Government Driven e-Participation

The case of “Urna de Cristal” in the Colombian context

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May 2015
ABSTRACT

This thesis studies government driven e-participation in the context of Colombia using the case of “Urna de Cristal” (Crystal Ballot box). Making use of three theoretical models it intends to answer the main research question that is: How does the government driven tool of “Urna de Cristal” relate to the concepts of participatory democracy, e-empowerment and sustainable e-participation? This research collects mainly qualitative data, collected from government representatives, civil society organizations and citizens. The findings show that “Urna de Cristal” only reaches to the level of e-engaging in Macintosh model of levels of e-participation. It is not fully sustainable according to the seven-phase model proposed by Islam (2008) since there is a special need to work on the last three phases of sustainable e-participation, which refer to promotion, participation and post-implementation analysis. The fact the “Urna de Cristal” is not e-empowering leads the analyses towards the limitations that block the e-empowerment process. From this analysis it is seen that the Government of Colombia is doing a lot to overcome the existing limitations but it is a challenging task that requires a lot of time and resources since there are entrenched limitations, coming from different stakeholders and that comprise a specific context, structures and mentalities. Findings also show that “Urna de Cristal” is not likely to survive long after the next election (2018) because it is it is an initiative that was proposed in the electorate campaign of Juan Manuel Santos, hence an alternative design is suggested.

Key words:
e-democracy, e-participation, e-empowerment, digital media, ICTs, e-government, sustainable e-participation, citizens, Colombia, “Urna de Cristal”
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**ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS**

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<thead>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GoC</td>
<td>Government of Colombia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and Communication Technologies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNPAN</td>
<td>United Nations Public Administration Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MINTIC</td>
<td>Colombian Ministry of ICT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DTF</td>
<td>Fuerza de Tarea Digital (Digital Task Force)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITU</td>
<td>International Telecommunication Union</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. INTRODUCTION

Framed within e-democracy and e-participation, this empirical study presents the case of a Colombian national government driven e-participation initiative named “Urna de Cristal” (*Crystal Ballot Box*) that forms part of a national transparency purpose that the current president of Colombia, Juan Manuel Santos, proposed during his first electoral campaign (2010). “Urna de Cristal” is created as a multi-channel platform which includes both traditional media - such as radio, text messages and a TV- and digital media such as twitter, Facebook, Youtube, Google + and a website that provides citizens with a virtual space to formulate questions, comments, opinions and proposals. The field of e-participation has been covered by many theorists and practitioners, which have discussed citizen participation from different viewpoints. In the literature review of this thesis I make special emphasis to the aim of participation within the context of democracy, which leads to discussions on how the government of Colombia is moving towards a more participatory democracy, which can be seen as a tool to overcome the legitimization crisis. By adding ICTs and digital media into the review, I turn towards the discussion of the transformed concepts of e-democracy and e-participation on which this study rests.

The interest in this case comes from the UN E-Government Survey where Colombia ranked 11th place (out of 193 countries) in the e-participation index, both in 2012 and 2014. The high ranking is especially interesting given the fact that the Internet penetration rate is only at 50,71%. Formally, my research question is: How does the government driven tool of “Urna de Cristal” contribute to the concepts of participatory democracy, e-empowerment and sustainable e-participation? In order to answer this question, I use different theoretical models, one which describes e-participation as a continuum of levels (Macintosh, 2004), one that sees e-participation as a process (Tambouris, Liotas, & Tarabanis, 2007) and finally I adopt a seven-phase e-participation model to evaluate the sustainability of the tool (Islam, 2008). This research will show how the combination of theories is needed to answer the research question since the theories separately would provide an incomplete view of which factors affect the e-empowerment of citizens through the government driven e-participation tool.

This research collects mainly qualitative data but uses some quantitative data to support the findings. The main research collection method is focus groups of government representatives and is complemented by interviewing civil society organizations and undertaking citizen face-to-face and
online surveys, which add to the study by providing a demand-side perspective. While operationalizing the theories I have positioned “Urna de Cristal” in the levels proposed by Macintosh (2004). By using the model proposed by Tambouris et al. (2007) I have identified various limitations that block the process of e-participation towards e-empowerment and have explored the actions being taken by the GoC to overcome these challenges. Finally I have evaluated “Urna de Cristal” with the seven-phase model proposed by Islam (2008), to determine the sustainability of e-participation.

Last but not least, adding to the study of e-participation, this study provides empirical evidence on how the context limits and strongly influences the degree to which citizens are e-empowered. This has allowed me to map prospective suggestions that could be used by the GoC and provide lessons learned for other governments.
1.1 Background

**Framing Colombia**

Colombia is a middle-income country located in South America with a total of 48,929,706 (2014\(^1\)) inhabitants. The densely populated capital of Bogotá has a total of 9 million inhabitants. The country is characterized by having a high level of inequality. According to the World Bank, Colombia had a GINI index\(^2\) of 53.5 in 2012\(^3\) and is on the top ten most unequal countries in the world and the second most unequal in Latin America, in terms of family income\(^4\). The inequality is due to many reasons, being the main the high level of land concentration, which has been a long lasting problem throughout history. Furthermore, the unequal access to education, especially higher education (university level), has reinforced these inequalities also generating further divisions between the knowledge poor and the knowledge rich.

Moreover, the violence in the country has been a predominant issue. Since October 2012 the Colombian government and the country's largest left-wing rebel group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), are currently under negotiations for peace, trying to end more than five decades of armed conflict. According to Colombia’s National Centre for Historical Memory\(^5\) more than 220,000 people have been killed in the armed conflict (80% of which were civilians). More than seven million people have registered with the government's Victim's Unit. The vast majority has been internally displaced by the violence, but many have also been kidnapped, threatened, killed or injured by landmines or forcibly disappeared. These circumstances have built an environment that has left many Colombians worried about general security issues.

Additionally, given the high amount of unemployed people (8.9%) leaves many individuals working informally in the highly polluted streets of Bogotá. For example, the simple fact that Bogotá, a city with 9 million people, does not have a metro due to political interest generates a transportation

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1 DANE Statistics
2 According to the World Bank the Gini index is defined by the measures the extent to which the distribution of income or consumption expenditure among individuals or households within an economy deviates from a perfectly equal distribution. A Lorenz curve plots the cumulative percentages of total income received against the cumulative number of recipients, starting with the poorest individual or household. The Gini index measures the area between the Lorenz curve and a hypothetical line of absolute equality, expressed as a percentage of the maximum area under the line. Thus a Gini index of 0 represents perfect equality, while an index of 100 implies perfect inequality.
chaos that translates into many other daily problems that Colombians have to address on a daily basis, such as citizen getting robbed or harassed in the Transmilenio (public busses that operate in a fast lane). Also the amount of time citizens spend commuting reduces their effective time (people cannot use their smartphones on the busses since there is a high probability of getting robbed). Given this political and socio-economic climate, the social problems that arise are harder to tackle since it refers to deeply rooted problems that are more complex to address. Yet, while being used wisely, ICTs are playing a crucial role in enabling possibilities for change, offering the opportunity to get people’s voices heard. Throughout this thesis we will see how the GoC is incorporating and prioritizing ICTs into their systems aiming towards having a more transparent, accountable, effective, innovative and participatory government. In order to make this possible a high rate of Internet coverage is necessary and according to the ITU statistics\(^6\) the penetration of Internet in Colombia during the year 2013 reached 50.71% of the population and the mobile-cellular telephone subscriptions per 100 inhabitants in 2013 reached 104. In other words, almost half of the population does not have access to Internet and even though the telephone subscription is higher than 100 this does not ensure that individuals have smartphones, with Internet access.

**Framing e-participation**

More so, in Colombia where there is a specific Ministry of ICT, and a digital agenda that intends to establish a more transparent, democratic and efficient government. Since 2010, the e-government program of the Ministry of ICT, (*Gobierno en Línea*), has framed its activities in the National Development Plans and in the Plan Live Digital (Molano, 2013). Colombia has been making significant progress in the ICT policy creating and following a framework that encompasses direct actions on infrastructure, services, applications and users, which are elements that form part of the digital ecosystem. In this study it is worth highlighting the need for the government to actively encourage citizen participation in the decision-making process and in the construction of public policies through the use of ICT hence strengthening citizen capacities to interact with the public organizations creating opportunities of collaboration, participation and influence.

The “Live Digital Plan” (Plan Vive digital)\(^7\), a public policy strategy for the ICT sector, was established with the aim to give the country a technological leap through wide dissemination of the

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\(^7\) Live Digital Plan: [http://www.mintic.gov.co/portal/vivedigital/612/w3-channel.html](http://www.mintic.gov.co/portal/vivedigital/612/w3-channel.html)
Internet and the development of its national digital ecosystem. Table 1 displays the aims of the “Live Digital Plan” 2014-2018⁸ and the previous “Plan Vive Digital” 2010-2014⁹ through which Colombia evidenced a considerable growth in the number of Internet connections with a special focus on infrastructure and local outreach. In its’ implementation the GoC also purchased a large amount of computers and tablets to be used by children and youth not only in schools but also in “Digital Live Points” (Puntos Vive Digital), which are public spaces with free access to computers and Internet.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Live Digital Plan</th>
<th>Aims and objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plan Vive Digital 2010-2014¹⁰</td>
<td>1. Triple the number of municipalities connected to the information highway. The aim is to extend the infrastructure to connect 1,053 of the country’s municipalities to the national fiber-optic network.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Connect 50% of micro-enterprises and small- and medium-sized enterprises (known as MIPYMEs) and 50% of homes to the Internet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Increase the number of Internet connections fourfold. Target: reach 8.8 million Internet connections by 2014.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Vive Digital 2014-2018¹¹</td>
<td>The two main objectives are:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Make Colombia leader in the development of social applications aimed to the poorest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Achieve a more efficient and transparent government with the use of ICTs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In order to achieve this they need to strengthen their digital talent and overcome the lack of professionals in this sector by promoting the increase the number of students enrolled in systems and programming. The “Digital Talent” (Talento Digital) program provides study scholarships to those enrolled in relevant careers in the field.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s own creation. Data collected from the Ministry of ICT

Moreover, the National Development Plan of Colombia (Plan Nacional de Desarrollo) is the framework that is presented by the president to the Congress in the first months of his government. They contain an objective framework, which will be implemented in each of the different sectors. The National Development Plan of 2010-2014 contained elements of good governance by promoting transparency and citizen participation. Similarly, in the National Development Plan 2014-2018 citizen participation continues to be encouraged and “Urna de Cristal” is specifically mentioned to

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strengthen citizen participation. This has legitimized the action and the work of “Urna de Cristal” because the government no longer speaks of some type of participation but makes specific reference to “Urna de Cristal” as the entity that drives citizen participation. Article 1 of the decree 2573 of 2014\textsuperscript{12} states the object which is to define the guidelines, tools and deadlines of the strategy of the Online Government to guarantee the maximum use of ICTs with the aim of contributing to the construction of a state that is more open, efficient, transparent and participatory and that provides solutions with the collaboration of the whole society.

Additionally, in the latest UN E-Government Survey\textsuperscript{13} Colombia was the only upper-middle income country that scored more than 66.6 per cent in all three stages of e-participation (e-information, e-consultation and e-decision making), making it an exceptional context to study e-participation. The UN E-Government Survey also ranks Colombia high in focusing e-participation towards e-decision by offering citizens with different e-decision-making services. This ranking puts Colombia next to the Republic of Korea and Japan as a world leader in e-decision making\textsuperscript{14}. In table 1, one can see that after the emergence of “Urna de Cristal” in 2011, Colombia escalated from the 26\textsuperscript{th} position in 2010 to the 11\textsuperscript{th} in 2012 with regards to the e-participation index.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E-Government Index</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-participation Index</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors own creation. Data extracted from E-Government Survey Report 2008-2014

**Framing Urna de Cristal (Cristal Ballot Box)**

Juan Manuel Santos, current President of Colombia, elected in 2010 and re-elected in 2014 proposed “Urna de Cristal” (Cristal Ballot box) in 2010 as part of his electorate campaign. The name Cristal Ballot Box could be conceived as a metaphor of transparency and citizen participation. The

\textsuperscript{12} Decreto 2573 de 2014: \url{http://www.mintic.gov.co/marcodereferencia/624/articles-7663_recurso_1.pdf}
structure of “Urna de Cristal” is said to have three different but complementary dimensions (Cusba, 2013), which in turn result in three forms of participation:

1- Participation for information and transparency: where citizens could visualize results and progress regarding the government management.

2- Participation for citizen consultation: seeks to generate interaction and more relation with the citizens. Online consultations provide citizens with the chance to voice criticism, provide input and simply comment on government activities.

3- Participation for decision-making and impact: seeks participation in order to jointly find solution to problems and allow citizens to have an impact and influence the decision-making of the public administration.

