

Putting Public in Public Services:
Research, Action and Equity in the Global South

International Conference – Cape Town, South Africa
April 13-16, 2014

Draft conference paper, please do not cite without permission from the author

Winning elections, providing public services: Exploring the tensions in Latin America

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Abstract:

Thinking about the possibilities that a local government provide alternative public services to privatization, this paper proposes paying special attention to the discussion of what it means to govern in democracies in its minimum and procedural sense, i.e. you must win elections to govern. Is there a tension between providing public services and winning elections? Can the provision of public services be an incentive for decision makers? What kind of restrictions or political impediments could a government face if aiming to provide a different public service?

This paper aims to contribute to the debate through some results from an analysis of over 500 local innovations in Latin America, and works on the normative success criteria of researchers from the Municipal Service Project, David MacDonald and Greg Ruiters (2012), with a focus on those variables or electoral and political factors that might be involved in the process of transferring alternatives.

It seeks to make a theoretical and methodological contribution to the model for analyzing experiences, whilst also suggesting other elements for the debate, including the analysis of some electoral and political elements as variables that can intervene in the decision process and implementation in other contexts. The operationalization of electoral incentives is proposed to discuss the “decision” stage of the policy process, and the distinction between the different elements of political constraints related to obtaining nominations, cabinet configuration and electoral networks that feed and support bases of political parties for the process of “implementation”.

The databases that have been the object of study consist of innovations from over eight Latin American countries and attend different issues, including the priorities of this conference (health, water and electricity).

Introduction

“Las luchas y contradicciones no pueden pues asustar a los revolucionarios, porque son la sangre, el hábito de vida, el impulso fundante de las sociedades, de las clases sociales, de la propia vida de los revolucionarios, del cielo que nos cobija a todos. (...) La vida es sinónimo de lucha sumada a contradicción, y en el caso de nuestra revolución, las clases populares, su vanguardia indígena-campesina-obrera y vecinal es la condensación viviente de esas contradicciones, de esas luchas, cuyo producto será su auto-emancipación. Comprenderlas y articularlas como un flujo de *voluntad de poder* común, comunista, capaz de remontar a cada paso las iniciativas de las clases pudientes y conservadoras, es la tarea del *Gobierno de los Movimientos Sociales*, teniendo presente que habrán victorias temporales y derrotas hirientes que nos obligarán a conseguir nuevas victorias y así hasta el infinito, hasta que el tiempo histórico conocido hasta hoy se detenga, se quiebre y surja uno nuevo, universal, de los pueblos del mundo en el que el bienestar de la humanidad sea el producto consciente y deseado del trabajo de todas y todos.” (García Linera, A.;2011: 74)

Maybe the *Fukuyaman* mantra is true: 1989 did signal the “end of the history”... certainly the end of *their* history. The *tale* of two confronting views of the world reached an end, and a new “paradigm” for the left in Latin American begun. That was also the first year of the PT’s government in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre, and with them the “new left” experimented with novel ways of government. Probably the practice that since then has become an integral part of what we now define as an alternative to the old and mainstream ways of governments, is the participatory budget that was first tried in Porto Alegre, just after the fall of the Berlin wall.

After winning five subsequent elections in this emblematic city, however, the PT was finally defeated in the 2004 elections. But why did this happen, If they were governing with and for the people? Why did that people not support them in the election? Probably in democracy doing good things is not enough.

It is intellectually useless to accept the easy explanation of the “tiredness of governing”, because if we do that, we will be implicitly accepting that elections are only a matter of “alternation” in which some are in government until people get tired and then vote for another. Consequently, we would be interpreting the social conflict expressed during elections more as an exercise of “waiting your turn” than an agonistic fight to *occupy* the political institutions. A more productive possible explanation could be found in the possible costs of the orthodox economic management from the first half of the Lula`s Governemnt (Chavez, D., et al 2008:51).

A different possible explanation is offered in this paper, focusing on the political rather than in the economical and in the local rather than the national perspective. The argument formulated here is based on the existence of “creative tensions” between the provision of public services and the electoral process in our contemporary democracies. It does not matter if we consider the liberal democracy and its electoral processes as unfair, unjust or not at all democratic. For those who have chosen changing the world inside the institutions, they have to confront elections and their own logics, and this means that they have to contribute to another way of doing politics, whilst at the same time playing the game by its rules.

How do these electoral logics, then, affect the provision of public services? It does not take too much to identify what can be considered as “contradictions”, how to make it possible the “*para todos, todo*” (everything for everyone) with the very limited resources of a local government? How to match the demand of openness, accountability and participation in the decision making process with the personal legitimate intentions of the politicians to scale up in the government positions? How to accept conflict and discussion when unity and loyalty is needed during elections in order to get enough votes? How a policy maker can learn from alternatives considering the politics that would imply their replication?

