes. Thus, the issues regarding urban planning do not emanate from technical or normative aspects, rather in their operational methods and the exclusion of different stakeholders from planning processes.

Therefore, this thesis poses the hypothesis that if more and different social actors were to be included in urban planning decision-making processes, it would make urban planning processes more efficient and in accordance to the city that people want and need.

Objectives and Research Questions

The discussion thus focuses in the way urban planning institutions incorporate public participation in the process of public management and the accuracy of the used mechanisms. The main objective of this thesis is to analyse the current public participation alternatives to which citizens have access in order to influence the planning of the city. In order to do so, this work aims at 1) understanding how formal participation mechanisms work in Leon and who are the stakeholders involved in them, 2) identifying the advantages and challenges involved in the current formal participation mechanisms, in order to 3) develop a constructive critique and discussion, also by 4) integrating experiences from organized civil society groups.

The main research question is:

How to ensure the right of citizens to shape their city and to have a real influence in its development?

This question is untangled in several sub-questions, to make the research work easier. Thereby, each section is guided by the following questions:

Literature review

1. How to have more inclusive cities concerning decision-making? Why must citizens have the right to shape and transform the city and to be part of the urbanization processes?

2. What does a more inclusive planning approach entails? What is the role of urban planning institutions in the creation of more inclusive cities?
3. What does participation mean in the field of urban planning? Why is it necessary? Who should be involved and to what extent? What is the ideal pursued by public participation?
4. Which stakeholders are involved in public participation processes? How to recognize their role in different decision-making processes?
5. Which are the main challenges and obstacles found when introducing participatory practices in urban planning decision-making?

Case study

6. Which are the current participation mechanisms involved in the urban planning of Leon? Which are or have been their objectives, methodologies, and outcomes?

Discussion

7. Are the current mechanisms of public participation regarding the urban planning of the city being legitimate and a tool for citizen empowerment and organization? What are the gaps hindering existing public participation mechanisms? What can be done to improve the current mechanisms, in accordance to the local context?

Rationale and Significance of Research

This study becomes fundamental as it analyses how decisions regarding the transformation of the city are made, and how these processes include different urban actors and sectors. Furthermore, it does not only conduct a formal research about participation in general nor local urban planning decision-making processes, but proposes a new analytical framework that could help to more clearly visualize the distortion that occurs within decision-making processes and that may be applied to other contexts.

The study faced some limitations specially regarding constraints to obtain accurate and objective information about the case study, mainly due to lack of local formal studies and academic research. Also, as it involves a lot of political and economic interests, it is something that “is better not to question”, fact that limits open and honest conversations

with key actors and public servants. In spite of these limitations, it opens up the discussion on how to create more inclusive and democratic ways to make decisions about the city.

Methodology

This thesis has an *applied research* focus, as it aims to analyse a specific, practical issue about the city. The first section comprises a *literature review* obtained from *secondary data*. Several books and articles were consulted for this matter. The second section includes the case study of formal and non-formal participation mechanisms. The information about these mechanisms was obtained through both *secondary data*, as several laws, by-laws, articles, and newspapers were reviewed; and *primary data*, as the author conducted several interviews with key actors. These interviews were *un-structured* (open conversations guided by key points and questions to discuss) and took place in February and March of this year (2019). The *semi-transcription* of these interviews can be found in the appendix of this thesis.

Section 1: Literature Review

1. Cities and inclusion

The aim of this first chapter is to give a possible answer to the questions: How to have more inclusive cities concerning decision-making? Why must citizens have the right to shape and transform the city and to be part of the urbanization processes? Therefore, this work begins by analysing the current issues concerning the way in which cities have been governed and which theoretical framework could serve as a guidance for a further change. The *commons*, *the right to the city*, *governance* and *urban collaborative governance* theories are thus presented, as they serve to re-define the city and to introduce more inclusive forms of city-making.

1.1 Excluding voices: the neo-liberal city

Since their inception, cities have arisen as places of exclusion as there has been an unequal distribution of power within the historical and current processes of urbanization (Steil & Connolly, 2009). From a political-economic perspective, extensively described by Harvey (2012), cities can be outlined as geographical and social concentrations of surplus. Since the use of the surplus has typically been controlled by a few, urbanization can be described therefore as a sort of class phenomenon. As a result, the economic elite and the political power who supports it have hold a monopoly over the city and its development, over its resources and the patterns of urban administration, policing and regulation, and over the definition of urban rights and urban justice: *“After all, justice is whatever the ruling class wants it to be”* (Harvey & Potter, 2009, p. 40).

This current system with its urban development machinery has displaced large urban population sectors from the creation and transformation of their own environment. The internalisation of market principles into urban planning guidelines has derived into minimum public intervention, top-down decision-making structures, demotion of social and environmental issues, and privatization of public land. Place-making, thus, increasingly becomes a rational entrepreneurial activity, deeply in conflict with citizen values of collaborative power sharing, political participation, and economic and social equity, among others (Calderón, 2013).

However, different approaches and demands for alternative ways of urbanization have emerged in reaction to the neoliberal city. A series of academics, intellectuals, and social movements have sought to reclaim control over the city, about how and who shapes the urban space, how it develops and grows, in search for the promotion to a greater access to urban space and its resources for all urban inhabitants. The commons, described below,

serves as a theoretical framework to root this approach and helps to set a different mindset for thinking the city from its inhabitants and their needs.

1.2 Changing the mindset: the city as a commons

The concept of *the commons* has been widely used by grassroots movements towards the vindication of resources and heritage and has served as a counter-model against the neoliberal focus of private property and ownership. A generic definition of the commons is hard to formulate, since different disciplines have approached the concept with varying definitions, different to each other but at the end consistent. Even though and for the sake of this work, the commons can be described as “*the collective and local ownership of land, resources, or ideas, held in an often communal manner*” (Holder & Flessas, 2008, p. 300), or more simply defined by Hess (2006) “*the commons is a general term for shared resources in which each stakeholder has an equal interest*”.

In urban theory, the commons has been used as a framework to re-define the city and its resources. With it, the city can be defined itself as a commons, since it is a “*shared resource that belongs to all its inhabitants*” (Foster & Iaione, 2016, p. 288). The main objective of conceiving the city as a commons is to change its democratic and economic functioning. It opens up other more equitable and inclusive forms of city-making, as it re-opens the access to the city as a cooperatively managed resource: created, used, preserved, and managed by all its inhabitants. In this way, the concept of the commons serves to protect the city from commodification or enclosure by economic elites and claims a different manner in which the city and its resources are governed (Foster & Iaione, 2016).

1.3 The right to the city

Thereby, the concept of the commons is deeply aligned with the idea of *the right to the city*. First articulated by Henri Lefebvre and later shaped by different progressive urban thinkers, the right to the city is the collective right to claim the way our cities are made and re-made, the right to change and reinvent the city (Harvey D. , 2012). More than mere inclusion, it encompasses the access to participate in the development of the urban environment (Fainstein, 2009), to be part of the decision-making processes that shape the city as a collective resource shared by all (Foster & Iaione, 2016). “*It is not only the right to a choice of what is produced after it is produced, but a right to determine what is produced and how it is produced and to participate in its production*” (Marcuse P. , 2012, p. 36).

The right to the city can therefore be used as an ideal towards which to aspire and to mobilize urban population. However, the demand for the right to the city must be brought down and implemented in pragmatic mechanisms in order to include citizens in the urbanization process.

1.4 Governance

Since the last third of the XXth century, some States have recognized decision-making processes have not been permeable to all urban actors. Therefore, the definition of the administrative role of the State has been subject to several changes in order to better adapt it to contemporary societies. Over, time, it has been seen that governments (due to diverse reasons) have had to integrate into their deliberation and action processes different independent social and economic agents that do not stick to political logics. In contrast to the traditional notion of government centred on the State, the concept of governance emerges to highlight that countless non-governmental actors play an important role in governing resources. Governance is therefore not a function limited to the State because it is not just *what governments do* (Cole, 2011). The concept of governance thus refers to the greater capacity non-governmental actors have acquired over decision-making and influence in orienting the processes of public affairs, policies and services (Serna de la Garza, 2010, p. 35).

There is still a persistent conflict between this pluralistic tendency, which recognizes a wide range of knowledge and values that the concentration of stakeholders may bring, and a techno-corporate traditionalist view, which seeks to keep control of management and knowledge (Healey, 1997). However, new forms of association and coordination of government with private and social organizations have emerged, in response to the current dynamic and complex diversity (Serna de la Garza, 2010).

1.5 Urban Collaborative Governance

Bringing back the framework of the commons initially described and taking further the concept of governance, a *commons-based governance* approach refers to a collaborative system of decision-making that, more than just including other stakeholders and institutions, also redistributes the power over the city resources. This model deals with political, social and economic inequalities in cities, as well as envisions collaboration across formal governance arrangements (Foster & Iaione, 2016).

Three principles – namely horizontal subsidiarity, polycentrism, and collaboration – set governance from a commons-based governance approach¹:

- **Horizontal subsidiarity.** The general aim of the principle of subsidiarity by itself is to “*guarantee a degree of independence for a lower authority in relation to a higher body*”

¹ These principles were proposed by Foster and Iaone (2016) but more extensively described in this thesis.

or for a local authority in relation to central government” (European Parliament, 2019). It therefore entails that power should be shared between several levels of authority. Taking this concept a bit further, horizontal subsidiarity encourages governments to share the responsibility of caring for common resources with citizens. This implies a shift of citizens to be “*city-makers rather than just city-users*” (Foster & Iaione, 2016, p. 328) or, in other words, to turn spectators into collaborators (Bishop, 2006).

- **Polycentrism.** Polycentrism is defined as multiple centres of decision-making, formally independent to each other but that may function in a coherent way with “*consistent and predictable patterns of interacting behaviour*” (Ostrom, Tiebout, & Warren, 1961, p. 832). This principle entails moving away from a centralized State to a regime in which diverse actors are part of a decision-making centre as co-partners or co-collaborators. Thus, the role of the State becomes a coordinator or a facilitator, providing the necessary tools to connect the several actors and to help to enlarge the boundaries of innovation (Foster & Iaione, 2016).
- **Collaboration.** Collaboration happens when actors with different interests work together in order to achieve a common goal. This may happen across agencies, sectors, and relationships. By including different stakeholders, issues that cannot be solved by one organisation on its own may be addressed in a better way (Bingham, 2010). Collaboration can serve not only as a principle but as a methodological tool, with which heterogeneous individuals and institutions work together to co-create or co-govern (Foster & Iaione, 2016).

Following these principles, the concept of *urban collaborative governance* seeks to give an alternative vision for co-governing the city as a common resource. It entails creating a system which distributes decision-making power to an engaged public. As a facilitator, the role of the state would be to create the conditions under which citizens be able to cooperate with public authorities to take care of commons resources including the city itself as a resource, developing collaborative relationships along the way (Foster & Iaione, 2016).

2. Re-designing the square from urban planning

Given the theoretical foundation for rethinking the city and its management in a more collaborative way, the aim of this second chapter is to link this framework to the field of urban planning. The specific research questions addressed in this chapter are: What does a more inclusive planning approach entail? What is the role of urban planning institutions in the creation of more inclusive cities? Therefore, this chapter will present and describe the frameworks of collaborative planning, consensus building, institutional design at the

systemic and the local levels, and the role of urban planners within collaborative planning approaches.

2.1 Collaborative Planning

Since the second half of the last century, criticisms concerning the technical rationalism and the limited power of citizens over city issues boosted new ways of thinking about urban planning. From then on, several planning approaches have emerged following a more participatory and decentred style (Lane, 2003). Collaborative Planning is one of the many approaches to planning theory. It is defined as a civics planning model that delegates responsibility among stakeholders who work together in face-to-face negotiations in order to reach a consensus agreement (Gunton & Day, 2003). Thereby, this model recognizes that a negotiation process is necessary to reach acceptable outcomes, even though it involves conflictual or opposed interests. In this way, collaborative planning responds to the top-down planning tradition by creating an environment in which all participants are able to pose their interests and discuss them, instead of one actor defining the complete process of decision-making (Healey, 1997).

2.1.1 Consensus building

Collaborative planning relies importantly on the creation of agreements. Consensus building is fundamental as it enables participants to creatively and collaboratively reach a common decision (Sanoff, 2000). It has become an increasingly common tool to search for feasible strategies that respond to complex, controversial and/or uncertain planning tasks (Innes & Booher, 1999).

Although many activities could fall under the tag of consensus building, it can be defined as a “*method of group deliberation that brings together for face-to-face discussion a significant range of individuals chosen because they represent those with differing stakes in a problem*” (Innes J. , 1996, p. 461). In this method, the main objective is to reach an agreement rather than using the majority rule, using methods to assure that all participants are heard and respected (Innes & Booher, 1999).

For that, consensus building runs parallel to the idea of *communicative rationality*, largely developed by Habermas (1984). Within this framework, he describes an ideal speech situation, which implies that (Sanoff, 2000):

- No constraints must interfere in the discussion process, so that individuals must feel free to express their personal opinions.
- Each participant must have equal opportunity to express their concerns.
- All participants must assume equal power. This goes hand in hand with the abandonment of political hierarchies and access to full information.

- The discussion must be rational, centred on good reasons rather than threats or interests.

During the discussion, the group can explore different interests and develop a criterion to make decisions with which all participants can agree. Therefore, consensus building entails a collective search for a common ground and opportunities which may benefit all participants (Innes J. , 1996) or, in other words, for a *unitary public interest*. This unitary public interest, rather than an aggregation of individual interests, accepts the diversity of knowledge existing in the group and merges it into a unitary proposal (Innes J. , 1996).

For implementing consensus building, a new mindset is needed. It involves a shift from a technocratic point of view to an openness of action in a *qualitative, discursive way*. Also, although consensus building may bring tangible results such as agreements in form of policies, plans, or even new legislations, most of its effects may be less tangible. These products can be seen in the creation of *social capital*, in the form of networks and trust; *intellectual capital*, by reaching to agreements on data and facts, and by understanding each others needs and situations; and *political capital*, as the combination of capacity helps to coordinate and build new alliances that support legislation and ensure its implementation (Innes J. , 1996).

2.2 Institutional design, a systemic approach

In processes of collaborative planning, the participants engage in the collective endeavour of *institutional design*, which has two interacting levels. The first one concerns the administrative, political and legal systems, or in other words, *systemic* institutional design (Healey, 1997). This level is fundamental as it frames the different instances of local governance. Its re-design could entail a change in the forms of the overarching governance structure, which would then permeate to the following levels.

A system open to a pluralistic, collaborative planning must commit to a range of parameters (Healey, 1997):

1. It should acknowledge the social networks within local and urban regions, which involve a variety of stakeholders with different systems of meaning, cultural diversity, ways of thinking, ways of organising and complex power relations.
2. It should recognise that shifting to a governance system implies that much of the work occurs outside the formal institutions of government and should seek for redistributing power outside these instances.
3. It should open up opportunities for local initiatives and interventions, by enabling, facilitating and encouraging diversity in routines and organisation styles.

4. It should be an open and accountable system, with continuous critical review and change.

2.2.1 Urban planning institutions

Urban planning institutions play a fundamental role in governance systems and, if collaborative planning is to be implemented, they must also go through a process of institutional design.

Spatial planning has the potential of shaping and building relations and discourses, as well as social and intellectual capital, because of its influence at the neighbourhood, town, and urban levels (Healey, 1997). In addition, spatial planning institutions are involved in the process of defining the rational use of resources and the rational distribution of their benefits among society. Thereby, planning institutions are very well embedded in the political process of *choosing what to do*, that is, in the decision-making process (Guaraldo, 1993).

Therefore, collaborative approaches in urban planning institutions should focus on the task of building networks across different scales, by creating new relational capacity across the diversity of stakeholders (Healey, 1997). This also includes not letting decision-making lie in the hands of a few to achieve their own purposes or interests, distorting the planning practices (Guaraldo, 1993).

2.2.1.1 Rethinking the role of urban planners

Furthermore, within the institutional design of urban planning institutions comes an additional reconfiguration of roles: the one of urban planners. Following the ideas of collaboration and integration of different stakeholders in the decision-making processes described before, the need for a facilitator of such processes emerges almost by logic. Thereby, there is a window of opportunity for urban planners, as the ones who have the broadest and most comprehensible view over urban processes, to be the ones who take this role. Furthermore, urban planners are able to hold a middle position between governments, organizations and individuals who are concerned for developing the future of the city, which gives them the special potential to be the *networkers* linking these actors and the *facilitators* of collaboration processes.

Thus, the role of planners is to grasp this challenge with a dual strategy. The first one is to promote creative technical, architectural, and institutional solutions. In this sense, planners have the necessary capacities and knowledge to concretize collaborative planning approaches with actual practices. The second strategy would be the management and resolution of the conflicts the interaction between different stakeholders may bring. Regarding this matter, the implementation of consensus building might help to bring economic, social, political, and environmental interests together. In this processes the

outcome would be balanced by all parties and, furthermore, future legal costs and clashes between stakeholders could be avoided. In addition, linguistic differences are a major obstacle to reach consensus when different people with different backgrounds, knowledge, and value hierarchies interact. In this cases, the planner could assist each group in understanding the different priorities and reasoning, as well as supervising that any language dominates the discussion (Campbell, 1996).

2.3 Institutional design, a sectorial approach

The second level of institutional design concerns the construction of social, intellectual and political capital in order to develop strategies for local change (Healey, 1997). The local level is quintessential for effective participation due to several reasons. First of all, the transformations of social relations must start from the everyday lives, as *“justice can not be defined abstractly”* (Steil & Connolly, 2009, p. 174). At the grassroots level it is more feasible to meet citizens with their needs and desires, and it also ensures that everyone, including *the excluded* and marginalized communities, have mechanisms at hand to express their concerns and transform their environment. Second, participation at the local level could also help to develop capacities in subjects and institutions, deriving in the strengthening of citizenship and exercise of the right to the city (Fernández, 2006). Third, transformations in the distribution of power must begin here. Robert Dahl (1967) referred to the Chinese box of power and participation: there is greater opportunity for democracy at the neighbourhood level, but less amount of power. Thus, to take advantage of that democratic potential it is crucial to give more power to the local level, so people have more influence in the outcomes of urban planning processes and, therefore, in city-making (Fainstein, 2009).

The aim will be then to bring to neighbourhoods locally-based participatory democratic forms of decision-making, giving institutional power to communities, with the support of other levels of governance and connecting to larger fields of policy-making. In order to do so, the abovementioned *systematic institutional design* is fundamental, as it will enable a functional governance model which can incorporate different communities and counter-institutional positions. Thereby, it is about creating a long term change in the nature of the relationships between decision-makers and community members by enabling greater participation with connections to public sector agencies, the private sector and tertiary stakeholders (Steil & Connolly, 2009).

3. Public Participation in Urban Planning

The aim of this chapter is to set a definition for public participation within the field of urban planning. The specific research questions here addressed are: what does participation mean in the field of urban planning? Why is it necessary? Who should be involved and to

what extent? What is the ideal pursued by public participation? This third chapter will give possible answers to these questions, followed by a review concerning the role that power plays within participation.

3.1 What is participation within urban planning?

This work supports the idea that public participation can serve as a mean to practically grasp the previously described theoretical framework in order to achieve more inclusive decision-making over urban processes. Therefore, participation serves as a mean to achieve and ensure the right to the city, a mean to guarantee the power to all inhabitants to transform and decide over their urban environment. Following this idea, participation is described as an instrument to facilitate individuals the space and tools to co-create, to decide on their common goods and common goals, in accordance and response to their reality, their multiple needs, possibilities, potentialities, and their social and cultural conditions (Romero, 1995).

Participation as a mean becomes a form of mobilization *to get things done* (Moser, 1989), in this case, to fulfil the right to the city. But participation can also be seen not only as a mean but as an end when the focus is on the mere process itself. In this way, participation could also serve as *“an opportunity to develop people’s consciousness about other aspects of their living conditions”* (Guaraldo, 1996, p. 435). Consensus building practices would be an example of participation as an end, as the focus is not only on the results but the by-products of the process: the production of social, political, and intellectual capital.

3.1.1 What for?

This definition recognizes that the built environment is more adequate to the needs and aspirations of its inhabitants if they are actively involved in its production, instead of being treated as passive consumers. This implies that urban residents are the ones who know better their own needs and possibilities, as they are the ones that will live and enjoy cities (Romero & Mesías, 2004). Participation entails broadening the understanding of reality by the inclusion of several points of view, which results in a social value, such that the more people engaged the more valuable it becomes (Foster & Iaione, 2016). Thus, participation gives the opportunity to create mechanisms for incorporating difference into urban planning decision-making processes and to guide urban development by understanding the specific context needs and potentials.

3.1.2 Whose participation?

Although the concern is to include all possible stakeholders in urban decision-making processes, it is important to highlight and repeat that some sectors already have this power

and have historically and widely held it. This includes the economic elite, the real estate owners and speculators, the political hierarchy, the media. The concern might turn, in exchange, to those who have not been able to exercise their right to the city because of economic, cultural, social, ethnical, gender, and ideological reasons (Marcuse P. , 2012). A just participation within the context of urban development requires that everyone, with special focus on *the excluded*, are deliberately included in the future (Arnstein, 1969) and have “*a mechanism at their disposal for empowering their own plans for their communities as well as the power to make those plans actually guide development*” (Steil & Connolly, 2009, p. 183).

Therefore, participation requires building and linking different relationships, organizations and institutional arrangements. The result of this integration takes the form of an organization that works at multiple levels through horizontal networks (Shannon & Schmidt, 2002). In order to do so, it is necessary crossing or expanding existing institutional rules and divisions of authority.