In its purpose of making it a social inclusion initiative, “Urna de Cristal” was also promoted as a multi-channel platform where any citizen, regardless of his/her geographic location or socio-economic status would be able to communicate with the government without the need of mediators. The team of “Urna de Cristal” started operating in 2011 and is located in the Ministry of ICT. Nowadays, the team is composed of 12 individuals plus 23 division administrators coming from 20 different Ministries and other governmental entities. The role of the division administrators is to support the team of “Urna de Cristal” when a specific question that they are unable to answer appears or when there is a high demand of questions regarding a certain topic.

After the emergence of “Urna de Cristal” in 2011, there was a need to open new channels of participation so that the citizenry could communicate with the government via digital media. Therefore the President of Colombia and the Minister of ICT encouraged the creation of a specialized group, named Digital Task Force (Fuerza de Tarea Digital). This team currently complements “Urna de Cristal” and is composed of 5 experts who are in charge of articulating and supporting the various digital teams for all the entities of the GoC. Hence, the tasks of the Digital Task Force (DTF) have become very relevant, especially while supporting the first level of e-participation that is e-enabling through e-information.
The DTF works around two different tasks\textsuperscript{15}:

- **Synergy President:** by jointly disclosing content related with the weekly activities of the President of Colombians, Juan Manuel Santos.

- **Synergy Government:** supports governmental entities by disseminating their specific issues with the help of related institutions in order to enhance the reach and impact of the message. For example, if the Ministry of Security wants to publish a message related to road safety, “Urna de Cristal” and other entities, such as the Ministry of Education, Health and so forth, could also publish the message.

Another relevant governmental entity is the “Centre of Innovation in E-Government” (Centro de Innovación en Gobierno Electrónico) which is an initiative that was born in 2013 from a partnership between the Ministry of ICT and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations -UNDESA- and UNDP. The aim of the Centre is to bring the government and its institutions towards a better future by creating a permanent environment of innovation in the community of e-government. This is being done by the construction of a digital ecosystem that promotes a more efficient, transparent and innovative services.\textsuperscript{16}

As seen in figure 1, “Urna de Cristal” mediates the participation of citizens and transfers it to the Government entities. Complementarily, the DTF is aiding all the government entities in their first stage of e-participation, which is e-enabling through e-information. We will further see in the analysis section how this group is working under collaborative structures that affect the reach, exposure and impact of the information that is being disseminated. The diagram shows some of the 20 government entities, which include all the ministries as well as other government entities. Furthermore, it is seen how the DTF (ftd) is supporting the Presidency of the Republic of Colombia (Presidencia de la República) in their communication strategy as well as all the forms of digital communication present in the Government, including “Urna de Cristal” and the different ministries


\textsuperscript{16} Centre of Innovation in E-Government: \url{http://centrodeinnovacion.gobiernoenlinea.gov.co/es/sobre-el-centro/que-es}
and government entities that communicate directly with the citizens directly through other Facebook pages, Twitter accounts or webpages.

Figure 1: Framing "Urna de Cristal"

Source: authors' own creation

Channels available
One of the main channels used in traditional media is the television program of “Urna de Cristal” which is broadcasted weekly, every Thursday at 7pm and it is retransmitted every Sunday on the institutional channel. The moderator, John Jairo Ocampo, is the Press Secretary of the Presidency of the Republic of Colombia. This TV program is planned and coordinated by the Presidential team. During the program, which lasts between 30 to 60 minutes, the citizens get informed about current issues existing in the public administration not only in the form of news but more as a question-answer dialogue between the citizens participating and the representatives of the public administration on stage, which varies depending on the topic being discussed. Also, the questions that are raised throughout the TV program come from all types of media (Facebook, twitter, telephone calls, Skype calls and text messages). In some cases there is even a journalist who goes to the street to select random citizens and encourage them to pose a question. Furthermore, the radio program of “Urna de Cristal” is run by a subcontracted collaborating journalist and is streamed
every Wednesday at 7pm, reaching 120 municipals, mainly rural, having a potential to reach 14 million people.

Apropos digital media, “Urna de Cristal” has created many diverse digital mediums. Firstly, the website [www.urnadecristal.gov.co](http://www.urnadecristal.gov.co) is a digital tool through which citizens can access information on current government issues and concerns. It is also used as a way of communicating the policies that are being implemented at the same time as it invites citizens to participate by sending in questions or proposals.

Table 2 displays some indicators, which are associated to some of the channels used by “Urna de Cristal”. From 2013 to 2014, “Urna de Cristal” has significantly increased it number of followers on social media, as well as the number of website visits and more importantly the number of interactions. In general terms all of the indicators have increased considerably from 2013 to 2014, except the number of received calls to the call centre, which has decreased in 21.1% and the number of exercises involving impact and decision-making that have remained in 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicador</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of citizens impressions</td>
<td>1.115,296</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of followers on social media</td>
<td>53,993</td>
<td>167,197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of website visits</td>
<td>1.115,296</td>
<td>2,326,206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of received calls to the call centre</td>
<td>19,820</td>
<td>15,640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of registered users to the “Urna Movil”</td>
<td>75,708</td>
<td>189,009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of exercises involving impact and decision</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of campaigns of diffusion, education and consultation</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of interactions</td>
<td>347,395</td>
<td>2,944,389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of questions managed</td>
<td>28,276</td>
<td>53,010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Urna de Cristal

1.2 General and Specific Objectives

This thesis studies the case of “Urna de Cristal” as a national government driven e-participation tool and relates it to the concepts of participatory democracy, e-empowerment and sustainable e-participation.
In order to carry out this research, I frame this study within the studies of e-participation, which are conceived within the studies of e-democracy. I have adopted different theories of e-participation, e-empowerment and sustainable e-participation that will help me analyse the findings from a specific lens. These theories will be explained and developed in the theoretical framework. I will undertake this analysis by using data that will be collected through focus groups, interviews and surveys with government officials, civil society organizations and citizens, which I will return to in the “Methods and Research” section of my thesis (see 4.4). Finally, through the analysis of the data collected I intend to extract existing opportunities and barriers and detect possibilities of improvements. If possible, I will provide recommendation of how e-participation can be designed more effectively and systematically adding empirical evidence to the studies of e-participation that explore e-empowering and study sustainable e-participation.

1.3 Definition of Research Questions

The central research question of this thesis is to study: How does the government driven tool of “Urna de Cristal” relate to the concepts of participatory democracy, e-empowerment and sustainable e-participation? In order to answer this question I will formulate three sub questions:

1) According to Macintosh’s (2004) model what are the levels of e-participation that are being reached by “Urna de Cristal”?

2) What are the limitations and barriers that the Colombian Government and Colombian citizens come across in using “Urna de Cristal” as an empowerment tool?

3) According to Islam’s (2008) model of sustainable e-participation, is “Urna de Cristal” a sustainable government driven e-participation initiative?

These questions are of special relevance since the involvement of citizens in the government decision-making and policy development is seen as a way of either empowering citizens in issues that affect their lives and/or as a way of legitimizing the representative democracy that is in crisis. As a result of e-participation, the government has the responsibility of managing resources that enable e-participation to become relevant, effective and sustainable. It is not enough to open channels for e-participation but a sustainable design must be created and implemented, meaning that the
government must have the sufficient resources, defined processes and solid structures that frame the e-participation of the citizens in a way that generate a possibility of e-empowerment. In todays society democratic governments are under pressure to adopt a new approach to policy-making- one which places greater emphasise on citizen involvement both upstream and downstream to decision-making. It requires governments to provide ample opportunities for information, consultation and participation by citizens in developing policies options prior to decision-making and to give reason for their policy choices once a decision has been taken (Vergez and Caddy, 2001; 71). So, in this context citizens can be defined as partners, which in turn have certain duties and responsibilities, such as participating actively in the decision-making process in order to find solutions to problems, jointly with the government.

Arnstein (1969) defined civic participation as the redistribution of power from the authority to citizens. Hence, the creation of a participatory democracy requires governments to empower citizens. Empowerment, can be defined as the process by which individuals and communities are enabled to take such power and act effectively in changing their lives and their environment (Minkler 1992, Robertson and Minkler 1994). Power itself being the ability to act or take decisions in ways that affect self and/or others (Staples, 1990). Since power is inherently relation, for power to operate it requires an interaction or exchange between two or more parties (Naim, 2013; 17). But in order to change the power distribution the number, identity, motivations, abilities and attributes of the players must also change (ibid).
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section I will outline the most relevant approaches, studies and theories that already exist in the field of democracy and participation as well as how digital media have converted these concepts into e-democracy and e-participation. Looking through the literature, it is evident that these concepts have not been static but on the contrary they have evolved adapting to the fast changing technological environment that is adding a new innovative dimension in the public sector.

2.1 Democracy and Participation

I will now try to examine how various theorists have attempted to explain democracy and citizen participation using different arguments. These theorists differ on how much participation is desired; in turn influenced by the way democracy is enacted. Yet participation has a two-fold justification or meaning. On the one hand it can be conceived in a country where there is a legitimization and representation crisis in a democratic government. This occurs when the people don’t feel that they are being represented and have little or now credibility in the government. It is here where the government sees the need to create an accountability system that justifies and legitimizes the power accumulation of the state. On the other hand, it can be justified as a genuine desire to create a more participatory democracy where citizens can gain more voice and power over the decision making process that results in policies that affect their daily lives. Here citizens are conceived as partners addressing problems and seeking to provide and create better solutions in partnership with the government.

But what is democracy? It may be a challenging task to define democracy, a concept that has its roots in the Greek polis and means the “the rule of the people”. Since then the concept, idea (and enactment) of democracy has been constantly changing (Orihuela & Obi, 2012; 64). It can also be defined as a political system that organises society and attempts to peacefully solve societal problems and issues (Dahlgren, 2000) with the existence of a democratic or civil culture that builds on and legitimises a formal system of delegation of power (ibid, 2000). However, democracy is not a panacea of all human problems, but it offers the most compelling principle of legitimacy- the consent of the people- as the basis for political order (Held, 2006).
Democracy has different models in which participation plays distinct roles. First of all, representative democracy, takes place where citizens do not plan or execute a policy in a direct way, but it is their political representatives that will carry out the task for them through free elections during which they are handed a mandate to embody and execute the will of the people (Dahl, 1998). In this model of democracy the forms of participation are mainly reduced to voting. In his previous work, Dahl (1956) suggested that political equality was the existence of universal suffrage (one man, one vote), with its sanction through the electoral competition for votes, more importantly, to the fact of equality of opportunity of access to influence over decision makers through inter-electoral processes by which different groups in the electorate make their demands heard. More recently, Alperovitz (2013) states that democracy involves important values like equality, liberty and ecological sustainability. However, Colombia is good proof that even a representative model of democracy can be corrupted and can become undemocratic since some politicians buy votes, directly or indirectly using groups or individuals who can influence individuals in his/her community.

When this occurs a legitimization crisis surfaces since the people do not trust the governments to provide solutions to their problems, even more in a context like a Colombia were corruption occurs on a daily basis. Commoner in his book “The Poverty of Power” (1976) relates this also to the different crisis that humanity has come across, first there being a threat to environmental survival; then there was the apparent shortage of energy; and now there is the unexpected decline of the economy (page 1). This leads the state to the problem of citizens’ limited degree of formal political participation, their apathy, their dissatisfaction with unresponsive political representative institutions, their disempowerment and non-transparency of the political and policy processes (Vedel; 2006). According to Neubauer et al. (2012) the ever-increasing citizens’ apathy for participating in the formal democratic political processes can be a reaction towards their discontent with the present political systems. It is here where governments adopt a more participatory form of democracy, in order to make them more accountable, transparent and participatory. Democratic systems in fact offer varying patterns of what are called structures of opportunity for participation which in turn depend on the initiatives that citizens themselves take, but a basic point is that such agency is always contingent on circumstances (Dahlgren, 2013; 11). Thus, any perceived lack of participation should not be seen simply as a question of civic apathy, but must be understood in the context of the dynamics and dilemmas of democracy more generally; and by putting these contours into focus, one can see that there are strong patterns having to do with power, legitimacy, and meaning that have an
impact on participation (ibid, 2013). Notwithstanding, Pateman (1970) also points towards the
dangerous of pseudo-participation, which entails attempts by the elite to domesticate and defuse
participatory energies, which, were they to develop autonomously, could become a threat to their
power.

A parallel argument emerged from Dahlgren (2013) who concentrated on what he calls alternative
democracy, which focuses on efforts, aimed at attaining social change by democratic means while
circumventing electoral politics. The growth of alternative politics can be seen in part as a response
to the difficulties facing traditional democratic institutions. This in turn relates to the socio-
economic and political problems that arise. For example in Colombia, the high unemployment, the
lack effective public transportation, the need for more equal education, the high corruption are some
factors that affect the daily lives of citizens. Another question worth addressing is who should
participate and why. Various utopian models of democracy and citizen participation have also been
discussed and suggested throughout history. Back in 1968, Rousseau central function of
participation was an educative one, using education in the widest sense. His ideal system is designed
to develop responsible, individual, social and political action through the effects of the participatory
process where the individual learns that he or she has to take into account wider matters than his
own immediate private interests if he or she is to gain co-operation from others and learns to link
private and public interest.

