



Design of a Standardized Index to Evaluate the Democratic Quality of Participatory Processes: A Participant-Centered Approach

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Abstract

Participatory processes have proliferated within contemporary democracies, generating an increasing need for rigorous evaluation tools to assess their democratic quality (Fung, 2015; Smith, 2009). Despite the abundance of empirical studies and theoretical frameworks, the scientific literature reveals a persistent absence of standardized instruments capable of systematically evaluating these processes according to established democratic criteria (Rowe & Frewer, 2004). This research, conducted at the University of Valencia, seeks to address this gap by developing a standardized Democratic Quality Index applicable to participatory processes at the local level, with potential for broader national and international application. The originality of the proposed index lies in its two-stage structure: a pre-questionnaire assessing participants' expectations, followed by a main questionnaire evaluating their perceptions of democratic quality across seven key dimensions. The methodological design follows a sequential mixed-methods approach. First, a scoping review identified relevant dimensions and indicators in the literature (Moysan & Ródenas, 2024). Second, a Delphi panel of international experts refined these indicators. Third, empirical validation is underway through factorial analyses of data collected in participatory processes in France and Spain, with results expected by June 2025. This index generates a weighted score reflecting alignment with participants' expectations, thereby addressing critiques of presumed universality in democratic evaluation (Parés & March, 2013). It contributes to the field of participatory democracy by bridging normative and empirical approaches (Abelson & Gauvin, 2006; Warren, 2017), offering a validated tool to evaluate, compare, and improve participatory processes in a contextualized and citizen-centered manner.

Keywords: citizen engagement, democratic quality index, evaluation, mixed-methods research, participatory democracy