3.2 The cornerstone: power

3.2.1 Redistribution of power

Although matters of structural societal changes are not the focus of this work, it is necessary to understand that current lack of democratic decision-making lies at the feet of power redistribution. Understanding the way in which power operates in decision-making processes is crucial to the theoretical approach of the challenges participation processes face in urban planning (Calderón, 2013). Power relations have the potential to oppress and dominate not just through the distribution of material resources, but by prioritizing knowledge that supports its interests while suppressing or ignoring knowledge and practices that go against it (Healey, 1997). Power is based on social, political and economic inequality, which is “*socially created and structurally embedded*” (Marcuse P. , 2009, p. 94). Therefore, it becomes necessary to question the structures and sources of power embedded in our systems and the legitimacy of its use.

Therefore, to recover the right to the city to those that do not have it entails the established relations with those in power to change (Guaraldo, 1996). Participation involves an inevitable sharing and then transfer of power (Moser, 1989). This also means eliminating the right to dominate and control decision-making structures and processes that power-holders exercise (Marcuse P. , 2012) and thus demanding changes in the status quo (Fainstein, 2009). This demand also comes out from a necessity for more equitable and transparent relationships (Romero & Mesías, 2004). Only through power redistribution significant social reforms can be done and real mechanisms of participation can be achieved. Participation without redistribution of power derives in an empty ritual, in a pantomime

where the power-holders claim inclusion but in which, at the end, the powerless will not have real influence in the outcome of the decision-making process (Arnstein, 1969).

3.2.1.1 Reactions towards power redistribution

Albeit participation is, in principle, the cornerstone of democracy, it usually faces strong racial, ethnic, ideological and political opposition when redistribution of power emerges as a need for real participatory processes (Arnstein, 1969). When trying to involve a wide variety of actors, participatory practices often fall short in actively doing it and developing a meaningful dialogue between participants. Often, participation of some stakeholders is prioritized over others, favouring politicians, developers, or designer preferences over local needs and values (Calderón, 2013).

As previously mentioned, counteracting the existing power structures entails the redefinition of rights and the reconfiguration of social processes upon which they rest (Harvey & Potter, 2009). But, as Fainstein (2009) asked, what arguments could make people accept redistribution of power if they know they are already in an advantage position? For that, there is a need to transcend self-interest narratives and base the argument on collective good, that is, going from an individual rationality to a social rationality. Understanding that solutions to urban environment issues must not be only legitimized by what dominant classes think should be (Romero, 1995). Such mobilisation must be backed by sufficient support at the political level, social movements or a supportive elite (Fainstein S. S., 2009).

3.2.2 Empowerment: the ideal of participation

The level of power available to citizens in participatory practices has been an important source of critique (Lane, 2003). Several authors have drawn different scales in an attempt to measure the power given to citizens in decision-making processes. In the models proposed by Arnstein (1969) and Guaraldo (1996), the higher levels refer to processes in which citizens have a direct and active influence during the planning process. Both authors agree that the highest step would be *citizen control* or *empowerment*. In this level, participants or residents have genuine specified power on formal decision-making bodies, able to govern a program or institution and in full control of the outcomes of the process. Also stated by just-city theorists, participation in its more radical concept “*goes beyond the involvement of stakeholders to governance by civil society [and] results in the exercise of power by those who had previously been excluded from power*” (Fainstein S. , 2000, p. 467). The ideal of participation, therefore, aims at pluralistic, cooperative and decentralized development of an urban vision, managed and created by all.

4. Inclusion of different stakeholders and counter-institutions

A rebalance in the urban decision-making power structure entails the development and involvement of the broad forces and wide variety of actors that interact in the urban space. Different actors have access to different levels and sources of power and socio-cultural capital (knowledge). Within their specific contexts, they use their power in the creation and transformation of their physical and social environments (Calderón, 2013).

Therefore, the inclusion of different stakeholders would derive into reframing urban issues and mobilizing different social sectors of the city (Fainstein, 2009), joining all kinds of knowledge, widening the technical point of view with more experiential inputs, and bringing more creativity to urban life (Harvey & Potter, 2009). The result is an entrenched interconnection able to address more complex matters and developing *“new forms of social partnership through which a shared sense of the public good is created and debated”* (Cook & Kothari, 2001, p. 38).

Urban planning thus becomes a political process. In it, counter-institutions play a fundamental role as they are able to be a motor of change while being part of the established order (Steil & Connolly, 2009). In this way, counter-institutions maintain an alternative vision and complement the existing one by working together with existing institutions.

Therefore, this chapter revises two different approaches for categorizing the stakeholders involved in urban planning decision-making processes, in order to understand the relations between each other and the different interests they respond to. The first categorization explains the expected role of each stakeholder in a collaborative governance system. The second, classifies stakeholders according to the power they hold in a decision-making process.

4.1 Types of stakeholders

4.1.1 Classification in accordance to a collaborative governance system

One way of classifying stakeholders is by social sectors, namely the public sector, the private sector, civil society and intermediary organisations:

1. Public Sector. As mentioned before, in a collaborative governance structure, the dominant position of the State should gradually fade in order to give more space to autonomous centres of decision-making, in which all actors who have a stake become collaborators. The role of the State becomes then that of a facilitator, who provides the necessary tools and connects different networks of actors to foster innovation and creativity (Foster & Iaione, 2016). Two levels of intervention can be defined: the central and the local

level. From the central level, the State is in charge of installing capacities within the municipalities to carry out participative processes, by providing human and technical resources. Furthermore, the central level also supports by funding and giving a legal framework for participation. By its part, the local level is in charge of establishing participatory strategies and implementing mechanisms in accordance to the needs, demands, and expectations of the inhabitants (Fernández, 2006).

2. Private Sector. The private sector is also an important stakeholder within participatory processes. Pragmatically, this sector could bring special technical expertise, innovation, funding and know-how management to address complex problems (Forrer, Kee, Newcomer, & Boyer, 2010). In this matter, the State facilitates an enabling environment for private companies to intervene in participatory processes while also setting the boundaries for their intervention. The State should conduct four principal activities in this regard: mandating, that is, setting a legal framework; facilitating, by incentivizing companies to engage in social and environmental agendas; partnering, by looking for strategic partnerships which may bring complementary skills and inputs; and endorsing, by giving political support (Fox, Ward, & Howard, 2002).

3. Civil Society. Several authors have described civil society as the intermediate sphere between the state and the market (Friedmann, 1973) (Ehrenberg, 1999), or as a set of mediating structures between an individual's private life and the large institutions of public life (Berger & Neuhaus, 2000). These definitions imply that civil society activities do not involve neither economic or political pursuit. From this perspective, a wide range of actors are here encompassed (Scholte, 2002). The engagement of civil society in urban planning is considered as fundamental for policy development and implementation, having a democratizing effect on planning. Its involvement enables cooperation and transfer of knowledge, being a factor of success for projects' implementation. It also acts as a check on State power and a counterpoint to its rationality (Lane, 2003). Civil society *"is supposed to revive communities, train effective citizens, build habits of respect and cooperation, provide a moral alternative to self-interest, limit intrusive bureaucracies, and invigorate the public sphere"* (Ehrenberg, 1999, p. 233).

Nevertheless, civil society cannot be conceptualized separate from the other spheres (public and private sectors) and therefore immune from the exercise and abuse of power. Within this sphere, conflict raises too and in processes of public participation is important not to reinforce and reproduce inequality (Lane, 2003).

4. Intermediary organisations. In general terms, intermediary organisations take the form of non-profit organisations, aligning themselves with community groups while building bridges across institutional structures and filling the gaps in the organisational field (Steil & Connolly, 2009). Because of reasons relating to ideology, organisation and scale,

intermediary organisations are able to reach the grassroots levels and connect them to the public and private sectors. The success of these organisations relies mainly in two reasons. First, they are not perceived as a political threat, which allows them to move between sectors without being attached to any of them. Second, they are not attached to political restrictions (Moser, 1989), such as electoral terms or political will. Because of their connection to all sectors, intermediary organisations must be able to *speak everyone's language*, that is, to get along with technical engineering, planning and legal backgrounds, as well as with local community groups, among others (Steil & Connolly, 2009).

4.1.2 Classification in accordance to their relation to their power over decision-making

Another way for classifying stakeholders is in accordance to their power over the decision-making process. Following this logic, Straus (2002) identifies four different groups:

1. Those with the formal power to **make** a decision. These are the people who have the authorization to make final and binding decisions. The inclusion of these stakeholders is crucial so that the decisions are not ignored by formal institutions.

2. Those with the power to **block** a decision. These kind of stakeholders may or not be formal decision-makers, but can block or delay the implementation of a decision.

3. Those **affected** by the decision. This group usually comprises the largest of the mentioned categories. These people may take on a passive role (voluntarily or forcibly) due to lack of power, influence, information, or expertise. But this situation may be reversed by redistribution of power and roles.

4. Those **with relevant information and expertise**. Sufficient knowledge is fundamental to make wise decisions. Outside experts are sometimes included to bring more content and process. These include local or international (technical) advisors and consultants, academia and civil society organisations.

To these categories, and taking into account the context of the case studies later exposed, a new one may be added to the list:

5. Those with power to **influence** a decision. This group may include all the above categories mentioned above. However, some actors could not entirely fit in them. This category therefore refers to those able either to transform the previously made decisions or to exercise pressure in decision-making processes using legal or illegal means.

5. Challenges and Obstacles for Public Participation

In order to transform urban planning practices and styles, learning to read the politics of a place is an essential skill. This involves understanding the context of current practices at

both, the local and broader structural levels. Although traditional routines and styles seem to be firmly embedded in the system, it is important to remember that they are a response of internal and external forces (Healey, 1997). To be able to distinguish the directions in which they move is crucial to explore the ways in which planning outcomes might be improved and government processes and structures might be transformed (Lane, 2003, p. 363).

This chapter accounts for some of the challenges and obstacles found when introducing participatory practices in urban planning decision-making, and would serve as the framework to analyse the current challenges participation mechanisms face in the selected case study.

5.1 Top-down, technocratic planning tradition

In general terms, Latin American cities have followed a traditional or rational model of planning, seen as an expert-driven technocratic activity leaving social aspects as secondary in the scale of importance for a project's success (Moser, 1989) (Irazábal, 2009). This technofunctionalist approach tends to de-politicize community work and to routinely diminish and avoid matters of social justice. Participation is understood as a process of expert-driven consultations with local stakeholders, and used as a way to legitimize the view of the experts. Most of the times, participants are recruited through community groups and filtered by their ideology. As a result, participants tend to be similar or what experts were looking for. These kind of top-down structures are often postured as democratic and used to advertise in the mainstream media as stories of successful community participation. This traditional model has plenty of advantages for authorities, as its neutrality and efficiency erases conflict. However, this model gives little place for diversity and critical analyses of power relations, and has little potential to ensure social and environmental sustainable practices (Fraser, 2005).

Nevertheless, in the last decades of the 20th century there was a wave of national democratization and decentralization in Latin American countries, leading to demands for more inclusion in place-making processes and determination of the future of cities. The traditional model of planning has been gradually displaced by a more collaborative planning model. Participatory planning thus has become more popular in Latin American cities. However, there is still a need for more mechanisms to ensure the inclusion of participation in decision-making processes, in both medium and long term planning (Irazábal, 2009).

5.2 Learn to Participate

Not only because of historical and political-economic reasons participation is hard to grasp. In the complexity of human and inter-personal relationships, the ability to participate

is acquired throughout life. In other words, participation is also a *learning attitude* (Romero & Mesías, 2004, p. 39). This learning attitude requires both, power-holders and citizens, to have “*a mindset of openness and inclusion, as well as trust in the process of collaboration*” (Straus, 2002, p. 39).

Professionals and decision-makers, are accustomed to power and hold on to a technical or methodological position, making a clear distinction between them and the other stakeholders, most of the times claiming more knowledge and expertise on urban development procedures. A re-learning process is necessary to insert this group in participative processes (Romero & Mesías, 2004). Citizens, on the other hand, often confuse participation with reacting or simply opposing to urban projects, rather than proposing new ideas for more appropriate goals and future action. Accommodating the diverse interests and opinions into alternative urban visions and plans, in contrast to a narrow attitude of crying out individual and uncomprehensive demands, requires commitment and also to learn how to best participate (Davidoff, 1965).

5.3 Politicization

In places with sharp social inequalities, participatory practices can prove susceptible to manipulation by power-holders (Irazábal, 2009). In Mexico, public participation has been largely used by public agencies as a mean of legitimizing the political system, as well as a mechanism for gaining votes or for ensuring compliance with current decision-making structures (Gilbert & Ward, 1984).

Leaders or political parties may find the opportunity in participatory processes for maximizing electoral advantage, especially around election days. This can be obtained by two methods (Gilbert & Ward, 1984):

1. Co-optation. It happens when a group is led by its leader to formally affiliate with a supra-local institution. This could have positive outcomes, as the leader could be the bridge between the grassroots level and public institutions. However, there is also a great risk that the leader does this task for personal gain. Political parties and government institutions may be also willing to co-opt leaders for extending their influence over neighbourhoods to which otherwise they could not reach.
2. Clientelism. In contrast to co-optation, clientelism entails an informal arrangement of personal exchanges of resources between actors of unequal status. In this method, the leader of a community maintains personal relationships with power-holders who control the resources, also with the possible aim of gaining personal benefits.

The use of these methods over time has developed an attitude of apathy among low-

income communities, and a sense of impracticability of challenging the status-quo. They also “*undermine and suppress community autonomy and reduce active participation*” (Gilbert & Ward, 1984, p. 774).

5.4 Misuse of terms

It is very common that practitioners often refer as public participation to processes of information gathering and consultation. They argue these processes allow them to make more informed decisions with regard to residents’ needs (Calderón, 2013). However, several authors refer to these practices as forms of pseudo- or non-participation, because the decision-making power remains in the practitioners in charge of the process. Arnstein (1969) and Guaraldo (1996) describe information and consultation as levels of tokenism. They consist in a one-way flow of information with no chance for citizens to give feedback or to negotiate. During these processes, citizens may have the chance to hear and to be heard but their views will be ignored by the power-holders, having no real influence in the outcomes of the process.

5.5 Representativeness

Especially when working at a local level, communities are often perceived as socially homogeneous places, also parallel with a romanticized idea that *the poor* will automatically organise themselves. It is fundamental to understand the economic, political and social heterogeneity that exists at all levels (Moser, 1989). People build diverse systems of meaning and ways of acting, they live in different social and symbolic worlds even they share the same place. This results in a difference on how they experience, value, and use space. Such differences raise conflicts and matters of domination and subordination. Space, as the product of social relations, is most likely to be conflicting and unequal (Calderón, 2013). Therefore, it is crucial to recognise that space involves different groups with different values, and that a spatial area does not automatically or necessarily constitutes a community.

Deeply related to this social complexity is the matter of how to represent the different visions and needs complex socio-spatial relations entail. Representativeness may be defined and approached in several ways. However, taking into account the scope of this thesis, only two kinds of categorisation will be described: quantitative and qualitative representativeness.

Quantitative representativeness aims to create a statistically correct image of the public to be represented. This type is often referred as a *microcosmic representation* as it intends to create a sub-group which proportionally refers to the frequency of characteristics present in population, such as sex, income, education, religious belief, or political attitudes. Qualitative representativeness, by its part, requires that the created sub-group includes the

full spectrum of the relevant characteristic of population, without taking into account if it matches with the quantitative distribution in the selected population (Hainz, Bossert, & Strech, 2016).

These two kinds are used differently as they have different properties. A quantitative representative group is often used to know the frequency of attitudes or opinions among the general population, inferred from the attitudes and opinions of this sub-group. By its part, a qualitative representative group should be used when the aim is to ensure the inclusion of people whose characteristics are found with a lower frequency in general population. These people would probably not be included in a quantitative representative group, leaving behind their views, experiences, and discourses (Hainz, Bossert, & Strech, 2016). In urban planning participatory processes, several authors e.g. Denters & Klok (2010) and Allen (1998) have found the representation of the wider range of discursive positions within society has had better results in the success of projects in terms of efficacy, acceptance, and satisfaction. Qualitative representativeness thus lowers the concern of selectivity and elitism involved in decision-making processes, as socially marginal groups are represented in the decision-making group.

5.6 Blame the protocol

Selecting which participatory method is to be used relies on the goals that want to be achieved and the type of public that is going to be involved (Calderón, 2013). However, whichever the selected method, there is always the risk that the participation tools and mechanisms implemented limit or corrupt participation by the very format they are designed by. This risk comes specially when designers of participatory methods are not aware or decide to ignore the abovementioned power structures that hinder equal possibility of involvement in decision-making processes, without critically reflecting and “*understanding the deeper determinants of technical and social change*” (Cook & Kothari, 2001, p. 39). The designers thus may lower or restrain the vision and criticality of the process in order to not disturb the status quo. By doing so, the consequences would be either reproducing the existing structures of power, disguising unacknowledged leadership under the argument of non-hierarchy, or reinforcing the existing power structures. Thereby, citizens may be part of participatory processes but would have no real influence in the outcomes (Palmås & von Busch, 2015).

The risk relies in mainly two actions. The first one is called *translation* and happens when, in the course of the participatory process, the original goals are displaced through successive enrolments. In a process of translation, many people become losers, causing their original objectives to be significantly marginalized. The second one is called *drift* and takes place when some voices are treated as *noise* and are filtered out. In urban participatory processes, conceived as “*a chain of sequential data exchanges, each link is governed by desires of receiver, implying that the non-desire is treated as noise*” (Palmås & von Busch,

2015, p. 241).

As mentioned before, consensus building is about reducing the amount of arguments and opinions and merge them into a *unitary public interest* in order to facilitate decision-making. The concern is the manner in which this consensus is reached. Translation and drift could facilitate that the material forms of participation (that is, the methods, the *protocol*) derive into micro-power tools for reproducing the current structure. In this case, the problem turns to rely not in human culprits but in the material forms of collaboration. The planners of the participatory processes may have not consciously taken an ideological line, but *merely followed the protocol* (Palmås & von Busch, 2015).

However, although one could not blame practitioners for the consequences of the selected processes, they do need to be careful about not falling into “*the naivety of assumptions about the authenticity of motivations and behaviour in participatory processes; how the language of empowerment masks real concern for managerialist effectiveness; the quasi-religious associations of participatory rhetoric and practice; and how an emphasis on the micro level of intervention can obscure, and indeed sustain, broader macro-level inequalities and injustice*” (Cook & Kothari, 2001, p. 14).

5.7 Regain trust

A large history of bureaucratic, authoritarian, and politicised government forms has generated indifference and apathy among society. Credibility on participatory processes has been undermined, as people do not trust that these processes would develop into improvement for their neighbourhoods and cities. Therefore, to transform this situation it is necessary to generate credibility and regain trust in honest, efficient and democratic processes. For that, it is crucial to design and initiate instruments and behaviours that show genuine interest in the involvement of different stakeholders in urban decision-making. Specifically, local administrations need to promote institutionalized participation and to support autonomous social participation. Public participation would be possible as long as an environment of trust and tolerance is created (Bylaw 119, 2008, p. 3).

Section 2: Case Study

The case study selected for this thesis is Leon, a two-million-inhabitant city located in the central part of Mexico. Leon is the largest city belonging to the State of Guanajuato and the seventh most populated city in the country (INEGI, 2015). As most Mexican cities, municipal management in Leon has been characterized by spending the public budget according to the needs that were appearing or that were detected, based on subjective and changing interpretations. The decisions about the implementation of projects, programs, policies and actions have been typically defined by small political groups and power-holders (Sotelo Barroso & Castrejón, 2002). Many of these tendencies abide, however, this management style has been changing over the years. Since the foundation of the Municipal Planning Institution in 1996, the city included the strategic planning model as guideline for the development of the municipality. Thereby, the city aimed at *“establishing dynamic consensus and agreement mechanisms among the different social groups and territorial scales, transforming the city in a long-term common strategic project”* (IMPLAN, 2009, p. 44). Since then, different public participation mechanisms and processes have been established in different planning processes of the city.

This section accounts for the current mechanisms and instruments of public participation involved in urban planning. The mechanisms have been divided into two categories: formal and informal. The formal mechanisms refer to the ones included within legal instruments and government institutions. The non-formal mechanisms refer to the ones derived from initiatives of civil society. The formal mechanisms are divided as well into participatory structures and participatory exercises. Both, the participatory structures and exercises will be described including their objectives, actors involved in each of them, and their tasks and role in urban planning decision-making processes. By its part, the non-formal mechanisms account for two initiatives from organized civil society that have had an important stake in urban planning processes. A description of their objectives, methodologies, and outcomes will be presented.

1. Formal mechanisms of public participation: The Municipal Planning System

In 2001, the Government of the State of Guanajuato decided to design a system which could bring more knowledge, tools, and methods for municipal development planning, also including public participation and more integral execution and evaluation mechanisms (Sotelo Barroso & Castrejón, 2002). The Municipal Planning System (MPS) was then concretized and included in the Municipal Organic Law of the State of Guanajuato. This Law defined the MPS as *“a permanent mechanism of comprehensive, strategic, and participative planning, through which the Municipality and the organized civil society establish coordination processes for the development of the municipality”* (Decree 278, 2012, p. 28).

Each municipality within the State is now obliged to create their own Municipal Planning System.

The elements of the MPS established by the Municipal Organic Law are divided into a) structures and b) planning instruments. The structures are (Decree 278, 2012, p. 28):

- A structure of coordination. This will be the municipal planning department. In León, this body is called the Municipal Planning Institution (IMPLAN by its acronym in Spanish).
- A structure of participation. This structure is called the Planning Council of Municipal Development (COPLADEM by its acronym in Spanish).

By its part, the planning instruments are:

- A Municipal Development Plan
- A Municipal Program of Urban Development and Ecological Territorial Structuring²
- A Municipal Government Program
- And the different urban projects developed by the IMPLAN



Figure 1 Municipal Planning System. Own creation with information from (Decree 278, 2012).

