Citizen participation for sustainable transport: Lessons for change from Santiago and Temuco, Chile

Lake Sagaris

Dept. of Transport Engineering and Logistics, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Centro de Desarrollo Urbano Sustentable (CEDEUS), BRT Centre of Excellence, Chile

ARTICLE INFO

JEL classification: R58
Keywords: Sustainability Transitions Transport Participation Democratization Human agency

ABSTRACT

Winning citizens’ support for urban planning decisions has been a challenge at least since Jacobs published her groundbreaking Death and Life of Great American Cities (Jacobs, 1961) and Arnstein defined a “ladder of participation” (Arnstein, 1969). Since then, anti-highway movements and pro-cycling advocacy have demonstrated considerable efficacy (Buehler & Pucher, 2017; Fackler, 2009; Harcourt, Rossiter, & Cameron, 2007; Hovey, 1998; Ladd, 2008; Mohl, 2012; Sewell, 1993).

With few exceptions, however, public transport and Bus Rapid Transport (BRT) have failed to fire imaginations and fuel social movements in their favour. Using Innes and Booher’s 2000 framework typifying participatory approaches, this study examines the interface between government decision-making and citizens, in two contrasting cities in a transitioning country, Chile. From its inception, the New Alameda Providencia BRT corridor (NAP) has attempted to transform a transport project into a highly valued public space in Metropolitan Santiago. In the regional capital of Temuco-Padre Las Casas, innovative participation in Temuco Te Mueve Public Transport Plan was designed to build consensuses and permanent citizen-government collaboration.

These experiences underline the need to pay more attention to both process and institutions for sustainability. They also suggest strategies for transitions, even where governance arrangements are particularly complex.

1. Introduction

Winning citizens’ support for urban planning decisions and transformations has been a challenge, at least since Jane Jacobs’ groundbreaking Death and Life of Great American Cities (1961) and Sherry Arnstein defined her “ladder of participation” (1969) according to the quality of power relationships and communications involved.

In the ensuing decades, social advocacy around transport has mostly been expressed in anti-highway movements and pro-cycling advocacy. Both have demonstrated considerable efficacy (Fackler, 2009; Harcourt et al., 2007; Hovey, 1998; Ladd, 2008; Mohl, 2012; Sewell, 1993). Indeed, after a serious decline from the 1960s on, cycling is enjoying a significant renaissance, inspired by health, environmental, and other concerns (Buehler, Pucher, Gerike, & Götschi, 2016; Pucher and Buehler 2016, 2017).

With a few notable exceptions, however, public transport and Bus Rapid Transport (BRT) have failed to fire people’s imaginations and fuel social movements. Faced with the lack of spontaneous citizens’ movements in their favour, formal participation has failed to rise to the challenge of building a significant constituency for both. Indeed, scholars and practitioners raise significant questions about participation for sustainability (Bickerstaff, Tolley, & Walker, 2005; Rydin & Pennington, 2000).

Should social sustainability receive more priority within policymaking, when it comes to the sustainability trio (economy, environment, the social)? To date, the focus in transport has been more on economic and environmental aspects, but social buy-in has increasingly come to the fore as essential if “sustainable” transport projects are going to generate the political support and the behavioural changes necessary for their success. If so, we need to place a higher priority on human agency and the challenge of shifting both human behaviour and collective values, raised by many thinkers (Banister, 2007; Newman & Dale, 2005; Newman & Jennings, 2008; Sagaris & Arora, 2016).

Governance arrangements, too, as they enhance or inhibit meaningful public involvement have increasingly come into focus (Avritzer, 2010; Baiocchi, Heller, & Silva, 2011; Bulkeley, Castán Broto, Hodson, & Marvin, 2011; Geels, 2012; Grin, Rotmans, & Schot, 2010; Smith, 2011; Susskind & Elliott, 1983).

This study goes beyond the tools and methods of participation to explore process and governance. To do so we examine the interface between government decision-making and citizens in two contrasting cities and projects in Chile. From its inception, the New Alameda Providencia BRT corridor (NAP) has attempted to bring in relevant actors and turn a transport project into a highly valued public space in...
Metropolitan Santiago. In the regional capital of Temuco-Padre Las Casas in southern Chile, innovative participation in Temuco Te Mueve Public Transport Plan was designed to build consensuses and permanent citizen-government collaboration.