With the purpose of contributing to the debate and promotion of public services, these undeniable contradictions are suggested here to be understood as the “creative tensions” Alvaro Garcia Linera refers to:

(Creative tensions are those) “tensions, issues and divergences that make it visible the debates among the people, involving laborious society either to observe, protect, accelerate or strengthen their revolutionary process. So they are exhilarating and dialectical contradictions of our Process of Change, *productive forces* of the revolution whose existence and democratic and revolutionary treatment will allow us to move forward.” (García Linera 2011, p. 72)

How then can we understand the possible contradictions between public services and electoral politics as creative tensions? Following a public policy approach, two different but interconnected lines of thought are suggested in relation to the stages of the policy process. First, the decision-making process, and then the implementation process, both are needed for later efforts on replication and learning. For the decision-making process it will be argued that one of the tensions is related to the “private goods” that can be provided in what we understand as “public service” and how this particularity can influence the reasoning of politicians in search of their minimum of votes needed to win elections, forcing a “portfolio diversification”.

For the implementation process it will be discussed how the political process inside the movements and parties can influence the decisions of the human resources, “the public servants”, that will have to implement the public services. This internal competition can also affect the unity needed for the electoral process, generating a certain kind of “opposition inside the government”.

If the arguments and assumptions are correct, these political/electoral circumstances should be taken into account in the later stage of the alternatives research: the analysis for their possible replication. If it can be argued for cognitive reasons, that criteria used to recognize alternatives may be different for their replication, the arguments about the electoral incentives and constrains would contribute to a political criteria for the learning of alternatives.

How to win elections?

To understand the possible tensions between politics and public services it is important to have at least a general image of the elements of the political phenomena we are referring to. The “electoral process” is the essential element of democracy, and according to one of the definitions from which the procedural liberal democracy is developed, we can understand the democratic method is simply “that institutional system, to reach political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote”. (Schumpeter, 1984 p. 343) The scenario for that competition, defined and regulated by the political Constitutions of every country, are the “electoral campaigns”. These campaigns fulfill two important functions (Martínez i Coma, 2008 p. 3): 1) a “publicity function”, in which the government presents their results to the citizens and 2) a “control function”, when also citizens have the opportunity to reward or sanction by casting their vote.

Experience and research suggest that the people vote is not decided completely, or at least not only, during the electoral campaign: “there is no consensus among theorists or between professional politicians on the usefulness of election campaigns. For some, elections are won or lost before the day of the vote. Campaigns, then, serve to strengthen or amplify voting trends. For others, its utility lies in mobilizing the faithful electorate and can be used to influence between groups of undecided voters.” (Martinez and Mendez 2004 p. 24). Further more, it should be considered other kinds of political phenomenon, like the previous “internal elections” inside every party, during which the militants decide the candidates.

It should be noticed that at the core of the democratic model is "competition". A value that is fundamental for the distinction between governments from right and left, according to their intentions of reducing or slowing it down, or at least to create better conditions among the competitors. A model of governance that prevents competition, inevitable suffers tensions with the actual political process that exists, in which it has to act and from which it obtains its resources. Although governing under values of cooperation and with practices opposed to competition, they are forced to compete at least electorally.

New left governments have to recognize this. Particularly because this competition, even if it is only "potential" – as claimed by Schumpeter (1984:345)- also falls inside the political parties or political movements. Members compete among themselves to choose who will be presented as candidate. It is this potential competition that makes the public servants and those in relation to the political process, to live on speculation and plot to remain competitive. Resources are invested, favors are granted, alliances are created, confrontations are simulated or acute, whilst the decisions on goods and services that the government should be distributed have to be taken and implemented.

How this political process affects the public service provision? The tensions

The reasons for the arrival in the 1980s and 1990s of the new left governments in the big cities in Latin America may not be the same as for their re-election. As Daniel Chavez (2004) says, among the numerous reasons that contributed the most evident ones are those of “omission”. There were no previous elections in those cities, due to the specificities of the political systems -like in Mexico City- or simply because there were no elections at all because of dictatorships. Daniel Chavez also mentions the “voto de castigo”, a protest vote or punishing vote, to the neoliberal governments and their catastrophic results, in conjunction with the social mobilizations against those neoliberal policies, giving in this way a potential base of support to left parties.

But now, more than 20 years after the firsts PT local governments in Brazil, there is a different situation. With the left national governments in Brazil, Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador confronting the constant right-wing attempts to de-stabilize the system – and the increasingly recurrent preoccupation on what to do with the so called middle class and the difficulties to obtain popular support in big cities and urban areas- the question of how to win elections becomes strategic in order to continue the deepening of the new projects of democracy and to sustain the resistance to the neoliberal recipes. The need of alternatives in these circumstances is a great opportunity to re-think what can be understood as the internal contradictions of democracy, and that urges to reach consensus whilst at the same time confronting every election. The creative tensions are therefore the result of the discussion when thinking about how to promote alternatives to privatization and at the same time procure the votes needed to win elections.