Within these elements, different participation mechanisms are embedded. The type of participation mechanism is defined by the type of element. In general, it can be said that the MPS structures entail *participatory structures*. For the sake of this thesis, by participatory

² There is no mechanism of public participation included for its elaboration. Therefore, it will not be included in this thesis.

structure is understood as more permanent participatory strategies, which take the form of citizen groups, committees or councils. On the other hand, the planning instruments include *participatory exercises*, which can be defined as temporary participatory practices that last only for the creation of the instruments.

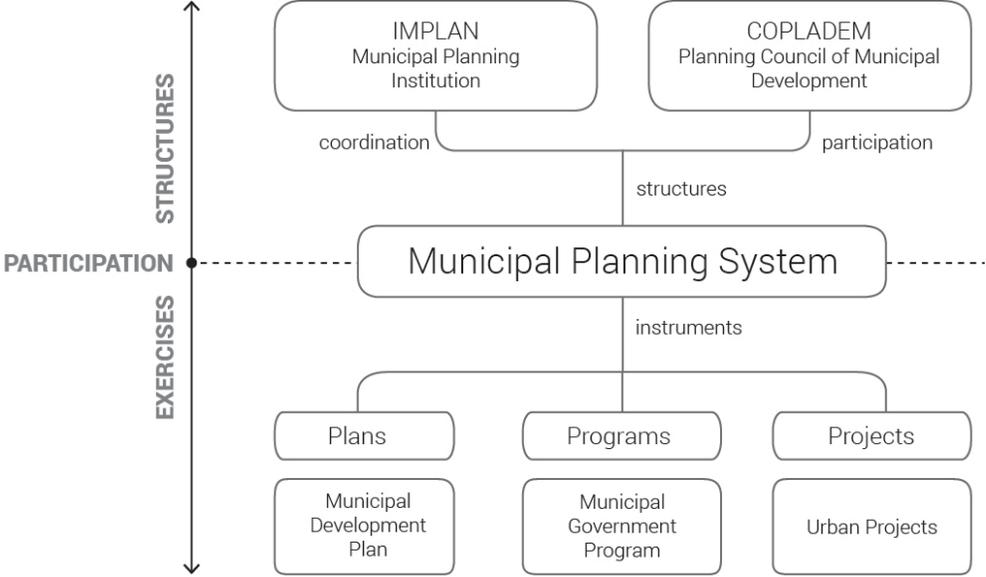


Figure 2 Division of participation mechanisms into a) structures and b) exercises (own creation)

1.1 Participatory Structures

As mentioned before, the MPS structures, namely the Municipal Planning Institution (IMPLAN) and the Planning Council of Municipal Development (COPLADEM), entail

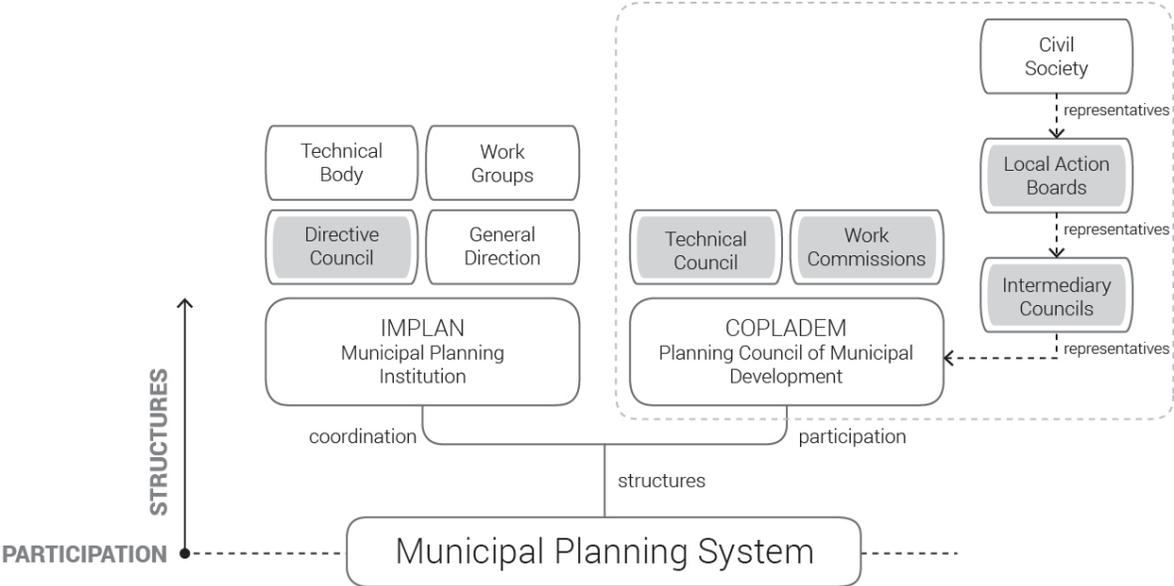


Figure 3 Formal participatory structures (own creation)

participatory structures. This section will describe more in depth this structures, how are they conformed, and their objectives and tasks.

1.1.1 Municipal Planning Institution (IMPLAN)

The Municipal Planning Institution (IMPLAN) is the institution in charge of coordinating the MPS in León. This institution was founded in 1994 as a decentralized public body. Since then, it has oriented and assessed the municipality in the urban planning of the city. It is integrated by a General Direction, a *Directive Council*, a Technical Body, and different work groups and commissions (IMPLAN, 2019).

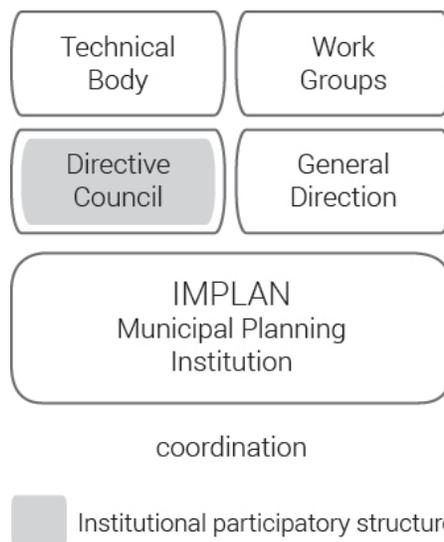


Figure 4 IMPLAN structure (own creation)

1.1.1.1 Directive Council

The Directive Council is the *participatory structure* of the IMPLAN and is considered the “*highest authority of the Institute*” (Reglamento del Instituto Municipal de Planeación, 1999, p. 9). The following are the mandatory activities of this Council (IMPLAN, 2019):

- Review, analyse and approve the guidelines for the city’s development
- Review and, in its case, validate the technical design of the instruments of the MPS
- Propose a strategic project portfolio of investment
- Approve the plans of the institute
- Conform the Technical Commissions
- Revise the financial states and monitor the right implementation of the budget
- Revise and approve the annual expenses and income budget of the institute
- Name the General Director

The decisions of the Directive Council are made using a voting system. In case of a tie, the president of the council has the last word. The members of the Directive Council, as stated by the internal procedure of the IMPLAN (1999) are:

- The members of the Urban Development Commission
- The president of the Directive Council of the water company of the city
- 14 citizen councillors
- A representative from the Consultative Council of Economic Development of the city



Figure 5 Current Directive Council of the IMPLAN (IMPLAN, 2019)

The citizen councillors are the key stone of this council, as for the IMPLAN citizen consultation is essential to *“know the feelings and opinion of the social sectors, since through these perspectives we give support to the development strategies of the Municipal Planning System”* (IMPLAN, 2019). Although the IMPLAN website states that citizen councillors are selected through a citizen consultation (IMPLAN, 2019), the internal procedure of the IMPLAN (1999, p. 10) states that they will be selected by the Municipality: *“the Municipal president will designate them directly”*. Moreover, this procedure also states that *“the [current] members of the Directive Council have the possibility to propose the Municipality the profile of the [next] citizen councillors”*. In practice, they are selected by the city Major him or herself and it is possible to observe that they all share similar professional backgrounds, moving between architects, civil engineers, and businessmen. In addition, seven out of the fourteen citizen councillors own a construction company, and five out of fourteen have a directive position in an economic-related board of the city (see Appendix).

1.1.2 Participation structure of the Municipal Planning Institution

The participation structure of the MPS is called the Planning Council of Municipal Development (further referred as COPLADEM in this document), and it emanates from a structure of neighbourhoods’ leadership (Bylaw 119, 2008):

1. In the first level, each neighbourhood selects representatives to take part in the *local action boards*

2. The city is then divided by sub-sectors, from which some representatives of the local action boards are selected
3. Finally, from these intermediary leaders the representatives that will conform the COPLADEM will be elected

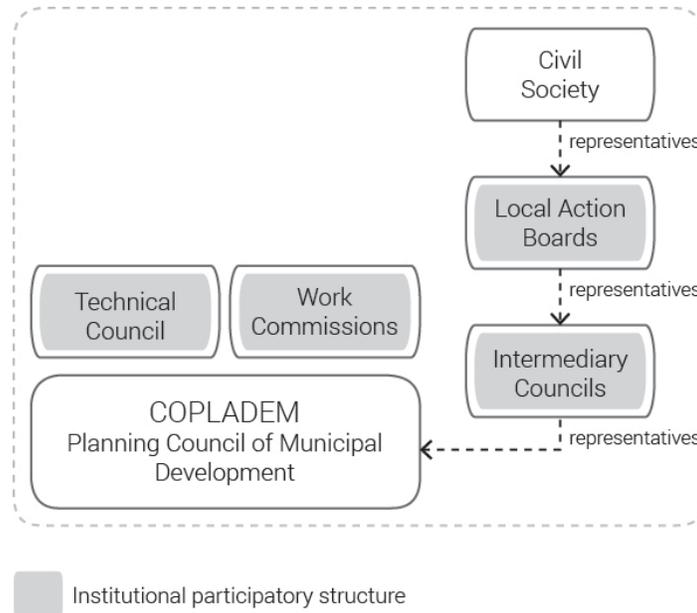


Figure 6 Neighbourhood's leadership structure (own creation)

1.1.2.1 Local action boards

The figure of the municipal local action boards (*comités de colonos*) is described in the “Bylaw for the Integration of Citizen Participation Organizations”, passed in 2008, which is in turn based on the Guanajuato Constitution and the Municipal Organic Law. This bylaw points out the forms, means, and procedures of citizen participation and its cooperation and collaboration with the municipal administration. The main form of participation is the local action boards. They are the formal most direct link between authority and citizens, defined as “bodies of citizen representation, participation and social collaboration in the management of demands and proposals of general interest to a neighbourhood” (Bylaw 119, 2008, p. 6).

The Department of Social Development is the one in charge of validating the organizational figure of the local action boards and to establish their coordination and financial mechanisms. The *promoters*, hired by this Department, are the individuals in charge of promoting, constituting and monitoring the boards in the neighbourhoods.

Local action boards have legal personality and are conformed by a group of democratically elected neighbours. Each neighbourhood should have one committee, although neighbourhoods with higher population density are allowed to have two. They must

do their job without any political or religious implications. Their main tasks are (Bylaw 119, 2008):

- Serve as a representative body of a specific neighbourhood
- Make known to authorities the different citizen demands
- Safeguard the goods and public spaces of the neighbourhood
- Promote the involvement of all inhabitants of their neighbourhoods in the realization of a Community Development Plan
- Realize a work plan and a report of activities and results each year
- Conduct interim meetings every 15 days
- Establish communication mechanisms through which they can inform neighbours of governmental actions

Assemblies are the specific mechanisms by which the local action boards call for citizen participation within the neighbourhood. Agreements made in the assemblies are validated through a voting process, in which 50% plus 1 of the registered participants must agree (Bylaw 119, 2008).

The city of León has 1,646 neighbourhoods officially recognized. By 2012, there were 390 boards, in which 2,397 persons participated, with an average of 6 persons per board (Góngora Cervantes, 2013, p. 223). By 2016, there were 548 local action boards, from which 96 were renovated, 76 suffered a restructuring process, and 61 were renovating their members (esloCotidiano, 2016). By 2018, the number of local action boards increased to 599 (Zamora, 2018).

1.1.2.1.1 Gender-related issues within local action boards

An important feature of these boards is that their members are, in its majority, women. A study conducted in 2012 by Góngora Cervantes (2013) revealed that 62.6% of the boards' members were female. However, the number of women participating at these boards decreases abruptly in front of male leadership when moving to the next levels. In the final level, the COPLADEM, there was only one female representative.

A possible explanation relies in the perception of local action boards as a primary decision-making public space, in which a strong relationship household-community can be established. Therefore, the presence of women at this level does not threaten their gender roles, as their participation is not seen as leadership rather as a service addressed towards others, according to the socio-cultural education of their gender. Even though, the scope of neighbourhood leadership provides women, more than men, with an opportunity to influence community issues within the framework of the *ethics of care*, that is, within the private space that allows them to improve the situation of their family and the immediate

context. However, it is evident that women, along with other social minorities, are still a focus of concern in the process of democratization (Góngora Cervantes, 2013).

1.1.2.2 Planning Council of Municipal Development (COPLADEM)

The COPLADEM is a consultative body, auxiliary to the Municipality in the planning of the city. It is a body of mixed composition (government - citizen representatives) organized into two structures: The Technical Council and the Work Commissions.

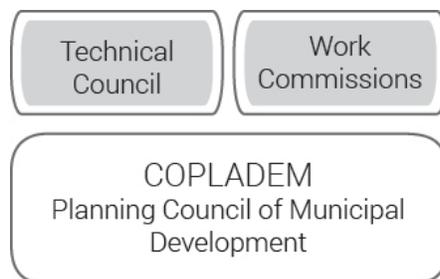


Figure 7 Structure of COPLADEM (own creation)

1.1.2.2.1 Technical Council

The Technical Council is conformed by (IMPLAN, 2019):

- The Municipal President³
- The general director of the IMPLAN
- The president of the Environment Department
- Eight representatives from civil society⁴
- The general director of the Social Development Department
- The general director of the Rural Development Department
- The general director of the Public Infrastructure Department

The main tasks of the Technical Council are (IMPLAN, 2019):

- Validate the proposals of programs, projects and municipal government actions originated from citizen and institutional consultations
- Participate in the process of elaboration of planning municipal instruments
- Implement mechanisms of consultation and social participation in the planning processes

³ The Municipal President is also president of the Technical Council

⁴ Representatives from the local action boards. Each one of them will be part of one work commission.

- Evaluate the achievement, execution and impacts of the planning municipal instruments and communicate their results
- Make proposals relative to the city's development

Another activity of this Council is to allocate federal financial resources to priority projects within the neighbourhoods, especially the Fund for Social Municipal Infrastructure. This fund is one of the most important incomes for municipalities, which corresponds to more than 30% of the available resources of municipalities and almost half of the expenditures of public administrations in public infrastructure (Góngora Cervantes, 2013, p. 223).

The Technical council should meet at least once every three months. The agreements will be made through voting, in which 50% plus one of the participants must agree. In case of a tie, the Municipal President will have the last word. The agreements made will be captured in a written acknowledgment and will be published in the IMPLAN website (Sotelo Barroso & Castrejón, 2002).



Figure 8 Current COPLADEM Technical Council (IMPLAN, 2019)

1.1.2.2.2 Work Commissions

Currently, the work commissions are divided into 8 topics: Infrastructure and equipment for development, agricultural development, education and culture, health and social assistance, sports and recreation, economic development and tourism, safety and transport, and environment and ecology. Each work commission is integrated by (Reglamento del Consejo de Planeación de Desarrollo Municipal, 2013):

1. A representative from civil society integrating the Technical Council
2. A secretary. This person is part of the IMPLAN staff and will be in charge of coordinate and facilitate the work commission's meetings, as well as to prepare the minutes of the meetings.
3. The public servants specialists in the work commission's topic.

4. The specialists, technicians, researchers, public servants, or any person that the coordinator determines that could add to the functioning of the commission. They will be able to take part but will not have any power of decision-making, as they are not involved in voting procedures.

The work commissions should meet at least once a month. Each commission has the following tasks (Sotelo Barroso & Castrejón, 2002):

- Design and coordinate the implementation of participation mechanisms to gather the perception of society with respect of the topic the commission is in charge of
- Systematize and interpret the gathered information
- Permanently keep information updated
- Participate in the elaboration of investment proposals
- Promote the implementation of evaluation tools for the impact of the plans and programs
- Identify non-profit institutions and organisms dedicated to research and planning, with the purpose of integrate them to the work commissions

1.1.3 In short: urban planning decision-making flow including participatory structures

To sum up, the participatory structures included in the Municipal Planning System are the local action boards, the COPLADEM (work commissions and technical council), and the Directive Council of the IMPLAN. Their roles and activities related to decision-making within urban planning are summed up in the following table:

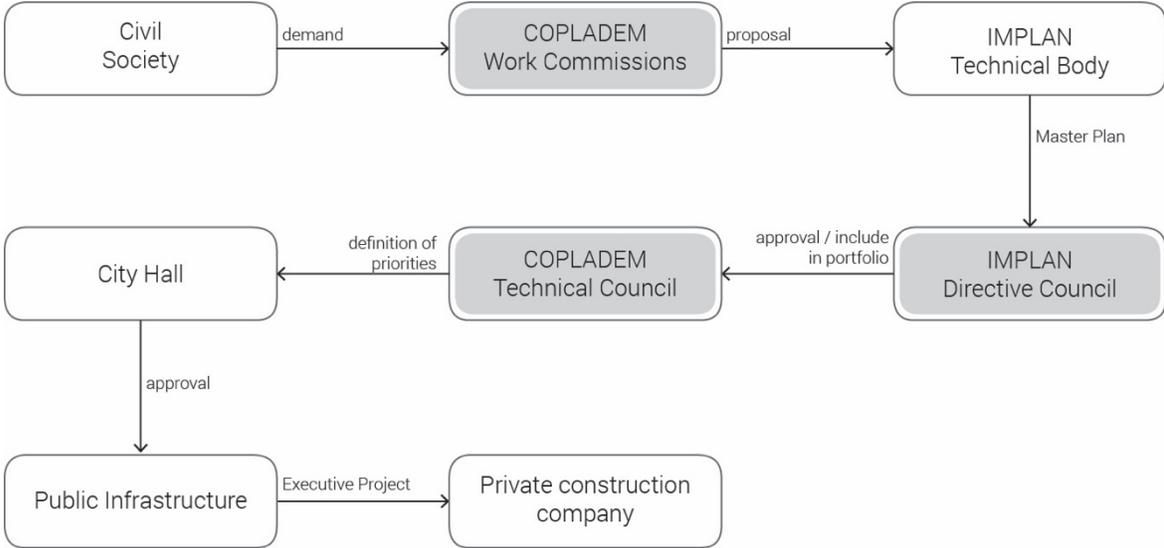
Local Action Boards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Serve as a representative body of a specific neighbourhood - Make known to authorities the different citizen demands - Establish communication mechanisms through which they can inform neighbours of governmental actions
COPLADEM Work Commissions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participate in the elaboration of investment proposals - Identify non-profit institutions and organisms dedicated to research and planning, with the purpose of integrate them to the work commissions
COPLADEM Technical Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Validate the proposals of programs, projects and municipal government actions originated from citizen and institutional consultations - Implement mechanisms of consultation and social participation in the planning processes - Make proposals relative to the city development
IMPLAN Directive Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review, analyse and approve the guidelines for the city's development - Review and, in its case, validate the technical design of the instruments of the MPS - Propose a strategic project portfolio of investment - Approve the plans of the IMPLAN - Revise and approve the annual expenses and income budget of the institute

Table 1 Roles and activities of formal participatory structures (own creation)

In order to better understand the activities of each institution and their role in the decision-making process, a practical example might help. This example also includes other decision-makers involved apart from the abovementioned participatory structures:

A proposal for building more and better bike lanes emerged from a civil society organization. This demand was transferred to the Safety and Transport work commission of the COPLADEM. The work commission worked on a general proposal, which was then transferred to the technical body of the IMPLAN, who made a draft of the Bike Lane Master Plan, setting the guidelines of its concept and design. Then, the Directive Council of the IMPLAN approved the Master Plan and included it in the portfolio of investment of the then municipal administration. The project was then delivered to the Technical Council of the COPLADEM, who decided which sections of the Master Plan were to be prioritized. Later on, the project was transferred to the City Hall, who approved the project and then passed it to the Department of Public Infrastructure, which made the executive project. This Department then hired a construction company, who built the bike lanes.

Therefore, the decision-making flow may be represented in the following diagram (Figure 9):



■ Institutional participatory structure

Figure 9 Example of decision-making flow in which participatory structures and other decision-makers are integrated (own creation)

From the previous example and information about the participatory structures, it is possible to draw a general decision-making flow (figure 10), including all actors that are involved in the process:

From civil society some representatives will take part in the local action boards. Within these boards, the representatives will gather the different demands and concerns emanating from the neighbourhoods. Then, some of these representatives will be selected to go to the Intermediary Councils. From these councils, eight representatives will be part of the COPLADEM. There, the work commissions will divide the collected demands into different topics and make proposals. These proposals will then be transferred to the technical body of the IMPLAN, which will transform these proposals into plans, programs, or projects. The outcomes will be passed to the Directive Council of the IMPLAN, which will approve them or not. If they approve, the plan, project or program will be included in the portfolio of the administration. Then, the Technical Council of the COPLADEM will define which parts of the plan, project or program are to be prioritized, and how the budget will be distributed between the selected ones. The decision will be transferred to the City Hall, which will approve or not. Then, the City Hall will pass it to the corresponding Department, depending on the field of execution (public infrastructure, social development, environment, etc.). The selected Department will draw an executive project, which will be turned in to an assigned executor. These executors can be private (e.g. construction companies, consultancies, firms) or public (e.g. public universities).