### 2.2 ICT, E-democracy and E-participation

E-democracy discourse arises from the theoretical tradition of participatory democracy and the
adopting of ICTs in most institutions. In Silverstone book “Why study media” (1999) the various
and opposing roles of media are summarized as follows:

> The media connect and separate in one breath; they include and simultaneously exclude; they offer freedoms of
expression and claims rights of surveillance and control; they are both enabling and disabling; they create new
inequalities just as the seek to eliminate old ones (page 146).

First of all, multiple technological innovations, particularly in the field of communication and
information, played a substantial role by facilitating socio-political transformations (Neubauer, Vuga,
However, ICTs and particularly the Internet do not create an entirely new political order but are themselves embedded in the larger socio-political processes that surround them (Agre 2002). Nevertheless, the fragmentation and fracturing of media space; the liberalization of media markets as well as the digital destruction of the politics of spectrum scarcity; the opportunities enabled by the falling entry to media; all these are indicators of a new kind of media space which will have profound implications for the exercises of power as well as the opportunities for public participation in political life (Silverstone, 1999; 144). More so, while giving credit to digital media one cannot underestimate the significant role that traditional media still plays in our society, even more in countries where the access to Internet is not sufficiently broad. This is especially relevant in the context of this study since the Internet penetration rate in Colombia is 50.7%, meaning that there is almost half of the countries’ population that does not have access to Internet, hence they cannot e-participate. Therefore, the value of digital media lies in the extent to which they enmesh with old media to provide multimedia platforms that allow a participatory model of democracy where participation, inclusion, and expression are continuously present (Banda et al.; 2009). Jørgensen (2013) holds that digital media is supplementing conventional or traditional media, rather than replacing it. Stieglitz & Brockmann (2013; 173) stated that ubiquitous and easy access could be understood as an enabler for individuals to participate in political discussions.

The media have always played a crucial part of the political process in democracies as well as tyrannies, for the dissemination and management of information is in turn a crucial part of managing a nation state; and the creation and management of citizenship is in turn dependent on effective information and communication within governments and among the governed as well as between them (Silverstone, 1999; 146). Back in 1999, Silverstone saw how people were already thinking about ways of involving digital media technologies in the revival of politics. There are those who see in the interactivity of global networks the opportunity to revive existing democratic structures and to enable individuals to use (albeit, only those who have access to a terminal and know how to use it and why) to respond to, or even maybe initiate, dialogue with political leaders and governments (ibid; 152). Hence, people started to see options and opportunities to create new forms of political participation, entirely new structures and new kinds of (self) governance (ibid).

Digital media and the Internet have enabled the term e-democracy to arise. This term was coined in 1994 by e-democracy.org which is a non-profit project based in Minnesota that had as a mission
strengthening participatory democracy through ICT (Mishra, 2012; 7). As the OECD\textsuperscript{17} states technology is only an enabler, facilitating methods of engagements, new or already existing. E-participation activities are not new but rather an evolution of many existing activities affording an extra push by widespread deployment of the Internet (Sæbø, Rose, & Skiftenes Flak, 2008; 2)

The term ‘e-Democracy’ captures both the intent to support democracy and studies of the outcomes and context (Macintosh; 2008). In previous studies, Macintosh (2004) gave a definition of e-democracy referring also to e-voting and e-participation:

\textit{E-democracy is concerned with the use of information and communication technologies to engage citizens, support the democratic decision-making processes and strengthen representative democracy. The principal ICT mechanism is the Internet accessed through an increasing variety of channels, including PCs, both in the home and in public locations, mobile phones, and interactive digital TV. The democratic decision making processes can be divided into two main categories: one addressing the electoral process, including e-voting, and the other addressing citizen e-participation in democratic decision-making (page 2).}

Similarly, Coleman (1999) reasoned that for democracy to work there must exist different channels of communication providing free flow of information both amongst citizens and between representatives and voters (page 67). By making reference to citizens and voters he implicitly addresses the two categories of democracy: voting and participating. However, this study will only focus on the e-participation side of e-democracy excluding the e-voting category.

Hence, it is seen that e-democracy does not operate in a vacuum; the main actors are the citizens (Mishra, 2012). The need of a more transparent and accountable agencies has motivated democratic governments to encourage G2C (Government to Citizen) communication and participation (Coleman & Blumler; 2009) where citizens can put their views on specific issues, can access other’s views and participate in the decision making process of the government (Mishra, 2012). As citizens begin to experience a two-way relationship with their institutions there is an increasing expectation that those elected to represent and govern them will be more accessible and interactively accountable online (Coleman & Blumler, 2009; 90). In the last decades, ICTs have enabled new forms of public participation named “e-participation” which has emerged and is composed of two

\textsuperscript{17} Promises and Problems of e-democracy (OECD; 2003) \url{http://www.oecd.org/governance/public-innovation/35176328.pdf}
elements: “e” and “participation” (Sæbo, Rose, & Skiftenes Flak, 2008). Similarly, Sæbo et al. (2008; 3) refer to the use of new ICTs with the implications that the technology has the ability to change or transform citizen involvement in deliberation or decision-making processes. The previous definitions can be highly contested since we will see that more than just the mere use of ICTs is required to transform citizen involvement in deliberation.

Given the attention that this topic has had, many different definitions have emerged from many researchers and international organizations. In this paper, I will adopt definition provided by Macintosh & Whyte (2008), since they not only differentiate between the top-down and ground-up initiatives but also present e-participation as a continuum, with three different levels and stages of e-participation, which they identify as e-enabling, e-consulting and e-empowering. These concepts will be further developed in the theoretical framework. In short Macintosh & Whyte (2008) defines e-participation as:

\[
\text{The use of ICTs to support information provision and top-down engagement i.e. government-led initiatives, or ground-up efforts to empower citizens, civil society organisations and other democratically constituted groups to gain the support of their elected representatives (Ibid; 16).} \]

Top-down e-participation, are those that are initiated, funded and managed by state bodies (Coleman & Blumler, 2009; 91). A contrary direction of e-participation is also possible, the bottom-up initiatives that are created and run by the citizens. However, as stated previously, this study will only focus on the first type. Nevertheless, as suggested by Coleman & Blumler, they should be conceived as a spectrum rather than being mutually exclusive (ibid, 91).

While trying to answer the question of who should participate, many authors have addressed education while discussing this. Different theorists from Rousseau (1955) to Pateman (1975) stress that participatory democracy requires a well-informed and well-educated citizenry. More recently Alperovitz (2012) goes further by highlighting the need for real participation, the kind where people not only react to choices handed down from on high, but actively engage, innovate, create options and also decide upon them (Alperovitz, 2012). Parra & Arenas-Dolz (2014) put special emphasis on the appropriate use of information technology and communication (ICT) with a view to achieve universal common education, aimed at increasingly activating civil society, that is intended to
facilitate that each human being can participate as a citizen by actively exercising their rights and responsibilities. Even though, some might consider this equality a utopia, impossible to reach, they think it is worth pursuing it because in that direction it will be possible to obtain, continuously and increasingly, better levels of distribution and the enjoyment of a democracy that is more inclusive and fair.

From a more practical view, governments from all around the world are implementing e-participation. E-participation has also been raised in benchmarking studies, such as the UN E-participation Index that forms part of The United Nations E-Government Survey\(^1\) that is produced every two years by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. It is the only report in the world that assesses the e-government development status of the 193 United Nations Member States. It serves as a tool for decision-makers to identify their areas of strength and challenges in e-government and to guide e-government policies and strategies (page 3 – Report UN). From the UN E-government report 2014, it is said that countries in all regions of the world and at all levels of development continue to make significant investments in public sector ICT for these reasons. However the e-participation index generated by UN is only a supply side assessment that does not take into account the citizen perspective, while as mentioned earlier it is their input and participation that enables this process of e-participation to become meaningful and valuable. A government can provide a set of useful services to their citizens, but if citizens are not interested in participating in the political process of their countries, or if they do not know how to participate, the efforts become futile (Orihuela & Obi, 2012).

Also there is a growing rhetoric from the governments of diverse opinion and at various levels in favour of mutually respecting partnership between citizens and their representatives (Coleman & Blumler, 2009; 101) and placing the citizen at the centre. This has been classified as citizen-centric governance. In order to implement it, governments have tried to foster innovative projects that intended to shift the balance of power from the state to the citizens with the use of different digital media channels (ibid; 90). However, this seems to be more a rhetoric that aids governments to

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\(^1\)Since its inception in 2003, the conceptual framework of the United Nations E-Government Survey has adopted a holistic view of e-government development resting on three important dimensions: (i) the availability of online services, (ii) telecommunication infrastructure and (iii) human capacity. The methodological framework has remained consistent across survey periods while carefully updating its components to reflect evolving successful e-government strategies, pioneering practices and innovative approaches to tackling common challenges for sustainable development.
become more accessible, accountable and legitimate. Like stated above this intention or rhetoric is rarely enacted.

2.3 Objectives and Limitations of e-Participation

Not surprisingly, while studying government-driven e-participation many researchers contemplate the aim or objective that governments set. Various authors such as Coleman & Blumler (2009), Sæbø et al (2008), Islam (2008) and Macintosh (2004), have explored the objectives and aims of these initiatives. Coleman & Blumler (2009; 91) argue that these initiatives or tools have been created to provide citizens with new democratic opportunities. From a more critical perspective they consider the limitation of top-down participation being motivated by the pragmatic need to secure state legitimacy, efficiency and acceptance of the political process (Sæbø et al, 2008; 2) or by the genuine desire to share complex decision-making with the citizens (Coleman & Blumler, 2009; 111). Also, the application of ICT in e-participation aims to motivate and engage wider range of citizens through diverse modes of technical and communicative skills to ensure broader participation in policy process, ensuring a more transparent and accountable governance (Islam, 2008). Macintosh (2004; 2) stated that e-participation generates greater opportunity for consultation and dialogue between government and citizens and observes technology as an emerging tool to provide people with the capacity to participate and influence decision-making (Macintosh, 2004; 2). This could be strongly argued since e-participation does not only require the technology but also the willingness of both citizens and government representatives to participate. It has become apparent that it is not enough to provide people with an Internet platform in order to increase their willingness to participate (Dahlgren, 2013). Moreover, we live in societies where many actors are competing intensely for our attention through the media. Berger (2011) reminds us that just having an interest does not automatically mean we will take an interest, and more generally, that western democracies are struggling with, among other things, what he calls attention deficit. Thus, any perceived lack of participation should not be seen as simply a question of civic apathy, but must be understood in the context of the dynamics and dilemmas of late modern democracy more generally. More so, given that the citizens are the main actors of e-participation, even if governments provide ample opportunities for accessing information and forms of interacting through advanced communication technologies, if the citizens are not computer or information technology savvy then there is no way e-democracy can be possible (Mishra, 2012; 11).
Additionally, a considerable focus has been given to study how technologies are mirroring the existing inequalities or even widening them. Wilhelm (2000) holds that these technologies never did and never will automatically usher in the coming of the age of democratic utopia where everyone will have equal opportunities to participate because the implementation and proliferation of new technologies establish new and/or strengthen old hierarchical divisions (e.g. socio-economic) between socio-political groups. More specifically, Silverstone (1999; 153) sheds light on the importance of media literacy and holds that we all need to know how the media works and we need to know how to read and understand what we see and hear. As pointed out in the background, Colombia still has a significant 6% of illiteracy and this is obviously a factor that alienated these individuals from the system. Another relevant factor to take into account is the level of technological literacy that becomes another element or mean of division and exclusion. Therefore, Tambouris et al. (2007) emphasize that the categories of tools is also essential since providing a combination of mediums, such as radio, mobile phones, SMS, call centres, is essential to include the people without access to Internet or the less digital, hence narrowing down the existing digital divide.

On another note, Molinari (2010) and Islam (2008) have introduced the concept of sustainability into e-participation. Molinari (2010) pinpoints two main limitations of e-participation: firstly the number of active participants in the electronic trials is typically very low, and in any case not statistically representative, nor amenable to representation, of the underlying target group, not to speak of population as a whole. Secondly, the relatively poor impact of the majority of projects and achievements on the underlying decision-making process of the governmental agency involved.

In order to dive deeper into the e-participation, scholars started to look at empirical cases that would answer important questions such as what actually makes citizens participate. Governments that are implementing government-driven e-participation have had to deal with this problem of low participation. Some authors have referred to the importance of promoting these tools through a serious out-reach campaign, other have proposed to create virtual spaces for e-participation in already existing platforms, such as Facebook or twitter where many citizens are already active (Stieglitz & Brockmann, 2013). However, not even this has been proven to be fully effective since the same patterns of little or no e-participation revive. Studies have shown that active participants in
social media are rare and that most users are passive, collecting or at best disseminating the information provided (Neubauer et al., 2012; 236). The new form of democratic citizens’ engagement through online participation remains (in global terms) an action of the few rather than a movement of the many (ibid; 237). Also, we all know that devoting attention to politics requires time, energy and knowledge, which are scarce resources in the context of the daily lives of many individuals. And as we put these contours into focus, we see that there are strong patterns having to do with power, legitimacy, and meaning that impact on participation (Dahlgren, 2013). Moreover, critics of online deliberation argue that most policy issues are too complex and time-consuming for the public to give serious consideration to them (Coleman & Blumler, 2009; 99). Thus, the limitations that emerge from the enactment of e-democracy, more precisely, of e-participation seem endless since there is a long list of variables that affect the proper functioning of it.

