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Wear and Tear: Civil Servants'
Grueling Implementation of Paris
Participatory Budgeting (2014–
2020)

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Abstract

The Paris City Council began a participatory budgeting in 2014. A team of specialized civil servants was created to implement it in 2015. Most of these civil servants left the team before or in 2020, which marked the end of the first implementation mandate. It is important to understand why they did it to better understand the professionalization of participatory democracy. Thus, our research question is: Why did all but one of the civil servants comprising the participatory budgeting team leave it before or in 2020? The paper is based on a 3-year ethnography of the Paris City Council Participatory Budget team, interviews with civil servants, and documents written by them. I argue that the implementation of the participatory budgeting wore civil servants out. After voicing their concerns unsuccessfully, they decided to exit the team. The findings help to understand what implementing participatory institutions does to those performing it.

Keywords

Participatory democracy, professionalization, civil servants, participatory budgeting

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Introduction

The “new spirit of democracy” (Blondiaux, 2008) goes hand in hand with professionalization: Specific actors live on and for public participation. They are “public participation professionals” (PPP)¹ (Bherer *et al.*, 2017a). However, we know little about them and even less about the “official PPP” who have “the status and working conditions of public servants, [whose] operational context is public administration, and [who] must navigate the institutional politics of policymaking” (Escobar, 2017, p. 141).

Surprisingly, academics have shown little interest in PPP until recently, even though they are central to public participation processes. Blondiaux and Fourniau (2011) found that the professionalization of public participation is one of the eight core questions of studies on participation. However, the first major contribution to PPP was the collective work edited by Laurence Bherer, Mario Gauthier, and Louis Simard (2017). They stated that PPP are invisible but pivotal actors in participatory processes (Bherer *et al.*, 2017a). For these authors, PPP are at the heart of interactions with all other actors in the participation process, they can shape participatory processes by fighting for or against their instrumentalization by political actors, and they have the “heavy burden” of reinvigorating democracy.

In recent literature on PPP, scholars have studied who these professionals are, what they do, and how they affect the participatory institutions in which they work. First, some academics have tried to identify the PPP. Some are interested in their sociological characteristics (Mazeaud, 2009; 2012; Mazeaud and Nonjon, 2018), but most debate their categorization. Others study the structure of the field, for example, by examining the skills required to become a PPP.² Second, some scholars attempt to describe and understand the daily activities and challenges of PPP. For example, Chilvers (2013) offered four types of PPP roles based on their main activities: coordinate, practice, orchestrate, and study. Beyond describing their work on the frontstage of participatory institutions (facilitation, etc.), research is beginning to study the backstage. The daily work of PPP is said to be riddled with contradictions (Chilvers, 2017). They participate in “culture change” in governance (Escobar, 2017) because they must convince their colleagues of the value of the systems they support (Mazeaud and Nonjon, 2018). In addition to implementation of the device for which they are responsible, they create social demand and engage in activities to demonstrate participation (Mazeaud *et al.*, 2018). For some, their work

¹ “Individual working in the public or private sector who is paid to design, implement, and/or facilitate participatory forums” (Bherer *et al.*, 2017a, p. 1).

² See Sandfort (2017) for an example of the skill of facilitation.

may be more production of figures than participation (Gourgues, 2016; Gourgues and Mazeaud, 2018). Third, research has studied the influence of PPP on public participation and on the structures that host them. The results are less numerous. While some researchers concluded “participatory modernization” (Sintomer *et al.*, 2008), others have questioned it.³ Other researchers have typologized PPP according to their beliefs and their links with the participatory mechanism (Bherer *et al.*, 2017b; Lewanski and Ravazzi, 2017). In summary, thanks to the first research trend, we can identify and categorize PPP. Another section of the literature provides descriptions of the day-to-day work of PPP, and finally, the influence of PPP on the systems they implement are starting to be analyzed.

However, there is an aspect that has not been studied in the literature: the effects of the implementation of participatory processes on PPP. In this study, I aim to address this issue. More specifically, I wish to understand why “Participatory budgeting in Paris has become the word to flee”⁴ and why civil servants have indeed fled it.⁵ Our research question is: Why did all but one of the civil servants comprising the Paris City Council Participatory Budgeting team leave it before or in 2020?

