

BOGOTÁ'S DISTRICT SCHOOL OF PARTICIPATION

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Abstract

This case study presents a general context of the main citizen participation initiatives in the Capital District of Bogotá and, particularly, the challenges, advances and achievements of Bogotá's District School of Participation (in Spanish Escuela Distrital de Participación de Bogotá) which has as main objectives the strengthening of the citizen's capabilities to come into play in the public affairs and to exert in their citizenship rights in the context of Bogotá's new development plan (2020-2024) and Bogotá's Open Government Strategy (in Spanish Estrategia de Gobierno Abierto de Bogotá GABO). During the pandemic caused by COVID 19, the school was forced to move their educational programs to a virtual and remote environment in order to keep citizens active despite the quarantines and social distancing. Today, the biggest challenge for Bogotá's District School of Participation is to acquire the institutional and technical capacity of training and educating smart citizens that will help achieve a smart and sustainable city, according to Bogotá's 2020-2024 Development Plan.

Keywords

Competencies, citizen participation, digital platforms, smart citizens, virtual education.

1. Introduction

Bogotá’s citizen participation has become relevant for city governments in the last 14 years. However, the most recent district administrations have linked citizen participation with new agendas and projects related with building Colombia’s capital as a smart and sustainable city. This approach becomes evident in the new city administration that goes under the leadership of Mayor Claudia López, who defined five objectives in the 2020-2024 District Development Plan: A New Social and Environmental Contract for the XXI Century Bogotá, that aim for social, economic and environmental sustainability as shown below:

Image One. Objectives of Bogota’s Development Plan 2020- 2024



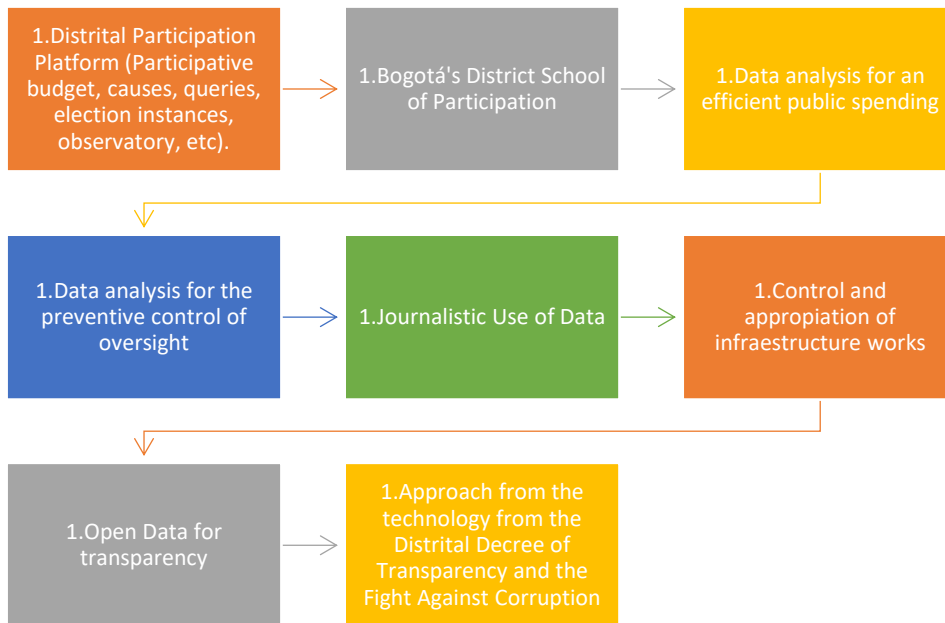
Source: Created based on Bogotá's Development Plan 2020- 2024

In the cited Development Plan and, as an application of the fifth objective, the achievements of globally positioning Bogotá as a Smart City are defined along with promoting Bogotá's Open Government Strategy as a new governance model that reduces significantly the risk of corruption while allowing citizen control and oversight of the government.