**Contribution of this study to the field of e-participation**

This study adds to the academic discussion by gathering and providing empirical data. There are many researches that studied e-participation in western countries; however not many studies have focused at looking at South American countries through the lens of the western theories and to my knowledge, there is no existing academic research that addresses “Urna de Cristal” as a specific e-participation case study. Studying the case of “Urna de Cristal” in the Colombian context add to the field since this is a case with different socio-economic, political and technological realities. Therefore, analysing the extent to which citizens are empowered or disempowered in the context in which they are situated, since empowerment is contingent upon the positioning of the individual or group in relation to their context and the structure(s) they find themselves in (Savingnya, 2013). Even though the concept of e-participation has been widely discussed the speed of innovation is endless and academics like Islam (2008; 10) request further empirical and qualitative researches that will help to examine the interoperability and sustainability of the proposed model that should lead to needed improvements over time. In addition to this, my study is of relevance to the GoC as well as other political institutions that can use this study to consider possible limitations and extract lessons learned.
3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section I will present the theoretical perspectives that will guide the analysis of my research. Given the complexity of the topic under research, which studies the extent to which citizens are being empowered or disempowered through the use of “Urna de Cristal” which is a government driven e-participation tool. Here, I will draw a combination of theoretical models and concepts that will in turn help me to describe and understand the case in more detail. First of all, I will draw upon the model proposed by Macintosh (2004) that develops three main levels of participation. I will also address the framework for e-participation suggested by Tambouris et al (2007) where participation is contemplated as a process (either top-down or bottom-up). Lastly, I will adopt Islam’s (2008) model of sustainable e-participation to analyse the sustainability of the government driven e-participation initiative of “Urna de Cristal”.

3.1 Levels of E-Participation

Many scholars have discussed civic participation. Arinstein (1969) defined civic participation as the redistribution of power from the authority to the citizens. She proposed a ladder of 8 levels which are: 1) Manipulation, 2) Therapy, 3) Information, 4) Consultation, 5) Placation, 6) Partnership, 7) Delegated power and 8) Citizen control. The first two steps are categorized under non-participation, which are more aimed at educating participants. The following two levels (3 and 4) allow citizens to hear and to be heard. The next level of placation allows citizens to advise the decision makers who have continued right to decide. In the last three levels the citizens actively and democratically exercise power. This model reminds us that participation should not be understood in either–or terms, as present or absent, but rather as a question of degree, a continuum (Dalhgren, 2013).

Yet, in this paper I will draw upon a more modern model that is proposed by Macintosh (2004) since she acknowledges e-participation as a continuum, which aims towards e-empowerment where active participation takes place. She also frames e-empowerment as a variable of time and maturity and time meaning that e-empowerment is not something that is obtained overnight. From a more technical perspective she adopts the complexity that the information input creates which in turn
generated the need of information Management Systems (IMS) to be implemented as well as adapting the structures to this.

As seen in figure 1, she differentiates 3 main levels of participation: E-enabling, E-engaging and E-empowerment that respectively corresponds to information, consultation and active participation. These concepts are taken from the OECD report and are defined as follows: (a) **information**: a one-way relationship in which government produces and delivers information for use by citizens; (b) **consultation**: a two-way relationship in which citizens provide feedback to government. It is based on the prior definition of information. Governments define the issues for consultation, set the questions and manage the process, while citizens are invited to contribute their views and opinions; and (c) **active participation**: a relationship based on partnership with government in which citizens actively engage in defining the process and content of policy-making. It acknowledges equal standing for citizens in setting the agenda, although the responsibility for the final decision rests upon government.

![Figure 2: Macintosh's Levels of e-Participation](image)

The first level of e-participation is e-enabling and deals with giving support to those who would not typically access the Internet helping them to take advantage of the large amount of information available and addressing the aspects of accessibility and understanding of information. The term e-enabling is of special relevance in the context of Colombia since the Internet access is still not widely distributed as well as digital literacy or media literacy is also something that not all citizens can take
for granted. As Bennett (2008) argues that we must not only prepare citizens for politics but also improve politics for citizens, because telling people to participate in bad institutions is mere propaganda.

Furthermore, the second level, e-engaging, refers to allowing deep contributions and supporting deliberative debate on policy issues through consulting a wide audience. It’s a mistake to imagine that the success of consultations is dependent upon process, more importantly it is dependent upon commitment (Coleman & Blumler; 2009; 196) of citizens. It has been noted by that the conversation about society is government centric and if this is not changed consultation cannot work because it is based on an inadequate description of what the problem is (ibid).

Finally, the third and ultimate level of e-participation is defined as e-empowerment, which concerns citizens’ active participation and influence on policy formulation. Macintosh (2008) highlights a number of issues with regard to technology design and development. First, the increasing amount of information available over the Internet implies a need for knowledge and information management systems. Second, the range of stakeholders involved requires personalized communication integrated with the delivery of relevant information. Lastly, Macintosh (2008) emphasises the need for information systems design to move towards more collaborative working environments to support government and civil society to work in partnership.

3.1.1 E-enabling, E-engaging and e-empowerment

The first step of e-enabling is essential since it is in this stage where the citizens acquires information and knowledge that are used in the upcoming levels of e-engaging and e-empowerment defined by Macintosh. Nowadays, citizens can obtain information not only from the government itself but also from third parties (Orihuela & Obi, 2012). More so, the emergence of the network society has also allowed citizens to produce their own content allowing citizens to renounce to the existing power elite, which is dominated by the owners of the main means of communication (Castells, 2009). Hence, the sea of information and knowledge existing in the Internet has made the search of information a challenge. Additionally, the emergence of the so-called “Filter bubbles” (Pariser, 2012) as the new gatekeepers, are defined as the personal unique universe of information that a person lives online and that decides what information they receive depending on who they are, what they do and which social connections they have, among other factors. If one would revive the Nietzschean
idea of the inexorable ties between power and knowledge, this could lead us to the idea that the
degree of empowerment is also limited by the exposure one has to information and knowledge.
Silverstone adds to this discussion and holds that the world is too complex for us to grasp since we
are vulnerable to information overload and the public opinion itself has become the media artifact,
to be created and manipulated at will, an ersatz barometer of the well-being of ailing government
(Silverstone, 1999; 148). Thus the individual is empowered in a very specific and limiting way and are
consequently empowered only in order to make ‘correct’ choices, informed and based upon the
knowledge acquired from different authorities present on the Internet (Neubauer et al., 2012; 240),
which receive more exposure than the information and data being created by ordinary individuals.
Here one could add Castells (2009) view that media ownership is increasingly concentrated and the
possibility of customization and segmentation of audiences has helped large organizations to
maximize advertising revenues.

The second level involves e-engagement which like empowerment is cognitive; unlike empowerment
it is not perceptual but involves waiting to consider a social issue using higher order thinking
(Greene & Miller; 1996). Being engaged in a topic is to consider the issue relating to the topic
carefully, actively seeking information and having cognitive deliberations and discussions and
possibly some form of activism (Scullion, Gerodimos, Jackson, & Lilleker, 2013; 4). Mills (1967)
goes further and suggests that in modern society both freedom and security depend on organized
responsibility (page 297). Freedom and security not meaning independence from each individual but
more that men have effective control over what they are dependent upon (ibid, 1967).

The third level of e-participation is e-empowerment. In 1985 Rappaport concluded that it is very
difficult to define empowerment in terms of outcome because it includes psychological and political
components; however, empowerment is easy to recognize when you see it happen; it is easy to intuit.
The absence of empowerment is also easy to identify: powerlessness, learned helplessness,
division, loss of a sense of control over one's life could be the terms with which to conceptualize
the status of lack of empowerment. Empowerment often assumes different forms in different
people and contexts; consequently empowerment cannot in fact be measured but only considered in
each case since it is dependent on the context (Rappaport 1985, Rappaport 1987)
Empowerment can also be defined as the acquisition of power, power itself being the ability to act or take decisions in ways that affect self and/or others (Staples, 1990). In the process individuals and communities are enabled to take such power and act effectively in changing their lives and their environment (Minkler 1992, Robertson & Minkler 1994). Similarly, civic empowerment refers to the acquisition of power by the citizen with the view to restoring, strengthening or serving a model of democratic governance usually based upon normative conceptualisations of the relationship between the government and the citizens (Scullion, Gerodimos, Jackson, & Lilleker, 2013).

Hence, the main aim of most e-participation initiatives is to e-empower citizens aiming at enhancing the possibilities for people to control their own lives and improving them. But what does it mean to empower a citizen? Giving them the medium? If we refer back to Macintosh’s (2004) model of e-participation we can see that the first level of e-participation is e-enabling and by this she refers to giving the citizens the means to communicate, such as Internet, information and also the necessary skills to act. However, the Internet has been embraced by many for empowering citizens, providing more and better government information, for enabling public debate and bringing more participation to the decision making process (Van Dijk; 2000). The issue raised and discussed in the literature is whether citizens are truly empowered through the use of ICTs or whether ICTs reinforce the established political structures (Charalabidis et al. 2012). Adopting the view of Savingny (2013: 13), I will also challenge the idea that the media are empowering the masses. On the contrary, the way in which empowerment is understood is dependent on a set of pre-existing power relations, who structure the environment within which social and political interaction takes place (ibid). Therefore, empowerment through e-tools is framed as a process in which an individual takes control of his and her life outside state patronage, through services, tools and information available on the Internet. So, in this thesis I adopt the view of the medium being an enabler and not as a direct form of empowerment.

The emerging forms of political participation may give citizens a false sense of empowerment hence ending up disempowering them as they distract or remove them from issues, debates or actions that really matter (Scullion et al., 2013). Dahlgren (2013) wagers that much participation does not go beyond the phase of expressing and developing an opinion since most public spheres are ‘weak’ in the sense that their links to decision-making are remote, often because the formal decision-making
structures are such, or because various mechanisms of exclusion deter the impact that opinion may or should actually have on decisions.

In order to end this subsection with a more positive note, some scholars believe that if implemented and promoted properly, e-participation platforms can provide the people with a virtual space or what Ardent would call a wider room, where they can get their voices heard and where they can learn from the disseminated information/data or from others citizen’s contributions. Additionally, learning to participate by doing is fundamental as well as understanding that participation may result in some sort of change if action is being taken (Alperovitz, 2012). We do not learn to read and write, to ride or swim by merely being told how to do so, it is only by participating on a limited scale that the people will ever learn how to exercise it on a larger scale (Mill, 1963; 186). Hence, empowerment is also a process of awareness and capacity-building which increases participation and decision-making power of citizens and may potentially lead to transformative action which will change opportunity structures in an inclusive and equalising direction (Andersen & Siim, 2004). More so, e-participation has also been conceived as a form of added value. In the information or knowledge society in which we live today, citizens’ input and knowledge can be shared to make better decisions. Citizens are capable of not only detecting their problems easier but are also capable of finding their own solutions to their problems (Coleman & Blumler; 2009; 108), which they comprehend.

Yet, the questions that citizen should ask is what do we want and what are we willing to do about it? (Coleman & Blumler, 2009; 196). The problem with most e-democracy projects to date is that they have been either top-down or grass-root in nature, the former have been limited by the rationalities of governmentality and the latter by the institutional disconnection. For e-democracy to become sustainable it must be seen to be both credible and effective (ibid). These two concepts do not well describe the consultation tradition as it has developed over the last 50 years (Ibid).

3.2 E-participation as a Process

Macintosh model of e-participation is complemented by the work done by (Tambouris et al., 2007) which has been widely used and presents a framework for assessing e-participation projects and tools. E-participation cannot be conceived solely as a question of levels but must be also be analysed as a process that is intended to be democratic, which includes different participation areas and
techniques that are supported by various categories of tools which are based on distinct technologies. The proposed framework suggests that there are three main layers of analysis: participation areas, categories of tools and technologies. Tambouris et al. (2007) suggest that participation areas have to do with the specific area or fields of citizen engagement and involvement in the democratic process, while category of tools refers to the software applications, products, tools and components that are being used in e-participation which are in turn based on a number of diverse technologies. As we will see in the analysis section the deconstruction of e-participation as a process allows me to address the main research question by extracting variables that influence (positively or negatively) the degree to which citizens are being e-empowered.