In Santiago, innovation hinged on a Citizens’ Observatory to interact with planners and designers beyond an initial round of public events. A legacy of failure and distrust has dogged the effort, however, hampering dialogue that could build consensus. Temuco, meanwhile, has sought innovative participatory methods to integrate multiple modes in its new “public” transport plan. By linking public health (physical activity and mental health) and environmental (air, noise and water pollution) and transport objectives, Temuco has created an innovative plan, but serious hurdles associated with extreme centralization remain, as few transport decisions are made by regional planning staff, with national ministries the main authorities.

Both experiences underline the importance of good governance for sustainability, a major challenge in most developing cities and countries. Looking at a large metropolitan city such as Santiago provides multiple examples of both challenges and strategies to overcome barriers to more sustainable transport. Notwithstanding, just under 7% of the world’s population live in large and megacities. Meanwhile, almost 27% of the world’s population live in small cities (under 500,000 inhabitants) such as Temuco, making these experiences highly relevant for comparison. Together, the lessons from both cities suggest strategies for transitioning toward more sustainable transport, even where governance arrangements are particularly complex, social capital relatively low, and discontinuity high.

2. Methods

The Santiago and Temuco cases discussed in this article form part of ongoing participatory action research conducted by the Laboratory for Social Change (the Lab), a collaboration between Transport Engineering at the Pontificia Universidad Católica (Chile) and a citizens’ urban planning organization, Living City.

Through its ongoing work with researchers in Europe, India, the United States and Latin America, the Lab has identified the importance of “human agency” as a key, perhaps paramount, aspect of “social” sustainability, along with equity, health and environmental concerns as they affect people’s jobs, civic participation, health and safety (Sagaris & Arora, 2016). It increasingly views sustainable transport as an “ecology of modes” with its equivalent “ecology of actors” or agents, who may become more or less active in the promotion and use of specific modes, depending on specific social, cultural and urban contexts (Sagaris, Tiznado-Aitken, & Steiniger, 2017).

In more recent work, the Lab has used both quantitative (surveys, mining Origin-Destination data) and qualitative (focus groups, participatory mapping, workshoppping, etc.) to study gender as a proxy for exploring equity, discrimination and exclusion/inclusion issues in transport.

By building collaborations into planning projects and processes in the living laboratories of real cities (Evans & Karvonen, 2011; Tippett, 2010), the Lab works through networks’ of key actors from government, citizen organization and private spheres. It co-designs and evaluates the effectiveness of real-world experiments, consisting mainly of innovations in participation and collaboration that could favour more sustainable transport decisions.

The Lab has investigated “sustainable” transport on both theoretical and practical levels, considering issues of social sustainability as paramount within the traditional sustainability trio of walk-bike-bus/Metro integration. As with more conventional definitions of sustainable transport, improving environmental impacts (reducing noise, water and air pollution due to emissions) remains central, complemented by economic aspects (reduced fossil fuel dependency, greater efficiency). Additional social concerns are also key, however, ranging from social equity through health and access, to the creation of better travel conditions, and jobs for low-income people, such as recyclers who use mostly tricycles and street fairs (similar to farmers’ markets in the global North), which are easily accessed by foot and bicycle.

In recent years the Lab has developed gender analyses as a proxy for evaluating equity and inclusion in transport policy, because while discrimination varies by place (on religious, ethnic, racial and other grounds), sex-based discrimination seems relatively universal.

Since 2015, the Lab’s collaborations with different transport agencies, cyclists’ organizations and public transport operators have reinforced these networks and, in 2015–2017, it tested theoretical work in real-life city planning situations as reported here.

In Temuco-Padre Las Casas (Temuco-PLC), the Lab worked with regional transport authorities, other government and citizen actors, to innovate in participation to create a more socially just sustainable transport plan. In Santiago, the Lab supported Casa de la Paz, an NGO charged with innovating and implementing participatory sessions in a new Bus Rapid Transit corridor, New Alameda Providencia. In both cases, a participatory action research (PAR) approach was used to co-design, implement, observe and evaluate results from these processes. The Lab’s positionality is that of a participant who observes, and is guided by precepts developed for this kind of research, by Stacey and Griffin (2005) and Coghlan and Brannick (2005), among others. Both efforts are ongoing, as are evaluations of results and proposals for deepening participation in future phases: implementation, in the case of the Temuco-PLC plan, and continuity of participation in the next phases of NAP, involving design of additional segments of the project, construction and, eventually, operations.