If we try to address the issue of elections, and specifically the question about how to win them, we will find a clear distinction between the “academic perspective” and the “practitioners perspective”. There are different academic approaches that try to explain the phenomenon; the “political and civic cultural studies”, “collective action”, “institutional mechanism” and more recently “populism and discourse”, amongst others. But what is useful for the purposes of this analysis is the practitioner’s organization of electoral campaigns. This question has been considered by focusing on the tools used for winning elections, in particular clientelism. Indeed at the beginning of this research, one of the first questions was if it was possible to find alternatives that persuade politicians to invest in public services. More specifically, it was looked at whether it was possible to convince politicians to abandon clientelistic practices and offer instead public goods. The assumption behind was that the constraints of resources and the unavoidable situation of confronting elections, both pushed politicians to choose clientelistic practices and not other policies; this was the way they guarantee the minimum sufficient of votes needed to win the election.

There are at least two aspects of clientelism that makes it not only useful for the analysis but also to consider it as an inevitable political phenomenon. The first one is about “What is needed for clientelism?” and the second one is

“How is clientelism understood?” Clientelism should be better understood as a human relation produced by unavoidable conditions - at least in the global-south - by: a) peoples need for private goods, b) the government limited resources (budget constraints) for providing private goods, c) the existence of human emotions like loyalty and gratitude from those who receive to those who give. The fact is that there are too many people that need something with a characteristic of a private good. The other inescapable reality is that public services produce private goods. This two facts reduce the possible maneuvers for the bureaucrats and intermediaries to avoid the possible relation that can be generated in the offer and receive of the goods.

The classification of goods developed by Vicent and Elinor Ostrom (1999) is a useful analytical tool to better understand the relationship between private goods and clientelism on the one hand, and private goods and public services on the other. They distinguish public and private goods according to their possibilities of exclusion and jointness of use or consumption: “**Exclusion** occurs when potential users can be denied goods or services (...) Where exclusion is infeasible, anyone can derive benefits from the good so long as nature or the efforts of others supply it. The air we breathe can be viewed as a good supplied by nature, so exclusion is difficult to attain. (...) **Jointness of Use or Consumption**: “No jointness of consumption exists when consumption by one person precludes its use or consumption by another person. In that case consumption is completely subtractible. (...) A loaf of bread consumed by one person is not available for consumption by another: it is subtracted from the total that was originally available.” (Ostrom E. and Ostrom, V. 1999)

Those goods that are “used” in the clientelistic transactions are the ones classified as “private goods” because of their possibilities of exclusion and no jointness of consumption. The following table will make it clear that the word “private” does not mean that are provided by a “private company” but that they are goods that can be provided by the government, but with certain characteristic related to the possibilities of exclusion and jointness of consumption. In the table 1, the difference between private and public goods is contrasted.

Table 1. Public goods VS Private goods.

Private Goods	Public Goods
Relatively easy to measure quantity and quality	Relatively difficult to measure quantity and quality
Can be consumed by only a single person	Consumed jointly and simultaneously by many people
Easy to exclude someone who doesn't pay	Difficult to exclude some who doesn't pay
Individual generally has a choice of consuming or not	Individual generally has no choice as to consuming or not
Individual generally has a choice as to kind and quality of goods	Individual generally has little or no choice as to kind and quality of goods
Payment for goods is closely related to demand and consumption	Payment for goods is not closely related to demand or consumption
Allocation decisions are made primarily by market mechanism	Allocation decisions are made primarily by political process

Table in Ostrom, Vincent y Ostrom, Elinor (1999)

This understanding of “the public” and “private” is what gives sense to a particular situation: public services provide public and private goods. This clarification and distinction is also crucial because it allows an extensive understanding of the word “public”. When talking about “Public Services” it is important to recognize that the word “public” has at least three different connotations (Rabotnikof, 1997 p. 17-21). For instance, public can be understood as what is general and common, what is visible and manifest, and also what is open and accessible. In a conversation about the remunicipalization of public services that were previously privatized, it is normally referred to the first one, in relation to property and the State as the owner or partner. The “visible and manifest” conception is usually understood as transparency as a criteria of the service, just as it is developed by McDonald, David A y Ruiters, Greg (2013). The “open and accessible” understanding of the public relates to the possibilities of excluding someone of the use of that is been named as public, and is related to the characteristics of the public described above by the difference made between public and private good.