Tambouris et al. (2007) also adopt directionality of participation, while proposing a five-stage top-down and bottom-up framework, starting from the democratic process (top) of a country until technology (down). Here, the democratic layer, as from top-down, addresses e-participation as a democratic process that acts as a catalyst by facilitating communication between policy makers and the public and between themselves (G2G). Furthermore, they believe participatory techniques are used in order to engage and involve all the democratic stakeholders and address the issue of carrying out participatory processes.

Figure 3: E-participation as a process (Tambouris et al., 2007)

Source: Author's own creation using the model of Tambouris et al.
3.3 Sustainable e-participation

Not many scholars have discussed the sustainability aspect of e-participation. Molinari (2010) and Islam (2008) are two of the scholars that have put forward a model that tries to provide a sustainable option for e-participation. Islam (2008) states that the word sustainability refers to the continuation of producing expected outputs without creating any disharmony and imbalances in a system. He criticises the existing models and provides a new alternative that he names the 7Ps model. On the other hand, Molinari’s (2010; 1) model defines sustainability as the ability of a participatory decision-making process to maintain juridical compliance, legitimacy, social value, efficiency and productivity over time. Molinari holds that sustainable participation emerges whenever these five dimensions are not jeopardised, compromised, or are left unaltered, by the introduction of participatory elements into a given decision-making process regarding issues of public relevance. Yet, in this paper I will adopt the model proposed by Islam (2008) since it attempts to create a singular sustainable model based on theories and the lessons learned from existing e-participation initiatives of developing and developed countries so that the benefits of ICT can be maximized and greater participation be ensured (ibid; 1).

Although Islam (2008; 8) acknowledges the existing models stated above, he sustains that most of the frameworks do not provide a clear and complete roadmap to the policy makers with adopting ICT based participation in their e-governance and e-democracy implementations programs. He also questions the universal applicability since every country has different socio-economic and technological settings. In return, he creates the 7Ps sustainable e-participation model. Islam’s model in figure 4, has seven phases, starting from the down to top, and can be explained, compared and related in any of the three segments proposed by Macintosh (2004).
1. Policy and Capacity building:

According to Islam (2008; 9:10) this first phase is the most essential base for initiating any project to be sustained for a long period. Without a concrete national planning and policy agenda and a strong but visionary leadership and political consciousness, nothing is achievable in a country. He argues that the national policy agenda should be addressed and reformed in accordance to the ‘5Ws’ and ‘2Hs’ that is: what, why, whom, when, where, how and how much under the considerations of the country’s socio-economic and technological realities. This should particularly include the sources and allocation of funds both for short and long-term.

Development of techno-skills through vocational and formal education, building sustainable telecommunication infrastructure including hardware, software, websites, mobile phone based services and networking and making them available in both rural and urban community through various public and private agencies, institutional readiness in both supply and demand sides, formulating appropriate legislations and transparent applications, promoting ICT research initiatives and awareness and above all strengthening democratic processes and political conscious from the both directions of central and local government are a must prior to adopting any e-initiative in a country.
2. Planning and goal settings:

The ‘5Ws’ and ‘2Hs’ should also be addressed here but giving particular focus on selecting target audience and to ensure how to make effective participation in the decision making process. This phase also provokes that e-Participation programmes emerge from overall e-governance initiatives, and cannot be launched in isolation (Islam, 2008; 9:10).

3. Program and content development:

The development of a program and its corresponding contents must be designed in a way so that this can be considered appropriate to the focused group and accordingly be accessible through easily and widely available tools (Islam, 2008; 9:10).

4. Process and tools:

This forth phase determines how the programs and contents should be used. Different tools may be used for achieving different goals through different mechanisms. This also suggests the importance of using multi tools since not all goals are achievable through a single tool or channel and mechanisms. The channels can vary from web sites, mobile phones, digital televisions, call centres, kiosks, computers, PDAs and any future e-channel that would be easily and widely available to the targeted audience. Above all, Islam suggests that the socio-technical barriers of the participants must be kept in mind while designing the process to access the tools and contents (Islam, 2008; 9:10). This phase relates to the categories of tools proposed by Tambouris et al. (2007).

5. Promotion:

Many projects have failed because of inappropriate awareness on the supply and the demand sides. Therefore, steps should be taken to make both sides aware of the mission of the initiative and how the initiative will provide benefits to the stakeholders. In order to increase awareness both offline media and online media should be used to support these initiatives. Islam (2008) also sustains that the promotional campaign is more critical at the local community or rural level than to the upper or urban level (Islam, 2008).

6. Participation:

This is the final implementation level where participation takes place depending on the stage of evolution of adoption the e-Participation program. This can generally be of one-way at the initial
level, changing the direction of communication as it matures over time and practices. Here, association of rewards in the participation process on both sides is needed in order to keep the motivational level of the participants sustained (Islam, 2008; 9:10).

7. Post-implementation analysis:

Functionality of a system cannot be sustained without the presence of an effective feedback mechanism and impact analysis. Subsequently, incorporating the results in order to correct and upgrade the service. Therefore, the feedback and corrective measure in each phase contribute to the overall quality of the systems. However, feedback originating from this level and entering the first phase of the model may not provide immediate corrective actions, since this structure is long term in nature. In addition, according to the Islam’s proposed model, the more we proceed to the upper parts of the ladder, the less likely need to adopt corrective measures.

After presenting the theories, it is important to establish a link to my main research question, which is: How does the government driven tool of “Urna de Cristal” relate to the concepts of participatory democracy, e-empowerment and sustainable e-participation? First of all, as we have seen Macintosh’s (2004) theory suggests e-empowerment as the ultimate level of e-participation, while Tambouris et al. (2007) frame e-participation as a process, which involves various factors that have to be considered such as participation areas, techniques, categories of tools and technologies. Islam (2008) approaches e-participation by introducing the sustainability factor, which implicitly relates to the sustainability of the e-empowerment of citizens. Hence, I will use these combinations of theories to construct a unique theoretical tool, which I will operationalize in the methods section and that will in turn help me to answer the research questions. It is understood that the models presented by both Macintosh (2004) and Tambouris et al. (2007) are very technically oriented but I believe they provide a relevant conceptualization and categorizations that will guide me in the design of the research as well as in the analysis section. So, it is important to note that I will only use these models partially since socio-cultural aspects also have to be taken into account while carrying out the analysis. Islam’s (2008) model fills in this gap since it considers aspects of the country’s socio-economic and technological realities and is also meant to be valid for all e-participation projects that are carried out in both developing and developed countries.
4. METHODS AND RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1 Methods

The purpose of this section is to justify my methodological choices and to develop a system that will help me bridge the theory and the empirical parts of this thesis. All the theories presented in the theoretical framework have several subcomponents, which I have used to formulate the questions posed in the focus group and interviews.

In table 4 below, I display how I have used the three models presented in the theoretical framework to answer my main research question, which is: How does the government driven tool of “Urna de Cristal” relate to the concepts of participatory democracy, e-empowerment and sustainable e-participation? First of all, by operationalizing Macintosh’s (2004) model I address the first sub research question: What are the levels of participation that are being reached by “Urna de Cristal”? This is a question that is uniquely answered by “Urna de Cristal” and the DTF. Additionally, I inquire my second sub research question that deals with the limitations and barriers that both Government and citizens come across in using “Urna de Cristal” as an e-empowerment tool. In order to answer this second sub-question I operationalize the theory and model suggested by Tambouris et al. (2007). Finally, I address the last sub research question that inquires the sustainability of “Urna de Cristal” as a e-participation tool by operationalize Islam’s (2008) model of sustainable e-participation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key theory</th>
<th>Key Factor</th>
<th>Key measure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Levels of e-participation</td>
<td>E-enabling; E-Engaging</td>
<td>See questions appendix 2, 3, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macintosh (2004)</td>
<td>E-Empowering</td>
<td>E.g. What are the consultation exercises that are being implemented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>by Urna de Cristal? What has been their effect?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation as a Process</td>
<td>Democratic process; participation</td>
<td>See questions appendix 2, 3, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tambouris et al. (2007)</td>
<td>areas; participatory techniques;</td>
<td>E.g. What criteria's does “Urna de Cristal” use to define the topics of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>categories of tools; technology</td>
<td>participation? What topics attract more participation? Why?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Table of Measures
### Sustainable e-participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7Ps model</th>
<th>Policy and capacity building; Planning and goal setting; process and tools; program and content development; Promotion; Participation; Post-implementation Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

#### 4.2 Epistemological and Ontological stance

Research activity, at least in the realm of social science, tends to concentrate on epistemology (how we know, what we know and how knowledge can be acquired on the entities examined) rather than ontology (the study of being, of what exists and of what is thinkable (Loukis, Macintosh, & Charalabidis, 2012).

It is understood that social reality has a meaning for human beings and therefore human action is meaningful: that it has a meaning to them and they act on the basis of the meanings that they attribute to their acts and to the acts of others. Therefore, the job of the social scientist is to gain access to people’s “common-sense thinking” and hence to interpret their actions and their social world from their point of view (Bryman, 2012). Giving this definition, one can say that the epistemological stance of this study is interpretivism and adopts a deductive approach since the aim is not to produce theory but to explore a context and time dependent phenomenon that is guided by set of different complementary theories. Hence adding to the study of e-participation while providing empirical evidence of e-participation that takes in Colombia a highly unequal country, with 50,71% Internet penetration rate, ranking 11th place in the e-participation Index in the UN E-Government Survey of 2014 and 2012.

As a social scientist I am explicit about the subjectivity that is inherited in social sciences and thus in this study. I will be aiming to place the interpretations that have been elicited into a social scientific frame. But we also need to take into account that there is a double interpretation going on: the researcher is providing an interpretation of others’ interpretations. One can even say that there is a third interpretation going on because the researcher’s interpretations have to be furthered interpreted in terms of concepts, theories and literature of a discipline (Bryman, 2012). Moreover, I
as a human being have a construction of experiences, knowledge, skills that builds a specific viewpoint that acts as a unique lens where my representation of things can be different from others.

4.3 Selection of the case

The case of “Urna de Cristal” is considered to be a unique case. This case was selected based on the fact that in 2014 Colombia ranked 11th place in the e-participation index. This indicator is calculated by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the UN and is part of the UN e-Government Survey. More precisely, in this survey Colombia is presented as the only upper-middle income country that scored more than 66.6 per cent in all three stages of e-participation (e-information, e-consultation and e-decision making). This specific factor made me interesting in looking at e-participation in Colombia, a country with 50.71% of Internet penetration.

According to Yin (2009) a case study approach is also preferably used when the researcher wants to examine a contemporary event, using more exploratory questions such as “how” and “why”, hence being suitable in the case of my research questions. As stated earlier the selected case is the specific multichannel platform offered by the government called “Urna de Cristal”. Juan Manuel Santos, being a candidate for the Presidential elections at that time, proposed this tool in 2010 promoting it as an innovative and inclusive approach to e-participation that would promote efficiency, transparency and citizen participation among the national and local government of Colombia. In its purpose of making this a social inclusion tool “Urna de Cristal” was also created and promoted as a multi-channel platform where any citizen, regardless of their geographic location or socio-economic status would be able to communicate with the government without the need of mediators.

4.4 Data Collection Method

The research questions are answered through various streams of data collection such as focus groups, a semi-structured interview and face-to-face and online surveys. The data collection took place between February and April 2015 in three cities: Bogotá (capital city), Cartagena (coastal city) and Honda (interior). My initial plan was to undertake interviews only in Bogotá but after being informed by the “Urna de Cristal” team that the awareness was higher in the smaller cities I decided to travel to Honda that is located three hours from Bogotá and has 27.000 inhabitants and Cartagena that is a coastal city with more than 900.000 inhabitants. These cities were chosen due to accessibility and resources limitations. Moreover, since the amount of user was very low, I decided to randomly
contact users directly from the twitter and Facebook pages. The data is mainly qualitative in nature but I have also used some quantitative data to provide a general contextualization as well as to validate parts of the qualitative data extracted from the focus groups, interviews and surveys.

Applying a combination of methods (focus groups, semi-structured interviews, face-to-face and online survey) was necessary in order to gain more complete information for the analysis of the case. Finally, at the end of all the data collection there was an existing coherence within the findings where clear patterns started to emerge.

4.4.1 Selection and Data collection of the Government Representatives

I have selected to interview the “Centre of Innovation in E-Government”, the leader of DTF and the team behind “Urna de Cristal” in order to contextualize e-participation in a specific structure and understand the process in detail, while exploring the limitations and possibilities (i.e. the political, legal and structural context) behind “Urna de Cristal”. It must be noted that these focus groups and interviews were done on a voluntary basis and there were no rewards or contacts related to the selection of the government representative. This also proves the openness and willingness of the government representatives to be as transparent as possible.