Participation is generally recognized as crucial to development, public support, and efforts to shift behavioural and consumption patterns toward greater sustainability and, particularly in developing countries, as part of democratization processes crucial to building more equitable, peaceful and economically prosperous societies (Avritzer, 2009; Carroll & Gaventa, 2001; De Souza Briggs, 2008; Fung, 2011; Gaventa, 2004; Gaventa & McGee, 2010; Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub, & Limongi, 2003).

In transportation too, diverse authors underline the importance of social values and community organizations when sustainability is a significant goal (Banister, 2007; Low & Gleeson, 2003; Newman & Jennings, 2008).

But widespread debates over the effectiveness, ethics and power relationships intrinsic to participation (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Hickey & Mohan, 2004) underline the need to carefully define the parameters of an activity that is often reduced to a list of tools or methods, with little consideration for the underpinnings.

Arnstein’s ladder of participation (1969) distinguishes between forms of state-controlled participation (manipulation, therapy, tokenism) and genuine empowered citizenship. It has remained a key reference for examining the quality of a participatory process from the perspective of those involved (Fig. 1).

Based on Davidson, Dooris and Heritage created a “wheel of participation” (2011) specific to healthy cities. They sort participatory techniques according to the quality of communication, starting from information (one-way), and running through consultation (two-way), participation (deliberative) and finally empowerment (collaborative), which fills out categories in Arnstein’s ladder, considering cities (Fig. 2).

Suskind and Elliott (1983) provide three typologies that identify a combination of methods, institutions and social norms that make participation more or less meaningful. The first is paternalism, in which government actors retain significant control, often producing frustration and participation “fatigue” (Bickerstaff & Walker, 2005); conflict, in which social movements form to reject unwanted policies or defend specific urban values, as occurred during the anti-highway “revolts” (Ladd, 2008) of the 1970s and 1980s in Europe and North America; and co-production or collaboration. This last is equivalent to the upper rungs of Arnstein’s ladder and occurs, for example, when Dutch governmental authorities hire the national cyclists’ organization to carry

403
Innes and Booher have developed a theoretical perspective based on power (2002), complexity theory applied to planning (2010) and almost 20 years working through collaborations, noting four categories in this regard. Public participation, they note, is essentially about “fairness and justice”, requiring innovative processes that go beyond traditional techniques (p. 7, Innes & Booher, 2000) to tackle the challenge of the “largely invisible models that tacitly frame the actions of different players in the policy arena” (p. 13, Innes & Booher, 2000). These authors find that two models, “technical bureaucratic planning” and “political influence” encourage “ritualistic versions of public involvement”. As with Susskind and Elliott’s conflict category, Booher and Innes note that “social movements”, a third typology, emerges when citizens excluded from the power structure organize to impact through their numbers.

Of particular relevance is their fourth category, “collaborative planning and public participation”. The essential idea is that “planning should be done through face-to-face dialogue among those who have interests in the outcomes, or stakeholders” (pp. 14–18, Innes & Booher, 2000). This offers opportunities to build “civic community”, in which “citizens talk to one another on public issues and build an understanding of these issues through interchange ... As a result, they become better informed, not only about the issues, but more importantly about what they want and believe in themselves. They begin also to develop some shared sense of being part of a community” (pp. 22–23, Innes & Booher, 2000).

This fourth typology is arguably the most relevant to navigating the challenges of sustainability, which require multi-level changes ranging from individual behaviour through urban design, and laws governing such diverse matters as traffic speeds, responsibility in the event of a collision, and incentives for building sustainable transport systems rather than highways for cars (Bulkeley & Betsill, 2005; Geels, 2012). Moreover, in the case of countries democratizing after military dictatorships and other forms of authoritarian rule, deliberation is vital to build democratic cultures and civic competencies (Barber, 1998; Dahl, 1998).

For this to work, Innes and Booher highlight the need for diversity (D), which brings in multiple perspectives, and interdependence (I), the glue that holds diverse participants through conflicts. These groups function through authentic dialogue (AD),1 creating the DIAD components that together compose transformative collaboration.

This conceptual framework is applicable to conditions regarding participatory governance in Chile (Table 1), with most processes falling

---

1 This is very similar to the deliberative processes studied by Gastil (2008) and Sunstein (2000), so this article refers to authentic dialogue and deliberation interchangeably.
within the first quadrant, characterized by low diversity, low interdependence of interests. Most participatory processes attempt to convince or co-opt (upper quadrants), rather than to listen and convert or co-evolve (lower quadrants).