The peculiarity of clientelism lies in the nature of the goods that are provided, but in the performance security in the implicit contract of exchange, and its place in the strategy for electoral support (Magaloni, Diaz-Cayeros, Estévez. 2006). This means, as Magaloni *et al* suggest, that the key to understand it is to see clientelism as one of several alternatives that politicians have. So, if there is no clarity or certainty in the electoral profitability of the alternatives, the probabilities for the selection of the alternatives decrease. Assuming that clientelism is a key tool to win elections, and that the links between citizens and political intermediation through an exchange of goods for votes is done, then it is possible to recognize the tension between the political incentives that exist for the provision of public goods, versus those with the characteristics of a private good. Magaloni, Diaz-Cayero and Estevez (2007) study on the Mexican policy “PRONASOL” explains this tension in its proposed “portfolio diversification”. Magaloni *et al* affirm that the Mexican government was forced to strategically diversify the provision of goods and services according to estimations of electoral revenues.

According to the primary results from this research on local governments, the diversification and estimation of electoral revenues is related to the number of votes needed to win elections. This minimum quantity of votes needed to win elections is what could be named as “the minimum sufficient”. Lets take the example of the Mexican local governments to clarify the argument. The Mexican “Premio Gobierno y Gestión Local¹” (Award Government and local management) is coordinated by the prestigious and public financed Centro de Investigación y Docencia Economicas CIDE. Every year, since 2000, they award five local experiencies that fulfill the criteria of efficiency, efficacy, attention to real demands, transparency, citizens development, institutionalization, and innovation. Among the different criteria of the research, there are two main issues that are important for the matter of this paper: 1) Have they been reelected? 2) What has been the relation between the votes they have received and the total amount of population in that

¹ <http://premiomunicipal.org.mx/ee/>

locality? The later relation between votes received and the population let us know the “minimum percentage of support” from the whole community that is needed to win the elections.

The table 2 concentrates the results from the first question about their reelection, according to the theme the experiences that has been awarded².

Table 2 Reelection in relation to the theme.

Theme	Total	Reelected	No Reelected	U&C
Ecological conservation	10	8	2	
Municipal Development	11	5	4	2
Social Policies	7	4	3	
Administrative Modernization	5	3	1	1
Urban Planning	4	3	1	
Public services	6	3	3	
Transparency & Accountability	4	3	1	
Municipal Infrastructure	5	3	1	1
Education, Culture y Sports	3	1	2	
Financial modernization	1	1		
Citizen participation	2	1	1	
Police and Civil Protection	2	1	1	
Total	60	36	20	4

Figure 1 shows the distribution of the minimum sufficient in relation to the total population of their localities. In the X axis is from 1 to 60 in relation to the order in which they have been awarded, for instance the first five are from the first year of the award, and ordered as they appear in the list of the website. There was no need to continue the Y axis to 100, for the simple reason that none of the municipalities received more than 45 percent of votes in relation to the total population. The percentage of the total population in the municipalities awarded by the CIDE is equivalent to the “minimum sufficient of votes” that is needed to win the election.

The idea of democracy as the “governments of the majorities” is questioned by these results. The majority of the municipalities received votes from less than the 25 percent of the population. This anomaly should be a creative tension for the new left governments in Mexico (if there are) to concentrate in obtaining the support of at least that minimum number in order to win the election and later be reelected.

² From the 60 local experiences, 4 of them are from localities governed by “Usos y Costumbres”, in the State of Oaxaca.