The main data collection consisted of two focus groups carried out in the Ministry of ICT - MINTIC of the Government of Colombia. One was done with the “Centre of Innovation in E-Government” and the second one with the “Urna de Cristal” team. Since the leader of the DTF of “Urna de Cristal” was unable to attend the focus group I undertook a separate semi-structured face-to-face interview. As mentioned in the background, the DTF is a specialized group in strategies concerning social media, digital media and citizen participation. It was created to design, articulate and implement the strategy of interaction and digital communication of the Colombian Government. This team is not only supporting “Urna de Cristal” but also all the governmental entities and bodies which also have their own channel(s) of digital communication. For example Coldeportes (the Colombian governmental body in charge of sports) has a separate Facebook\textsuperscript{19} and twitter\textsuperscript{20} page. The same occurs with for example the Ministry of Education and other governmental bodies.

\textsuperscript{19} Facebook page of Coldeportes: https://www.facebook.com/Coldeportes
\textsuperscript{20} Twitter page of Coldeportes: https://twitter.com/search?q=Coldeportes&src=typd&lang=en
Table 3 displays more details regarding the number of participants, the data collection method, the data and the duration of the interview and focus groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actors</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Data collection Method</th>
<th>Date and Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Centre of Innovation in E-Government</td>
<td>5 members from the team</td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>5th of March 1h 20min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Urna de Cristal”</td>
<td>5 members from the team</td>
<td>Focus group</td>
<td>17th of March 1h40min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader of Digital Task Force (“Urna de Cristal”)</td>
<td>1 member directly</td>
<td>Face-to-face semi-structured interview</td>
<td>31st of March 1h20min</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The “Centre of Innovation in E-Government”, “Urna de Cristal” and the DTF are all located in the Ministry of ICT, therefore all the focus groups and interviews took place in this location. Throughout the focus group with “Urna de Cristal” and the interview with the leader of the DTF, I posed fairly similar questions (see appendix 2) that relates to the functioning of the platform and the existing structures inside the government leading to various questions related to the main research question which is: How does the government driven tool of “Urna de Cristal” relate to the concepts of participatory democracy, e-empowerment and sustainable e-participation? From here I addressed the different levels of e-participation defined by Macintosh where I asked the group/individual to provide examples of each of the stages. Additionally, I also presented questions regarding the main limitations and challenges that in turn lead me to pose questions regarding the sustainability of government-driven e-participation initiatives such as “Urna de Cristal” (see appendix 2 and 3). Although exposing the theories that I am using had the risk of the interview effect, I believe it actually helped the interviewees to understand what I meant by e-participation and e-empowerment especially since there is a large discussion on whether ICTs are e-empowering or enabling e-empowerment. Also after asking questions about sustainability, I presented the theory of Islam (2008) to encourage more discussion. Additionally, I probed data, relevant to the research topic, which also helped the team to provide more specific answers on the specific cases of citizen
incidence and e-empowerment. For example I displayed Table 2 in this thesis to inquire more about the exercises involving impact and decision.

The focus group with the “Centre of Innovation in E-Government” was designed differently since this entity regards e-participation from a more strategic and contextual viewpoint. The questions being asked in this focus group turned towards trends, e-participation and the challenges and opportunities that the GoC comes across while building innovative solutions (see appendix 3). Even though this entity has little connection to “Urna de Cristal” undertaking the focus group with them was of special interest given the importance of the context when analysing e-participation. Their input was valuable and relevant since they do research on different online government topics including topics of e-participation and also have some studies of the consultation exercises that have been carried out in Colombia.

Finally, all the focus groups were recorded with the iPhone audio recorder. As stated in the table 3 the focus groups and interview lasted between 1-2 hours each. All the focus groups and interviews were held in Spanish, the native language of all participants. The recorded data was mostly transcribed word-by word in Spanish and later some parts were translated into English.

4.4.2 Selection and Data collection of Citizens

The first step in the citizen data collection consisted of a short survey (see appendix 4) to explore the general awareness of “Urna de Cristal”. In total I obtained a small sample of 30 Colombians that were selected randomly in the public areas such as plazas, commercial centres and others. As stated earlier the selected cities were from Bogotá (capital), Cartagena (coast) and Honda (interior) and the survey took place in March 2015. From these 30 citizens only three knew “Urna de Cristal” two of which were from Honda and one from Cartagena. As the survey was related to the awareness and use of “Urna de Cristal” I obtained very little user information. The second step of my data collection consisted of more face-to-face interviews with the directors of two civil society organization in Cartagena: Fundación Social – Cartagena cómo vamos21 and FUNCICAR22. The aim was to obtain a citizen perspective from the lens of civil society organizations. The duration of this

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21 Fundación social cómo vamos: [http://www.cartagenacomovamos.org/tag/fundacion-social/](http://www.cartagenacomovamos.org/tag/fundacion-social/)
interview was 1 hour and the main questions were related with citizen’s participation in politics and use of digital media.

Due to the fact that none of the interviewees used “Urna de Cristal” on Facebook, twitter or the web site, I decided to undertake a third round of data collection where I contacted citizens randomly from the followers of twitter and Facebook. I was able to get four people to participate in the online survey that was designed to get feedback from the digital media users and explore the perception, use and impact of “Urna de Cristal” from a citizen perspective. Even if these replies cannot qualify as statistically representative, they represent an interesting indicator of opinions of the current users. Also even, the fact that from 30 surveyed citizens only three people knew the platform is also a finding. Additionally, the non-representativeness is compensated by the more qualitative data that arises from the government interviews and that relate to the citizens limitations for e-empowerment.

Table 6 below displays more detailed information on the different stages of citizen data collection.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citizen number</th>
<th>Data collection Method</th>
<th>Place and Duration</th>
<th>Channel awareness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>STAGE I: Citizens</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Random Citizen Survey</td>
<td>30 Face-to-face survey</td>
<td>Honda, Cartagena, Bogota 10-15 each</td>
<td>Television</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>STAGE II: Civil Society Organization</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FUNCICAR and Fundación Social Cartagena</td>
<td>Face-to-face interview</td>
<td>Cartagena 1 hour</td>
<td>Television and Newsletter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>STAGE III: Digital Media users of “Urna de Cristal”</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Users</td>
<td>5 online surveys through twitter and email.</td>
<td>15-20 minutes</td>
<td>Twitter, facebook</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s own creation

4.5 Reliability and Validity

In this segment I will address the two concerns that arise when conducting research: (a) reliability and (b) validity. Reliability refers to the extent to which a research operation is consistently repeated, replication meaning the extent to which a re-study repeats the findings of the initial study (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, & Liao, 2003). This, though, is applicable for quantitative research and is a more
complicated question in regard to qualitative research (Bryman, 2008; 31). While validity refers to the issue of whether an indicator (or set of indicators) that is devised to gauge a concept really measures that concept (ibid, 171).

It must be noted that the issues of validity and reliability have another meaning in qualitative studies, as they are not applicable in the same way compared to the quantitative setting. According to Yin (2009; 149) reliability is also about minimizing the errors and biases in a study and making sure data collection techniques or analysis procedures will yield consistent findings. To increase the reliability of the research I formulated and asked questions in the most neutral and clear way possible, as discussed by Yin (2009). Using semi-structured focus groups, interviews and surveys became a strength in terms of reliability since if offered me the necessary flexibility to direct or re-direct the data collection method towards other topics that I as a research did not take into account in the first hand.

Moreover, validity concerns if there is a good chain of evidence (Yin, 2009). Since interviewees’ answers can include bias, incorrect information or data. For this reason conclusions should not solely be based on the data collected from the interviews but it should also be corroborated with information or data retrieved from other sources (ibid). Hence, to enhance the validity of my study, I looked at the interactions on the different digital channels of “Urna de Cristal”, I watched the “Urna de Cristal TV program several time (where the government representatives answer questions to citizens regarding a topic proposed by the GoC. Finally I looked at data and statistics that backed up different facts retrieved from the interviews/focus groups/surveys.

Restrictions regarding the validity of the results have to be made in the sense that the small sample of “Urna de Cristal” citizen users cannot be generalized for e-participation, since there was only 5 surveyed individuals. Getting more e-users was especially challenging since the “Urna de Cristal” team could not provide emails of citizen users due to data protection and while contacting 30 “Urna de Cristal” followers on Facebook and twitter only 5 provided answers to the online survey. Nevertheless, from these surveyed interviews the answers of to the questions had very similar answers, hence one could extract clear patterns. Yet, to be able to drawn more valid conclusions from this paper, more citizen users need to be surveyed. Furthermore, it has to be stated that the data collected through focus groups, interviews and surveys is based on self-assessment of the representatives of “Urna de Cristal”, “Centre of Innovation in E-Government” and citizens.
4.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues arise at a variety of stages in social research and relate directly to the integrity of a piece of research (Bryman, 2008; 173), hence ethical issues were raised from the very beginning of the research, especially as the empirical material was gathered through focus groups and interviews. One of the first considerations when beginning to design the interviews was to consider the ways the research possibly could harm the participants, and how to avoid such occurrences. Even though the subject under study does not represent a particularly sensitive topic, I wanted to ensure the confidentiality of records (Bryman, 2008, 118) and ensure a secure environment so that participants would feel more confident during the interviews or focus groups. This was done by undertaking two informal meetings through Skype, in February 2015 before travelling to Colombia. In these informal meetings I got the chance to explain to the head of the teams (“Urna de Cristal” and “Centre of Innovation in E-Government”) the intentions of my research and the information that I needed to gather. During these meetings I was also able to ask various questions of the structure, processes and structures that helped me to dive deeper into the specific topic. This meant that all records and identities of interviewees were treated as confidential. Special care was taken in the analytical section, so that the identities of the interviewees were not reviled. This was done by keeping the names anonym and instead classifying individuals under groups. For example, a member of the “Urna de Cristal” team, or a non-user or user of “Urna de Cristal” etc.

Another action was sending the head of the teams a document explaining the purpose of the study and the structure of the focus groups. Additionally, before undertaking the focus groups all interviewees were handed with a consent form where both the purpose of the study and the ethical considerations was explained in detail. This gave the interviewee the possibility to be informed about what participating in the focus group implied, which methods would be used and how the data collected would be used. This form also explained the way in which the information and data will be published. This consent form can be seen in the appendix of this thesis.

4.7 Limitations

It is understood that all methods—whether explicit or not—have limitations. The advantage of explicitness is that those limitations can be understood and, if possible, addressed. In addition, the methods can be taught and shared. This process allows research results to be compared across
separate researchers and research projects studies to be replicated, and scholars to learn (King et al., 1994).

Due to time and resource limitation I was only be able to conduct the study in three Colombian cities: Bogotá, Cartagena and Honda. Ideally I would have liked to undertake a greater number of interviews including other main cities such as Medellin, Cali, Bucaramanga and Santa Marta. Also this study was unable to look at more specific cases such as the efforts done by the government to e-empower disabled citizens by providing these with the technological tools to participate. Nor will this thesis look into different varying contexts (north and south, east and west, urban and rural, at different levels of governance). However, these could be proposed as possible research topics.

It is understood that the tools and methodology also becomes a limitation. As argued by Shapiro (2002) the method-driven research leads to self-serving construction of problems, misuse of data in various ways, related pathologies summed up in the old saying that if the only tool you have is a hammer, everything around you starts to look like a nail. Although it would have been desirable to conduct citizen interviews at a larger scale I was only able to survey 30 citizens and undertake five “Urna de Cristal” user surveys. Despite this being a limitation, throughout the analysis process a clear pattern and coherence of results started to emerge meaning that this small-scale analysis is to a certain extent representative of the society. The data collected through the surveys was also coherent with what the government representatives stated in the focus groups and interview. The transparency and openness of the government representatives was an essential factor since they did not seem to have any concern in saying something that might give the GoC a bad image. Therefore, the answers provided by the government representatives and the citizens were also consistent adding thus a greater degree of validity to the results.
5. PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

In this section, I will analyse the findings through the lens of the theories presented in the theoretical framework. The analysis of the data is structured around each research question. First I explore the main research question: How does the government-driven project of “Urna de Cristal” relate to concepts of participatory democracy, e-empowerment and sustainable e-participation? Second, I explore the limitations of e-empowerment both from a governmental and citizen perspective, at the same time exploring what is being done to overcome these limitations. Finally I address the question of sustainability of government driven e-participation. While doing the transcriptions I started to organise the information under the main themes related with the research questions. As it will be seen in the section of analysis, I have divided all relevant comments under each main topic and organized the comments under sub themes using representative quotes.

5.1 “Urna de Cristal” and levels of E-participation

As mentioned in the background section, “Urna de Cristal” was born from the electorate campaign of Juan Manuel Santos in 2010, (current President of Colombia elected in 2010 and re-elected in 2014). He proposed the creation of “Urna de Cristal” as an innovative and inclusive approach to e-participation that would promote efficiency, transparency and citizen participation among the national and local GoC. The UNPAN defined it as: an online public consultation site combined with on-going coverage of current affairs, use of social media and publication of open data across ministries making the Colombian transparency initiative standout in the region.23

Limiting Context

Before addressing the theory it is worth emphasizing again the Colombian context in which “Urna de Cristal” operates (see section 1.1). It’s not just a coincidence that while undertaking the citizen surveys in Honda, I came across one citizen that did not know how to read or write and was therefore only informed through radio and television.