Probably the most significant shortcoming of the upper quadrant approaches is that they ignore the reality that the central objective of the process cannot be simply convincing people of the intrinsic values of the project: rather, the project itself must change in response to citizens’ concerns. Consistently refusing to alter projects in response to citizens’ inputs has led to a powerful rejection of Transantiago, the effort to establish a BRT system in the Chilean capital (Martínez Concha, 2008, pp. 47–51; Morandé & Doña, 2007; Sagaris 2014a, 2014b; Witter & Hernández, 2012).

The two cases studied here reflect attempts to shift from the sterile technical-bureaucratic approach through imposition to a more open, co-evolutionary participation that could potentially improve support for BRT and public transit in general. In essence, these efforts reflect an effort to improve process quality through greater collaboration and empowerment of participating organizations (Arnstein, Dooris and Heritage) but they also require shifts in citizen-institutional relations (Susskind et al., Innes and Booher), as discussed below. The next section presents the cases and results to date, followed by a discussion of possible lessons, and some final reflections (Sagaris, 2015).

3. Cases: A major urban project (Santiago) and an innovative transport plan (Temuco)

Working in the living laboratory of real cities and planning environments typically involves seizing the opportunities that arise and working collaboratively to apply some version of the planning strategies developed theoretically by an academic researcher or team. Since 2015, two such opportunities have arisen, one involving a major urban transformation, the New Alameda Providencia BRT corridor planned for Santiago’s emblematic main street (2015–2017) and the other a regional transport plan for Temuco-Padre Las Casas, a medium-sized metropolitan region in the south of Chile, with a large indigenous population.

Table 2 summarizes the key variables for each initiative and participatory process. While the NAP process was planned for two years, including meetings to report back to citizens on results, the Temuco-PLC process covered eight months, and focused on generating a plan based on existing projects and citizens’ aspirations for improvements to public transport.

Table 3 outlines the main activities. Many are standard practice, particularly public hearings and field visits addressing thematic and territorial concerns. Others are more innovative, at least in the Chilean context, including the second round of hearings to report on the impacts of participation in final project design (NAP) and the citizen...

---

**Table 1. Four models of planning and policy making**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHARACTERISTICS</th>
<th>Low diversity</th>
<th>High diversity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low interdependence of interests</td>
<td>Technical Bureaucratic Convincing</td>
<td>Political Influence Co-opting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile examples</td>
<td>Nueva Alameda Providencia BRT corridor</td>
<td>Regional council (CORE) assignment of resources using political party quotas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High interdependence of interests</td>
<td>Social Movement Converting</td>
<td>Collaborative Co-evolving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile examples</td>
<td>Costanera Norte Anti-highway movement. Citizen movements for road safety amendments and cycling infrastructure</td>
<td>Temuco-Padre Las Casas Sustainable Transport Plan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own elaboration using Chilean examples based on the model from Figure 2, p. 13, Innes and Booher 2000.
Table 2
New alameda providencia (NAP) project and Temuco-PLC plan.
Source: Laboratorio de Cambio Social, Origen-Destinacion calculations Ignacio Tiznado, 12-IX-2016.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Nueva Alameda Providencia</th>
<th>Temuco-Padre Las Casas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Timing</strong></td>
<td>2015-2017: three years</td>
<td>2016-2017: seven months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transport element</strong></td>
<td>BRT corridor project</td>
<td>Full integrated plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Starting attitudes</strong></td>
<td>Trauma: Transantiago doesn't just go away</td>
<td>More open trusting relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key city characteristics</strong></td>
<td>Large Metropolitan region, 6,000,000 people, 40% of Chile's population and GDP</td>
<td>Regional capital city, 300,000, strong indigenous presence (500,000 in city and surrounding region), suburban structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key transport characteristics</strong></td>
<td>Sustainable transport (walk-bike-bus) 73% of daily trips</td>
<td>Sustainable transport (walk-bike-collective taxis-bus) 63% of daily trips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Automobility</strong></td>
<td>Share of car trips under 5 km (more suited to active transport modes), 58%</td>
<td>Share of car trips under 5 km (more suited to active transport modes), 26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main activities</strong></td>
<td>Public hearings (2016), Observatory (Jan–June 2017), participation in design cycle, new round of Public hearings coming up</td>
<td>Phase I: five-month participatory process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legal framework (participation)</strong></td>
<td>Winning bid, contract for participation, researchers part of Casa de la Paz team responsible for participation</td>
<td>Phase I: winning bid, researchers in charge of contract for participation and new plan, monitoring and participatory system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Next phases</strong></td>
<td>Phase II: Goal is to continue Observatory throughout planning and implementation cycle, including operations</td>
<td>Phase I with a direct contract</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

...observatory, discussed here.