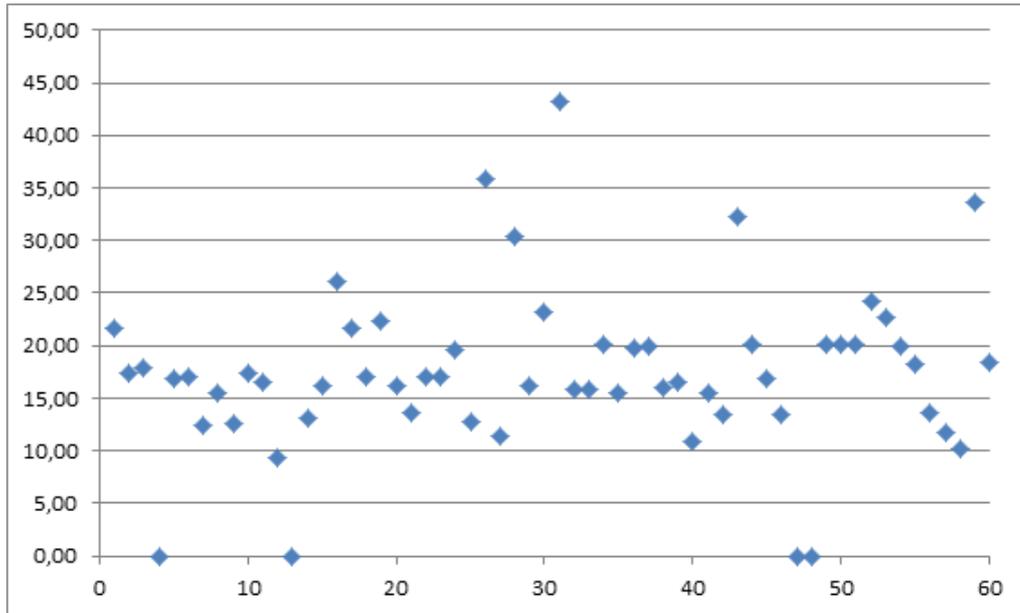


Figure 1 Votes received in relation to total population

Regarding the methodological consideration of the use of the total amount of the population instead of only the population in the electoral list, It must be said that even if some of the total population are too young to vote, it does not mean that the elected government would not represent them and has to work for them; considering that the purposes of the research is to show how “representative is the amount of votes governments received”, it is important to consider the population as a whole. Similarly, another issue that must be highlighted is that regarding the issue of the difference in the systems where the vote is optional or mandatory. The minimum sufficient can increase if the vote is compulsory. In the majority of the countries in Latin America vote is optional. The fact that in the new left national governments in Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador or Uruguay, voting is compulsory can be an important issue for a latter discussion. In table 3 a list of the countries that consider voting as an obligation is presented:

Table 3 Countries where the votes is compulsory

Latin America	The rest of the World
Argentina	Australia
Bolivia	Belgium
Brazil	Egypt
Costa Rica	Greece
Ecuador	Lebanon (only men)
Honduras	Luxemburg
México (it is compulsory but it has no penalty in case of not voting)	Nauru
Panamá	Democratic Republic of Congo
Paraguay	Switzerland (Schaffhausen)
Peru	Singapore
Republica Dominicana	Thailand
Uruguay	

Governments can provide private goods to maintain the minimum sufficient to win elections. But what happen with the population that does not receive anything directly? And more over, what if they do not perceive to receive anything from the progressive policies? This could be a hypothesis for what has happened in the protests in Brazil when the “vem pra rua” movement arises, or considering the recent electoral losses of Alianza País in Quito, Guayaquil and Cuenca in Ecuador. This can be characterized as the response of the middle class (not only, but some part of them) to the not *perceived* benefits from the policies promoted by the governments.

The vagueness of the “perception issue” is another tension that has to be resolved by the new left governments. Strategies of political communication and touching narratives could offer some clues on the possible direction. Meanwhile and in regard to the privatization, according to the famously poll carried on by the “Latinobarómetro”, there are good possibilities for the remunicipalization actions to have a positive appreciation from the population. In table 4 we can see the results of two questions made by the Latinobarómetro the year 2011, in which the proportion of population that is not satisfied with the privatization is around 59%, and those that see as beneficial the privatization is more than 45% of the population.

Table 4 Questions made by the Latinobarómetro in 2011

Satisfaction with the privatization of state services		The privatization of public enterprises has been beneficial to the country	
Public services were privatized, water, electricity, etc. Taking into account the price and quality, nowadays you are much more satisfied, satisfied, less satisfied or much less satisfied		Do you strongly agree, agree with, disagree or strongly disagree with the statement: “The privatization of state companies has been beneficial for the country”?	
Much more satisfied	4.2	Strongly agree	6.0
More Matisfied	23.7	Agree	32.0
Less satisfied	36.2	Disagree	33.3
Much less satisfied	22.9	Strongly disagree	13.4
Did not answer	0.3	Did not answer	1.7
Does not know	12.6	Does not know	13.6

(Not asked in Uruguay and Puerto Rico)

(Not asked in Uruguay and Puerto Rico)

Politics of the Public Servants.

A decision process, either participatory, transparent and horizontal, always followed by an implementation process The "feasibility" of the alternative should be incorporated as a condition in the process of decision-making. This, of course, is nothing new. Since the middle of the last century a debate around the study of the "decisions of government" has produced a variety of approaches. The self called "policy sciences" has a considerable course of

discussions that provides us with interesting clues to elucidate the right questions to ask in order to transform the intuitions into real results.

One of the "achievements" of the orthodox view of public administration, separating "politics" from the "administration" has been the professional career service. Under the assumption of "technical knowledge", requirements and tests are generated to find "experts": professionals through a series of tests and requirements were hired by the government to provide services under technical criteria, apart from political influence. Recruitment and promotion on merit put them away from possible manipulations and influence, guaranteeing that their decisions should only be based on their technical knowledge.