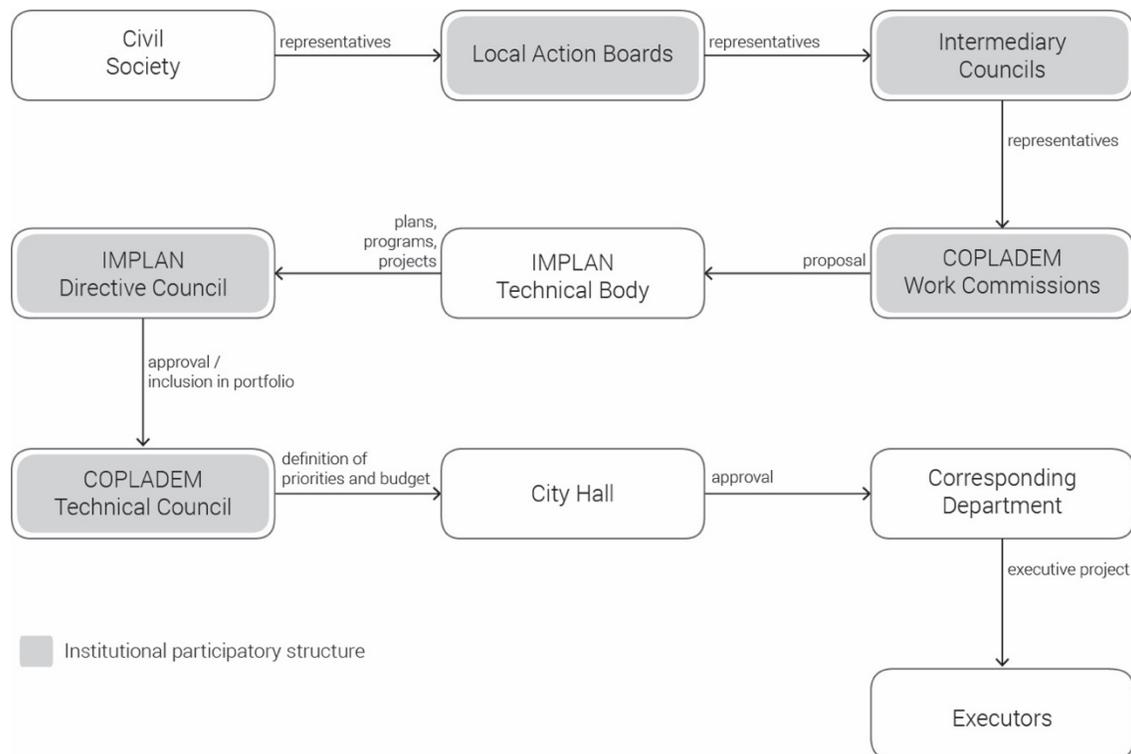


Figure 10 General decision-making flow involving participatory structures and other decision-makers (own creation)

It is important to highlight that this is only one of the existing decision-making flows that deal with urban planning. However, the others do not include public participation mechanisms and are therefore not included in this thesis.

1.2 Participatory exercises

The planning instruments of the Municipal Planning System are the Municipal Development Plan, the Municipal Government Program, and punctual urban projects. All these instruments include *participatory exercises*, which will be further described in the next pages.

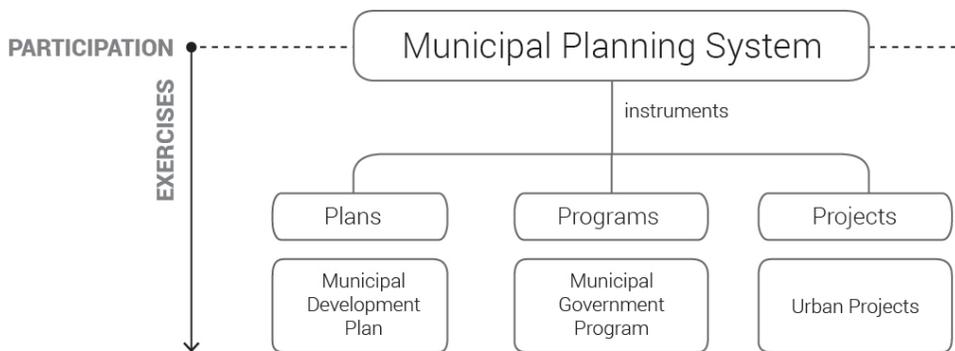


Figure 11 Planning instruments of the Municipal Planning System (own creation)

1.2.1 Plans

A plan, in this context, is understood as an organised set of goals, objectives, strategies, means and resources to achieve the development of a determined area or a sector of society. The objectives of a plan are set for mid and long-term, setting a vision for the city. They contain general purposes and objectives, strategies, and the public policies and legal regulations in which they rely (Sotelo Barroso & Castrejón, 2002).

1.2.1.1 Municipal Development Plan

The Municipal Development Plan aims to guide the development of the city in a long term, giving general guidelines to the actions of civil society and the municipal government. This plan is envisioned for at least 25 years and it must be evaluated and updated every 5 years, in accordance to national and state development plans (Decree 278, 2012). This plan contains a *diagnose, product of a participation process*; a prognosis of the future situation of the city; the objectives that would be followed in a long-term; the strategies that the municipality assumes; and the institutional responsibilities of the involved municipal departments (Sotelo Barroso & Castrejón, 2002).

1.2.1.1.1 Participatory diagnose

In 2013, the IMPLAN started the process for the creation of the Municipal Development Plan, calling it “Leon towards the Future. Vision 2040”. The realization of this plan followed a participatory methodology and has been the greatest participatory exercise done so far in terms of public coverage. This exercise included the elements and activities explained below (IMPLAN, 2015):

1. Orientation exercise for a strategic vision. This activity included three presentations involving the topics of economic development and competitiveness, public policies and urban security, and environment and ecological planning. These presentations were intended to set a first future vision in accordance to the *“major international trends to reach the territorial equilibrium following a sustainable development model”* (IMPLAN, 2015, p. 1).
2. Citizen consultation. Stated in the 44th article of the Guanajuato State Planning Law, this stage is intended to know the opinions and proposals of inhabitants (IMPLAN, 2015). The call was made through 2 local newspapers, a mailbox placed in the city hall, and a consultancy page in the IMPLAN website. In addition, 34 workshops took place in strategic locations (local action boards, rural districts, public spaces, and peripheral *poor* neighbourhoods). In these workshops, by using different participatory mechanisms, people were asked about their needs and expectancies for the future development of the city. 1,800 people participated in these workshops, from which: 1,500 were kids (9 to 12 years old), 222 were young people (12 to 29 years old), and 120 were seniors (above 60 years old).
3. Work Commissions. Each Work Commission of the IMPLAN met with the help of an external assessor to make a diagnose from the perspective of each sector and to define the objectives, strategies, and programmes for short, mid and long-terms. In this stage, workshops and interviews gathered 70 specialists and 50 public authorities, with the participation of one-thousand people.
4. International Urbanism Workshop. 24 international professionals in the fields of architecture, urbanism, landscape and engineering gathered with the objective of exploring new visions and focuses of territorial urban analysis (IMPLAN, 2015). Together public authorities, the workshop resulted in a set of strategies, programmes and actions to be included in the Municipal Development Plan.

5. A special participatory exercise was made for the historical city centre. Citizen councillors from the Consultative Council for the Protection and Promotion of Historic Heritage gathered to make an analysis of the city centre and the historic neighbourhoods of the city.

The process of final integration of the Municipal Development Plan consisted in a methodological-technical analysis to evaluate the consistency of the sectorial diagnoses and the participatory exercises, in order to conform the 2040 vision for the city. The results were narrowed down into a strategic diagnosis, which shows the key areas for the sustainable development of the city and the main challenges restraining it.

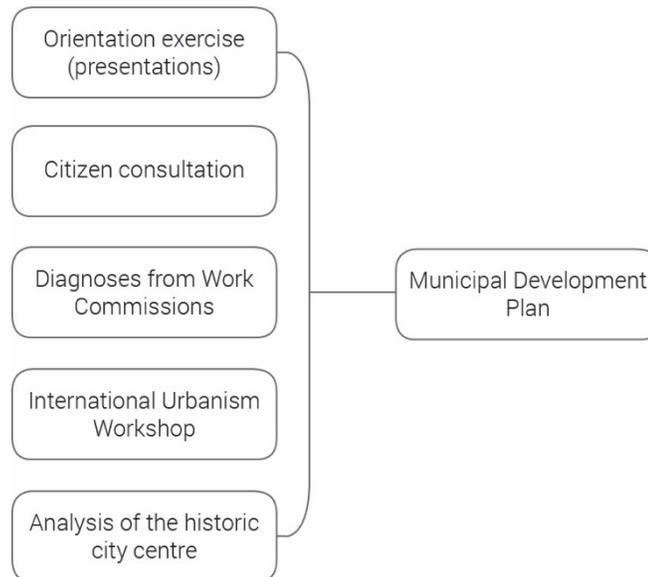


Figure 12 Inputs for the Municipal Development Plan (own creation)

1.2.2 Programs

A program is understood as *“a set of specific actions that seek to achieve a concrete impact over the social reality, in an organised way and with the tailored resources for those actions”* (Sotelo Barroso & Castrejón, 2002, p. 35). The length of programs is usually a short or mid-term.

1.2.2.1 Municipal Government Program

The Municipal Government Program contains the specific objectives and strategies of the ongoing municipal administration and should be aligned to the Municipal Development Plan. The Municipal Organic Law establishes that this program is to be elaborated by the IMPLAN, in collaboration with the different Departments of the municipal

administration and the COPLADEM. The final document will be then approved by the City Hall and be valid for three years (Decree 278, 2012).

Several were the inputs for the elaboration of the latest Municipal Government Program 2018-2021 (IMPLAN, 2019):

1. Proposals from the IMPLAN Work Commissions, which were already included in the Project Portfolio of the administration.
2. Programs and actions proposed by the different Departments of the municipal administration.
3. Proposals defined by the Major during the electoral campaign.
4. Proposals from the COPLADEM.
5. Proposals from social and private sectors.

Regarding the last point, the interviewee Primo García (see Appendix) mentioned there is no defined legal mechanism for the inclusion of the social and private sectors in the elaboration process of this program. However, last year (2018) an independent process took place in which four external actors gave recommendations in accordance to their concerns about the needs and development of the city. These external actors were: 1) the Coordination Business Council, 2) the Citizen Observatory, 3) the Iberoamericana University, and 4) FURA, an environmental NGO. Each actor made their recommendations in a separate way, through conferences or independent requests. The IMPLAN then gathered these recommendations and decided which ones were plausible to be included in the Municipal Government Program⁵.

The elaboration process followed the decision-making flow seen in figure 13:

⁵ No parameters were defined for this activity.

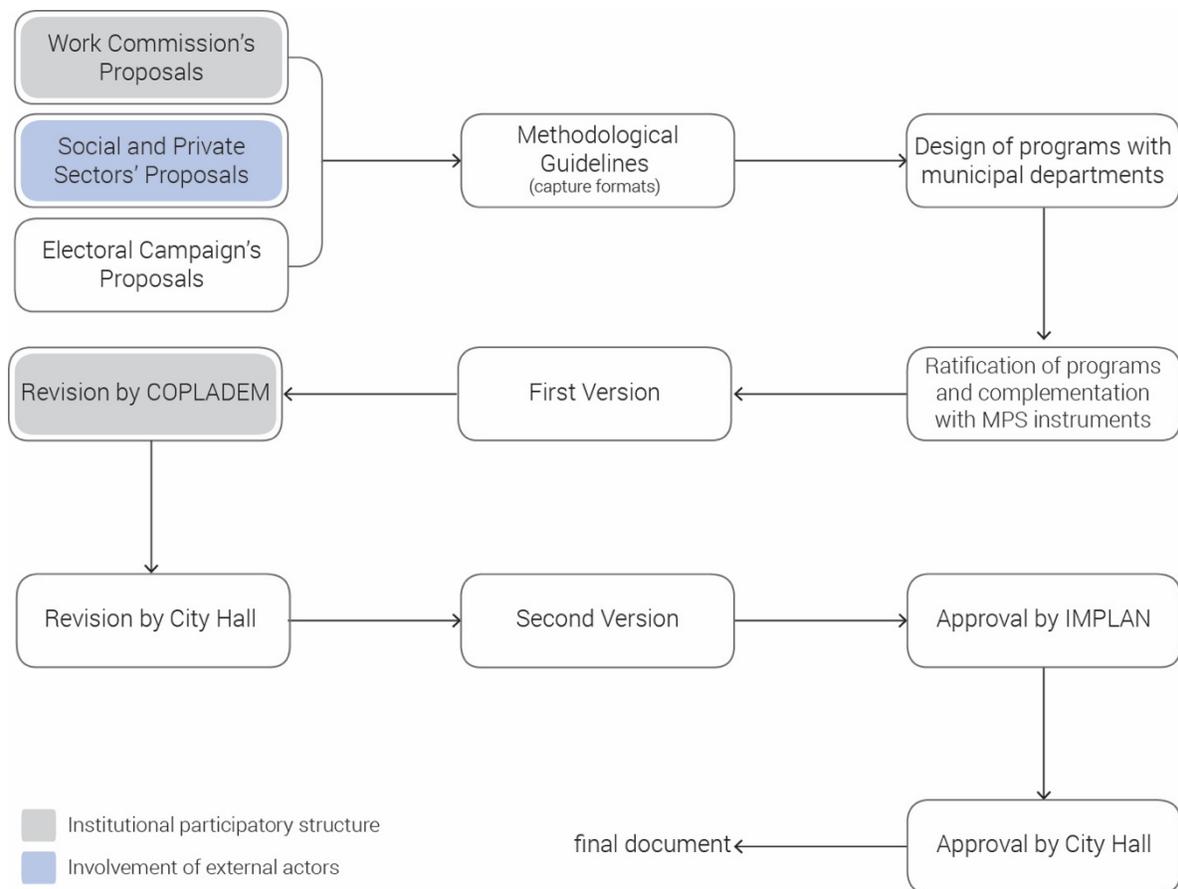


Figure 13 Decision-making flow of the Municipal Government Program (own creation)

1.2.3 Projects

Projects are the most concrete expression of plans and programs hence they have the highest degree of realization and specificity. Projects respond to the vision expressed by plans and their execution is accomplished in a short-term. They include the specific actions for execution, the steps to achieve it, the necessary budget for its realization, and the evaluation criteria for its impacts (Sotelo Barroso & Castrejón, 2002).

1.2.2.1 Public participation in urban projects

In the case of Leon, mechanisms or procedures for the integration of public participation in urban projects are not defined in any legal instrument. The inclusion of *social participation* and *participatory exercises* are vaguely mentioned in the Municipal Organic Law and the State's Constitution, but they do not describe any specific participation procedure. Therefore, the participatory exercises and activities included in the planning of urban projects are merely initiative of the IMPLAN, following a *moral compromise* with society.

The interviewee Primo García (see Appendix) mentioned the IMPLAN seeks to include civil society in the analysis stage of urban projects. Therefore, the punctual analyses are made through participative diagnosis, in which the IMPLAN, with help of the Social Development Department, calls the local action boards (mentioned previously in this section) to participate in working groups in order to know their problems and make proposals. These proposals, which stay in an *ideal* level, are taken by a consultant of the IMPLAN, who draws conceptual profiles of projects. These drafts are later integrated to the Work Commissions projects or to the Municipal Government Program.

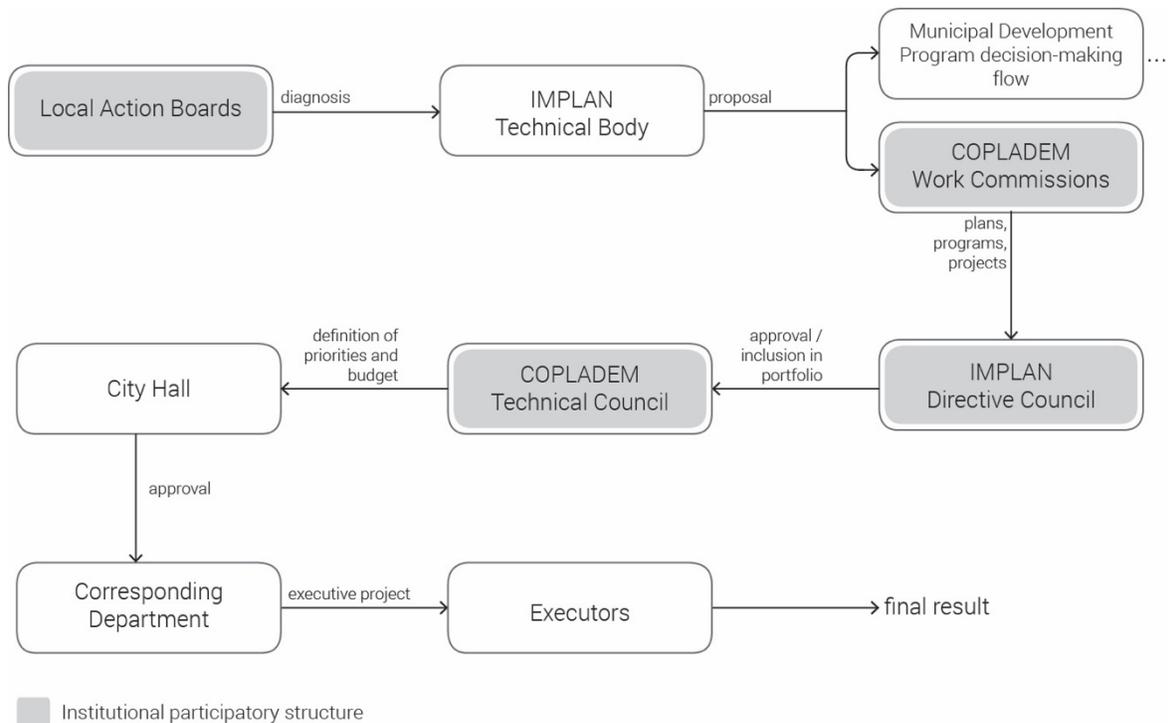


Figure 14 Decision-making flow of urban projects (own creation)

1.3 Publication and citizen consultation

It is important to notice that neither the decisions made by the participatory structures (IMPLAN and COPLADEM) nor the final instruments to be executed (plans, programs or urban projects) go through a process of publication or citizen consultation. The interviewees Jesús Sotelo, Ricardo Ibelles and Primo García (see Appendix) mentioned there is no legal figure that mentions the decisions reached ought to be published. Therefore, there is no collection of public opinion or instruments for citizens to express disagreement. The only way for civil society to *oppose* to the execution of a plan, program or project is the legal protection (*amparo*), which has to go through a court process.

2. Non-formal mechanisms of public participation

This chapter revises two initiatives from organized civil society that have had an important stake in urban planning processes. The first one, FURA, serves as an example of an organized group of civil society using the formal participation mechanisms presented in the first chapter of this section. Their experience shows the challenges and obstacles they have faced by doing so, helping to pragmatically point out the failures of these participation mechanisms. The second one, AUGE, was chosen because of its scope and work methodologies, which the author thinks are an example of good practices and may help to improve the formal decision-making flows presented before.

2.1 FURA

The Tree Saving Foundation (*Fundación Rescate Arbóreo*, FURA) is dedicated to the preservation, rescue and proper management of urban trees. In addition to the educational activities they perform, this NGO has been crucial in the development of the city as it has been positioned as a strong counter-institution in environmental matters. The information presented about this organization was extracted from the empirical research of this thesis, namely the interview conducted to Ricardo Ibelles, general director of FURA (see Appendix).

2.1.1 Inclusion in formal decision-making structures

FURA has been working in making proposals on how to improve the environmental state of the city. It was one of the four institutions which gave recommendations for the development of the Municipal Government Program, presenting 13 environmental proposals to the city hall (to see proposals: Zona Franca, 2018).

In addition, FURA currently takes part in three citizen councils of the city. Their position in these councils was gained thanks to their relation with a municipal councilmember (*regidor*), who used his influence to let them in. In these councils they are able to hold some decision-making power over environmental issues, however, they can only be part of them for three years. Also, the IMPLAN have invited the organization to several planning exercises, which usually entail citizen consultation processes in which different stakeholders are *heard*. An important fact about this exercises is that neither FURA or the other participants have seen the final products derived from these consultations.

2.1.2 Counter-reaction: Opposition to urban projects

FURA has had several experiences of opposition to urban projects which imply a hazard to the environment, especially trees. Their most recent mobilisation was against the

construction of a BRT terminal which involved cutting down 493 trees. The steps the process followed can be summarized in the next points:

1. FURA requested the IMPLAN the information about the project of the BRT terminal. This information was denied, arguing it was under a *reserve information system* which allowed the institution to keep it private for 5 years⁶. FURA had to call for the Transparency Law, which establishes that any information regarding environmental matters has to be public. After a legal process, the IMPLAN delivered the information to the NGO.
2. This information was made publish in social media by FURA, which had strong public reactions among civil society.
3. FURA developed a counter-proposal, which showed an option that did not entail the cutting of the trees.
4. The IMPLAN partly agreed and made another proposal which included a mitigation measure to compensate the trees that still this proposal was going to cut down. Both institutions agreed on it.
5. The terminal was built but the the mitigation measure was not executed. As there are no formal instruments within the MPS that bind the institution to execute it, FURA had to impose a legal demand so the agreements are enforced.