To make Bogotá's Open Government the default management model that supports Bogotá's smart city strategy, three main objectives are defined: 1) Achieve effective citizen participation in the city's decision making, 2) Empower citizens of their social control through analytics and data access, and 3) Accomplish a public administration management that is visible and transparent for citizens.

For achieving the previous three objectives, the city's mayor's office integrated eight initiatives that will be executed within the 2020-2024 District Development Plan and as shown in the image below:

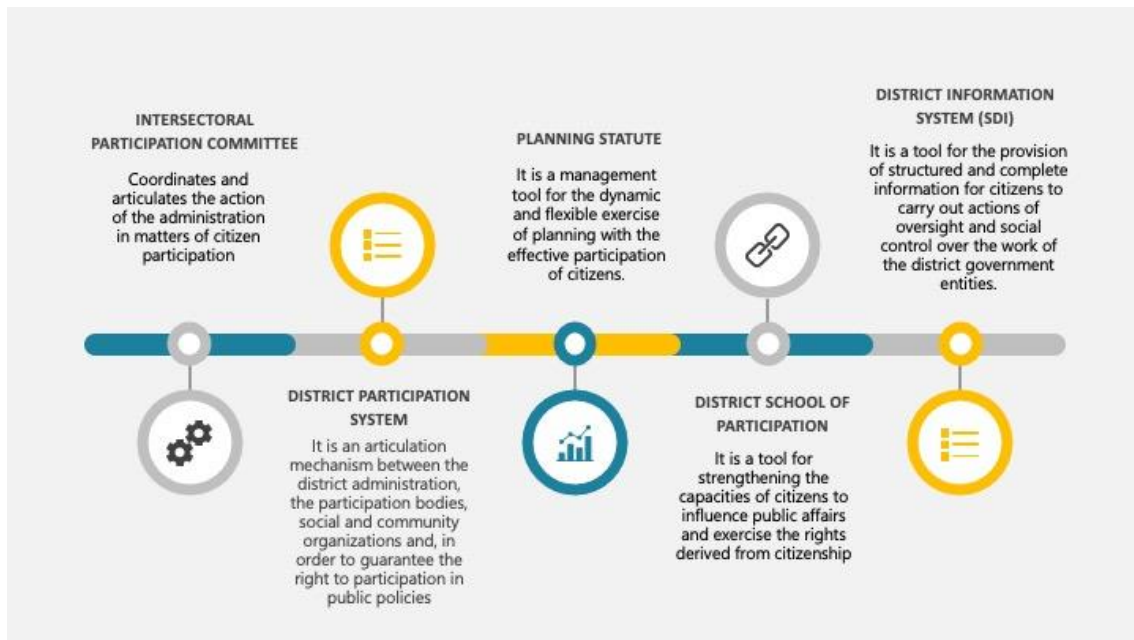
Image 2. Initiatives for the development of Bogotá's Open Government GABO



Source: Created based on information available from GABO

It should be noted that the previous city governments - and since 2007- had created different instruments and resources for citizen participation, nevertheless, in the current administration of Mayor Claudia López is the first one to create and acknowledge a vision of Bogotá as a smart city in an open government.

Image Three. Resources for citizen participation in Bogotá.



Source: Created based on the study of: Qué ha pasado con la participación ciudadana en Bogotá? del Foro Nacional por Colombia (2019)

In this context and for the purpose of this case study, we selected one of the resources: Bogotá's District School of Participation, mainly because of its length of service, development and relevance for Bogotá's citizens to become smart citizens.

Bogotá's District School of Participation was created in 2007 as a program from the District Institute of Community Action and Participation (IDPAC), with the purpose of generating a more active citizenship in which citizens of Bogotá could be recognized as subjects of economic, social and cultural rights; identified, appropriated and responsible for the political community to which they belong (Sanabria, 2020).