Local governments in Mexico (although it can also be seen in the rest of Latin America) had decades incorporating persons for political reasons into the bureaucracy. Despite the neoliberal efforts to reduce the state apparatus to a minimum, governments have used the jobs in the bureaucracy to reward or thank electoral support. So, every time government changes, a phenomenon of expansion of bureaucracy occurs in two stages: first, by the end of the period of one government, they seek to ensure the permanence of those who entered into the public service in their period of administration; in a second moment, once the new government begins, they seek to open new spaces (making some to quit, or open up new spaces) so the "trusted" people can be hired and "supporters" can have their gratification.

Although this practice seeks to be corrected in the future, it must be accepted that this phenomenon has happened during the last years (probably decades) with the consequences of bureaucrats that owe their jobs to a leader or a party (politicized bureaucrats). Considering the later convulsions and changes in parties in charge of the local governments all around Latin America, there are considerable probabilities that some of the bureaucrats may have supported different parties, with the subsequent consequence of opposition within public administration apparatus and in the process of the implementation of any decision. It can be also the case that bureaucrats are part of the same party but from different political groups, supporting different leaderships or from diverse social origins and ideological orientations; this last situation will be the more direct influenced by the processes and results of internal elections in the party, politicising decisions and implementations since the moment they arrive to their jobs, and intensified just when internal campaigns start.

Traditional political parties used to have among its functions the training of its members, preparing them for the exercise of government under certain ideological and technical criteria. Without entering into the discussion if this function was fulfilled correctly or not, it is possible to recognize the value of the task and its importance in the new movements that are displacing traditional parties, particularly in the south of Latin America. Although the representativeness of the leader, the "new democratic prince" (Fabrini, S. 2013), has been *needed* to articulate a discourse and lead the alternative projects, it is not *sufficient* to ignite a change in the provision of public

services. Here appears another tension to be solved: the bureaucracy of the new left.

Since Thatcher and Reagan efforts to reduce the State, the idea of bureaucracy has been under attack from both parts of the ideological spectrum. From the left side we can find a considerable attention to the horizontal and bottom-up governmental practices, contrary to what could be the basis of any bureaucracy. From the right side we have the powerful ideology of the New Public Management, solving the problems of the verticality and from a bottom up perspective but with a market-based orientation. A fact is that there is no possibility of running a government without a bureaucracy, so this situation produces a particular tension: the need for a new left bureaucratic theory.

Another step in the direction of a productive discussion could be to recognize that there is a relationship between the success of the policies and the political carriers of the politicians. The case of Belo Horizonte in Brazil could be a good example. One of the policies that have received so many awards is the Brazilian Belo Horizonte policy for food sovereignty, first implemented by Patrus Ananias from the PT in 1992. The reason for the enormous attention on this local policy could be that it was the inspiration for the very popular (and electorally recognized) Lula da Silva's policy Fame Zero. What can be for the purpose of this paper is that it was not only the policy but also the politician that was recognized; Patrus Ananias becomes in 2004 the Minister of Social Development and Fight Against Hunger, the ministry in charge of the implementation of the Fame Zero policy.

Other political lesson could be drawn from the Belo Horizonte case. After that period of government of Patrus Ananias as *prefeito* of Belo Horizonte, the PT governments are re-elected and a very interesting, and also very frequent phenomenon occurs. During the period of government of Patrus Ananias (1993-1997), the vice-prefeito is Célio de Castro, who will be the candidate for the PT and prefeito of Belo Horizonte for the next period (1997-2002). When Célio de Castro is prefeito, his vice-prefeito is Fernando Pimentel, who will be the candidate for the PT and prefeito of Belo Horizonte for the next period (2002-2009). If being vice-prefeito increases your chances for being prefeito the next period (as can be inferred by the previous example) we can expect not only conflicts inside the party (in this case the PT) to select the vice-prefeito, but also the enormous importance of the internal process of distribution of positions. A last lesson from the Belo Horizonte example could be the relation between the local and national politics. Patrus Ananias is not the only one that was first prefeito and later Minister. It was also the case of Fernando Pimentel, who was appointed in 2011 the Minister of Development, Industry and Commerce.

The political competition inside governments and parties are an unavoidable reality that places the attention on the need of a new bureaucratic theory from the left; a theory that considers the possible incentives and calculations of the actors, in order to expect their receptiveness and efforts in the replication of alternatives.