The answer to this question comes from an observation already made in the literature and from an ethnographic study. The daily work of PPP in public administrations is “nervously and emotionally demanding” (Mazeaud, 2012, p. 48, translated by the author) and can lead to burnout in some cases (Escobar, 2017).⁶ During my immersion in the Paris City Council, civil servants from the participatory budgeting (PB) team regularly talked to me about the difficulties they faced in their day-to-day job of implementing the Paris PB. Thus, my central argument is that the implementation of the Paris PB has worn them out. In the French common sense, “wear” (*usure*) means “The state of a material thing which is altered, deteriorated by prolonged use or under the effect of physical or chemical actions”; figuratively, it refers to a person’s “insensible weakening, [and the] slow deterioration of the[ir] vital forces, intellectual faculties, [and] affective reactions.”⁷ In this paper, I assert that the civil servants on the PB team have worn

³ For Mazeaud and Nonjon (2018), participation – or “participatory culture” – within the administration does not necessarily go hand in hand with modernization.

⁴ Valérie, a civil servant who worked on the Paris PB until the end of 2014, Interview 2020/03/02.

⁵ I designate civil servants and employees with a temporary contract working as such as “civil servants” to distinguish them from the political staff of the Paris City Council.

⁶ These two academics provide observations about how public participation affects PPP in government. For example, Mazeaud (2009; 2012) suggested that being a PPP in an administration has positive effects for one’s career; however, I believe that neither approached the question directly.

⁷ <https://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/usure>, accessed November 2, 2020. Translated by the author.

themselves out, that is, deteriorated themselves by implementing the Paris PB. I distinguish two kinds of wear out: sprint wear, linked to intense effort expended over a few weeks or months, and background wear, which is a more gradual process (in which there may also be sprint wear).

First, I explain my methodology and provide some information about the Paris City Council's participatory budgeting. Second, I present my arguments. I first describe the wear and tear experienced by the civil servants comprising the PB team during the 2015 and 2016 editions. Novelty and poor anticipation of resources seem to explain this. I then show that the civil servants on the PB team experienced their membership as “shattering” (an indigenous term), despite the team's structure and the processes that occurred. Next, I present their strategies facing this situation. Finally, I discuss my findings and address some limitations.

Methodology and Participatory Budgeting in Paris (2014–2020)

Empirical data originated from three sources linked to ethnography. I immersed myself within the Paris City Council PB team between January 2017 and January 2020. I observed the daily interactions of civil servants comprising the PB team, as well as their meetings. I also conducted interviews with six of the eight civil servants on the PB team.⁸ In this paper, I use interviews with civil servants from other departments of the Paris City Council and political actors. Finally, I draw upon documents produced by civil servants working at the Paris City Council from 2014 to 2020.

The Parisian PB is a territorial PB⁹ implemented by civil servants and political actors working at the Paris City Council since 2014. There are 21 PB processes, one at the city scale and one at each district scale. The participation process is organized annually in five phases (see Table 1). Beyond this annual process, projects selected through voting are implemented (986 projects were voted on between 2014 and 2020). Civil servants execute project implementation, sometimes with the help of citizens or associations, or by outsourcing to companies. There are two other PBs in Paris: the Participatory Budgeting for Primary and Middle Schools, which is a thematic PB, and the Participatory Budgeting of Social Landlords, which is an actor based PB. These are not part of this study.

⁸ In this paper, I use only interviews with civil servants or employees with a temporary contract who spent at least one year on the PB team. I do not include temporary members (e.g., interns).

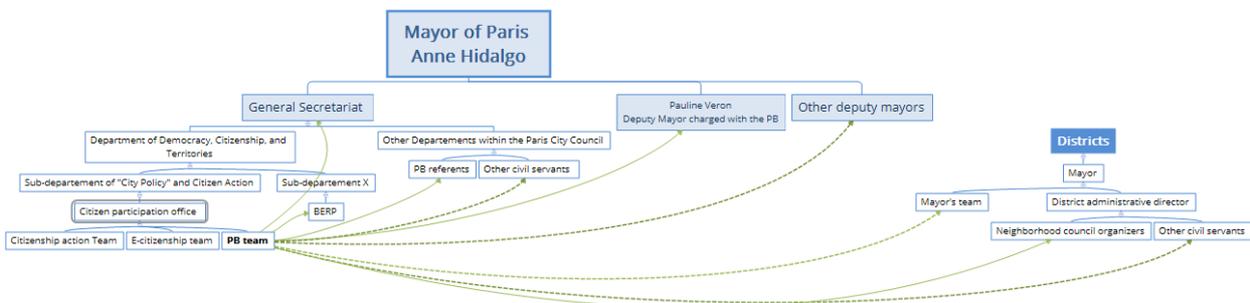
⁹ Participatory budgeting is “a particular form of budgetary procedure that involves the participation of citizens in the development of the finances of the public authority concerned” (Nay *et al.*, 2014, p. 49, translated by the author).