In the case of the Temuco-PLC, there were several noteworthy innovations. The most significant included the close encounters between regional transport staff and grassroots neighbourhood associations in mainly low-income neighbourhoods, which are seldom included in official processes. These focused on participatory mapping, the creation of a Citizens’ Roundtable and an Institutional Actors’ Roundtable, with joint meetings between the two.

In terms of the plan’s contents, the most significant innovations included moving away from the idea that public transport involved only the bus system, and toward the perspective that public transit (buses) was the backbone of a sustainable transport plan that should also contemplate walking, cycling, bike share, cycle taxis and other elements, such as collective taxis. The plan’s objectives were highly innovative, since they contemplated mobility, but also health, social inclusion, participation and other social objectives that can be enhanced by improvements to an intermodal public transport system.

The Plan also included the design of ongoing participatory instances built in to regular activities within the plan, particularly monitoring and evaluation, using traditional surveys (two-way communication),

Table 3
Nueva Alameda Providencia and Temuco PLC compared.
Source: Own elaboration based on observing participant activities both processes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nueva Alameda Providencia</th>
<th>Plan Temuco-Padre Las Casas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main activities</strong></td>
<td>Thematic and territorial dialogues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial round of thematic and territorial dialogues</td>
<td>Field visits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field visits</td>
<td>Led by Regional Transport authorities (political authority)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Led by Metropolitan Regional Government authorities (appointed political authority)</td>
<td>Citizens’ Observatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens’ Observatory: formation, training, exchanges with regional government and design consortium</td>
<td>Indicators: Sustainability and quality of life, level of service and access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focused on the design phase</td>
<td>Monitoring methods include field observation and annual benchmarking report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final round of thematic and territorial dialogues to report on impacts on design</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main innovations</strong></td>
<td>Focus on neighbourhood and other citizen organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thematic and territorial dialogues</td>
<td>Dialogic methods adapted to specific participants and events, rather than fixed methods approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field visits</td>
<td>Participatory mapping bringing government, university and community members together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Led by Regional Government (political authority) not DTPM (agency)</td>
<td>Territorial approach taking participation to specific places not usually covered by formal participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CITIZENS’ OBSERVATORY: Build ongoing participation throughout design process and beyond formal sessions</td>
<td>Roundtable of institutional actors; roundtable of citizen actors; and combined roundtable to begin to bridge between territorial and technical expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start from conclusions during formal participatory sessions and carry on</td>
<td>Ongoing provisions for diverse forms and scales of participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revalidate decisions through new round of formal sessions later 2017</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main results to date</strong></td>
<td>The plan itself particularly non-mobility goals: health, social inclusion, participation, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional government has seriously tried to innovate</td>
<td>Measuring projects against goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrified of political risks</td>
<td>Recognizing the need for programs and other “soft” policy instruments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instinct for control so strong interactions are carefully scripted — no room for spontaneous conversation, “authentic dialogue” (Boober &amp; Innes)</td>
<td>The monitoring system, with participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtually 100% turnover in the government’s team in one year</td>
<td>Ongoing provisions for diverse forms and scales of participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fragile political environment that could put whole project at risk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key achievements to date</strong></td>
<td>Solid foundation for integral planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formulation of Citizen Observatory</td>
<td>Participatory system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elimination of expropriations (for cars)</td>
<td>Participatory, qualitative and quantitative components of monitoring and evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some shifts in negative attitudes, but remain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Long-term challenges</strong></td>
<td>Building enough civic and governmental capacity to make both Citizens’ and Institutional Actors’ roundtables a permanent part of transport planning and implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building citizen support for a project that significantly integrates aspirations for a more beautiful and inclusive city centre</td>
<td>Coordinating very dispersed actors to achieve common goals and objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieving cross-cutting political consensus and enough support to implement a genuinely innovative project</td>
<td>Achieving ongoing progress amidst political and institutional turnover and changes, some of which may be favourable, but others are not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building civic capacity for long-term, diverse roles in the framework of a major standalone project.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
but also qualitative methods, favourable to deliberation, that could be applied with significant degrees of participation, such as safety, walkability and cycle-inclusion audits. Final recommendations pointed to the need for more systemic work on discrimination and exclusion, particularly of indigenous people, with a test application of a transport survey suggesting significant problems. The survey was only applied electronically, so could not be considered representative overall, but did identify significant issues regarding discrimination and inclusion, that require further action.