The GoC has been working towards improving the Internet penetration rate and the digital literacy of Colombian citizens with the use of different initiatives. For example, the Ministry of ICT of

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Colombia is currently investing to provide remote communities with Internet connection, schools with high technologies, Live Digital Points (Puntos Vive Digital) where citizens can have free access to computers and Internet, as well as digital education. More recently the government is also enabling disabled citizens with technological tools that will allow them to e-participate. All these initiatives turn toward 4 main areas: infrastructure, application, services and users.

Yet in order to e-enable citizens, awareness of the participation tools must exist. From the citizen interviews it became clear that the awareness of the tool was low. The people that were aware of the platform stated various channels through which they got to know the initiative such as social media, television, advertising from the presidency and programs from the senate. In the question regarding the amount of time that the citizen had been using the tool, the answers varied between 3 months and 2 years, while “Urna de Cristal” has been actively running since 2011. Regarding the purpose of use, all citizens stated that they are using the tool mainly to be informed of what is happening in the government and one of the citizens said he re-tweeted information to also keep his contacts informed.

5.1.1 E-Enabling

From the lens of Macintosh’s theory, it is seen that “Urna de Cristal” and MINTIC is doing a lot in e-enabling by investing in building a wide telecommunication infrastructure and by supporting those who do not have access to Internet or do not possess the necessary skills or capabilities to use these. Consequently, “Urna de Cristal” has been created as a multi-channel platform in order to include those who do not have the means to use digital media but do have access to participate via more traditional means such as TV, radio, or phone calls that do not require literacy or technological skills, but more oral communication capabilities. According to Macintosh (2004; 3) “the technology needs to provide relevant information in a format that is both more accessible and more understandable”.

A. Categories of tools: traditional and digital media

The variety of channels being used is crucial because the intention is to reach as many citizens as possible. Tambouris et al. (2007) hold that the categories of tools are based on technologies and

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support the e-participation techniques and areas. Members from the “Urna de Cristal” team stress that the efficiency of the channels varies depending on the participation campaign. This multichannel platform is using a number of software applications, products, tools and components that are potentially encouraging different participation areas. Below I will differentiate the tools in two main categories: a) traditional media and b) digital media.

- **Traditional Media**

The main advantage of the TV program is that the citizens that pose a question get a direct answer from the government representative(s), normally Ministers that are directly in charge of the topic under discussion. For example when the topic of the process of peace was addressed in the TV program, the peace negotiators, Humberto de la Calle and Sergio Jaramillo, were the ones answering the questions. Additionally the team of “Urna de Cristal” stated that this is also being used as a pedagogical tool:

*The TV program of “Urna de Cristal” has been a very important didactical tool since it is first hand information (...), also, other media such as the newspaper and radio make reference to it and this has helped us to solidify our position.*

The directors of the civil society organizations stated that traditional media still plays a very important role especially because even though the available ICT's allow a wider connection, not many citizens have smartphones with access to Internet, or have the necessary digital skills.

Throughout the data collection process both citizen and government answers confirmed the fact that there is a widespread rejection towards the Institutional channel through which the TV program “Urna de Cristal” is broadcasted. But, from the citizens that actually watched the television program there was a more positive perception.

*Every time I can I like watching the programs in that channel because it has very interesting topics – twitter user -
It’s better to be caught watching porn than the Institutional channel – non-user
That channel is full of lies – non-user*

The leader of the DTF holds that the knowledge of “Urna de Cristal” is higher in the rural regions because the people living in these regions don’t tend to have Direct TV (cable streaming service that provides a large variety of channels) so the probability of watching the institutional channel “señal institucional” is much higher here than in the larger urban cities.
The radio program of “Urna de Cristal” is also used as an informative tool where citizens and governmental representatives take part in a two-way dialogue, with the citizens asking questions and the government answering regarding a topic that is proposed by the government. Additional tools such as the call centre and the mobile USSD (free text messages) are also provided to citizens for accessibility and inclusion. The decrease of 21.1% in the number of calls received from 2012 to 2013 could be explained by the growing Internet penetration that has increased considerably in the last years.

- **Digital Media**

The digital media channels are based on the webpage and on social media channels. One of the main flaws of the webpage is that the questions and proposals posed in the webpage must match the proposed thematic selected by the government. “Urna de Cristal” justifies this pre-selection of topics by stating that it is a way to encourage people to e-participate and to provide input. Another disadvantage is the fact that in order to participate people need to register on the webpage by providing some personal information and this is something that not many citizens are willing to do.

The social media channels of the “Urna de Cristal” include a wide variety of channels such as twitter, Facebook, Google +, Instagram and the Youtube. The table below displays the reach of each channel. As it is displayed in the table twitter and Google + have the most number of followers but the team states that twitter and Facebook are the two social media networks that are most widely used and therefore there are two people responsible of managing them and creating content and interactions on a daily basis including weekends. The Youtube channel has various videos that normally come from the television program and which are used to provide information regarding different current topics such as education, housing, security etc.

The wide number of followers on Google + is mainly explained by the various Google hangouts that have been organised. The leader of the DTF stated …*at first none of the Ministers wanted to use it but the moment one of the Ministers started to organise hangouts the other started calling me up, seeking for advice on how to organise one.* So it’s seen that it is also a question of trends as well as openness of government representatives towards e-participation initiatives.
Table 7: Urna de Cristal’s Social Media Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media</th>
<th>Year of creation</th>
<th>Posts</th>
<th>Nº of followers, likes, following</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>October 2010</td>
<td>73,667 likes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>twitter</td>
<td>October 2010</td>
<td>105K tweets</td>
<td>109K followers 1100 following</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google +</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td></td>
<td>124 872 followers 2,184,727 views</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>262 post</td>
<td>562 followers 75 following</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youtube Channel</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td></td>
<td>1575 subscribed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s own creation. Data retrieved from social media sites in February 2015

The leader of the DTF reinforced the importance of using as many channels as possible:

“We are always at the forefront seeking to be present everywhere. For example when Pinterest had a boom, we were there too, also Google + but here in Colombia this channel has less interaction, but it can be said that we use all the means we have available since our main aim is to open channels for interaction, I mean where people are present, we need to be to there in order to give out information.

“Urna de Cristal” tries to provide the same message through all channels but often this needs be adapted to fit both the medium and the target group of that channel.

B. Inclusiveness through accessibility and understandable information:

Throughout the two focus groups (“Urna de Cristal” and “Centre of Innovation in E-Government”), it was commented that the way political information is communicated must be simplified and presented in forms that all citizens, regardless of their education level, can comprehend it. As both “Urna de Cristal” and the Centre of Innovation state: “Colombians do not like to read”; hence the need of making public communication as easy and entertaining as possible. The Centre of Innovation has detected this issue and is proposing to use more videos where things are explained with the use of images, schemes or videos. They have even identified private entities that are working on this such as Magic Marker Pro25, which have already created various videos for some government entities. The use of explanatory videos allows the GoC to communicate things more simplified and in a more entertaining way. Nevertheless, this is not always easy since public

communication has historically and culturally been done through the use of complex and juridical words. Breaking this system is sometimes challenging since the juridical department does not always allow it, especially in the case where there could be room for misinterpretation or misunderstanding and the government can be sued for it. So, making political communication more complex is actually a measure of minimizing risks.

(...) The language being used is even something legal. The government has worked a lot in seeing how to simplify the language on the web sites because a lot of web sites use a lot of legal language. Public entities are afraid of translating the content into citizen language because if the information is misinterpreted the citizens can sue the entities because the information is unclear and confusing. So entities decide to use the language that is used in the law, even if no one understands it, but at least they fulfil the law.

Another factor regarding accessibility is the fact that whole GoC has more than 700 accounts on digital media from many different sectors and entities involving numerous initiatives also provide evidence that there are numerous parallel digital channels that are informing and encouraging participation through other accounts different from “Urna de Cristal”. This is where the DTF comes to play a determinant role influencing e-enabling.

C. Responsiveness

One of the main strengths of “Urna de Cristal” is their capacity to respond to all the questions that are received.

For us the interaction is very important and that is where “Urna de Cristal” has gained ground. One can ask a question on Facebook or twitter and the team of “Urna de Cristal” will try to answer immediately.

The evaluations of “Urna de Cristal” are based on the amount of questions received and the amount of answers sent out per entity. Yet this form of communication is merely informative and does not imply any degree of e-empowerment.

The responsiveness is also ensured by a legal right called Derecho de Petición (Petition right), which states that the government entities must answer the citizens in less than 15 days. However, the online is still not fully regulated, as stated by the lawyer that works in “Urna de Cristal”. Nevertheless, the team has stressed the importance of answering questions posed on digital media as soon as possible. The leader of the DTF stated:
As I tell my colleagues, 15 minutes in digital media is too much because after that people are less likely to read the response, then it doesn’t matter if you use the persons’ name, hashtags etc.

This immediacy is especially important when it comes to “threads” since they normally generate a large amount of messages or comments, which make the earlier comments, loose visibility and exposure. Hence an answer may get lost in the discussion. Like one of the participants of “Urna de Cristal” noted: This is mainly due to the fact that conversations grow old in a matter of minutes in digital means. People don’t like to drag down to the beginning of the conversation to see all that has been said.

The team has also manifested their will of answering all the received questions regardless of the amount:

Even when we’ve had an overload of questions, we’ve had the ability and capacity to respond. For example this Thursday we had a program with the whole issue of housing aids. Normally, after a TV program we tend to receive around 30 to 40 questions, however this time I answered 150 on twitter. The same has happened in other occasions and even if it might take more time to respond to every question we’ve always managed to respond to everything.

As stated by Macintosh (2004; 2) providing relevant and appropriate feedback to citizens is important to ensure openness and transparency in the decision-making process. This in turn is strongly tied to the institutions ability to analyse contributions (ibid).

### 5.1.2 E-Engaging

The second level proposed by Macintosh (2004) is the use of technology to engage with citizens also known as E-engaging. This stage is concerned with consulting a wider audience to enable deeper contributions and support deliberative debate on policy issues. This term, in the context of government-driven e-participation, refers to the top-down consultation of citizens by governments.

As stated previously, the number of consultation has been especially low. In the last 3 years “Urna de Cristal” has implemented a total of five consultations regarding different topics. From the table below we can see this could be reduced to three since the others were not targeted to the common public but aimed more to experts and private entities.
### Table 8: e-Consultations Implemented by "Urna de Cristal"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consultation Exercise</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Medium used</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>Result of Consultation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sports Law</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>Offline and online media</td>
<td>Citizens</td>
<td>High 16,259 interactions</td>
<td>Draft of the sports law (soon to be presented to the Congress)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integral anti-corruption policy</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>Online media</td>
<td>Citizens</td>
<td>Low 3,025 interactions</td>
<td>Socialization of the anticorruption plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Policy on Social Innovation</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>1 ½ month</td>
<td>Offline and online media</td>
<td>Experts, Private Institutions</td>
<td>Low 4,598 interactions</td>
<td>Input document for the construction of the social innovation policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cruzada Anti-tramites</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>3 weeks</td>
<td>Offline and online media</td>
<td>Citizens</td>
<td>High 70,000 interactions</td>
<td>Anti-procedures decree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors creation. Data from Urna de Cristal

The consultation exercises vary in nature and have produced different results some with more impacts than others. First, the paramount example of e-consultation through “Urna de Cristal” is the anti-procedure exercise where the government consulted the citizens about the procedures that they thought should be eliminated and simplified. In this case the question came from the government and the citizens responded. In order to get a higher level of participation a media plan was implemented using both the support of digital and traditional media. “Urna de Cristal” stated:

*The country’s Internet culture is strong, but we follow a procedure that is still strongly linked to the influencers and the agents of opinion of traditional media, so here there is the possibility of a topic gaining force in the Internet but not until it goes through traditional media where it actually reaches the minds of everyone.*

Secondly, the idea of the Social Innovation Policy consultation was to invite citizens to the task of building and implementing this policy. This effort was lead by the National Planning Department, the Administrative Department of Science, Technology and Innovation and the National Agency for the Overcoming of Extreme Poverty. As seen in table 5 the participation was very low. In order to
increase participation a virtual participation platform\textsuperscript{26} was created, that was intended to increase the policy’s visibility, the number and quality of the citizens’ contributions, making this process more inclusive. Yet this consultation dealt with more strategic issues, hence the main target for this consultation was private entities. This platform enabled interaction and co-creation spaces from which information was gathered for the assessment and formulation of policy guidelines. There are discussions around specific topics and proposed problems and solutions, ideas about posed questions and topics are suggested and managed, and the Policy text is created collectively.

Thirdly, in the consultation for the anti-corruption policy, citizens were asked to prioritise the lines of work in the anti-corruption policy of the country. Given that the law requires the departmental and municipal entities to make an anti-corruption plan “Urna de Cristal” did all the socialization of the subject and published the draft copy of the law for a few days so that citizens could make their contributions to the drafting so that the entities could take it into account for the final document.