Table 1: The yearly process of the Paris PB (2014-2020)

Month	Phase	Details
January -February	Project submission	Parisians, as individuals or groups, can submit proposals through an online platform.
March-June	Technical review of the projects	Civil servants on the PB team review the project’s admissibility (whether they are within the scope of the PB). They then (a) write refusals pertaining to the projects that are not within the scope of the PB or (b) send the projects to other departments, where recipient civil servants review the feasibility of the projects and their cost.
June	Selection of the projects to submit to vote	Each administrative territory holds a meeting presided over by the mayor with elected officials, civil servants, and representatives of citizens. They select the projects to submit to the vote.
September December	Vote by Parisians Vote on the upcoming year’s budget	Parisians vote either online or in-person. Paris City Council elected officials vote on next year’s budget (which includes PB projects’ budgets).

Figure 1 maps out the administrative and political actors with whom the PB team worked. It is not an exhaustive organigram of the Paris City Council. From 2014 to 2020, the Paris City Council had one city mayor (who had several deputy mayors), twenty district mayors, and twenty-two administrative departments. I only indicate relationships that I hope will help the reader to better understand the paper.

Figure 1: The Relationships Between the PB Team and Paris City Council Administrative and Political Actors



Note : Solid lines indicate stronger relationships, while dashed lines indicate weaker ones.

Sprint Wear During the First Editions

In this section, I focus on the administration of the Paris PB until 2016. I describe the effects of its first edition on the civil servants who implemented it. I then explain how the PB team was structured and the creation of a software to manage the Paris PB projects. Despite these two resource improvements, the civil servants comprising the PB team barely coped with the 2016 voting period.

Burnout among civil servants during the first edition (2015)

The civil servants who implemented the 2015 Paris PB edition were “grilled”, according to Pauline Véron's Director of cabinet from 2014 to 2016 (meeting 2016/01/08), due to poor anticipation of the necessary resources. In 2014, there was a Citizen Participation team comprising three agents: Clara, Elise, and Valérie.¹⁰ It existed prior to Anne Hidalgo's election as the mayor of Paris in March 2014. These agents implemented the Paris PB 2014 edition, which is considered a proto edition.¹¹ In September 2014, a job description for a PB officer was published.

Nathalie responded to it and joined the team in October 2014. At that time, she was the only civil servant specializing in Paris' PB. Her position managed all required actions. However, the Citizen Participation team manager had to help Nathalie implement the 2015 edition, as Nathalie stated that she could not do it all: “Quickly, I had many responsibilities. We also realized that it was unrealistic to think that one person was going to be able to handle PB by themselves. So, Clara, the manager, very quickly found herself working full time on the participatory budgeting with me.” (Nathalie interview). Other of Nathalie's colleagues also had to help punctually.

This lack of foresight regarding human resources is also evidenced by the solicitation of help from outside the Citizen Participation team. Although all civil servants on the team were mobilized, other civil servants participated in implementing the 2015 edition. I will provide two examples. The first concerns the technical review of projects submitted by Parisians. The procedure for assessing their admissibility was as follows: (1) within 48 hours of the submission of a project, a DAJ civil servant reviews whether the project is within the Paris City Council competencies; (2) within 48 hours, a DFA civil servant reviews the budget's admissibility.

¹⁰ I changed all the civil servants' names.

¹¹ This first edition did not have a project submission phase that was open to Parisians. The Paris City Council asked Parisians to select projects from among 15 submitted to the vote. Those projects emerged from consultation with the various departments and elected official teams of the Paris City Council.

However, faced with 5 115 project submissions, the relevant civil servants declared that they were unable to comply with this procedure. The organizers of the Paris PB decided to change the procedure by introducing “marathon workshops” (an indigenous term). For several weeks, civil servants from the Citizen Participation team, one from the General Secretariat, one from the DFA, Pauline Véron’s advisor on the Paris PB, and other deputy mayors’ advisors instructed the projects submitted one by one during meetings. They then created a “task force” (an indigenous term) to process the admissible projects. They informed submitters about the status of their projects and coordinated with operational departments so that they could study those projects. The task force consisted of a heterogeneous group of civil servants, with the number varying from a dozen at the highest to three or four at the lowest.

The second example concerns the organization of in-person voting. Civil servants not specialized in Paris’ PB were also asked to help. They were from the BERP, a department specialized in organizing voting for representative elections. Organizing the PB voting period is a tremendous task. The civil servants comprising the Citizen Participation team could not do it, so the BERP stepped in. However, as soon as the PB team was created, in 2016, the BERP shifted from a leadership to a “wait-and-see” (Nathalie interview) position.