For brevity’s sake, rather than attempting to describe each case in full detail, the next sections focus on specific highlights from each experience. While the NAP project covers a longer period (two years to date), it involves participation solely at the design stage. In contrast, the much shorter (eight months) Temuco-Padre Las Casas’ process produced a plan, although how well that plan will be implemented remains unknown.

The Lab played an advisory role in designing and implementing the NAP process, focusing particularly on the Citizens’ Observatory, discussed below. The Lab worked closely with regional transport authorities in Temuco-Padre Las Casas, co-designing and co-implementing the resulting participatory process, and writing up results in the format of a plan, for local actors to develop and implement. Results presented here are based on initial analyses by those involved, of deliverables and products for each process. A further evaluation of the Observatory is currently underway. Ongoing monitoring of both initiatives is necessary, according to how well plans and designs advance through normal planning-construction-operations phases.

Both experiences offer significant insight into participatory strategies to achieve citizen support for more sustainable public transport, including BRT, and what is necessary to achieve the kind of multi-dimensional shifts in behaviour, projects and social values considered necessary for greater sustainability.

3.1. NAP citizens’ Observatory: mistrust and conflict mark a troubled process

Probably the most significant innovation in the NAP process has been the effort to create a Citizens’ Observatory to ensure a more continuous role for citizens’ participation throughout the lengthy development of this corridor. Continuity is typically lacking from formal processes, which invite people to speak their minds at hearings, through surveys and other procedures, but seldom report back on how that participation became part of the final product.

Because a project such as this one requires ongoing negotiations between the regional and national transport authorities and local governments, private operators and the consortium hired to produce the design, the continuity of citizens’ involvement is essential to ensure that citizens’ concerns are present at every stage of a complex and unpredictable planning process. Moreover, where innovation toward greater sustainability is an implicit goal, citizen participation can help to drive reluctant politicians toward new perspectives and ensure critical support from citizens when innovations are questioned by entrenched interests.

When the regional government’s NAP team agreed to work with a Citizens’ Observatory, they made a powerful commitment to ensuring that citizens genuinely and significantly influenced the final project. With any major transport project this would be a major challenge, but in the case of Transantiago, widely considered the most disliked public policy ever in Chile, this was a bold and difficult decision.

The Observatory was formed by volunteers who offered their time in the final plenary session of each of four public hearings held during the first phase of participation. Their commitment was to work from the decisions at these hearings, and to act collectively to ensure those observations and desires were reflected in the final designs.

The three central objectives for the Citizens’ Observatory were to:

- Build strong, ongoing citizen organization(s) and voice(s) on BRT and related issues
- Build citizens’ views into this design phase, and eventually construction and operations
- Monitor progress based on consensuses and indicators developed during participation.

With 74 volunteers from four territorial and four thematic sessions, the Observatory was relatively representative of the major population groups and interests along the corridor. From the start, members questioned the validity of the process and their own participation, and there were moments when the whole process threatened to collapse. The Observatory officially began in November 2016, with women accounting for 39% of membership and members’ ages reflected the mostly adult and older adult population attending main events.

The municipal areas covered by the project were represented by a strong mix of civil society organizations, including neighbourhood associations, cyclists’ groups, disabled individuals and organizations, small businesses and other instances.

Attendance patterns at the main activities to get the Observatory rolling showed loss of contact with 18% of those who had originally signed up, contrasting with 81% attending at least one followup activity and a strong core of 30% (22 people) participating in more than one meeting. Some degree of attrition was to be expected when initial enthusiasm wore thin or other responsibilities came to the fore. Indeed, the original plan for the Observatory contemplated a membership of 25–35 people. While some people left, by June 2017, membership remained relatively high, at 67 people, most from grassroots, regional or national groups.

Creating a functioning civil society organization in a post-dictatorial context is extremely difficult, however, and the Observatory’s formation posed many challenges. Individual agendas sometimes triumphed or undermined the Observatory’s collective actions, and building consensuses internally, within the Observatory, and among the Observatory and project proponents proved difficult.

In December, as the Observatory was getting started, one participant questioned, with widespread support from her peers whether the process would really reflect “a genuine citizens’ perspective”, although it ended with warm wishes for the Christmas season.