This example shows the general work methodology the NGO has followed several times in regard to the opposition to urban projects, and may be summarized in the following diagram:

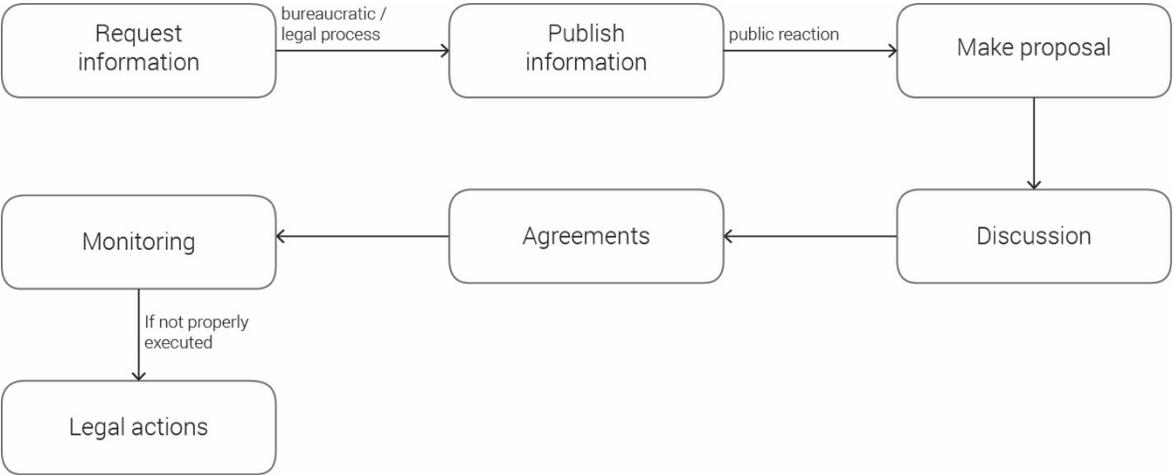


Figure 15 Work methodology of FURA when opposing to urban projects (own creation)

⁶ This system is not captured in any legal framework.

As observed, the main tools this NGO uses are: a) a *pressure dynamic*, with which they inform civil society about governmental projects and generate a public reaction, and b) legal actions, which need to be used as the urban planning system lacks of them.

FURA is an example of the many civil society organisations that have appeared in the last years. At an urban level, people has developed a more reactionary participation by themes of interest (green areas, mobility, gender, etc.). The usual action of these groups is opposition towards predatory projects and their methodologies resemble to the one used by FURA.

2.2 AUGÉ

Community Self-Management and Education (*Autogestión y Educación Comunitaria*, AUGÉ) is an NGO dedicated to community promotion. Their main objective is to offer tools and opportunities to people living in social exclusion, so that they can improve their situation through education and the development of their own potentialities. As the name of the NGO states, their methodologies rely in the concept of *self-management*. This concept entails trust in the abilities of others and respect towards their liberty: no one should decide over the actions and action-direction of others. Therefore, AUGÉ is an institution which invites urban dwellers to organize themselves, to learn and work to transform reality (AUGÉ, 2019).

AUGÉ works in the district of Las Joyas. This area is product of the agglomeration of 40 neighbourhoods that have been growing in an un-planned manner to the west of the city. It is estimated that nowadays more than 100 thousand people live there. Within the district of Las Joyas, AUGÉ runs diverse programs in the fields of education, health, culture and environment. The implemented projects seek to attend to the needs of communities, defined by the inhabitants through self-diagnoses facilitated by the NGO (AUGÉ, 2019). These self-diagnoses are seen by the organization as by-products. What really matters to them is the ability of communities to organize themselves and reach a common goal.

2.2.1 The Olla Park project

The NGO runs a program that specifically deals with urban planning. Since 2017, AUGÉ started the Program of Incidence in the Environment, which responded to the concern of inhabitants regarding the numerous spaces within the district that have not been urbanized and are place for crimes. The inhabitants' proposal was to gradually turn them into parks and recreational spaces (AUGÉ, 2019). This program involves the resolution of common problems through community organization, with the involvement of diverse municipal authorities and community members (AUGÉ, 2017). Currently, two undeveloped areas are going through this process. One of them is a brownfield which neighbours want to turn into *The Olla Park*. In this site, a school was intended to be built, however, the soil conditions

were not the optimal for this. AUGE then managed the city hall to change its land use to a green space. After achieving this, they started a community-driven process for the development of the park (AUGE, 2019). The methodology used for this program has followed the following steps:

1. Inhabitants of the district, specially the ones living close to the brownfield, were invited to take part in assemblies. During these exercises, the participants were asked to identify problems, to prioritise them and to generate proposals.
2. A specialist (landscape designer) worked in a participative design exercise along with the participants of the assemblies to make a conceptual design.
3. The result was then presented to the community, who were able to do some changes. The specialist adjusted the design. This cycle was done until the community fully agreed.
4. When the community approved the conceptual design, it was then delivered to the Public Infrastructure Department of the city, who made an executive project.
5. AUGE asked to see the project and presented it to the community. As it did not fulfil the expectations it was returned and asked the Department to change it. Again, this cycle was done until the community fully agreed.
6. The community, with the help of AUGE, has been monitoring the construction of the park and pointing out when something is missing or not done in a proper way.

The decision-making flow of this methodology can be seen in the following diagram:

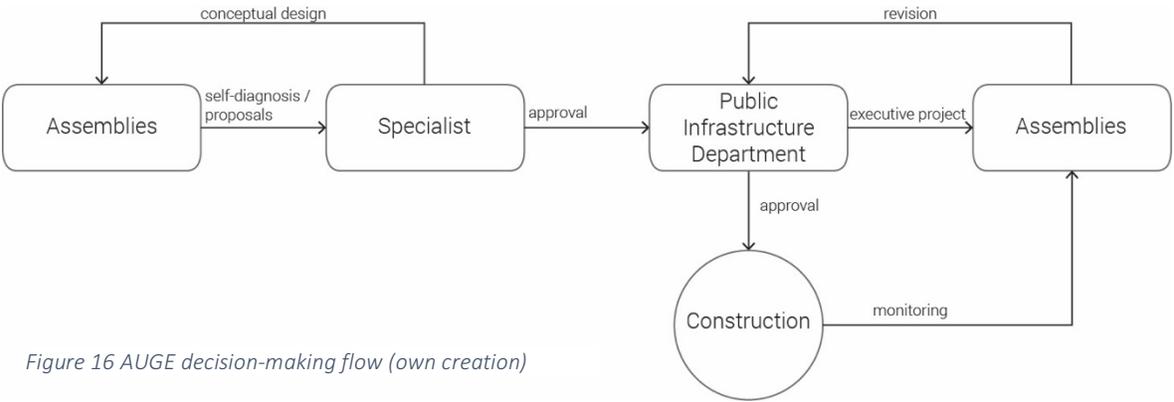


Figure 16 AUGE decision-making flow (own creation)

It is important to notice that AUGE serves as a mediator-facilitator in all phases. In addition, the process involves several cycles which include the participation of the community along the whole process.

2.2.2 The Olla Solidarity Network

Another experience of AUGE serves as case study for this thesis. By 2015 elections for mayor were taking place in the city. The community leaders who in that time participated and collaborated in AUGE's programs realised that what was being proposed in the electoral campaigns did not match with what inhabitants really needed, and when the candidates approached the neighbourhoods, the demands that they received were a sum of particular claims, without an adequate logic and prioritization. Therefore, a need to develop an agenda of necessities and proposals was observed, in order to present it to the candidates for mayor and to the corresponding deputies of the area. Thus, a participative methodology based on neighbourhood assemblies was chosen, aiming to integrate the greatest number of neighbourhoods that conform the district. Additionally, AUGE gathered all civil associations that were working in Las Joyas in the fields of health, sports, education, environment, security, women's affairs and culture, to help develop and support the initiative. The *Red de Solidaridad la Olla* (the Olla Solidarity Network) was then created, conformed by community leaders, inhabitants and 12 NGO's (AUGE, 2015).

During January 2015, 16 neighbourhood leaders were trained to carry out the assemblies themselves. Between February and April 17 assemblies were realized, during which participants analysed the issues of their own neighbourhoods and the ones concerning the whole district. After this analysis, proposals were made and later categorised into which ones needed to be solved by the government, and which could be solved from within the neighbourhoods, in different levels. The information obtained about what needed to be done by the neighbours themselves was taken apart and integrated to the planning processes of the Olla Solidarity Network. The actions concerning the government's involvement were asked to be prioritised by the inhabitants in three scales: urgent, important, and desirable, as well as categorized by themes. The resulting material was then systematized by the NGO's, generating a first document that was then returned to the original assemblies and other groups of inhabitants that did not participate in them. After revising, commenting and doing the necessary changes, the Social Agenda of Needs was finalised. In addition to the inhabitants' input, some quantitative data was included in order to better support the proposals. The document was developed and validated by 415 persons from 37 neighbourhoods (AUGE, 2015).

It is important to notice that the resulting document is not a list of demands, rather an agenda that compromises not only the authorities but the inhabitants and the NGO's as well (AUGE, 2015). The document was then presented to the candidates for mayor and the deputies of 8 different political parties. They all agreed to work on the agenda. The elected mayor reaffirmed his compromise and has later participated with the representatives of the assemblies to coordinate the actions to be developed (AUGE, 2015). As mentioned by a

representative of AUGE (see Appendix), the project was partly successful thanks to the political will of the mayor, as he decided to make large investments in the peripheral areas of the city and this agenda fitted in his plans.

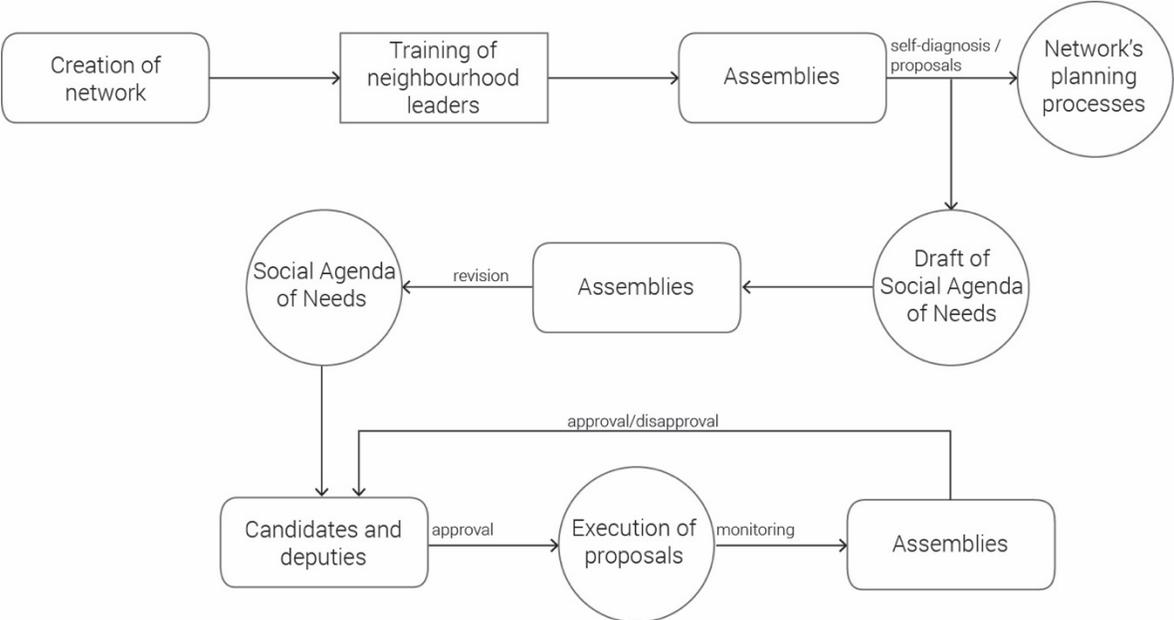


Figure 17 Decision-making flow of the Olla Solidarity Network (own creation)

Three years after the exercise was repeated. The assemblies were called back in order to reflect about the achievements made so far and the problems that abided. This exercise followed the same methodology and involved the participation of 777 persons, as well as the same 12 NGO’s which took part in the previous exercise (AUGE, 2018).

Section 3: Discussion

In the first section of this thesis, participation was described as a mean to achieve and ensure the right to the city, to guarantee the power to all inhabitants to transform and decide over their urban environment. Under this context, participatory practices and mechanisms should facilitate individuals the space and tools to co-create, to decide on their common goods and common goals, in accordance and response to their reality, their multiple needs, possibilities, potentialities, and their social and cultural conditions. Derived of this rationale of participation, the research questions guiding this discussion section are the following: Are the current mechanisms of public participation regarding the urban planning of the city being legitimate and a tool for citizen empowerment and organization? What are the gaps hindering existing public participation mechanisms? What can be done to improve the current mechanisms, in accordance to the local context?

To give a possible answer to these questions, this section connects the presented literature review and the the case study research in order to analyse the described participation mechanisms. It is important to highlight that the author did not integrate the application of any already established evaluation criteria for public participation methods because of the following reasons:

- Multiple context factors directly affect the type of participatory mechanism utilised. Therefore, it can be said that no method could be considered universally effective to evaluate participatory mechanisms.
- Evaluation criteria tend to be limited to suggestions and criticisms about the disadvantages of the various techniques, as they focus on what characteristics they do fulfil instead of analysing what is wrong.
- The empirical research of this thesis showed up that the participation mechanisms are “well-thought but poorly implemented”. Therefore, the problems about these mechanisms rely in procedural failures rather than in their conceptualization process.

Instead, a more critical approach is to be adopted in this section. The intention is to create a framework for discussion based on which the failures in the instrumentalisation of the participation mechanisms can be pointed out, so that we can know exactly what is hindering the decision-making processes involving participatory mechanisms.

The section will be divided into two parts: First, the formal participation mechanisms will be analysed using four different analytical frameworks in order to find the failures they may have and in what rely those failures; second, the lessons learned from the non-formal participatory mechanisms are revised, so that they could serve as guidance for further recommendations.

1. Formal participation mechanisms

The participatory structures will be first analysed. First, an identification of the different kinds of power each structure involved within the urban planning decision-making process exercises is to be done. Second, each structure will be examined individually so as to recognize the different challenges they face, in accordance with the *Challenges and obstacles of Public Participation* chapter of Section 1. Finally, a series of filters are proposed in order to connect, concretise and summarize the previous two analyses.

Later, the participatory exercises will be analysed according to two of the analytical frameworks previously used in the participatory structures: the challenges they face and the filters found in their creation processes. In addition, a relation between the actors involved and the influence over the outcomes will be revised.

It is important to mention that the statements written here have come by following the proposed analytical framework. However, the author holds no actual evidence and is not accusing any mentioned actor of the veracity of these statements.

1.1 Participatory structures

1.1.1 Power over decision-making

The stakeholders' classification proposed by Straus (2002) and described in the literature review will be used as analytical framework in this part. Therefore, the participatory structures involved in the urban planning decision-making process, as well as the non-participatory structures and actors involved, will be categorized in accordance to their 1) formal power to **make** a decision, 2) power to **block** a decision, 3) if they are **affected** by the decision, 4) those **with relevant information and expertise**, and 5) those with power to **influence** a decision. This analysis can be graphically seen in figure 18, followed by an explanation of the assignment of these categories.

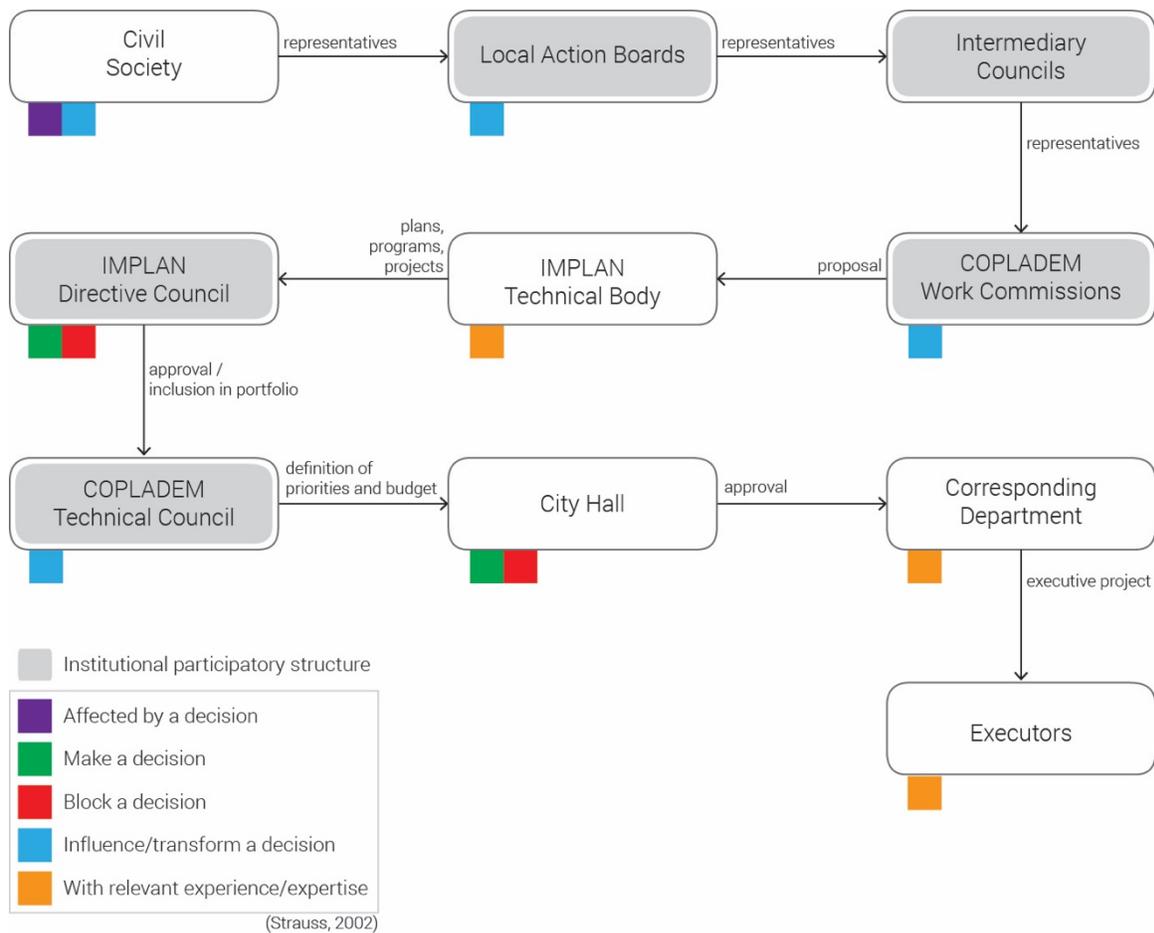


Figure 18 Power over urban planning decision-making (own creation)

1. Civil society. If civil society is not actively engaged in the creation of their environment they are most likely to take a passive role in the decision-making process. If that happens, this sector would fall into the category of **affected** by the decisions made, as they are the main recipients of the outcomes of the process, the ones who are going to live the changes made to their environment. However, when organised, people may be able to **influence** a decision by exercising pressure using legal actions and mechanisms.
2. Local action boards. They hold the power to **influence** a decision thanks to their position as representatives of civil society, gained through a legal participatory mechanism.
3. Intermediary councils. This group is only transitional, so it has no power over decision-making.
4. COPLADEM work commissions. These commissions can **influence** decisions as their task is to shape the ideas of local action boards into general proposals. Within this

task, they are also able to dismiss or include information, demands or proposals, therefore transforming the original inputs and influencing the outcomes.

5. IMPLAN technical body. As an actor with technical **expertise** and knowledge, they are in charge of translating the proposals from the work commissions into concrete plans and projects.
6. IMPLAN directive council. The authority of this council mainly relies in its political and economic power, which allows them to **block** or **make** final and binding decisions by deciding whether to include the projects into the municipal portfolio or not.
7. COPLADEM technical council. This actor is able to **influence** the decision after the approval of the IMPLAN directive council. The members have the power to define the priorities of the projects or plans and how the budget is going to be used.
8. City hall. The city hall approves or not the COPLADEM's decision. Thanks to its political power, it can **block** or **make** final and binding decisions.
9. Corresponding department. The different Municipal Departments are in charge of drawing the executive plans, after the approval of the city hall. Therefore, they have the **expertise** to develop the different plans and projects which are going to be implemented.
10. Executors. These actors are hired because of their **expertise** in a specific field. They are the ones who execute the final decisions.

1.1.2 Challenges

Seven different challenges participatory mechanisms may face were identified and presented in the literature review of this thesis, namely 1) top-down, technocratic approach, 2) learn to participate, 3) politicization, 4) misuse of terms, 5) representativeness, 6) protocol, and 7) regain trust. Each participatory structure within the decision-making process faces several of these challenges, which hinder their ideal functioning. They are derived from the type of methodologies used by each structure, how they are implemented, and the different interests and interactions between internal and external actors, among other factors. Thereby, each participatory structure will be examined individually in order to identify the different challenges they face.

1.1.2.1 Local action boards

Strong distinctions may be observed between what neighbourhoods' committees ought to be and how they function at a practical level. As described by Irazábal (2009) and Gilbert (1984), these structures are highly susceptible to manipulation by power-holders and have been largely used as a mean to legitimize the political system and/or to gain votes. The empirical research showed up several challenges local action boards currently face, which may be divided by stages:

1. Creation.

- The main challenge in this stage is the **politicization** of both, the promoters and the leaders of boards. Political parties have seen an opportunity in these actors because of their direct contact with people. Therefore, they *hire* promoters for them to recruit followers within the neighbourhoods. When selected, also boards' leaders often establish personal links with political parties either through the promoters or through other ways. This results in co-optation or clientelism relationships. Thereby, political parties use local action boards for extending their influence over neighbourhoods and gaining votes and political affiliation, maximizing their electoral advantage. Leaders and promoters, by their part, gain personal either financial benefits or political recognition in exchange.
- Another challenge faced during this stage is **lack of legitimacy and representativeness**. To make their work easier and when there is no previous community organization, boards' promoters often choose the members of the boards themselves. The selection of leaders by an external party brings two main consequences. The first one is that it detracts recognition from neighbours (sometimes inhabitants are not even aware of who these leaders are) and, therefore, their legitimacy decreases. The second consequence has to do with qualitative representativeness and the **top-down structures** described by Fraser (2005). It is highly possible that not all the groups integrating the neighbourhood are represented in the board, as promoters often choose *the same ones*, which means they fit into the profile promoters are looking for. This derives into a homogenous group, which entails no real counterweight or confrontation to authorities. Furthermore, representatives could be making decisions in accordance to their economic, social, ethnic, or political status, filtering out the demands that do not relate to their them.