Human resources were underestimated in the implementation of this edition. This had consequences for civil servants specializing in the Paris PB. Before the summer of 2015, DFA civil servants audited the resources for the implementation of the PB. The auditors stated that 36 full-time equivalent workers were mobilized for project instruction, including 13 at the DDCT (instead of one, as initially planned). Thus, the auditors wrote “[Public] participation in the PB exceeded expectations and posed an organizational challenge for the Departments” (p. 5). They implied that the large number of projects submitted created processing difficulties. In her interview, Nathalie said that the high number of proposals “endangered” the 2015 edition. The two civil servants from the Citizen Participation team “didn’t count their hours” and “burned themselves out” (Julien interview).

Consequently, they took sick leave, one after the other. Nathalie stopped working for several months at the start of the summer, followed by Clara. The organizers of the Paris PB considered their sick leave to be evidence of burnout due to PB implementation. In her interview, Nathalie judged this edition as marked by “craftsmanship and improvisation”. Resources in the form of a team specialized in the implementation of the Paris PB were needed to avoid “human suffering” (Arminius interview) related to the 2015 edition.

Civil servants worn out by the first voting period (2016)

Despite qualitative and quantitative improvements to resources, the 2016 voting period wore civil servants out. The increase in resources has taken two main forms: the creation of a dedicated team of civil servants to implement the Paris PB and the use of software for project processing.

Between the end of 2015 and the beginning of 2017, a specialized Paris PB team was created. First, the Paris City Council created four jobs dedicated to the Paris PB at the DDCT. The aim was to have a 5-person team, as recommended in the 2015 DFA audit. Four persons arrived to join the PB team between October 2015 and March 2016: Arminius, Alexandra, Emmanuelle, and Julien.¹² The PB team was structured and complete. In 2017, two other people arrived to join the PB team. Unlike the other civil servants on the team, Bernard had no prior work experience as a civil servant or in public participation. His recruitment was different from that of the others. He met a high-ranking Paris City Council civil servant who offered him an opportunity to work on the PB. I was the second. I was recruited through a French PhD candidate contract (Convention Industrielle de Formation par la Recherche).¹³ Bernard and I arrived in January 2017 and were seen as “reinforcements” (an indigenous term) for the PB team (unlike the other five members, we were not civil servants).¹⁴

An information technology project also took place. In 2015, 5 115 submitted projects were managed in Microsoft Word Excel. During the marathon workshops, each of the dozens of participants had dozens of pages of A3 printed digital Excel sheets for all the projects. After each marathon workshop, the task force addressed each project on a common Excel sheet. Nathalie claimed in her interview that “It was [the] source of errors and complications.” There was no back office to deal with these projects. Thus, the software program Eudonet was adjusted to follow the “life of a project” (an indigenous term), that is, whether it was admissible, what department should do the technical review, the review content, whether Parisians had voted on it, and if so, its implementation. According to the opinions of the civil servants comprising the PB team at that time, information technology was as important as human resources for the implementation of the Paris PB.

However, although the project’s technical review phase improved, the civil servants on

¹² Cf. appendices

¹³ It is a Ph.D. contract in which an institution (company, public institution, NGO) is subsidized to host a Ph.D. candidate for three years. The Ph.D. candidates are enrolled at a university and in a research laboratory.

¹⁴ The Citizen Participation Office was also created in 2015.

the PB team encountered challenges during the voting period. In 2015, the BERP organized in-person voting. In 2016, the PB team took over this responsibility. For four of the five civil servants on the team, it was their first voting period. Organizing voting required their full dedication to the institution during the relevant month; this entailed personal sacrifices, feeling overwhelmed by their duties, etc.:

[In 2016,] I never did a voting before. During the voting period, Nathalie was ill. She was on sick leave for one or two months. We had no benchmarks, and no one in the team had already experienced voting. We found that this was a lot of logistical work. We had to bring together a whole community of actors: BERP and ALG.¹⁵ We had to work on evenings [and] on weekends. We had to conduct a follow-up on the statistics of the voting stations, which mobilized a lot of people, and which was a source of stress. Not knowing how to do it was a bit of concern. We came out of this period of voting extremely tired. (...) For example, we found ourselves [having to write] dozens and dozens of letters by hand to send communication material to a bunch of different addresses. It took us hours. It was anxiety-provoking, complicated, [and] we found ourselves carrying ballot boxes, doing things that maybe were not within our purview. (Julien, PB team 2015-2017, interview 2017/10/20)

The civil servants on the PB team experienced the repercussions of their exertion during this period. For Nathalie, consequences arose before the voting period (she was on sick leave), while the majority faced issues afterward (they took short sick leaves).