Bogotá's District School of Participation is a setting of encounter and exchange of knowledge and practices around active citizen participation in public affairs. Citizen participation is, without a doubt, a relevant asset for a better performance and functioning of the city. Nonetheless, for the construction and development of a smart and sustainable city, the citizen's contribution and their changes of behavior is fundamental. A city can't be smart if the citizens are not. The smart citizen is the one

that has the capabilities and skills - which should be also held by the other actors of the city - to participate in public affairs and solve the territory's problems through innovation, technology and data (Peres, 2020).

Hence why it is relevant for the city government to create and promote the conditions and competencies for a proper active citizen participation in which citizens are actors and leads of innovation, intelligence and territorial sustainability. This is the current role of Bogota's District School of Participation, specifically the school is in charge of the development and improvement of physical and virtual platforms of the city's participation. Said platforms must be designed for citizens to take part in the resolution of urban and territorial problems.

2. Context / Problem

In 2018, only 49% of Bogota's population would interact in spaces of citizen participation enabled by the city's mayor's office. This percentage can be understood through the following reasons: a) The few number of spaces available for participation and the lack of resources or time of citizens to participate in public affairs. b) The lack of knowledge of the existence of participation tools and resources. c) A negative image of the participation bodies and instances and d) The absence of capacities for a proper citizen participation.

In this framework, Bogota's District School of Participation becomes relevant because of their general objective of service as a permanent space of training and education of citizens about their rights and how to use participatory democracy tools along with the open government's open data and social media.

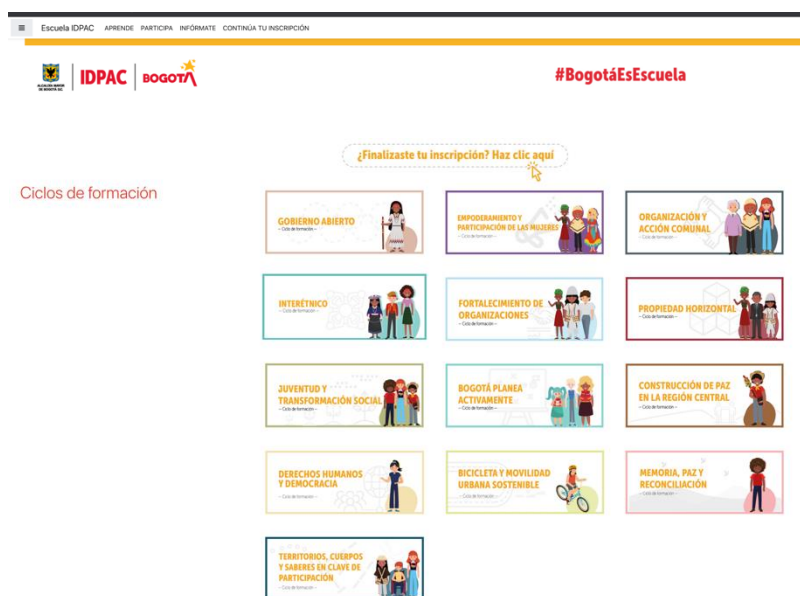
In order to achieve the objective mentioned before, the school developed and opened a virtual platform with free courses in their website:

<https://escuela.participacionbogota.gov.co/>

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This platform is being constantly updated with new available courses which are oriented to meet the needs of education and skill learning from those who live in Bogotá, in a context of innovation, intelligence and sustainability, as shown in the image below:

Image Four - Course offering from the District School of Participation



Source: District School of Participation's website

In 2020 and during the pandemic caused by COVID 19, Bogotá 's District School of Participation has achieved the development of institutional capability to reinforce the citizen's skills. This is evident in the following chart:

Chart One. Results from the District School of Participation during 2020

Between January and November of 2020 Bogotá's District School of Participation established an offer of 16 processes of training in which they were identified 26.724 trained users distributed as follows		
Cycle	Process of formation	Total
Bicycle and sustainable urban mobility	The bike in the district development plan	887
Bicycle and sustainable urban mobility	Rolling towards the construction of public policies	627
Bogotá actively plan	Participatory budgets: we are part of local planning	3.592
Bogotá actively plan	Citizen encounters V1	2.699
Bogotá actively plan	POT: Our territory, our plan	2.284
Bogotá actively plan	Citizen encounters V2	1.898
Strengthening organizations	Active participation in conflict resolution	2.611
Strengthening organizations	Teamwork and new leadership	2.091
Youth and social transformation	The youth agency and peacebuilding	523
Memory peace and reconciliation	The social and historical process of conflicts and participation	1.417
Memory peace and reconciliation	Memory, Bogotá contributes to the construction of peace	1.299

Territories, bodies and knowledge in the key of participation	Body, Diversity and Communication in terms of participation	1.354
Territories, bodies and knowledge in the key of participation	Possible cities from inclusion policies	1.321
	Communal elections 2020	3.042
	Technologies for care and participation	918
	Cycles workshops Bogotá leader	161

So far in 2020, 17,2% of the users of the School took part in the training processes related to the Citizen Encounters		
The second training process most demanded by citizens was Participatory Budgeting: we are part of local planning with 13.4% of users		
10 out of 100 users of the School were enrolled in the Active Participation in Conflict Resolution process		

Source: Balance II 2020 - District School of Participation of IDPAC

On the other hand, and taking into account the current situation of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the school had to develop skills for a digital transformation of their processes, activities and services, which implied new challenges since until 2020, and according to the official figures from the Ministry of Information Technologies and Communications, in Bogotá for every 100 citizens only 23 have access to internet connection from their households. Regardless, the Bogotá Mayor's Office is already taking action to aid the connectivity issues, so the citizen's activities are not interrupted by COVID-19.

3. Dilemma

In *Study. What is happening to citizen participation in Bogotá?* the author mentions the dilemma regarding the uncertainty and doubt that surrounds the lack of evidence that correlates the increase of citizen participation and the activities created by the

District School of Participation. This dilemma questions if the school is actually an important asset in the promotion of participation of Bogotá’s citizens in public affairs. In the cited study it is evident that this issue is caused by the absence of synchronization between the school’s agenda and Bogotá’s public policies.

This dilemma needs to be addressed and revised in the context of Bogotá's 2020-2024 Development Plan of the current mayor’s office that aims to make Colombia’s capital a smart and sustainable city. The real puzzle within our concept is to evaluate if the District School of Participation and their available courses will pull off a synchronization with Bogotá’s smart city policy - that is currently in a formulation stage - and if it will achieve to encourage behavioral changes in the citizens such as promoting the care taking of resources such as water, avoiding the deterioration of the ecosystem or decreasing the amount of food waste.

Image Five. Impact of the behavior of citizens in the waste of resources and the deterioration of the ecosystem in Bogotá.



Source: Created based on information from the National Department of National Planning, Bogotá’s Mayor’s Office and Greenpeace

Specifically, the dilemma of Bogotá’s District School of Participation questions if they have the institutional and technical capability or skills to train smart citizens that help with the city’s smart and sustainable city goals established in the 2020-2024 District Development Plan.

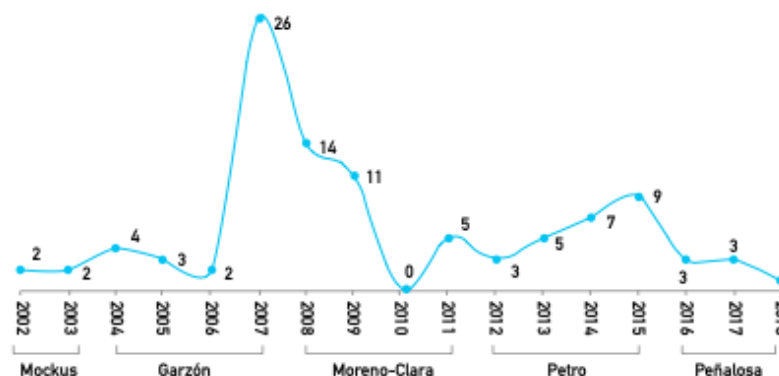
4. Case Development

Since 2007, when the District School of Participation was created, the capital government’s interest in the promotion of interactions between district entities and citizens has increased significantly. An evidence of this tendency is the development of the virtual educational platform of the District Institute of Community Action and Participation (IDPAC).