2. Methodologies.

- A big challenge is not only the methodologies used but how they are used. Mainly because of lack of training, boards' members not fully understand the dynamic of the methodologies. Consequently, assemblies often fall into long-lasting and tiring discussions that only serve to expose individual requests, without analysing the diverse interests and opinions of the part of society they are representing. Therefore, they **need to learn** how to use the mechanism.

- The third challenge identified during this stage refers to a *communicative gap* embedded in the **protocol** of the used methodologies. When civil society pose their demands to the representatives of the local action boards, they are able to choose which demands from civil society are to be heard and discussed and which are not. This information filtering may be done consciously or not, as they can easily fall into **translating** the received demands and misinterpreting the original messages.
 - Another obstacle embedded in the **protocol** is voting as the primary method used for reaching final decisions: 50% of the participants plus one must agree with a decision so it can be approved. The majority rule highly hinders reaching agreements by hearing and respecting all participants and including all points of view, and may result in decisions with which not everyone is satisfied with.
3. Outcomes. As a result of the challenges and obstacles of the previous phases, the boards often do not have organisational capacity. Furthermore, they create division within neighbourhoods and strengthen the attitude of apathy towards participatory mechanisms, as people can see local action boards are *simulations* which only serve to legitimize the current political system and power hierarchies. These facts may explain the low number of boards with respect to the number of neighbourhoods within the city and why some neighbourhoods have opted to create their own boards parallel to the official ones.

1.1.2.2 COPLADEM

The empirical research of this work did not found any specific challenges or failures this structure may have. However, as it is the result of the selection of neighbourhood's leaders, it could be implied that it carries the challenges concerning local action boards. Thus, its **representativeness** and **political affiliation** may be put into question. In addition, as described before, this council faces gender-related issues, as women often do not take part in it.

Another challenge worth to highlight is the COPLADEM's method used for reaching final decisions. Its **protocol** also establishes voting as the primary decision-making method which, similarly to the local action boards, has the risk to ignore the proposals and ideas of the loosing parts.

1.1.2.3 Directive Council IMPLAN

The major challenge this structure faces is its **representativeness**. The selection of the council’s members is result of a non-democratic process, in which possible members are proposed by a reduced and exclusive group of people (the current directive council), and selected by the city mayor him or herself. The result is a closed group, whose members’ profiles resemble to the interests and profiles of the previous council. Therefore, this council has no qualitative nor quantitative representation, which rises concerns of selectivity and elitism involved in decision-making process and lowers the the acceptance and satisfaction of public opinion.

In addition, as expressed by the interviewees and confirmed by the research of the current council members’ backgrounds (see Appendix), the members of this council are, in its great majority, businessmen. This fact implies that the economic sector of the city is predominantly represented in this council, which not only entails the exclusion of all other sectors but also that the decision-making power of this structure is most probably biased by the **economic interests** of its members.

Also, as members are directly selected by the city mayor, they often do not contradict the political system who placed them there. Thereby, this structure serves to **legitimize the political system** and takes away the citizen counterweight the council could have in urban planning decision-making.

The following table sums up the identified challenges in formal participatory structures:

	Top-down, technocratic approach	Learn to participate	Politicization	Misuse of terms	Representativeness	Protocol	Regain trust
Local Action Boards	x	x	x		x	x	x
COPLADEM			x		x	x	
IMPLAN Directive Council	x		x		x		x

Table 2 Challenges identified in formal participatory structures (own creation)

1.1.3 Filters

The previous analyses led the author to define four *filters that hinder participation processes*. These filters may be seen as a generalisation of the abovementioned challenges and obstacles each participatory structure faces, which are a consequence of the type of power each stakeholder involved in the decision-making flow holds. The type of power allows the different actors to transform and manipulate the decisions and ideas they receive depending on their interests. Therefore, a similar phenomenon to *translation* and *drift* described by Palmås & von Busch (2015) takes place in the course of the decision-making process. It can be observed that, throughout the process, the participation of the involved stakeholders is diluted or distorted. The interventions and decisions made by the different participatory and non-participatory structures are displaced or transformed through successive enrolments. Some interventions are significantly marginalized, while others are treated as noise and filtered out, depending on the desires of the receiver.

Thereby, the proposed filters could help to more clearly visualize the distortion that occurs within the process. The identified filters are communicative, technocratic, political, and economic. Even though these filters do not act in the same way in each step, their causes and consequences are similar and thus could be generalised. The filters may be described in the following way:

1. Communicative. The communicative filter may be seen as the opposite from the ideal speech situation described by Habermas (1984) and consensus building (Innes J. , 1996). In this way, this filter may occur at three different levels:
 - a) When participants face different constraints in the discussion process. This happens when not all participants have equal opportunities to express their concerns, when there is a difference between the power each participant holds (because of their political hierarchy, knowledge or access to information), or when the discussion is centred on threats or interests. These constraints may benefit some participants while minimizing the possibility of others to fully intervene.
 - b) When the majority rule is used as a method of deliberation. This method highly limits consensus building, as participants do not have the opportunity to search for common ground and agreements that benefit all.
 - c) When representatives consciously or unconsciously transform the information or requests derived from the ones represented.
2. Technocratic. This filter resembles to the technocratic planning models described by Moser (1989), Irazàbal (2009) and Fraser (2005). Along decision-making processes, it is needed that individuals with specialized technical and administrative training and

experience (technocrats) give a concrete form to ideal proposals. Technocrats need to define criteria with which the delivered ideas adopt implementable and executable actions. In this process, choices must be made in a more rational, efficient and functional way. However, the technocratic filter occurs when their mechanisms imply an excessive autonomy from the initial values, objectives, and needs derived from more subjective criteria, dismissing social and human variables and reducing or avoiding matters of social justice.

3. Economic. The economic filter may be matched with the situation described by Harvey & Potter (2009) and Calderón (2013), where the economic elite defines the course of urban development and internalises market principles into urban planning guidelines. The economic filter thus takes place when decisions are made according to and prioritizing economic interests, which may benefit certain actors or population sectors. When this happens, social and environmental issues may be demoted, favouring entrepreneurial activities and their advocates.
4. Political. The political filter occurs when decision makers, according to their perceptions, priorities, considerations and interests, exert a major influence over the decision-making process, either by making, blocking or delaying final and binding decisions. Even when other stakeholders' interventions lead to a certain course of action and their proposals meet the criteria imposed by regulations, the deliberation of decision makers could completely change the outcome of the process. This filter is specially frustrating to other actors involved, as choices which seemed the most logical and/or proper are not made because of economic, social, or even personal interests of decision makers. This filter may be related to the economic filter, as the ruling class often has close connections with the economic elites, as described by Harvey (2012) (2009).

Applied to the case study, these filters may be found throughout the urban planning decision-making process in the following way:

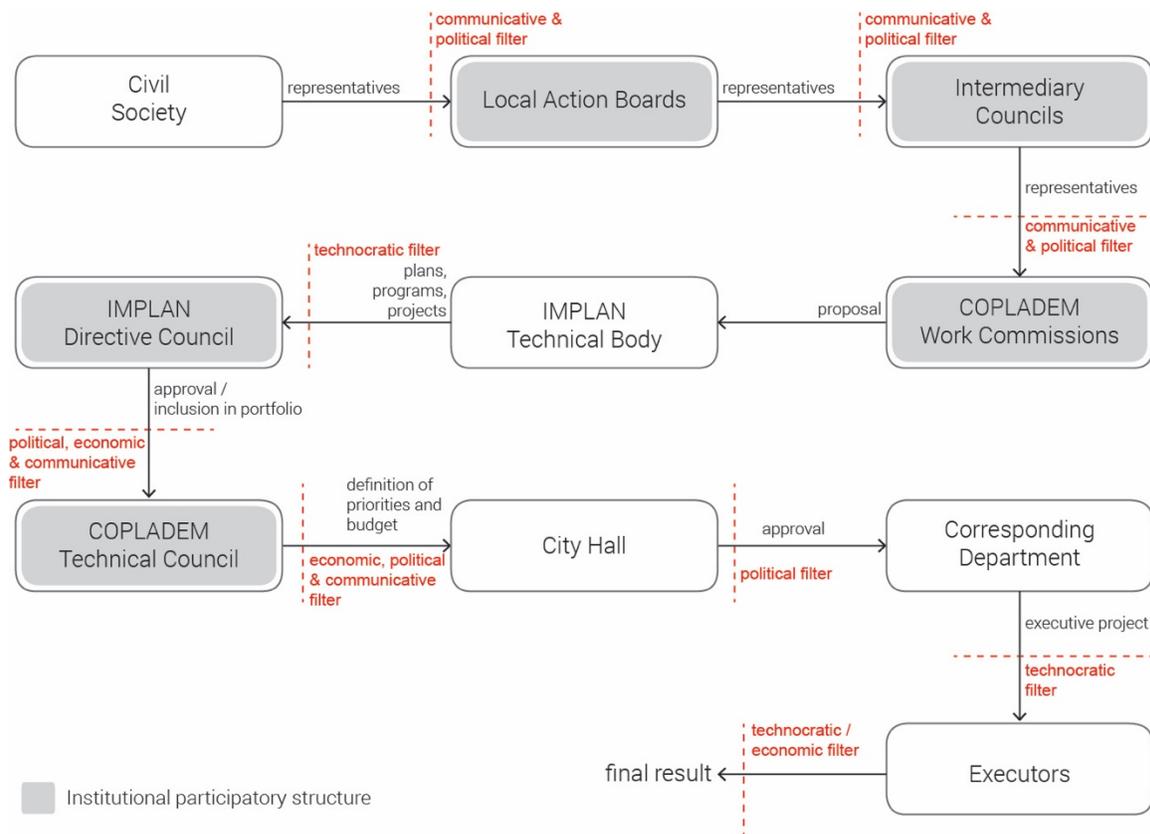


Figure 19 Filters that hinder participation the decision-making involving participatory structures (own creation)

1. Communicative. Although the communicative filter could be found within the majority of the process, it is more clearly observed in the neighbourhoods' leadership structure. Local action boards face the risk of translating the information and demands from civil society and also use the majority rule to make final decisions. When elected to take part into the intermediary councils and the COPLADEM, the same constraints might also be carried with them. This filter is also found in later stages of the decision-making process, when the Directive Council of the IMPLAN and the Technical Council of the COPLADEM make use of voting methods for deliberation.
2. Technocratic. This filter is found in the stakeholders with relevant expertise, who have the task to translate proposals into concrete programs and projects. Therefore, the Technical Body of the IMPLAN, the corresponding Departments, and the Executors might fall into the risk of deviating from initial established ideas and purposes when developing their tasks.

3. Political. The political filter is mainly found when decision-makers intervene in the process, that is, actors with established political power. In this case, the ones holding this kind of power are the Directive Council of the IMPLAN and the city hall. They are able to make, block or delay a decision according to their own perceptions, priorities, and interests, even if the outcome is not the most logical or accurate. The local action boards and the COPLADEM may also be applying this filter, as the selected leaders tend to be highly politicized, therefore responding to political parties' interests.
4. Economic. This filter is found in the Directive Council of the IMPLAN due to the fact that its members are mostly businessmen, who could guide the decisions towards their own interests or specifically to the economic sector of the city. The economic filter may also be observed in the technical council of the COPLADEM, as they have the task of handling national and municipal budgets and may fall into the risk of directing them to their neighbourhoods or specific areas of the city. A third actor who might be applying this filter are the executors. These stakeholders are the ones implementing the projects and programs and might be transforming the implementation in order to obtain economic benefits.

The use of the proposed filters serves to observe in a simpler way how decisions are transformed by each actor and how, through successive enrolments, the initial ideas product of different actors' intervention are distorted. Furthermore, as the decision-making process is a linear one, the final result turns out to be very different from the initial inputs.

1.2 Participatory exercises

1.2.1 Challenges

1.2.1.1 Municipal Development Plan

The main challenge identified in this mechanism is embedded in its **protocol**. The participatory exercise gathered the opinions and proposals from multiple and diverse urban actors and dwellers. Then, an external actor integrated all the inputs, producing a strategic diagnosis and guidelines for the sustainable development of the city. The task of this external actor is fundamental and also highly risky, as it has to capture in the most accurate way the *unitary public interest* and be able to express it in the final document. The concern would turn to the manner in which this consensus is reached. Translation and drift are necessary to reduce the input into a comprehensible view for the city, but the ones involved in this process must be very aware that it needs to serve the participants' different views and requests,

rather than to legitimize the current structure. If doing so, the final document would derive into another tool of power-holders for reproducing macro-level inequalities and injustices.

1.2.1.2 Municipal Government Program

The first challenge this program faces is its **representativeness**. First of all, it is important to highlight that this mechanism is not openly described as a participatory mechanism in any legal figure. However, the Municipal Planning Institution rejoice itself as if it was due to some inclusion of social and private sectors: four social organizations were included in the process. Nevertheless, the inclusion of these actors is not sufficient to fulfil the parameter of representativeness, neither qualitatively or quantitatively.

The second challenge lies in the **protocol** used to include and merge the inputs from the actors involved. This challenge deeply relates to the **technocratic** character of the IMPLAN, as the institution defined the standards and parameters to include and exclude the different proposals with relation to their efficiency and rationality. Therefore, and maybe unconsciously the consensus may have reached an undesirable outcome for the ones involved, reproducing again the current system.

1.2.1.3 Urban projects

As described in the case study, public participation is only included in the diagnosis part of the development of urban projects. Therefore, the intervention of civil society is limited to the extraction of information and to make basic proposals that could meet inhabitants' needs or desires. Designers and implementers think better projects can be made with the gathered information and consultations also serve to fulfil the goal of *listening to people*. After the extraction of information is done, the groups are abandoned with no further involvement neither in the approval of the final project nor in monitoring its implementation. The **concept** of participation thus is **misused** or at least highly limited in practice.

In addition, the information gathered from the urban dwellers is interpreted by a technician of the IMPLAN, who will draw the conceptual design of the project. This part of the process is most likely to fall into a **techno-functionalist approach**, in which the process turns into an expert-driven consultation and used as a way to legitimize the view of the experts. The final urban projects commonly result in punctual, non-comprehensive and mainly aesthetic projects, not related to the social reality, with an excess of focus in design and business.

In addition, as urban projects participatory mechanisms mainly rely in the local action boards, they carry with them the challenges and obstacles related to them, previously described in this section.

The following table sums up the identified challenges in formal participatory exercises:

	Top-down, technocratic approach	Learn to participate	Politicization	Misuse of terms	Representativeness	Protocol	Regain trust
Municipal Development Plan						x	
Municipal Government Program	x				x	x	
Urban projects	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Table 3 Challenges identified in formal participatory exercises (own creation)

1.2.2 Filters

The filters are to be examined in each mechanism in a separate way, as they all have different participation processes, isolated from one another:

1. Municipal Development Plan. The filters that may be hindering the development of this participatory mechanism are found mostly in the integration of the different inputs into a unitary and final document. These filters are **communicative**, as translation processes take place in order to reduce the amount of inputs into a sole proposal, and **technocratic**, as the experts in charge of producing the final document may deviate from the original values and objectives expressed by following more efficient, rational and functional methodologies (Figure 20).

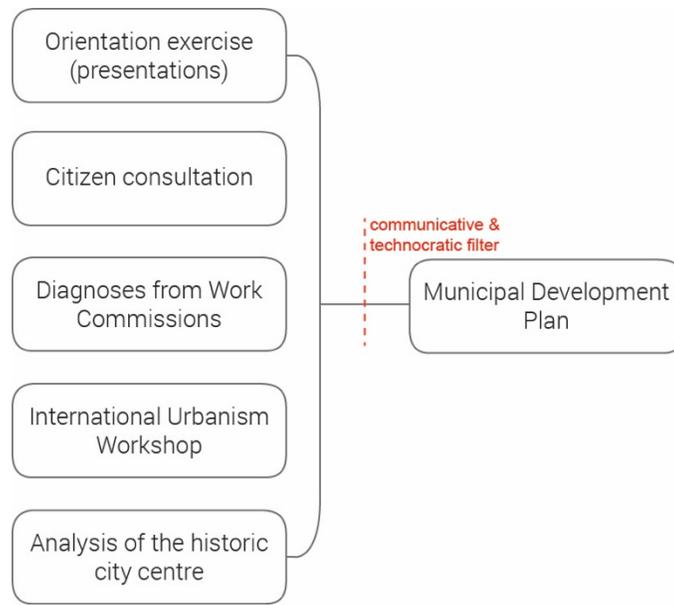


Figure 20 Filters that hinder participation in the creation of the Municipal Development Plan (own creation)

2. Municipal Government Program. The first filter found is after applying the methodological guidelines, which task is to systematize the input from the involved participants. A **technocratic** filter acts here, as the different voices are reduced to fit capture formats. Later on, **technocratic and communicative** filters may be found when involving municipal Departments, as they might be translating the delivered proposals and rationalising them in accordance to their fields of action. With the ratification by MPS instruments **economic and political** filters may be applied, in accordance to the filters found in the IMPLAN directive council and the COPLADEM technical council described above. **Political filters** may also be found after the intervention of the city hall and the IMPLAN, as they are able to approve or block the final decision (Figure 21).

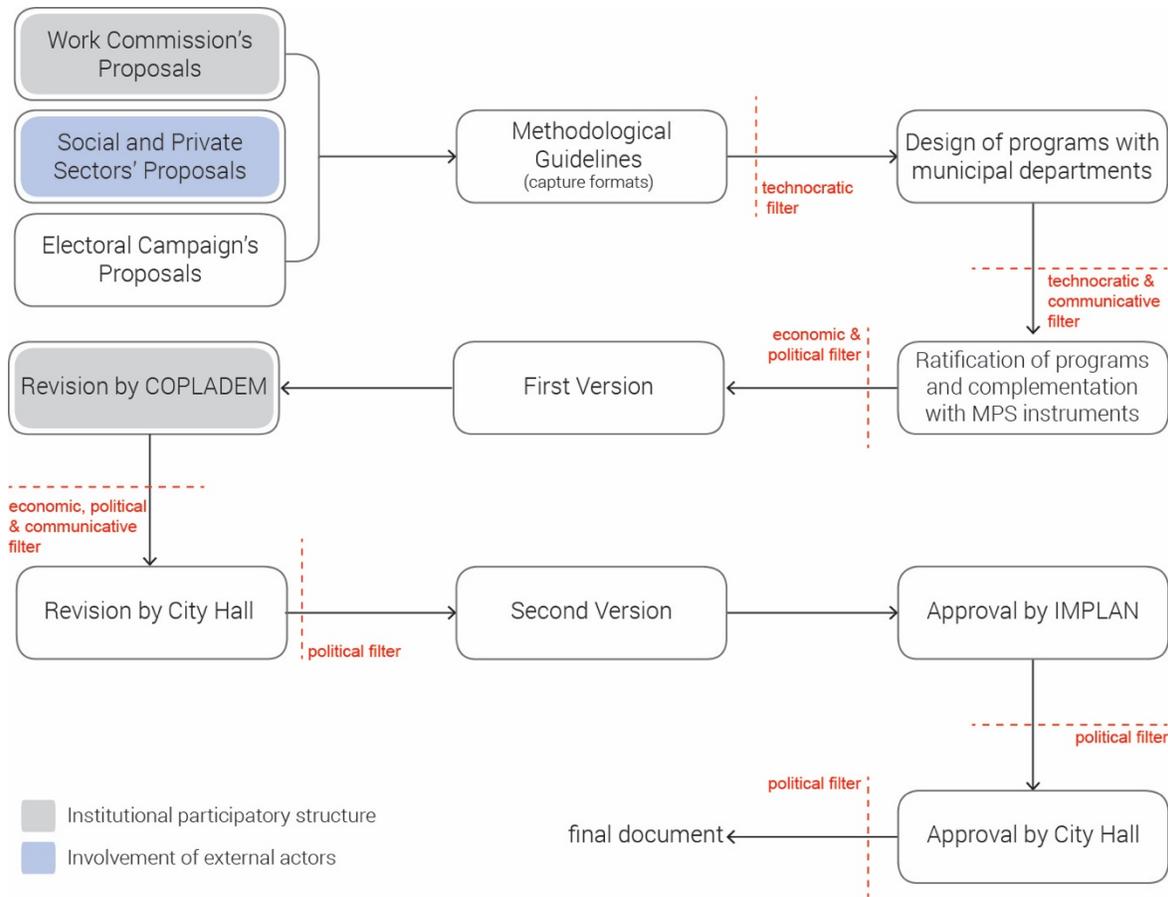


Figure 21 Filters that hinder participation in the creation of the Municipal Government Program (own creation)

3. Urban projects. Urban projects include almost the same stakeholders than the urban planning decision-making process described above. Therefore, the same filters can be found in this process (Figure 22).