In this section, I described the wear and tear on civil servants specialized in the implementation of the Paris PB in the early days of this public policy. Due to the underestimation of the required resources in 2015, three people experienced burnout during the implementation of this edition (Nathalie, Clara, and one of Pauline Véron's advisors). The increase in resources from 2016 allowed for a better experience of the edition concerning project review. However, the civil servants on the PB team did not have a good quality of life during the voting period.

I consider the 2015 edition to have been a sprint, while the 2016 voting period was a shorter sprint. These two sprints wore out the civil servants dedicated to the Paris PB. From 2017, there were no longer any substantial innovations, and the means seemed sufficient for implementing the Paris PB. These civil servants should, therefore, have enjoyed a better quality of life during the implementation of the Paris PB. However, they all decided to quit the PB team at one point or another. Why?

¹⁵ Civil servants in charge of logistics.

Background wear

In this section, I argue that the experience of the civil servants on the PB team was “shattering” (Emmanuelle interview). Next, I detail their reactions.

Implementing Paris’ PB: A shattering experience

Civil servants dedicated to implementing Paris’ PB found that it was a shattering experience. In her interview, Emmanuelle told me that participatory budgeting has “broken” people.

The most significant finding was the number of instances of sick leave. Four out of ten civil servants on the Citizen Participation or PB team between 2014 and 2020 took extended sick leave (sometimes more than once) attributed to the stress or fatigue of the implementation of the Paris PB. I counted two instances of sick leave in 2015 (Nathalie, Clara), two in 2016 (Nathalie, Emmanuelle), one in 2017 (Emmanuelle), and one in 2019 (Niloufar). All were due to the implementation of the Paris PB. Even Nathalie, who claimed that personal issues precipitated one of her sick leaves, stated that working on the Paris PB was a catalyst.

Another clue to these difficulties is institutional memory. The Paris City Council civil servants and elected officials quickly perceived membership of the PB team as difficult. For example, Niloufar told me in her interview that before joining the PB team in the autumn of 2017: “I knew [about] the workload, [about] the Unidentified Flying Object aspect of the PB team; I knew the personal risks I would encounter.” This observation transcended the perimeter of the PB team. Each department had “PB referents” : civil servants in other departments also concerned with PB Paris implementation. They voiced difficulties during all the mandate, from the 2015 audit to the day for annual feedback on the PB in 2019. On that day, the most common demand was to improve the resources for implementing the Paris PB. For some civil servants, the Paris PB had become “the word to flee” (Valérie interview).

I will now add a third point the two detailed above: expressions of unease at work from the civil servants on the PB team, either in words or through emotions. Six of the eight people with whom I worked between 2017 and 2020 expressed their suffering at work to me, either in our interviews or during informal daily exchanges. I have seen many of them crying at work. The seventh never expressed pain to me at work, but he told me that he endured a tense time in 2016; this was corroborated by others’ reports of having seen him crying. The PB team manager is the only one who never made such comments in my presence.

What caused these negative experiences? First, let us hypothesize that these civil servants did not have the “activist ethos” (Mazeaud, 2012) needed to implement a participatory

policy. Alice Mazeaud studied the civil servants involved in implementing the Participatory Budgeting for High Schools for the French region of Poitou-Charentes and showed that they had a predisposition to activism.¹⁶ I believe that most of the civil servants on the PB team also had this activist ethos. For example, Nathalie disliked her superiors' judgements that she "failed" in 2015 and 2016 because she took sick leave. In her free time, Alexandra made her children pose for photographs commemorating the completed Paris PB projects when she realized that such pictures would be needed. Niloufar was also committed to the success of the Paris PB. Convinced of the importance of Parisians attributing projects to the Paris PB, she dedicated personal time to placing stickers on the finished projects.¹⁷ Emmanuelle and Bernard often stayed at the office late, cancelling personal commitments for the sake of the PB. Most, if not all, of the civil servants on the PB team dedicated themselves to the institution for weeks, months, or years. Thus, I conclude that the hypothesis of unsuitable recruitment does not hold.

