Configurations of Digital Participatory Budgeting
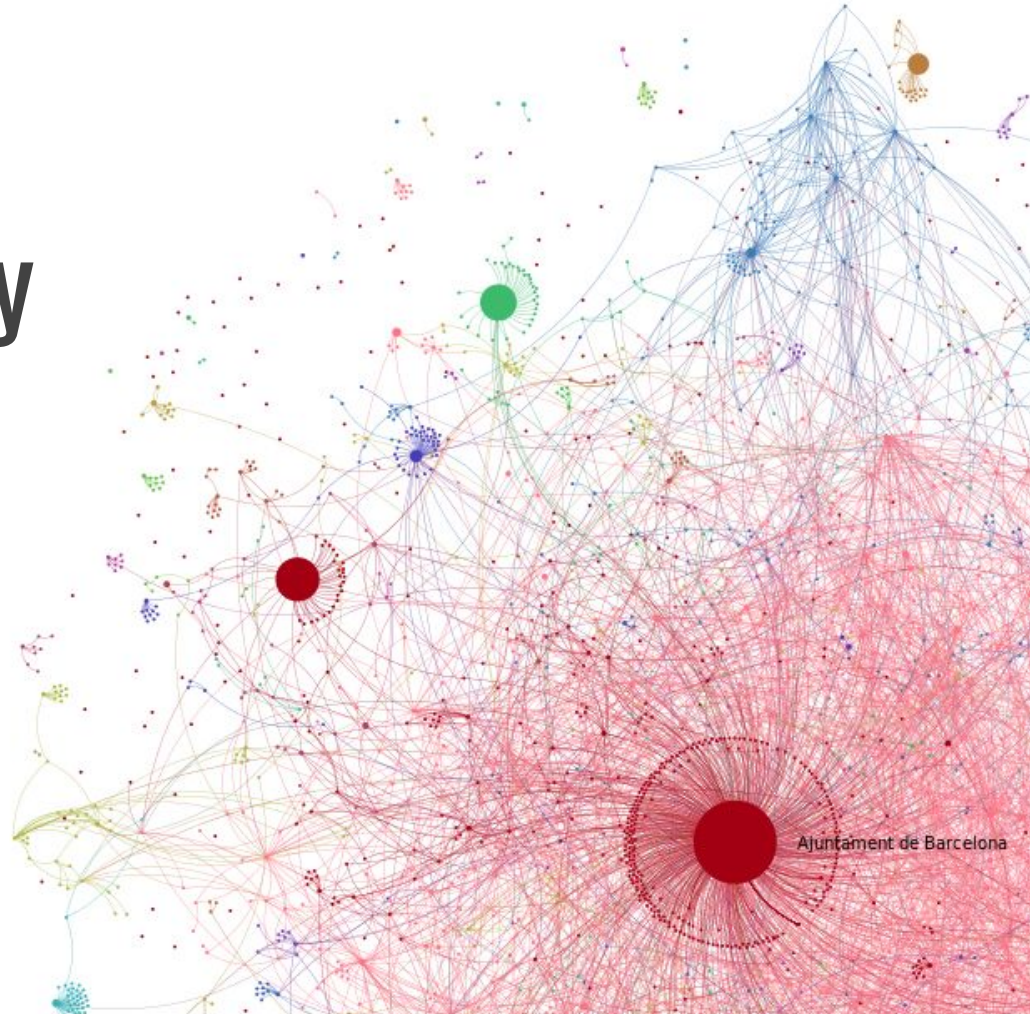
Pablo Aragón

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@elaragon

Ajuntament de Barcelona

Research challenge

Technology is playing an increasingly important role in participatory budgeting.

Technology design is inherently political and always embeds value: there are no such things as value-free and neutral digital platforms

Technology configuration is a form of software tailoring, aligning a piece of off-the-shelf software with workplace practices.

RQ1: What configurations exist in digital participatory budgeting?

As democracy is diverse, platform designs operate on different normative foundations.

RQ2: What types of civic participation do digital participatory budgeting configurations exhibit?

Data and methods

Decidim, the free open-source digital platform for participatory democracy

- Wide adaptation (hundreds of instances around the world on a single platform)
- Configuratibility (instance admins define processes by choosing components)
- Participatory budgeting as a feature

https://decidim.org

31 cases with participatory budgeting processes between 2016 and 2020, whose data were available through the API (24 in Spain, 6 in France, 1 in Finland).
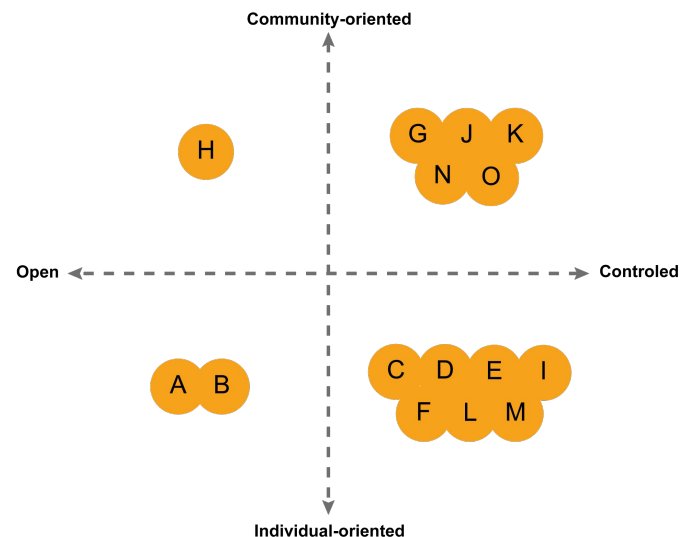
Inductive exploratory methods (observe, recognise patterns, construct explanation) for:

1. understanding participatory budgeting configurations
2. understanding the function of steps
3. understanding how configurations and steps impact the democracy of the process
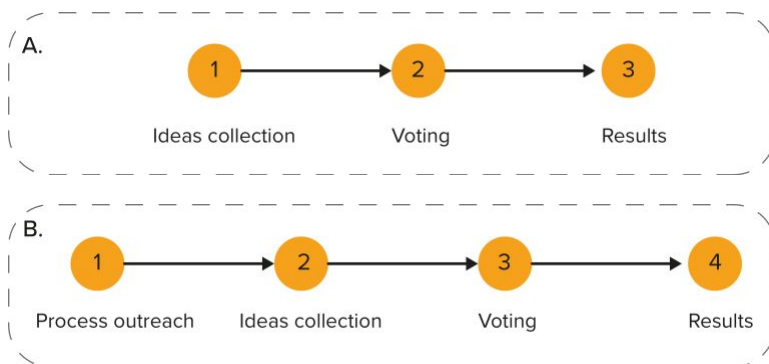
Socio-technical configurations of participation

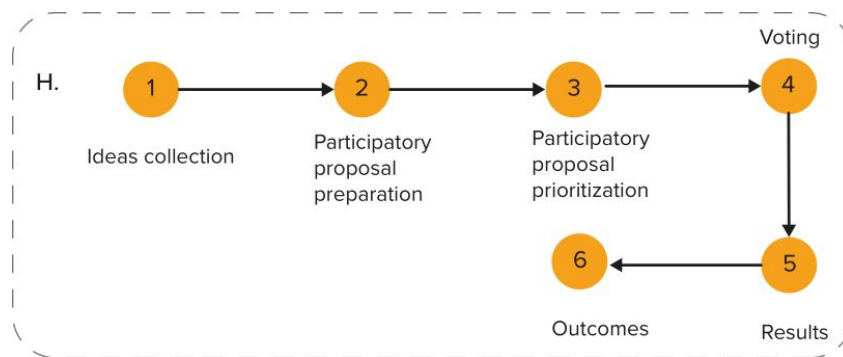Steps distributed across two democratic axis

Step	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O
Process outreach		✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Participatory proposals preparation							✓	✓					✓		
Ideas collection	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Admissibility assessment						✓									
Feasibility analysis			✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Participatory proposals prioritization							✓	✓							✓
Proposals prioritization											✓	✓			
Finalists announcement			✓		✓	✓			✓						
Voting	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Results	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Administrative approval												✓			
Process feedback										✓	✓				
Outcomes					✓	✓		✓			✓		✓	✓	✓
Number of cases	4	1	1	8	1	1	2	1	6	1	1	1	1	1	1

Individual-oriented and Open

A.
1 Ideas collection → 2 Voting → 3 Results

B.
1 Process outreach → 2 Ideas collection → 3 Voting → 4 Results

Community-oriented and Open

H.
1 Ideas collection → 2 Participatory proposal preparation → 3 Participatory proposal prioritization → 4 Voting → 5 Results → 6 Outcomes

Individual-oriented and Controlled

C.
1 Ideas collection → 2 Voting → 3 Feasibility analysis → 4 Finalists announcement → 5 Voting → 6 Results

Community-oriented and Controlled

G.
1 Ideas collection → 2 Feasibility analysis → 3 Participatory proposal preparation/prioritization → 4 Voting → 5 Results
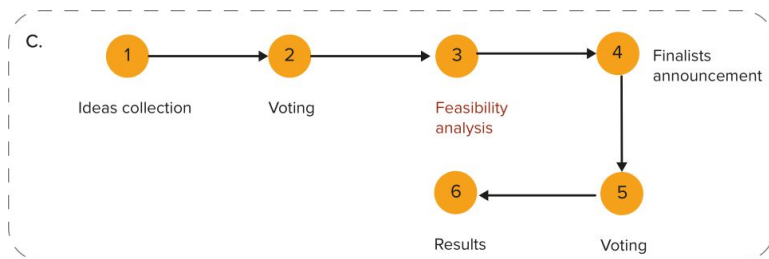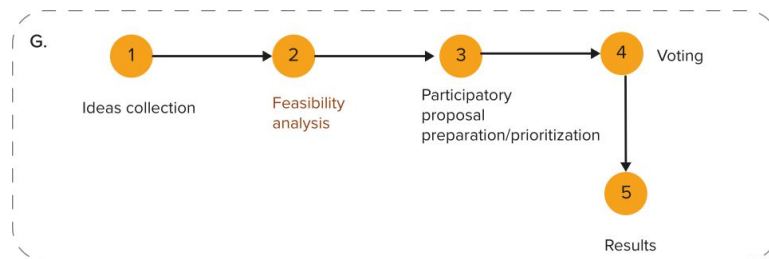
Summary of findings

RQ1: What configurations exist in digital participatory budgeting?

- Many!
  - 25 different technical configurations in 31 participatory budgeting cases
  - 15 different configurations of participation, i.e., socio-technical setups showing how citizens are expected and allowed to take part in participatory budgeting.

RQ2: What types of civic participation do digital participatory budgeting configurations exhibit?

- Configurations can present diverse forms of participation
  - Community-oriented vs individual-oriented // open vs controlled
- These dimensions also touch on key aspects of how democracy functions.

Aitäh!

Palacin, V., McDonald, S., Aragón, P., & Nelimarkka, M. (2024). Configurations of Digital Participatory Budgeting. ACM Transactions on Computer-Human Interaction, 31(2), 1-28.

Contact: elaragon@gmail.com https://elaragon.net