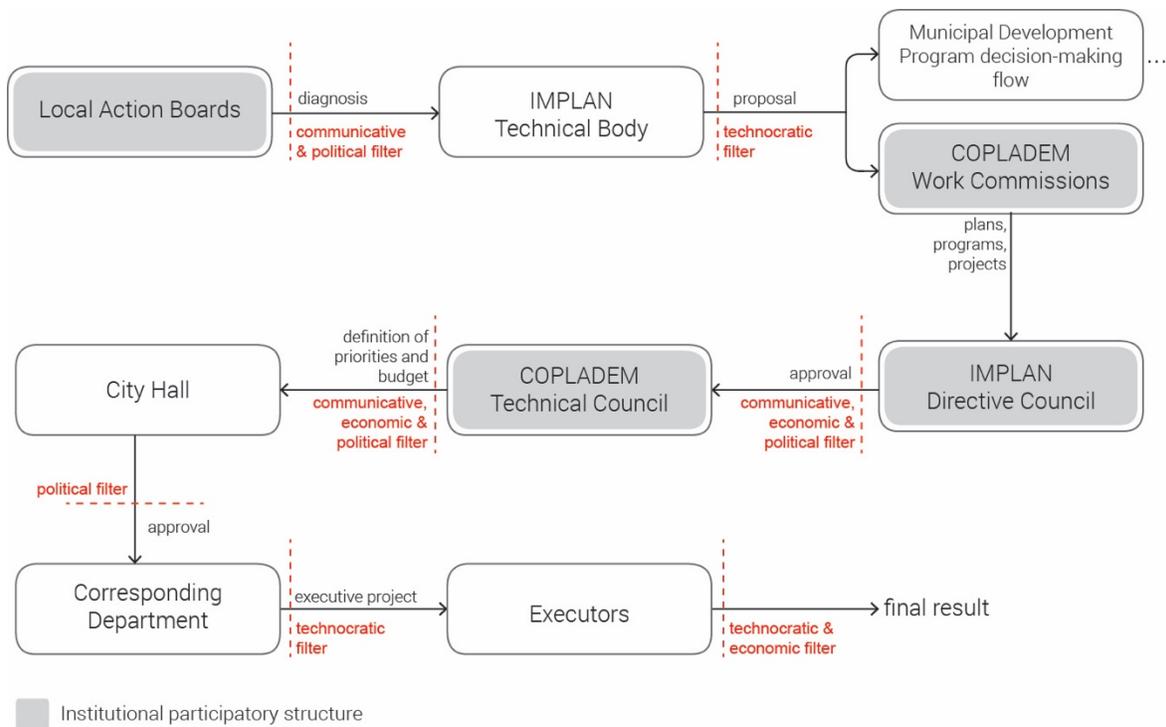


Figure 22 Filters that hinder participation in urban projects (own creation)

1.2.3 The Chinese box of public participation

The Chinese box of power and participation described by Robert Dahl (1967), may serve to analyse the influence of the outcomes of the Municipal Development Plan and the Municipal Government Program. Dahl poses the idea that, when greater opportunity for democracy, the less amount of power to influence the outcomes.

In the participatory diagnose process of the Municipal Development Plan around 4,360 people were involved, including several urban actors and sectors: general public, academics, experts, municipal authorities, representatives from neighbourhoods, members of different city councils, etc. This process has been the greatest participatory exercise done so far in terms of public coverage. However, the Municipal Development Plan is a set of subjective and general goals and strategies, meant to establish a long-term vision for the city. The plan gives general guidelines to civil society and municipal government actions, but does not establish concrete or legally-binding actions and procedures to follow. Therefore, it remains as an ideal which to aspire but does not oblige any of the parties involved in its creation to fulfil what established.

On the other hand, the Municipal Government Program contains the specific objectives and strategies of the ongoing municipal administration. Although aligned with the principles of the Municipal Development Plan, its creation follows a different process and

involves different actors. The participatory structure of the COPLADEM is included, as well as different Departments of the municipal administration and, most importantly, the major, whose electoral campaign's proposals must be included in this Program. Proposals from social and private actors were added as well, although after a filtering process (as described above).

In summary, it can be observed that the Municipal Development Plan entailed a great reflection exercise about the city's issues and involved a great amount of citizens and authorities in its creation, but the Plan has little influence in the actual planning and development of the city. By contrast, the Municipal Government Program entailed less involvement of different actors, but has a greater influence regarding the actions that are to be prioritized and implemented or, in other words, a greater influence over the transformation of the city (Figure 23).

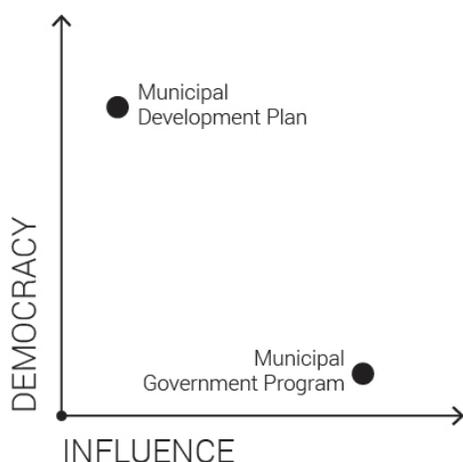


Figure 23 Influence in the outcomes vs democracy in processes (own creation)

2. Non-Formal participation mechanisms: lessons learned

The experiences and working methodologies of the revised initiatives from organized civil society leave important lessons to the analysed formal participatory mechanisms. The experience of the first NGO, FURA, has helped to point out the constraints an organized civil society group faces when trying to use the abovementioned mechanisms. Consequently, the failures of these mechanisms could be subtracted from these constraints. The lessons learned from the second civil society initiative, AUGÉ, may help to improve the formal participatory mechanisms, as several key features from their working methodologies could be transferred to them. This chapter accounts for the lessons learned from each non-formal participation mechanisms.

2.1 FURA

FURA is an example of the many organizations and groups that have aroused in the city against urban projects and governmental decisions concerning the city. FURA has gained an important place as a counter-institution in environmental matters. Following the characteristics of counter-institutions given by Steil & Connolly (2009), this organisation has become a motor of change while being part of established decision-making structures. Their involvement in local environmental councils have let them introduce an alternative vision to these spheres of power, complementing their work and collaborating with different institutions. However, their inclusion in the abovementioned councils had to do more with their close relationship to a power-holder than to open mechanisms of participation. Therefore, matters of accessibility to decision-making structures and their permanence⁷ in them are put into question.

Also because of their position as a recognised counter-institution, the IMPLAN has invited them to take part in several urban planning processes. Nevertheless, these exercises could fall into some level of tokenism, similar to what has been described by Arnstein (1969), Guaraldo (1996) and Calderón (2013). During these exercises, participants have the chance to be heard but their influence in the outcomes of the process is ignored or, at least, unknown, as they have never seen the final results derived from these consultations. Their intervention allows the IMPLAN to make more informed decisions with regards to some civil society's organisations, but these exercises do not actually allow them to directly participate in the production of the city.

In addition, the absence of mechanisms for the collection of public opinion or instruments for citizens to express disagreement against urban projects and decisions has led FURA and other civil society's organisations to seek solutions in legal actions and procedures. Therefore, their mechanisms rely on creating social and legal pressure to attract the attention of the public and decision-makers, so that they can enter into a process of dialogue and negotiation. In this matter, it could be said that the local level has fall short in developing and establishing participatory strategies in accordance to these groups' needs, demands and expectations. Also, the absence of these mechanisms could mean the lack of recognition of citizens as city producers and instead categorizes them as users or consumers (as expressed by Foster & Iaione, 2016), who are partly asked by what they *would like* but their intervention does not really matter in the final outcomes.

In short, the revision of the experience of this NGO shows their influence and power over urban decisions has been gained through social organization, clear structures and

⁷ As external *assessors* are only allowed to take part in the councils for three years.

objectives, personal contacts, and a perseverant fight and opposition through time against pre-defined models, not necessarily thanks to the existing participatory mechanisms. Their experience shows that it is possible for organized civil society organizations to make their way into decision-making structures and spheres, but there are still several obstacles and missing formal mechanisms that the municipality and the urban planning institutions need to create and democratize.

2.2 AUGÉ

The methodologies used by AUGÉ could likely fall into a collaborative planning model, described by Gunton & Day (2003), Healey (1997), and Innes (1996)(1999):

1. First of all, their focus relies in the concept of *self-management*, which understands the principle of trusting in others' abilities and respecting their liberty to decide. This concept goes along with collaborative planning, as it seeks the sharing of responsibility among stakeholders and facilitation of social organisation.
2. Their deliberation methodologies highly rely in consensus building. Assemblies imply face-to-face discussions in which all participants are heard and respected, and also enables participants to creatively and collaboratively reach a common decision. Assemblies help to create an environment in which all participants are able to pose their interests and discuss them, in contrast to processes in which one actor defines the complete process of decision-making.
3. The processes developed by AUGÉ aim to include all possible stakeholders: civil society, the different NGO's working in the district, the public authorities who have a stake in the matter, and external private assessors. The creation of the Olla Network is a good example of this.
4. Their final proposals look out for the creation of comprehensive, integral plans which could reflect the *unitary public interest*. Rather than the aggregation of individual interests and claims, the intention is to collaboratively prioritize the several needs and demands, and to distinguish the compromises that these demands entail not just for the government but for the neighbourhoods themselves as well.
5. Their implemented processes and methodologies serve to create more than just self-diagnoses and projects. The outcomes can also be seen in the creation of *social capital*, in the form of networks and trust; *intellectual capital*, by reaching agreements and by understanding each others needs and situations; and *political*

capital, as the combination of capacities helps to coordinate and build new alliances that the implementation of the reached agreements.

This NGO has had some advantages during their work in this district thanks to their role as an intermediary organization. As described by Steil & Connolly (2009) and Moser (1989), they have been able to align themselves with community groups while building bridges across institutional structures. They are not perceived as a political threat as they do not have any political pursuit, and are also not attached to political restrictions of time, giving them flexibility, permanence, continuity and the possibility to implement long-term processes. Their capacities have also allowed them to speak to all actors in their own language, filling the institutional gap and keeping close relationships with formal and informal institutions. However, as an NGO, they have limited capacity of implementing formal solutions, as they must still deal with political times and will.

Another pro from the experience of this organization is their focus on working at the *local level*. As described by Steil & Connolly (2009) and Fernandez (2006), the work at this level has allowed the transformation of social relations from the everyday lives and to directly meet citizens with their needs and desires. This direct relation gives all urban dwellers living in the district the possibility to express their concerns and to collaboratively work to transform their environment. This process develops different capacities in the participating individuals and institutions, as well as redistributes and de-centralizes power over city issues. Furthermore, by bringing to neighbourhoods locally-based participatory democratic mechanisms, the NGO has developed some kind of urban collaborative governance: a collaborative system of decision-making that includes different stakeholders and institutions, and redistributes the power over the city resources (Foster & Iaione, 2016).

Finally, a big success factor of AUGE lies in the inclusion of people (assemblies and the general public) all along their processes. Their intervention does not end in the definition of their problems and generation of ideal proposals. Moreover, when proposals are passed to technical or political bodies, they are returned to people for their approval and if the projects do not fulfil their expectations and needs, they are corrected and given again for reformulation. This cycling processes not only give legitimacy to projects but also gives people the certainty that the ideas and results derived from them. This fact empowers people to transform their own environment and to monitor and take care of their own creation. Therefore, in some sense it fulfils the right to the city, as these mechanisms give people *“the right to determine what is produced and how it is produced and to participate in its production”* (Marcuse P. , 2012, p. 36).

2.2.1 AUGÉ vs. local action boards

As it can be observed, the processes followed by AUGÉ highly resemble to the formal participatory structures of the local action boards. They both work at the grassroots level, use assemblies as the participatory methodology, and their main aim is to create mechanisms to enhance or produce social representation and collaboration in order to manage the demands and proposals from neighbourhoods. However, their results and social perception and recognition highly differ from one structure to the other.

One way to analyse why one structure is working and the other is not, is to look at the challenges the local action boards face (previously described) and to contrast them with the outcomes of AUGÉ’s methodology. This analysis could be summarized in the following table:

Local Action Boards	AUGÉ
Politicization	No political pursuit
Lack of legitimacy and representativeness	Legitimacy and social recognition
Top-down structures	Horizontal organization
Ignorance in use of participatory methods	Training in methodology
Extraction of information and consultation	Empowerment
Communicative gaps	Consensus building

Figure 24 Local action boards vs AUGÉ (own creation)

In addition, within the decision-making flow, local action boards are only included in the first stage of the process, while in AUGÉ’s processes, assemblies and the general public are involved from the self-diagnoses and proposals’ development until the monitoring and maintenance of the projects. Also, the focus of AUGÉ is not to merely fulfil a request for integration of communities into decision-making, but to create social, intellectual and political capital in order to empower people in the creation and transformation of their urban environment. These derives into comprehensive proposals, validated by a wide number of inhabitants. AUGÉ’s job could be compared to what the Social Development department is ought to do, but it is free of the many institutional restrictions this department is dealing with and the inadequate acts of this department’s members.

Section 4: Conclusions and recommendations

1. Summary of findings

When starting this thesis, the author posed several questions in order to frame and guide the research to be developed. This chapter aims to summarize the answers to these questions, found along the elaboration of this work.

Starting from a more general perspective, the first chapter of the literature review tried to understand the current issues found in cities concerning the way in which they have been governed and which theoretical framework could serve as guidance for further change. In this context, political-economic theorists have widely developed the damages the neo-liberal city has brought: an unequal distribution of power, derived from the control of urban development by a few (normally economic and political elites) and the exclusion of large amounts of population from place-making processes. However, a counter-proposal may be found in the commons theory, which tries to set a different mindset by re-defining the city as a shared resource that belongs to all. This new perspective opens up the possibility for more equitable and inclusive forms of city-making. Accordingly, the right to the city depicts the right to all inhabitants to collectively shape their cities. Thus, governance is an attempt from the State to adapt their governing style to contemporary societies, which demand for more transparency and power over decision-making. Therefore, governance aims at integrating more urban actors into decision-making processes by developing new forms of association and coordination with different social and economic actors. Developing further this idea, the concept of urban collaborative governance aims not only to include different actors into governmental processes but also to redistribute power over the city resources. This concept relies in the principles of horizontal subsidiarity, polycentrism, and collaboration.

Given the theoretical foundation for rethinking the city and its management in a more collaborative way, the second chapter of the literature review links this framework to the field of urban planning. The Collaborative Planning approach is reviewed, which seeks to delegate responsibility among stakeholders who work together in face-to-face negotiations to reach an agreement. Consensus building is essential to this planning approach, as it is a way to creatively and collaboratively reach a common ground. Collaborative planning entails the institutional design at two levels: the systemic and the local level. By systemic level it means a change in the forms of an overarching governance structure. At this level, urban planning institutions must go through institutional design, as they are crucial players in decision-making processes and have the capacity of building networks across different actors. Urban planners must grab this challenge with a dual strategy: by promoting creative technical, architectural, and institutional solutions; and by solving the conflicts the

interaction between different stakeholders may bring. At the local level, institutional design would derive into the creation of social, intellectual and political capital in order to develop strategies for local change. This would bring locally-based democratic forms of decision-making, giving institutional power to communities and connecting them to larger fields of policy.

The third chapter sets a definition for public participation within the field of urban planning. Participation, thus, is both a mean and an end. It is a mean to achieve the right to the city, to guarantee the power to all inhabitants to transform and decide over their urban environment. As an end, participation gives the opportunity to develop people's consciousness about other aspects of their living conditions. Participation incorporates different points of view into urban planning decision-making processes and it actively engages inhabitants in the creation and transformation of their urban environment. In this sense, everyone must have a mechanism at their disposal for realising their own plans and to guide the development of the city. In order to have real mechanisms of participation, it is necessary to redistribute power so that all the actors involved have a real influence in the outcomes of decision-making processes. For this to happen, it is necessary to transcend self-interest narratives and to back up changes in the status quo by sufficient support at the political level, social movements, or a supportive elite. The ideal of participation becomes that of empowerment, a situation in which citizens have direct and active influence during planning processes.

A revision of two different approaches for categorizing the stakeholders involved in urban planning decision-making processes is developed in the fourth chapter of the literature review, in order to understand the relations between each other and the different interests they respond to. The inclusion of different stakeholders derives into reframing urban issues and mobilizing different social sectors of the city, joining all kinds of knowledge, widening the technical point of view with more experiential inputs, and bringing more creativity to urban life. With this, urban planning becomes a political process. The first categorization explains the expected role of each stakeholder in a collaborative governance system, and classifies them into public sector, private sector, civil society, and intermediary organizations. The second categorization groups stakeholders according to the power they hold in a decision-making process, therefore by analysing if they have formal power to make a decision, formal power to block a decision, if they are affected by the decision, have relevant information and expertise, or have the power to influence a decision.

The last chapter of the literature review accounts for some of the challenges and obstacles found when introducing participatory practices in urban planning decision-making processes. Seven challenges have been identified: 1) Top-down technocratic approaches, which refers to a rational planning model in which planning is seen as an experts-driven

technocratic activity leaving social aspects as secondary in importance; 2) Learn to participate, as participation within the complexity of human interactions and interrelations needs the development of a mindset of openness, inclusion, and trust in collaboration processes; 3) Politicization, which means the manipulation of participatory practices by power-holders in order either to legitimize the political system or to maximize electoral advantage; 4) Misuse of terms, as participation is often misunderstood as a process of information gathering and consultation, in which participants have no real influence in the outcomes; 5) Representativeness, which poses the challenge to represent the different visions and needs of complex socio-spatial relationships; 6) Blame the protocol, which refers to situations in which participation tools and mechanisms limit or corrupt participation by the very format they are designed by; and 7) Regain trust, as credibility on participatory processes has been largely undermined among society and re-generating trust relies in the implementation of honest, efficient, and democratic processes.

The second section of this thesis accounts for the current mechanisms and instruments of public participation involved in the urban planning of Leon, the city selected for the case study. The mechanisms have been divided into two categories: formal and informal. The formal mechanisms are included in the Municipal Planning System, which is a permanent mechanism of comprehensive, strategic, and participative planning. This system entails two kinds of elements: structures and instruments. Within these elements, different participation mechanisms are embedded and the type of participation mechanism is defined by the type of element: the MPS structures entail *participatory structures*, understood as more permanent participatory strategies, and the planning instruments include *participatory exercises*, which can be defined as temporary participatory practices that last only for the creation of the instruments.

Thus, the participatory structures are: 1) the Directive Council of the IMPLAN, which is in charge of reviewing, analysing and approving guidelines for the city's development, technical designs and plans, among other activities; 2) the COPLADEM, which is a consultative body, auxiliary to the municipality in the planning of the city, and is derived from a structure of neighbourhood leadership. Local Action Boards are main form of representation, participation and collaboration at the neighbourhood level. Representatives from these boards take part in the COPLADEM. All these participatory structures are involved in some urban planning decision-making process of the city, along with other non-participatory structures and decision-makers.

By its part, the instruments of the MPS which include participatory exercises are: 1) the Municipal Development Plan, which serves to set the vision for the city and is a result of a participatory diagnose, the greatest participatory exercise made so far in terms of public coverage; 2) The Municipal Government Program, which sets the specific objectives and

strategies of the ongoing municipal administration and its creation includes some participatory structures as well as external inputs from other urban actors; and 3) Urban Projects, in which participation from civil society is only included in the analysis stage. Each instrument has their own production process which involve different stakeholders and procedures.

The non-formal mechanisms, understood as initiatives derived from civil society that entail participatory processes outside regulated formal structures, were revised due to their importance and influence they have had in some urban planning processes. Their experiences give important lessons to the formal participatory mechanisms. Thereby, two initiatives were studied. The first one, FURA, has positioned itself as an important counter-institution in environmental matters. Its working methodologies rely in two main actions: inclusion in formal participatory structures and opposition to urban projects by using a pressure dynamic and legal actions. The second one is AUGÉ, which is an NGO inviting urban dwellers from a specific district of the city to participative design, social education and social organization processes. Their working methodologies can be observed in their experiences of the Olla Park project and the Olla Solidarity Network.

Finally, the Discussion part of this thesis aimed at critically analysing the formal mechanisms of participation by creating a framework for discussion with which the failures or gaps of those mechanisms can be pointed out and their causes and consequences revised. Therefore, the participatory structures were analysed by first identifying the different kinds of power each of them exercises; second, by examining each structure individually in order to recognize the different challenges they face; and third, by connecting the previous two analyses with a series of filters that hinder public participation. These filters are namely political, economic, technocratic, and communicative. Likewise, the participatory instruments were also analysed by the challenges they face, the filters embedded in their production processes, and the relation between the inclusion of different stakeholders and the influence in the transformation of the city.

In the last part of the Discussion chapter, the lessons learned from the non-formal participatory mechanisms were revised, so that they could serve as guidance for the improvement of the formal participation mechanisms, in accordance to the local context. The lessons learned from are summarized in the following points:

- Counter-institutions are key actors to introduce alternative visions and critical reflection to formal decision-making structures and institutions.
- Access and permanence in formal decision-making structures to counter-institutions and organised civil society groups is difficult, as they face diverse bureaucratic procedures and there is no legal framework that facilitates their inclusion.

- Exercises of consultation to which counter-institutions are invited are perceived as ineffectual, as these groups recognise their inclusion is a mere extraction of information exercise with no further influence in place-making. Also, the process is perceived as not transparent, as the involved groups do not receive information about the procedure (how their inputs were used and how decisions were made).
- There has been an unresolved claim from organised civil society groups for mechanisms for the collection of public opinion or instruments for citizens to express disagreement about decisions concerning the development of the city. These groups have reacted towards this lack of mechanisms by using legal actions.
- Collaborative planning is very likely to be achieved at the local level, as the experience of AUGÉ has showed.
- Institutional restrictions of formal government departments and inadequate acts of their members highly hinder local participation mechanisms. This situation may be countered by the inclusion of intermediary organizations. These stakeholders are very likely to be key actors in the creation and enforcing of locally-based democratic participatory mechanisms, as they are able to move between different institutional levels and have the possibility of implementing continuous and long-term processes.
- There is a lack of recognition of NGOs in legal frameworks and institutions, which derives into lack of power for them to implement formal solutions.
- When working at the local level, it is possible to create units of urban collaborative governance in which power over city resources is redistributed among urban dwellers.
- The inclusion of civil society all along decision-making processes has been observed as a success factor in place-making projects. Cyclic processes (instead of linear ones) give legitimacy to projects, as well as transparency and the certainty to people that the results are adapted to their needs and desires. This fact also empowers people to transform their own environment and to monitor and take care of their own creation.