I will not present a single explanation for the degree of difficulty associated with working on the Paris PB. The civil servants with whom I was in contact provided several reasons for their exhaustion. The first among these is the workload, especially for the 2015 and 2016 editions. Workload is also a valid reason applicable to civil servants who monitored laureate projects up to 2020. For example, Alexandra said that she felt she was carrying a heavy burden:

It came like that. Did I talk to you about the big stone? It was when we were working on the journal of the projects that were laureate. During the first one, I had the mental image of an enormous stone, a monstrous one that I was trying to carry on my shoulders [she mimics carrying a big heavy stone]. (Alexandra, PB team 2016-2020, interview 2018/07/17)

As far as the project officers involved with the annual edition were concerned, we can suppose that their workload diminished with experience and the stabilization of the process from 2017. However, whereas there were four people in 2017, this number reduced to two in 2019. Second, some civil servants described more of a bore-out than a burnout. Much of their work was done using Eudonet. During the project review stage, they spent their time ticking and unticking numerical boxes using the software. In her interview, Emmanuelle said that it required "thousands of clicks". At least two told me that they found their work boring, as it did not allow

¹⁶ That is to say that they are "ready to commit to the device (...) The operation of the latter requires going beyond the administrative framework, both from the point of view of schedules and travel, to go upwind [of] the needs and constraints of the public, which requires maximum availability and leads these public officials to define themselves as activists" (Mazeaud, 2012, p. 47, translated by the author).

¹⁷ Projects were labelled with a PB Paris logo emblazoned on stickers, signs, or other physical media.

them to use their capacities. Third, the civil servants said that the successive annual editions did not give them time to breathe. Fourth, some shared that they felt undercompensated. In her interview, Niloufar described laureate project monitoring by referencing the image of the Shadocks: “It’s the Shadocks. You pump, you pump but it does not work”. Fifth, several civil servants described experiencing a loss of meaning. They joined the PB team with the desire to help Parisians participate. However, the daily implementation of the Paris PB discouraged them. Finally, six out of seven of the civil servants on the PB team mentioned management issues, which I discuss later in the paper.

The civil servants faced difficulties during their work on the implementation of the Paris PB, be it in its first years or later. I offered some reasons to engender an understanding of why difficulty characterized their experience. How did they react to their shattering experience?

Civil servants’ new spirit: Fleeing the PB Team

I use Hirschman’s (2004) analytical tool—exit, voice, loyalty—to analyze PB team civil servants’ reactions to their shattering experience. Let us note that as an organization, the PB team hierarchy has aimed to retain its customers and users, the PB team civil servants. Let us also note that the civil servants assessed the organization’s inability to offer suitable working conditions as a failure. What are the mechanisms for alerting and improving the organization from the viewpoint of the PB team civil servants?

First, PB team civil servants voiced their dissatisfaction and exited either individually or in sub-groups. Below, I illustrate some of the most symbolic and intense expressions of dissatisfaction and exits. There were also cases of sick leave. From 2015, Nathalie claimed that hers and Clara’s sick leave drew the attention of high-ranking civil servants interested in forming a dedicated team to implement the Paris PB. There were also expressions of dissatisfaction during team meetings and internal seminars. For example, in 2017, there were “clashes” (Bernard interview) during a team meeting where several senior members of the PB team expressed their dissatisfaction to their manager. Several civil servants experienced this meeting as traumatic. In 2018, during a back-to-school team seminar, a consensus was expressed regarding “inconsistency between the means [to achieve participatory budgeting] and the ambitions.” (PB team seminar, observation 2018/08/30). Finally, though I will not detail them here, dissatisfaction was expressed frequently during everyday moments.

Several civil servants felt that these vocalizations failed to improve their condition; as a result, they left the PB team. Four civil servants left between 2015 and 2019. Following the 2015

edition, when Nathalie and Clara took sick leave, their superiors asked whether they should be “exfiltrated” (an indigenous term), meaning transferred to other jobs within the Paris City Council administration. This question was put to both employees. Nathalie wanted to continue working on the Paris PB, but Clara did not. Clara never returned to the Citizen Participation Office. This is the first documented departure linked to difficulties faced during implementation of the Paris PB. Although Nathalie stayed, she started looking for another job at the beginning of 2017. After the traumatic 2017 meeting, she left the PB team for another job within the Paris City Council administration. Emmanuelle sought to leave as soon as she joined the PB team. She felt that she had not found what she had been seeking. She communicated her wish to leave after a few weeks, then at the end of her probationary period (she was on contract, unlike the others). Eventually, she decided to tenure first before leaving. She left as soon as she could after her tenure in 2019. The fourth exit was Julien, who left the PB team following his success regarding the entrance exam for the French National School of Administration.¹⁸ Unlike the other three, I cannot link his departure to discontent with membership of the PB team. Between 2014 and 2019, several PB team officials departed. No one from the proto-PB team generation remained, and three out of the five members of the first PB team generation had left (Nathalie, Julien, Emmanuelle).