This platform is managed by the District School of Participation and has evolved along with the newer mayor offices and their recent prioritization of citizen participation. Nevertheless, and as shown in the graph below, in some of the governments between 2001 and 2019, there was a significant reduction of the economic support to projects regarding participation.

Image Six. Economical support of Bogota's public administration to the initiatives of citizen participation.

Graph 1. Spaces of participation created in Bogotá 2002-2018



Source: (Martínez, 2019)

Table 4. Conformation of Bogotá's expenses budget by account type. Average 2005-2017 in (%).

Table 4. Conformation of the Bogotá expenses budget by type of account. Average 2005-2017. In %			
Development plan	Total amount	Amount of participation programs	%
Development plan 2001-2003	13.201.600.000.000	20.702.000.000	0,2
Development plan 2004-2008	21.892.800.000.000	759.728.000.000	3,5
Development plan 2008-2012	30.621.300.000.000	140.358.000.000	0,5
Development plan 2012-2016	53.065.402.000.000	777.781.000.000	1,5
Development plan 2016-2020	88.321.584.000.000	839.697.000.000	1
Total	207.102.686.000.000	2.538.266.000.000	1,2

Source: (Martínez, 2019)

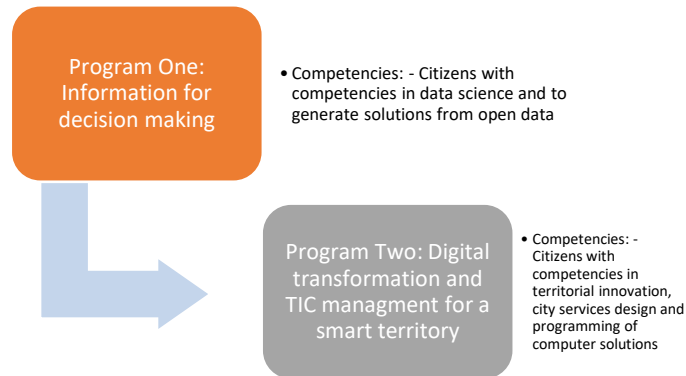
Bogotá's current administration led by Mayor Claudia López has shown the will to strengthen citizen participation in the context of the Objective Five of Bogotá's 2020-2024 Development Plan: Building Bogotá with an open government, transparent and citizen conscious. For the District School of Participation, this process of reinforcement is already happening in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is the reason behind the transfer and relocation of almost all of their activities to virtual platforms. As a result, there is easier access to the courses the school offers, disregarding the connectivity issues that some areas of the city suffer due to the lack of computers in vulnerable communities.

5. Closing the Case

The 2020-2024 District Development Plan: A New Social and Environmental Contract for the XXI Century Bogotá wants to take the capital to the level of a smart city, as shown in the image, with the aid of two main programs that require the development

of citizenship skills that are not being currently developed by the District School of Participation:

Image Seven. Bogotá Smart city program and skill requirements for citizens.



Source: Created based on Bogotá's 2020-2024 Development Plan

In this regard and in accordance with the previous dilemma, the district's administration, the District Institute of Community Action and Participation (IDPAC) and the District School of Participation have the challenge of acquiring the institutional and technical capabilities to educate smart citizens that help achieve the goals of a smart and sustainable city according to Bogotá's 2020-2024 Development Plan.

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