Criteria that identifies VS Criteria for learning and replication

According to Erik Olin Wright, any emancipatory social science faces three basic tasks: “first, to elaborate a systematic diagnosis and critique of the world as it exists; second, to envision viable alternatives; and third, to understand the obstacles, possibilities and dilemmas of transformation. In different historical moments one or another of these may be more pressing than others, but all are necessary for a comprehensive emancipatory theory.” (Olin Wright, E.; 2006:94). Following the distinction between a “theory of alternatives” and a “theory of transformation”, what the MSP has already done is *Developing alternatives*: “The second task of emancipatory social science is to develop a coherent, credible theory of alternatives to existing institutions and social structures that would eliminate, or at least significantly reduce, the harms they generate. Such alternatives can be elaborated and evaluated by three different criteria: *desirability*, *viability* and *achievability*.” (Olin Wright, E.; 2006:96)

We should add that this task of differentiation is nowadays very complicated. Daniel Chavez accurately says: "Distinguish between true political alternatives and hegemonic discourse is not so simple any more. (...) Marketplace supporters hacked the language of the new political left. Terms such as "community participation", "civil society" and "decentralization" decorate conservative leaders discourses, from British Prime Minister Tony Blair to President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, through the World Bank director James Wolfensohn. At the same time, there are many social and political movements around the world trying to rescue and re-appropriate this language through a renewal of democratic policy changes driven from the bottom-up." (Chavez, Daniel; 2004:17)

The results from the research of the alternatives should be then coupled with a *theory of transformation*: “Developing an understanding of these issues is the objective of the third general task of emancipatory social science: the theory of transformation. We can think of emancipatory social science as an account of a journey from the present to a possible future: the critique of society tells us why we want to leave the world in which we live; the theory of alternatives tells us where we want to go; and the theory of transformation tells us how to get from here to there. This involves a number of difficult, interconnected problems: a theory of the mechanisms of social reproduction which sustain existing structures of power and privilege; a theory of the contradictions, limits and gaps in such systems, which can open up space for strategies of social transformation; a theory of the developmental dynamics of the system that will change the conditions for such strategies over time; and, crucially, a theory of the strategies of transformation themselves.” (Olin Wright, E.; 2006:99-100)

This distinction between the recognition of alternatives and the process for their replication can be also recognized in the criteria of the awards that have the object of study of the research. In a first moment there is specific criteria to recognize the practices that can be awarded, the participants narrate their own experience in relation to those elements so the jury can identify the

elements of the award criteria in what participants say and in the evidence they show, and later determine if they can be “awarded” or not. It is the moment in which a practice is defined as an alternative or not. But later, in a subsequent moment, once the award has been already given, there is another narrative, produced usually by the academics that work on the lines of thought of the award. These narratives, usually published as compilations but must of the time just as an abstract in the web site, do not talk from the perspective of the public servant that wants to win, but from a perspective of someone that is “recommending” learning from and replicating that experience. And so the narrative changes; it is not any more about convincing a jury, but persuading others about the benefits and possibilities of learning and replication of the practice.

As one of the objectives of this paper is to contribute to the methodological debate of the criteria developed by David McDonald and Greg Ruiters (2012) table 5 concentrates the criteria that is also recognized in the awards. It would be possible to realize that the normative elements that could be the distinguishing criteria that are completely different to that of the awards are: 1) Equity, 2) Quality of Work, 3) Solidarity and 4) Public ethos. On the other hand, awards share some elements in the criteria of selection that are not part of the McDonald and Ruiters proposal. One is the “innovation or novelty”, and the other is the criteria of “efficacy”; understood as the accomplishment of the goals proposed by the initiative and the results and impacts obtained.

Table 5 Correspondences in the normative criteria of McDonald and Reuters

	Participation	Efficiency	Transparency	Equity	Quality of service	Accountability	Quality of workplace	Sustainability	Solidarity	Public ethos	Transferability
El Agora, Nodo Cono Sur del Foro Iberoamericano de Buenas Practicas, Argentina	X		X					X			X
Banco de Experiencias Locales (BEL), Argentina	X	X				X		X			X
Programa Gestão Pública e Cidadania, Brasil	X	X			X						X
Premio ITAÚ-UNICEF, Brasil	X							X			X
Programa Territorio Chile	X										X
Premio Innovación y Ciudadanía, Chile	X										X
Foro Nacional por Colombia	X										X

	Participation	Efficiency	Transparency	Equity	Quality of service	Accountability	Quality of workplace	Sustainability	Solidarity	Public ethos	Transferability
Premio Gobierno y Gestión Local, México	X	X	X					X			X
Premio Participación y Gestión Local, Perú	X										X

Based on the descriptions that appears in their collective database at <http://www.innovacionlocal.org/bancodeinnovaciones.php?lang=es>

Joan Font says “should make us be at least somewhat suspicious that some of these municipalities have been repeatedly rewarded for their municipal management by international institutions that seem to represent well these neoliberal doctrines. Should we stay with the calming explanation that transformative policies are not at odds with good management or should we reconsider what are the limits of social change made locally in an increasingly globalized world are?” (Font, J.; 2004:13). But despite the justified suspicion, it is possible to recognize the value of the analytical tools and approaches developed by the same international institutions. They may be useful in particular for the replication of the alternatives to privatization.