Second, I believe that there was a turning point at the end of 2019: the PB team’s second generation’s collective vocalization strategy followed by a collective exit. The second-generation members (Bernard, Niloufar, Mafalda) were also dissatisfied with the working conditions (Alexandra, the only survivor of the first generation with the manager, Arminius, grew even more dissatisfied). This discontent crystallized at the end of 2019 during the DDCT annual feedback meeting on the PB. After a colleague’s recent burnout, they decided to collectively voice their concerns and difficulties during that important meeting. They asked me to speak first, as I was an outsider. I wrote the speech and presented it to them for review. During the meeting, I used the metaphor of the goose that lays golden eggs: The Paris PB organizers are pleased because the number of voters, which is their main criteria for evaluating the Paris PB, has increased (the golden eggs), but the goose (the PB team) is exhausted. Following my speech, which was not well received by the PB team manager, the Citizen Participation Office manager, and the department’s deputy director, the department director said:

¹⁸ *Ecole Nationale d’Administration* is a training school for high-ranking French civil servants.

One of the administration's strengths is memory. We are in the crisis of the pioneers, which we send to the front line. There was a 90% loss in the regiments in the army. It is necessary for a work culture to succeed now to pioneers. [Working on the Paris PB] should become a common law. [The] Paris PB cannot hold if it is based only on individual sacrificial commitments. One must maintain the memory and processes. There is a strong turnover in the PB team. There was a very significant wear. The PB team civil servants must have time to breathe and rest. We will pay more attention to this issue. I think we need a new lease, all of us, and the PB team as well. (Director of the DDCT, observation, meeting 2019/11/26)

The strategy to collectively voice these concerns failed. The PB team civil servants did not feel that their work conditions had improved. Following this collective vocalization, the organization told them that they were working on restructuring the PB team to improve work conditions. However, for everyone but Niloufar, it was not a question of whether to stay but rather a question of when to leave. She changed her mind during the summer of 2020. All members left the PB team by the end of 2020. Anne Hidalgo, who was re-elected as the mayor of Paris, promised to increase the portion of the investment budget allocated to the Paris PB from 5% to 25%. The Paris PB is still an important public policy. However, nine out of the ten civil servants who dedicated themselves to the Paris PB from 2014 to 2020 decided to stop working on it by the end of the first mandate.¹⁹

In this section, I have asserted that the civil servants left the PB team because they felt that their job was causing them personal harm.

Discussion

My objective was to show that the work associated with the implementation of the Paris PB wore out those civil servants who dedicated themselves to it. Below, I point out some limitations of this argument.

Limitation 1: A study on fully dedicated civil servants

I studied the PB team's civil servants. Fully dedicated to its implementation, they were at the heart of supporting the Paris PB. However, other civil servants specialized in the Paris PB without being fully dedicated. How did those civil servants experience the implementation of the Paris PB?

This question is linked to an actual debate in participation literature. There is an ongoing struggle to categorize people who work in public participation. As mentioned, Bherer *et al.*

¹⁹ The last member, the PB team manager as of 2015, left in the first quarter of 2021.

(2017a) called them “public participation professionals.” Others have argued that this categorization is too narrow because it unifies actors with heterogeneous practices in the absence of a professional community. For this reason, Mazeaud and Nonjon (2017, 2018) used the concept of a “nebulous entity” of professionals working in public participation. Amelung and Grabner (2017) discussed “public participation advocates.” They asserted that it is better to consider the complexity of actions involved in work related to public participation. They also stated that this concept broadens the analysis of who is doing the work of public participation (activity), rather than public participation professionals (status), that is, actors who do participation work but are not PPP.

In this study, I studied the professionals of the Paris PB, not the “nebulous entity” of the Paris PB or its “public participation advocates.”

Limitation 2: A hidden factor?

On the one hand, Bherer *et al.* (2017a, p. 7) wrote that “This high ideal [reinvigorating democracy] can be a heavy burden when it is time to put it into practice.” On the other hand, the Paris PB team civil servants frequently discussed their everyday work difficulties with me. This yielded inductive data, which are data from the field. This was not my initial thesis objective. I argue that working on the implementation of the Paris PB (thus building and reinvigorating Paris’ local democracy) explained at least some of the difficulties the civil servants faced. However, this may not be the only reason.

For 2015 and 2016, the main factors seem to be the novelty of this public policy and underestimated resources. Any public policy, whether democratic or not, could face this situation, causing work difficulties and burnout. After the first two editions, I argued that PB civil servants were worn out due to their efforts to implement the Paris PB. However, the PB team’s superiors claimed that this is the case everywhere. Rather than the need to ameliorate democracy, it may be the Paris City Council’s resources that are problematic. Moreover, I am not a management academic. I did not include the opinions of the PB team civil servants regarding their hierarchy and management (who did not change from 2015 to 2020). Academics specialized in management may think that the problem was not an issue with democracy but rather one related to management.