2. Implications of the results

The theoretical overview presented in the first part of this thesis can become the basis for substantial changes in the way public participation is conceptualized and implemented. Nonetheless, the mechanisms analysed in the case study have shown there are still many areas of opportunities to actually grasp and concretize this ideal of participation.

The Discussion part of this thesis confirmed the comments of the empirical research. The formal participation mechanisms, although well-thought and conceptualized, fail when implemented. The several challenges and filters which distort decision-making processes derive into an inconsistency between the initial inputs and the final result, diminishing the capacity of people to take part in the transformation of their urban environment.

As observed, the problem relies in several factors. At an institutional level, although there is a common discourse and a genuine concern for more inclusive methodologies and procedures, there is a lack of critical evaluation, knowledge and capacities to actually implement these ideas and improve the current mechanisms. The technocratic focus of institutions hinders the integration of social justice into policies and mechanisms, as efficiency is more valued and prioritized. The political moves and economic interests involved in decision-making processes highly deviate the initial purposes and objectives to narrow results, distant to the reality and needs of the city and its inhabitants. In addition, several other factors must be added: lack of continuity, limited budget and slow management of financial resources, failed projects, inadequate mechanisms, lack of coordination, corruption, etc. At a broader scale, other factors may be identified. A social system that forces to maintain the traditional power spaces and the status quo. A lack of organized civil society groups and counter-institutions to monitor the development of projects, plans and programs. A low motivation to get involved in collaborative practices for a communal benefit. The combination of these factors has derived into a non-comprehensive and ineffective system of participation.

To sum up, the findings and results provide maybe more questions than answers to the main research question of this thesis:

How to ensure the right of citizens to shape their city and to have a real influence in its development?

However, it is clear that before thinking the forms to improve a situation, an analysis of the gaps and problems must be conducted to know what has to be improved. The research emphasizes the importance of creation, improvement and democratization of formal participatory mechanisms, including the experiences and knowledge of external parties, and supporting initiatives from civil society with more flexible and open structures.

3. Suggestions for further research

In spite of the limitations of the study, the research achieved to unravel a little part of a complex system of decision-making that has a direct impact on the transformation of the city. Further research is needed to continue untangling the local decision-making structures and processes, in order to identify the kinds and exercises of power involved in

them. More information about how decisions are made could help the city to critically point out the failures embedded in the system and to propose context-based solutions to those failures. Research about the different civil society initiatives is also needed, so as to identify social leadership and to study their methodologies and success factors, in order to keep contextualizing participation tools and methodologies so that they can actually fulfil the demands and needs of the city. Furthermore, the filters proposed in this thesis probably need lot more thinking and further study. This new framework needs to be discussed and critically questioned by more people, so it can be improved and applied to more case studies.

4. Recommendations

When involving oneself into a study like this, it is impossible not to start thinking what can be done to improve the identified issues. Therefore, the author proposes the following eight main recommendations in order to enhance public participation in the city of Leon:

1. **Institutional design.** For real and long-lasting changes to take place, it becomes necessary that overarching institutions, specially the urban planning department, go through a reconfiguration of several of their established principles, methodologies and procedures. Within these, the following aspects must be taken into account and included in regulatory frameworks:

- the involvement of a large variety of stakeholders with different and conflicting perspectives
- the acknowledgment of the processes that take place outside formal institutions and procedures that shape the city
- the redistribution of power among these instances
- the creation of open and flexible systems which could open opportunities for community-based initiatives and interventions
- the implementation of critical evaluation mechanisms

2. **Update of participatory methodologies.** The critical revision and update of the current mechanisms is crucial, in order to improve the methodologies used and the processes of implementation.

3. **Social education.** Currently, the participatory instruments and exercises developed and implemented do not include the element of social education. This point is fundamental for citizens to learn which mechanisms are at their disposal and how to better participate and collaborate.

4. **Transparent processes.** To fulfil this criterion, it is necessary to ensure that participants know how their inputs are going to affect the decision-making processes and, later on, the results of them. Afterwards, documentation and publication of how the processes were

carried away is fundamental to inform general public and to keep a reference of the progress made. This fact might also enhance credibility and help to restore trust in public participation mechanisms.

5. **Cyclic processes.** As observed, one main issue about current formal urban planning decision-making processes is that they follow a linear process. The inclusion of civil society all along the process is fundamental so that citizens are able to revise what has been decided and make further changes. In this way, the proposals are closer to the different realities and to what people need and want. Furthermore, the decision-making power does not rely in a specific elite or authority and is more equally redistributed. Therefore, civil society should be included in the creation of plans, revision of results, and monitoring during the implementation stage.

6. **Creation of mechanisms of consultation and evaluation of projects before they are implemented.** This point is embedded in the last one but is necessary to specify. In order to enhance and increase the transparency and acceptance of a project, it becomes necessary to ensure that population is aware of what is to be done and to have the right to reply, express disagreement, and transform the proposals so that they are more in accordance to what the city needs. These mechanisms should be legally-binding and obligatory for the implementation of all urban projects.

7. **Links between planning and execution.** Regulatory frameworks are needed in order to oblige executers to adhere to the results of participatory processes, so that they do not deviate from what has been agreed.

8. **Commitment of public authorities.** New forms of governance and decision-making are only successful if they are backed up by local authorities, which entails their preparation to make major mobilization efforts and firmly commit themselves to participation processes.

Appendix

Interviews

The conducted interviews followed an *un-structured* methodology, meaning they were open conversations guided by key points and questions to discuss, and took place in February and March of this year (2019). The *semi-transcription* of these interviews is found in the following pages. The interviewees were selected regarding their experience with participation methodologies and their position in key institutions of the city.

David Herreras



David has more than thirty years of experience in the fields of popular education, social development and human rights organizations. He is currently part of the directive Council of the civil association Propuesta Cívica A.C. and the non-governmental organization AUGE. He as well participates as councillor in several citizen associations of the city.

David has had a close relationship to the Municipal Institute of Planning (IMPLAN by its acronym in Spanish), as he has worked for more than 30 years with several NGOs and civil associations related to civic participation and community organization. Speaking about the IMPLAN, he mentioned this institute has a limited normative capacity, as it works more like a project generator. The projects they develop are punctual, non-comprehensive, and they do not actually serve the purpose of ordering the growth of the city. There have been some paradigmatic cases in which the IMPLAN has served as an organism to regulate the development of the city as a whole, but it does not usually have that capacity. Within the citizen council of the IMPLAN, the representative citizens are, in its great majority, businessmen. There is not real social representativeness, so it is actually the economic power the one who is taking all the decisions. Lately, the last major of the city gave a higher status to the institute, so that urban infrastructure decisions have to be firstly approved by the IMPLAN, but this has not been legally established. Also, the IMPLAN has made some efforts regarding participative planning and has an open posture towards it.

The conversation then turned towards the NGO he is working with: AUGE (Self-management and Community Education). They have been working in a specific district of the city, called Las Joyas. Their methodology includes first doing a Social Agenda of Needs, which includes organizing assemblies (normally from 10 to 20 persons) in which inhabitants identify

and prioritize problems, and generate proposals. These assemblies serve as an excuse for community organisation, and a by-product is the self-diagnose that people make of their own communities. Later, a conceptual design is done with help of a specialist. If the community approves the design, an executive project is then developed.

In 2015, the then candidates running for municipal major were invited to the district. This action was key for the success of the project, because their position obliged them to listen. A comprehensive project was presented to them, instead of individual requests (like “there is no water service”, “the sidewalk is in bad state”, etc.). This is why they do not consider themselves “petitioners”, rather they do and then demand for changes. They work in a collaborative and proactive way. However, this entails a permanent work of negotiation with many actors.

Nowadays, the project is partly successful thanks to the political will of the major, as he has decided to invest more in the peripheral areas of the city, where half of the population of the city lives. However, he thinks the participatory methods currently used do not work. They rely in the *comités de colonos* (neighbourhood committees), which leaders are selected by an external actor. Therefore, these leaders are not recognized by the community itself. The committees are a non-democratic instrument, which have no organisational capacity, they only generate more division among people and its principal aim is merely political, as they are normally linked with political parties who give “stoves” (material rewards) to people that vote for the parties. The committees are thereby used to social hand-outs and to receive personal benefits, instead of organising for a communal benefit. There is no real interest from the IMPLAN to improve this methodology, and it has developed into a non-comprehensive system of participation that does not work.

For David, the solution lies in *sectorisation*, that is, working at a neighbourhood level so to enhance public participation. For that, working with NGOs brings a lot of benefits, such as flexibility, permanence, continuity, and long-term processes. However, NGOs have little capacity of formal solutions. In his opinion, the current political discourse does not recognise NGOs or citizen associations, the real field of decision-making happens in informal political conversations. The existing formal mechanisms do not foster participation (as they aim only for obtaining information from people) and poses the question on how to change planning processes so they can, by themselves, encourage community organization. By its part, at an urban level people has developed a more reactionary participation. Interventions have appeared by themes of interest (green areas, mobility, etc.) and the usual action is opposition towards predatory projects.

Jesús Sotelo



Jesús is a senior consultant in organizational, human and social development. He has had a career of 25 years in leadership training both, in public and social initiatives. He is lecturer and researcher at the La Salle University, in León. He is a crucial actor for the topic of this thesis, as he has been an external assessor of social participation for the IMPLAN for many years.

Jesús extensively developed the evolution of the participatory practices that have taken place in the city, linking them with the national and local policies that helped to shape them. In this part, he highlighted that politicization has always been an obstacle in participatory processes, as well as a lack of consistency in the programs applied. In former times, formal mechanisms of participation submitted to processes of popular will, which derived in an assistant-related focus without any proper planning or involvement of different disciplines. Later on, in the 80's, a technocratic approach was implemented and all the previous social processes were constrained.

In his opinion, the legal framework that includes social participation in processes of urban planning is very wide, however, a proper instrumentalisation is what is missing: lack of continuity and financial resources, failed projects, inadequate mechanisms. Also, it is important to highlight the technocratic focus of the city's legislation. Its emphasis is more on order, efficient service's delivery, pertinent investment, equipment... instead of integrating social justice into policies and laws.

Speaking about the *comités de colonos*, which are the formal participatory arrangements of the Urban Planning Institution, he mentioned there are different trends within the current committees. Most of them have a party affiliation and some others do not. There are even localities with two committees, an "official" one and other one not recognised by the local authorities but recognised by the community. However, he highlights that the problem also relies in the promoters of the committees. This people are public agents of the Social Development Department who have the role of attending to the committees and promoting social services. But these public employees usually have a second role: they also work as promoters of political parties, who pay for their services of recruiting people. There are neighbourhoods that resist this actions and develop real community organisations, but most of them do not.

Jesús also mentioned the shortcomings of the IMPLAN. Although the institution has a very good staff with a wide and integral vision, he thinks the problem lies in the

implementation of the projects. From the participatory process, to the design, to the implementation, there are a lot of obstacles. As an example, he mentioned the *Corredor Madero*, an urban corridor that was thought by its inhabitants as a cultural promenade, but in the implementation the inspectors of the urban development department were corrupted by other interests and the final land use permits went to bars and clubs' owners instead of cultural establishments. He mentioned also the construction of bikeways, although they were designed with participation of several biking groups and the master plan was a "real piece of art", the designated construction company did not know anything about bikeways and ended up changing the whole plan. Corruption and lack of coordination make that the initial order is distorted throughout the different filters of decision-making.

Nevertheless, the IMPLAN is not officially the institution in charge of what happens after or during the implementation, as the projects go to the municipality and the administration then hires other agents for the implementation. There are regulations for the follow-up of the projects, but decision-makers do not care about them or do not know there is a regulatory framework. Therefore, there is inconsistency between "what it should be" and the operation. There is also a lack of counter-institutions to monitor the development of the projects and to oppose if something is not going according to the plan. Citizens have found forms of organization by specific topics (mobility, gender equality), and have raised different issues and placed them in the public discourse. However, there is still a lack of social mobilization and dynamism.

Other disadvantages that constrain participation in the city are, firstly, a labour-management traditionalist culture, that force to maintain power spaces and the status quo. Second, a lack of "urban heroes", or leaders with social initiatives. Third, a prevalence of an individualist mentality which also derive into individual requests at the moment of "participating", without having a wider and more collective vision. However, Jesús sees a great window of opportunity in the current migration flows that are taking place in the city, as multiculturalism will help to reconfigure the monolithic social structure that has prevailed for the last 200 years.

For him, three main actions should be done to improve processes of public participation involved in the urban planning of León:

- The first one is social education for an organized participation. The education complement is lacking in all participatory mechanisms, as citizens and decision-makers have to learn how better to participate and collaborate.
- Links between planning and execution. For that, there is a need for implementation and/or updating regulations, and to make them more proactive, that is, to oblige the executers to respect the initial planning terms.

- Update of participatory methodologies. The current participation mechanisms are very basic, outdated, do not foster empowerment. Also, there is a need for more coordination between public departments and more integration of different perspectives and backgrounds. The introduction of ITs could benefit the participation mechanisms as well.

Primo García

Primo is the current director of the Strategic Planning and Social Participation Department of the Municipal Planning Institution (IMPLAN) of the city.

Primo explained in detail how the Municipal Planning System is conformed and which are its instruments and structures. Later, he described the participatory exercise the IMPLAN included in the creation process of the Municipal Development Plan. He mentioned external consultants were hired to conduct the specific exercises using different methodologies, tailored for each age group. The aim of these methodologies was to get information and proposals from participants. At the end, a private university (Tecnológico de Monterrey) served as the assessor in charge of writing the final document, integrating all the inputs.

At a project level, he mentioned the IMPLAN seeks to include civil society in the analysis stage of urban projects. Therefore, the punctual analyses are made through participative diagnosis, in which the IMPLAN, with help of the Social Development Department, calls the local action boards (mentioned previously in this section) to participate in working groups in order to know their problems and make proposals. These proposals, which stay in an *ideal* level, are taken by a consultant of the IMPLAN, who draws conceptual profiles of projects. These drafts are later integrated to the Work Commissions projects or to the Municipal Government Program. The local action boards serve therefore as links between the IMPLAN and civil society, and are also in charge of monitoring the development of the projects.

When asked about the challenges the Institute faces in terms of public participation, he mentioned six main ones. These challenges could be divided into challenges external to the Institute and internal. The external ones are:

- Social indifference, lack of interest in new proposals
- Ignorance regarding the bureaucratic procedures and limitations. This results in people wanting immediate results and complains.
- There is no sense of co-responsibility, which derives into destruction of infrastructure (graffiti, robberies, etc.)

The internal challenges are:

- Among the IMPLAN staff, there is a lack of profile to promote participation (especially in social and rural development)
- Limited budget and a slow management of financial resources
- The staff must be more opened to evolution and social reality

He also mentioned some lessons the IMPLAN has learnt over the years with regards of public participation mechanisms. One is to have “rapid victories”, that is, immediate low-cost actions to motivate people and show them they were heard, while a bigger intervention is being planned. Other lesson has been not to generate great expectations among people, so they do not get upset afterwards.

Ricardo Ibelles

Ricardo is the current director of the non-governmental organization FURA.

Fundación Rescate Arbóreo (FURA) has mainly two objectives: to increase the number of trees within the city and to increase the number of native species in the urban green infrastructure. The foundation has had important achievements in the introduction of these objectives into the urban planning of Leon. One of these experiences happened during the construction of the third and fourth construction stage of the Integrated Transport System, which was going to build a BRT terminal that implied the cutting of 493 trees. Ricardo explained in detail how was their involvement in changing this project. Another example he talked about was when the municipality tried to “plant” artificial grass in the streets. The association published this plan in social media, which caused an important reaction in civil society. The IMPLAN then called them to stop the publication and invited them to a dialogue in order to re-design the plan.

Ricardo mentioned as well they are involved in three municipal councils. Their position in these councils was gained thanks to their relation with a municipal councilmember (*regidor*), who used his influence to let them in. In these councils they are able to hold some decision-making power over environmental issues, however, they can only be part of them for three years. In this regard, he mentioned they will continue to work “*with, without or in spite of public servants*”, later explaining their power has been gained through social organization, clear structure and objectives, and perseverance through time. He also mentioned citizen councils serve as *make-up* to power-holders, as the seats in these councils are reserved to businessmen: “*the councils have turned into mechanisms that validate what public servants say, either by ignorance or by private-economic interests*”. Regarding the IMPLAN Directive Council, he added because councillors are placed there by the mayor they

usually do not oppose to his plans and proposals. This fact takes away the counterweight councils may have in decision-making. The admission, as well, needs to be more democratic.

Also, they have been invited to several planning exercises, which usually entail citizen consultation processes in which different stakeholders are *heard*. He highlights these processes usually serve the purposes of 1) extract information from participants and b) fulfil the requirement of social participation. Nevertheless, it is a simulation, as these exercises are far from really integrating different alternative perspectives. In addition, FURA has never seen the final products derived from these consultation processes.

Salvador Zermeño



Salvador is the current director of the Research Centre of the University of Leon. He has been member of several citizen councils, technical advisor for the State Planning Institute (IPLANEG), among other experiences that pose him as an actor with wide knowledge of local political and urban planning processes.

From his experience working in projects or institutions near to the IMPLAN, Salvador has observed the participation methodologies used by the institution have most commonly been well posed but not well executed. In one hand, the citizens who participate are always the same ones, those who are nearer to what the institution is looking for (in terms of ideology, which entails no real confrontation) and they are been paid by political parties, which derives into a game of favours. Another result is “fake, diluted” communities, which are used to legitimize the strategic guidelines of the government. Therefore, the methodologies used can be graded as “simulated”, because they do not seek for real empowerment of people. In addition, the institute is not well trained to manage the information gathered by participatory methodologies. Regarding urban projects, the groups made are left after finishing the process, which serves mainly to collect information rather than organising the community or generating proposals with them.

In his point of view, the IMPLAN generates projects unrelated to social reality, with an excess of design and a focus on business. The projects are mainly aesthetic, “star projects”.

For him, the problem lies within a low politicised city, a civil society with a low motivation for getting involved in governmental decisions and greedy politicians.

Background research of the IMPLAN Directive Council members

Name	Profession	Job Position	Source of Information
Mauricio Blas Battaglia Velázquez	Engineer / Businessman	Current vicepresident of PROSPECTA, an innovation centre for enterprises, linked to the Guanajuato Chamber of Footwear Industry (CICEG)	http://www.ciceg.org/#
Enrique Octavio Aranda Flores	Architect	Owner of COSEBA, this construction company has been involved in scandals of influence peddling	https://soybarrio.com/2019-ano-de-oro-para-el-cunado-del-presidente-de-sapal-en-6-meses-logra-114-mdp-en-contratos/
Leticia Camino Muñoz	Engineer	Director of CIPEC, an organization that offers training in the fields of footwear, ITs, human development, and tourism	http://www.cipec.org.mx/index.php/capacitacion
Sara Beatriz Loyola Laso	Architect	Owner of the construction company Construction and Urbanism of Leon; coordinator of the postgraduate department of the University of Leon	https://www.linkedin.com/in/sara-beatriz-loyola-laso-a797b7122/?originalSubdomain=mx
Fernadno García Origel			
Gabino Fernández Hernández	Businessman	President of the National Chamber of Commerce and Tourism (CANACO)	http://www.canacoleon.com.mx/index.php?pg=nc
David Cashat Padilla	Businessman	Vicepresident of Marketing and Image of the Guanajuato Chamber of Footwear Industry (CICEG)	http://www.ciceg.org/#
Jorge Ramírez Hernández	Businessman	Owner of the construction company Electro Ramsa; former president of the National Union of Businessmen; current president of the water company of the city	https://www.linkedin.com/in/jorge-ram%C3%ADrez-hern%C3%A1ndez-2ab43316/?originalSubdomain=mx
Carmen Fabiola Vera Hernández		Director of the Mexican Association of Hotels in Leon	https://www.hotelesleon.org.mx/
Julián Tejeda Padilla	Construction Engineer	Partner of the construction company Diez Ingenieros Especialistas; former president of the Mexican Chamber of the Industry of Construction (CMIC)	http://www.diezingenieros.com/espa%C3%B1ol/inicio.html
Ana Paulina García Nava			
Arturo Torres Romero	Architect	Director of the architecture office Estudio ATR	https://www.linkedin.com/in/arturo-torres-romero-428352a9/?originalSubdomain=mx
Gustavo Ignacio Zermeño Zirión	Engineer		
Enrique Dorantes Ponce	Businessman	President of the Economic Development Consultative Council of the city; executive director of the company MD Manufacturing; councilor of the current administration	https://www.somosindustria.com/articulo/elige-md-manufacturing-a-proveedores-capacitados/ ; https://enterate.leon.gob.mx/leon-apuesta-por-un-nuevo-desarrollo/
Alejandro Arenas Ferrer	Construction engineer	General Director of the construction company AXXA Proyectos y Construcción; coordinator of the General Department of Public Works of the city	http://www.cmicgto.com.mx/index.php/2016-05-12-19-19-59/83-representacion-gremial/regional/122-direccion-general-de-obra-publica-de-leon ; https://www.linkedin.com/in/alejandro-arenas-ferrer-366572a1/?originalSubdomain=mx
Santiago de Mucha Mendiola	Businessman	General Director of the footwear company Julio de Mucha; former vicepresident of the Guanajuato Chamber of Footwear Industry (CICEG)	https://implan.gob.mx/enterate/noticias/item/67-eligen-a-nuevo-presidente-del-consejo-directivo-implan.html

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