This is not surprising in a post-dictatorial context, where basic civil society skills — such as democratic accountability, consensus-building, and responsibility of volunteers for tasks assumed — are the exception rather than the rule. Above all, extreme distrust emerged constantly, undermining the possibilities for reaching common agreements. This was further complicated by the project’s own scheduling, which forged ahead at top speed, then stalled for months on end as, for example, when the regional government had to redo negotiations with local authorities, after municipal elections saw political leadership of two of the four municipalities shift to opposition parties.

Similarly, several months and many meetings later, the same individual expressed doubts that any amount of citizen dialogue would influence the engineers promoting the project, noting that the corridors currently being built “gave no hope whatsoever”.

At a plenary of Observatory members (June 2017), the sense of futility remained, reflecting enormous uncertainties about the project’s future, and doubts that the project was worth defending. Among cyclists, in contrast, the project enjoyed considerable support, because it includes a cycling facility along a major route, where it is much needed.

Moreover, the Observatory and allies achieved a significant victory: they saved a small community slated for elimination to maintain space for cars.

The emerging discourse throughout 2017 revealed a delicate balancing act between existing fears and the desire to trust that change is possible; that Observatory members were willing to try “one more time”, but perceived a major gap expressed as “architects versus engineers”; and that they feared there was insufficient commitment to
social values such as heritage, trees and public space, versus a strong interest in building bus stations whose purpose was perceived to be solely reducing fare evasion (40% in June 2017). In early 2018, as the original contract for participation came to an end and the project was moving into further design and the first construction, a core group of Observatory leaders made a spirited effort to keep it alive.

3.2. The Temuco-Padre Las Casas sustainable transport plan

As with NAP, distrust was an issue in the participatory process to create the Temuco-Padre Las Casas Plan. In fact, the main adaptations in process design occurred during early meetings, when presentations were suspended to allow freer dialogue between participants questioning the authorities’ commitment to really listening to citizens. A specific list of communities’ concerns, based on these initial dialogues, became a stand-alone Citizens’ Agenda within the Plan, and the entire team of the regional secretariat, including the director, stayed past midnight at times to demonstrate their interest in direct dialogue with neighbourhood leaders.

The Plan involves six strategic objectives, each with tactical measures, to improve:

- health, active transport and universal access;
- road safety and quality of urban space
- gender, social inclusion and the rights of original peoples;
- work, commerce and diverse modes (including animal transport, such as horses and oxen and carts, common in this regional capital of a strongly rural economy);
- citizen participation and collaborative planning, and
- levels of service and access.

Moreover, citizens and government staff alike learned to use a Goal Achievement Matrix developed for the plan, to encourage consistency in implementation, by evaluating how well specific projects and programs line up with Plan objectives.

Participatory mapping during workshops highlighted both strengths and weaknesses of current public transport services, and underlined the need for basic participatory methods to simplify citizen proposals for location of bus stops, cycle parking or cycle ways; citizen participation in design of local bus stops, particularly given the cold rainy winters and long distances travelled by students; and the need for supplementary transport, such as a cycle taxi circuit to connect existing bus stops to the regional hospital entrance and other destinations, to simplify journeys by the elderly, the sick or people with dis-abilities.

People with visual, physical and mental disabilities participated, often repeatedly, throughout the process, raising awareness of extreme levels of discrimination, apparent for example in the practice of bus operators, who routinely refused to stop for them. Relatively high levels of discrimination detected by an electronic survey confirmed the need for a charter of rights and a system for enforcing them, no small challenge given that private operators provide most public transit services and authorities have few legal instruments for controlling their actions.

The brevity of the process was positive, in that in a relatively short period of time an innovative and more integrated plan was developed, with significant participation from key sectors. It was problematic, however, in that real testing of the plan’s full development and application will occur in an uncertain political environment, marked by significant changes after national elections (2017).

4. Discussion: contrasts, similarities and key lessons for sustainability

Five key lessons emerged from our observations and analyses of both processes:

a) Participatory process design must consider the aspirations and needs of both citizen and institutional actors, in light of the extreme fragmentation of Chile’s governance arrangements. At both national and regional levels, a diverse array of institutional actors are involved in key transport-related decisions. Sometimes jurisdictions overlap and often different ministries take competing and/or contradictory approaches to transport planning and participation. In both cases, creating a roundtable that brought institutional actors together and then brought these actors together with citizen organizations generated new collaborations and consensuses, facilitating project/plan development and making application of citizen observations more probable.