Despite this, I am convinced that implementing the Paris PB caused wear on the civil servants comprising the PB team (see below). I am also convinced that this wear explains why they left the team, even though it may not be the only reason.

Limitation 3: Is the Paris City Council case too specific?

The Paris City Council is a bureaucratic giant. Thus, it may be difficult to generalize these results. However, this is not a new fact. Mazeaud wrote that working as a PPP in an administration was “nervously and emotionally demanding” (2012, p. 48, translated by the author), and Escobar (2017) pointed out PPP burnout in Scotland. Moreover, as far as French PBs are concerned, the authors of the *Report on the first edition of the Participatory Budgeting of Clermont-Ferrand* (2018-2020) observed phenomena like those I described among non-specialized agents working on this PB. For this reason, I believe that there are several clues that support the generalization of my findings based on the Paris PB.

However, a comparative study is needed to rigorously demonstrate this phenomenon and identify the conditions under which it occurs (e.g., How does the size of the administration factor? Is it only during the first years of a participatory public policy, or does this occur even after decades? Which categories of PPP are more prone to wear?).

Conclusion

I studied public participation administration and its effect on civil servants. I asked the following question: Why did all but one of the civil servants on the PB team leave before or in 2020? I studied the Paris City Council’s PB between 2014 and 2020 (the first mandate of its implementation). I conducted a 3-year ethnography as part of the Paris City Council’s PB team. I conducted interviews with civil servants on the team and perused documents from the Paris City Council.

I argued that the daily work of implementing the Paris City Council’s PB was exhausting for civil servants. I described the sprint wear phenomenon that can be observed during the PB’s first editions and asserted that it was due to the novelty and the gross underestimation of (human) resources. I then described background wear, which refers to civil servants’ experience of their work on the PB team as “shattering” (an indigenous term), despite the increase in human and technological resources. Finally, I described their attitudes toward their difficulties. Some civil servants voiced their concerns individually or in small groups. Some left the team. In 2019, there was a collective effort to express the suffering they were experiencing due to PB implementation. However, this was not successful. Thus, all the civil servants comprising the PB team left their jobs before the start of the new mandate.

This study contributes to the participation literature through four elements. First, it

examined PPP working in administration, a group that was not previously studied extensively in the literature. Furthermore, it studies them on their backstage (day-to-day life within the organization) rather than their frontstage (public events). Second, it adds to the literature on PBs with a case that has received little attention: the Paris PB. This PB seems to have strongly influenced what Gilles Pradeau (2018) called the “third wave of participatory budgets in France” and is considered by some to be “a rising star in a luminous sky of global participatory budgets” (Cabannes, 2017, p.180). Third, the findings of the present study are in keeping with those of previous monographs in terms of a cumulative logic of proof: Civil servants who dedicate themselves to public participation work hard. Finally, this is one of the first papers to address civil servants’ reactions to the taxing task of building democracy.

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Appendix 1: The renewal of the Paris Participatory Budgeting Team

Year	Arrivals	Departures	Number of people
2014	Nathalie		1
2015	Julien Arminius		3
2016	Emmanuelle Alexandra		5
2017	William Arhip-Paterson Bernard Niloufar Mafalda (replacement of Nathalie)	Nathalie Julien	7
2018			7
2019		Emmanuelle	6
2020	New civil servant 1 New civil servant 2	William Bernard Mafalda Alexandra Niloufar	3

Source: Paris City Council.

Paris participatory budgeting team civil servants with at least a contract of 13 months signed between 2014 and 2020.

PB: Participatory budgeting

Appendix 2: Empirical data quoted in the text

Documents:

2015, « Audit des ressources du Budget Participatif », Direction des Finances et des Achats, Ville de Paris

2020, « Rapport d'évaluation de la première édition du budget participatif de Clermont Ferrand (2018-2020) », Ville de Clermont-Ferrand.

Interviews:

Alexandra, PB team 2016-2020, 2018/07/17

Bernard, PB team 2017-2020, 2017/06/22

Emmanuelle, PB team 2016-2019, 2018/07/31

Julien, PB team 2015-2017, 2017/10/20

Nathalie, PB team 2014-2017, 2017/05/23

Niloufar, PB team 2017-2020, 2018/07/31

Valérie, Citizen Participation team until 2014, 2020/03/02.

Fieldnotes:

2016/01/08 - meeting with Pauline Veron's director of cabinet

2016/01/12 - meeting with Paris PB team manager

2018/18/30 - internal seminar of the PB team

2019/11/00 - monthly notes

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