Another tension then has to be creatively solved, the use of the refined intellectual debates and concepts of the institutions that have been quite successful in promoting and implementing a certain view of government, “decolonizing” and “hacking” their knowledge for other uses. If there are certain reason in the constant arguments about the "hegemony" of the governance model of the New Public Management, then there should be a recognition of the "effectiveness" of their instruments to transmit practices. This diffusion of practices outlines steps and inputs needed in the processes of learning and transfer. It is possible to disagree with the contents of the policy, but the theoretical analysis and studies about replication and dissemination produced by those institutions should be part of a feedback or a counterpart for future discussions.

Conclusion

Despite some skepticism on think tanks direct impact on politics, there is a wider understanding of “think tank policy influence and social relevance in their roles as agenda setters who create policy narratives that capture the political and public imagination.”(Stone, D.; 2007: 156). This possible, and relevant influence on the agenda paves the way for alternatives to be considered by many policymakers. In the case of the Municipal Service Project, it represents the possibilities for the global south to learn from alternatives to privatization in very important areas such as water, health and

energy. But a theory of the alternatives has to be accompanied by a theory of transformation and in the case of local governments it should take into account the political and electoral elements that liberal democracy impose to contemporary governments.

In order to contribute to the replication of the alternatives already identified by the MSP, it is argued that the criteria used to identify alternatives is not at all the same needed to facilitate their learning; there are other elements and information –like the political criteria- that would be considered by the policy makers that will promote change in their own environments and contexts. By focusing on the internal contradictions of the government, there were offered some insights that could be taken into consideration for the discussion of the “productive issues” as Boaventura de Sousa Santos says: “those issues whose discussion may result in a depolarization of the pluralities that today constitute the thinking and action of the left.” (Santos, B. de S.; 2008:370).

Considering that there is no academic agreement about what mobilizes people effectively, clientelism has been proposed for the discussion. It is as a political practice that over time has been considered for its efficiency as an electoral tool. It is not an apologia of clientelism, but an analysis on its functional components --what makes it possible-. What are the *necessary conditions* for clientelism to happen? a) Demand, b) Private goods, c) A public servant from the government that relates with the clients. It has been argued that in the global south demand for goods and services is not only permanent but it exceeds the budget capacities of local governments to satisfy it. It has been also explained that governments provide private goods, so the question that remains is how to creatively solve the unavoidable clientelistic relation between those that receive and those that give.

As has been said, public servants play an important role in the political process that flows next and interrelated to the possible replication and implementation of alternatives. Bureaucracy, from the street levels to the cabinet formation, is impregnated of personal and political conflicts in a never-ending time line. In these conditions, what lines of discussion should be taken for the subsequent work on the diffusion and replication of alternatives, in order to creatively attend the tensions and envision new ways of doing (strategic) politics from the left?

1. A strategic diversification of portfolio that can organize the people that receives private goods. The “consejos comunales” in Venezuela or the PT in Brazil with the Participatory budgets have done this, staying in permanent contact with the people and mobilizing them during the electoral periods. The inevitable exchange of private goods in the context of need and suffer should be considered as a demand to develop a “decolonial” conceptualization of clientelism. A kind of “clientelistic reason” paraphrasing the already famous book of the “populist reason” by Ernesto Laclau.
2. A strategy of political communication for those sectors of the population that does not receive private goods, so they can positively value the public services. A very interesting approach could be the narrative

- policy analysis, in order to analyze and at the same time produce the narratives that can be told.
3. An innovative theory of bureaucracy in the intersections of the dichotomy of vertical-horizontal and the technical-popular, that considers the historical critiques from the left but do not accept the market-based solutions offered by the neoliberal NPM approach. A new left theory on the “cabinet formation” that recognize the electoral and political demands of the policy entrepreneurs or agents of change that will be in charge of promoting the alternative in their respective government. For example, to develop a theory on the conditions and criteria for the appointment of the public servants that will be in charge of the public enterprises of water, health and energy; a theory about the conditions and criteria to make decision and implement them inside the public enterprises.
 4. Critically, but seriously, consider some of the discussion in the field of policy science. On previous studies about policy transfer, policy diffusion and policy learning, and a particular attention should be paid to the narrative and interpretative policy analysis approach.
 5. New ways of resolution of conflicts inside the parties when time for internal elections comes. This new ways have to try to avoid the internal conflicts that arise and be as open and democratic as possible.
 6. New proposals for the “electoral processes”, to continue with the representative democracy but to move away from the unfair procedurals imposed by the liberal and Schumpeterian perspective (it means move away from the “economical” and “competitive” perspective of democracy and envision an other formula for aggregate popular willing and convert that in seats at the congress and the local government.

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