b) Cyclists are a key constituency as they tend to be the only organized citizen group interested in transport: if they see a public transport project as positive to their cause they will add their support, whereas if they see it as a threat they can actively oppose it. Cycling advocacy groups supported and participated in both the NAP project and the Temuco-PLC plan, helping to generate a more positive attitude among other participants and the general population through peer, social and other networks. Their experience enhanced credibility and they often led group discussions, introducing key information in conversations with others less familiar with sustainable transport concepts. This was particularly the case regarding health and social benefits of active, and public transport and less car-dependent lifestyles.

c) Partners from public health and other groups concerned with physical (in)activity and other social objectives can play a key role in positioning less car-centred solutions. This lesson was particularly evident in Temuco-PLC, where health experts from the local university opened participatory events with presentations on the health benefits of active transport. Evidence was less direct for NAP, although organizations representing both cyclists and people with disabilities were key transmitters of health-related messages.

d) Citizens’ Observatories require a crucial investment in their development and delicate negotiations to permit their growth and autonomy, to interact with an institutional partner, or participation will not be effective in the medium to long term. A more in-depth evaluation of the NAP Observatory is currently underway (April 2018). Initial results from both experiences indicate that these body require tangible resources to hire their own expert advisors and ensure meeting space, telephone and basic provisions for operations. When these are provided by an entity associated with the participatory process, and therefore the government and/or private sectors, mistrust can be reinforced rather than dissipated. Continuity and representativity are also at risk where resources are scarce and rules unclear or imposed from an outside body.

e) Participation must contemplate more than “educating” the public about a project’s benefits: it must also lead to genuine transformation of the final product, whether project or plan, if it is to be genuinely supported by citizens. This message was repeated continuously at virtually every meeting and event associated with both processes. Trying to “sell” citizens on project benefits, without first considering and incorporating responses to their needs, observations and aspirations, generates a high risk of failure for a participatory process itself and the associated projects or plans.

One remarkable point of widespread consensus in both processes was participants’ approval of the reverse traffic pyramid developed by the Danish Innovation Laboratory, which places cars at the bottom and pedestrians, cyclists and public transport at the top of a new set of priorities for urban and regional transport systems. This suggests strong suppressed demand for more pedestrian amenities, cycle-inclusion and other similar strategies as an integral part of innovative public transport projects, particularly BRT.

This perspective fits well with “complete streets” (North America) or “streets for all” (Europe) strategies for redistributing roads, public space and resources away from car-centred projects such as highways
and in favour of these other, more sustainable, healthy and socially inclusive transport modes.

5. Final reflections

Both the processes described here involved significant innovation in participatory methods and strategies to enhance shifts toward the greater sustainability of urban and transport systems. To date they have revealed significant barriers but also opportunities for reframing projects and plans to better respond to citizens’ needs and aspirations.

Above all, they point to the need to carefully design processes that will enable genuine dialogue between citizens and transport planners to improve plans and projects. This requires that transport planners in particular move beyond the assumption that participation, where it is useful, should focus mainly on “selling” a project to citizens or “educating” them so they “understand” its benefits. Empowering citizen organizations and observatories to ensure continuity in participation helps to reinforce consensuses built through participatory processes applied during the planning or design phase of transport initiatives. Guaranteeing the quality of the initial participatory process and maintaining this collaboration through specific institutional elements can preserve and build on goodwill, generating a positive cycle of participation-collaboration-more responsive plans and projects, and more credible monitoring and evaluation procedures.

Contrasting these experiences with innovation in participation indicates that participatory processes that don’t rise to the collaborative and associative rungs of Arnstein’s ladder may be destined to fail, undermining efforts to convince citizens of the value of sustainable transport. In this sense, experiences with cycling advocacy around the world and in Chile (xx), reveal that self-organization builds autonomy, self-confidence and a deeper ability to collaborate, which can mobilized in favour of other forms of sustainable transport.

The emergence of powerful process and institutional barriers to sustainable transport suggests that planners must find effective strategies to address these challenges in their own milieu, and that empowered and collaborative participatory models may be more likely to succeed.

How well these innovations will fare in the medium to long term remains to be seen: the proof of the NAP project and Temuco-Padre Las Casas plan will emerge over time, as these mature and potentially become an established part of the cities in which they are located. The NAP project experienced its first major advance with the elimination of unpopular expropriations that were, moreover, primarily to maintain space for cars within a project that is supposed to shift priority to active transport. More credible monitoring and evaluation procedures. Supplementary data related to this article can be found at http://dx.

References


Hovey, Bradshaw (1998). Building the city, structuring change: Portland’s implicit
Utopian project. Utopian Studies, 9, 68–79.