Fourthly, the consultation for the decree of the online government was intended to get input of a new manual. This consultation was mainly focused for more experts in this field and was not meant for the ordinary citizen; hence the participation was very low. Also the “Urna de Cristal” team emphasised that citizens have a hard time involving in things that do not directly affect them, so when it becomes aspects more macro and strategic, the citizens have a harder time understanding the meaning and relevance of their participation.

The latest consultation exercise has been the drafting of the Sports Law, here citizens have committed highly in this process since it is something, which they understand. “Urna de Cristal” asked the citizens: How would you like the Sports law to be in Colombia?

\textit{We received comments that had nothing to do with the Sports law in Colombia so we decided to analyse the law in detail and select specific topics. After this people started to provide more relevant, complete and interesting input. Many different topics emerged from this discussion such as social inclusion, racial aspects and the indigenous issue which is very present here in Colombia.}

From this consultation exercise it became clear that guiding the citizen into the discussion is also essential and once this is done many fruitful discussions emerge. On a similar note the directors of the civil society organizations stated that when it comes to sports the participation of citizen is

\textsuperscript{26} Virtual participation platform for social innovation: http://www.politicadeinnovacionssocial.co
extremely high since it is something they can relate to and that can actually bring citizens some type of tangible benefit.

From the instances shown in table 8, one can derive that all consultations are based on the principles of participation, transparency, and collaboration; and it intended to promote participation through the contribution of ideas from different stakeholders. Yet, the results are not sufficient to confirm that GoC is at the second level of e-engagement defined by Macintosh three citizen consultations in three years seems insufficient and more like punctual pilot exercises.

5.1.3 E-Empowerment

The third and last level of Macintosh’s model (2004) is the use of technology to empower citizens: e-empowering. This is concerned with supporting active participation and facilitating bottom-up ideas to influence the political agenda. This stage is rarely reached by government-driven e-participation initiatives such as “Urna de Cristal” since the top-down perspective of democracy are characterized in terms of user access to information and reaction to government led initiatives (Macintosh, 2004; 3).

The “Centre of Innovation in E-Government” emphasized the role of the media as an enabler and not as a direct empowerment tool: There is a confusion when saying that the media empowers the people, when in fact what they do is open a path to empowerment. What needs to be done is to encourage people to participate. When we talk about real e-empowerment it involves a longer and more complex process that requires people to read something about a topic, appropriate it, reflect upon it, analyse it and then emit an opinion. Very few cases of this occur in “Urna de Cristal”.

Like displayed in Macintosh’s model, reaching e-empowerment is a variable of time and maturity. The leader of the DTF stressed:

Consciously looking at Macintosh’s model of e-participation, in Colombia real empowerment does not occur, we have some examples but it applies only to a very small group of people compared to whole of the population of Colombia. Of course ICT’s empower you in the sense that they give you options to talk and not just here in government initiatives, you generally can give your opinion of whatever, wherever.
From the focus group, a member of the “Urna de Cristal” team explicitly said:

*One of our goals is to empower citizens and to increasingly reach more and more people. (...) But inside our goals we also want to focus on working with those who already follow us, those who are already asking and proposing in order to solidify that relationship and interaction.*

Nevertheless, the team of “Urna de Cristal” does not have control over how the input of citizens are being used; they are just responsible of providing other entities with the expertise and the means to open the channels for participation:

*It is important to clarify that we are very specific, we as “Urna de Cristal” do not have decision-making capacity, we are just a channel that approaches the citizen with a particular topic. The decision makers are others entities and are role is to advise them and provide them with the means and expertise for participation.*

This finding becomes a central point regarding my main research question, since this provides evidence that state the lack of control of “Urna de Cristal” over how the input is being used. This is a clear limitation that is blocking citizen real e-empowerment:

*What we do is to tell the citizen that we open the space for participation, we handle their input and we deliver it to the entity responsible, if the entity takes them into account or not, that’s a problem of the entity directly.*

Even though “Urna de Cristal” has been given the governmental task of national citizen e-participation it has no direct power over the decision-making process, meaning that when citizen provides input through “Urna de Cristal” the team members are only able to report the input to the corresponding government entity which can choose to use the input or not. Regardless of their decision, the entities rarely report back to “Urna de Cristal” and hence the citizens. The only thing that “Urna de Cristal” can do is send a message to the citizens thanking them for their contribution and informing them that their input has been passed on to the corresponding entity. Consequently, it can be said that “Urna de Cristal” is an enabler that has achieved a lot in terms of communication and e-information and that it has become an inter-mediator between citizens and government entities. Given the fact that all government entities have their direct digital communication channels through twitter, Facebook and web pages, complementing the task of “Urna de Cristal”. In short one can conclude that this internal structure affects the extent to which citizens are e-empowered, even more when there is no real evidence that allows me to conclude that citizens are being e-empowered through the use of “Urna de Cristal”.

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5.2 Empowerment limitations

From the focus groups and interviews, a long list of limitations and challenges were raised both from the side of the government and the citizenry. In this sub section I will comment on these and provide and relate them to main research question. It must be noted that this is not an exhaustive list; on the contrary, the limitations that arise are extensive, changeable and dependent on many other socio-economic, political and technological factors.

5.2.1 Government limitations:

As we have seen from the previous analysis that relates to Macintosh’s levels of e-participation, one can conclude that there is no real evidence of e-empowerment, meaning that the citizens have no real power to influence the decision making process. Yet, citizens are enabled and three specific cases of e-engagement have been enacted through consultation exercises. Having arrived to this finding, I explored the limitations and barriers arising from both a governmental and citizen perspective, which are blocking the possibility of reaching the 3rd and last stage of e-participation that is e-empowerment. These limitations are also strongly linked to the process of e-participation that involves the different factors proposed by Tambouris et al. (2007) comprising the democracy process, participation areas, participation techniques, categories of tools and technologies.

Firstly, from the results of the citizen survey, it becomes evident that very few people are aware of the existence of the national e-participation tool of “Urna de Cristal”, and the team is conscious about this issue and is trying to fix it by first informing internally about the tool:

*We have improved the knowledge of “Urna de Cristal” especially among internal public servants, starting from home. Since this is a relatively new tool and we realised that not even the public servants were aware of it. In this moment the number of public servants is around 8,000-10,000 and with contractors it’s almost 30,000. So, this is where we’ve started to gain ground.*

Although this could be a good strategy since each public servant might communicate this to their contacts and hence expand the number of people aware. Yet, much more than this should be done. The leader of the DTF stated that gaining awareness was a difficult task especially when there is an existing program called “Urna digital” broadcasted through Caracol, one of the main media channels on TV. Also, the leader of DTF explained that the knowledge of “Urna de Cristal” is higher in the regions because the people living in these regions don’t tend to have Direct TV (cable streaming...
service that provides a large quantity of channels) so the possibility of watching the institutional channel is much higher in the regions then in the bigger urban cities.

Regardless of the efforts made to reach citizens through various channels the citizen apathy strongly influences the amount of citizens participating in politics. The team of “Urna de Cristal” stated:

*The channels are open but if citizens are apathetic regarding participating, if there is no knowledge or if there is no interest in participating that’s another issue, but this apathy is seen from the simplest form of participation, which is the vote.*

Another factor affecting e-participation is the lack of trust and credibility in the GoC. This lack of trust and credibility is mainly nurtured by the continuous corruption scandals. This of course directs the communication of the government in way that there is a certain need to be defensive and show citizens what is been done to solve these issues. *Regardless of the political party that is ruling the government is going to have zero credibility due to the historical factors, with more than 200 years in the same line*

One of the team members from “Urna de Cristal” stated:

*Given the Colombian political system, we are used to waking up having to deal with the latest corruption scandal or according to the topic of the day which allows us to introduce that topic into the agenda and see what the local, national and departmental governors have done and said regarding that topic. If tomorrow there is a health scandal because they have neglected to assist a patient at a hospital, believe me that tomorrow we are going to have to activate the alarms to say what the government has done regarding health.*

From the statement above, one can conclude that the topics of the agenda are also strongly linked to the corruption scandals, which in turn creates a dynamic that is reactive towards these topics. “Urna de Cristal” is also strongly tied to the topics of the agenda consequently also having to adapt their e-participation topics to these.

Regardless of the awareness of the participation tool of “Urna de Cristal” there is a strong culture of not participating and especially not through a government-driven tool.

*“In Latin America and especially in Colombia, the level of participation is slowly lowering due to the lack of credibility of the governors’, so it’s a common denominator in participation in Latin America, and Colombia is not the exception. One example is seen in the latest presidential election where we witnessed an increasing abstention rate compared to previous years. So participation is much more complicated now even though we have the tools that facilitate the way and that maybe aren’t so binding. (...)*
More so, the lack of involvement of citizens is evidenced in the simplest form of participation: voting. The “Centre of Innovation in E-Government” stated: *In Colombia, it is seen that citizens don’t even remember whom they voted for. If you ask them why they voted for that representative some will answer because that candidate seems nice or is even good looking. Citizens seem to auto convince themselves and vote for a certain candidate without bothering about what they do.* Also, the increasing abstention rate is also a sign of disinterest and lack of trust and credibility. This lack of involvement in voting is evidenced at a larger scale in a more sophisticated form of e-participation where citizens have to contribute in the decision-making process which may involve finding solutions to a problem, helping to draft a new law, prioritizing problems or issues etc.

By analysing the participation areas, the participations techniques, the categories of tools and the technologies involving the e-participation process proposed by Tambouris et al. (2007) many other limitations and barriers emerged. For example the definition of the main topics of e-participation are mainly defined using a top-down approach meaning that the “Urna de Cristal” team sets a series of e-participation topics depending on what the agenda dictates which in turn can be immerse in any governmental sectors. More recently, the team is trying to do more in-depth research, especially on Facebook and twitter to see what citizens are talking about and try to define the topics using a bottom-up approach by choosing the topics that are being repeatedly discussed in diverse mediums and try to push up that opinion.

A parallel argument is that the scope of e-participation is also limiting the topics under discussion. Given the size of Bogotá, the economic epicentre, the type of problems that arise in the city are very particular and different from the ones occurring in other cities.

*Due to the institutional development we don’t deal a lot with the issues of Bogotá because we only cover nation” So the district topics are covered by the city hall or region. The city hall has their own programs and campaigns although we support them in some digital aspects we are very independent.*

Also the fact that “Urna de Cristal” is a national initiative makes it another barrier since a wider scope of participation is more complicated to manage. Like the leader of the DTF said: *“It much more complicated to gather people from a certain neighbourhood then to get a whole country to participate”.*
Additionally, the leader of the DTF stressed another limitation which concern the political polarization:

The negative continues to overshadow the positive all the time and on top of that we have another rock in the way of communication which is that political polarization (...) therefore some political issues become extremely complicated to discuss because the opposition is always very critical and this sometimes limits the range of topics because we always get criticism. However, with digital media things are much easier. That's the fun part, to see the diversity of opinions, listen to everyone, and form an opinion, allowing individuals to form a criterion from which one can use to actually say something.

The “Centre of Innovation in E-Government” holds that: “Polarization is a good marketing strategy where the citizen is out-of-place, lost, misplaced.” meaning that this exerts a fear of being categorized under one of the sides.

Another barrier is the limited resource available. As indicated earlier, “Urna de Cristal” only has a total of 12 permanent workers and 23 division administrators from 20 different ministries or government entities, who collaborate occasionally when a certain question that is too specific cannot be answered by the “Urna de Cristal” team. The fact that there are limited resources makes me question if more resources would be made available for the team if the level of participation increased. The answer was fairly simple:

As you know the whole government is under an austerity plan, we have lost human resources which have not been replaced and on the contrary we have to use our creativity and innovate in order to manage the resources we have as efficiently as we can.

It was also discussed that the limited resources are also seen to limit the topics that are being discussed: There are some topics that we couldn’t cover due to lack of time or lack of resources.

On the other hand, the leader of the DTF stated evidence of this collaborative and innovative that is arising due to limited resources:

You know one day I told my team: the graphic designer will no longer be available to any of you. If you want to launch a campaign you're going to have to design it yourselves using paint, PowerPoint, whatever tool you know how to use. Members of my team where so mad that they didn’t want to talk to me for like a week, but after sometime we started to realise that it was actually more successful because it was like if a normal citizen had created it and the number of shares we got were much higher.

The statement above provides evidence that leaving the governmental formality results in better
reception from the citizens and it allows “Urna de Cristal”. Also, this leads us to an interesting fact that has been evidenced in many fields, all around the world. The limitation of resources challenges the creativity of people; it expels a need for some type of innovation that can in turn lead to more successful results. From this limitation we come to understand the importance of the human capital. Even though it is an institution, it is composed of people and their work strongly affects the quality of the service that is being offered.

On a similar note, the leader of the DTF reinforced that retaining human capital is another big challenge especially given the complicated conditions that the government offers. Most of the people working are contractors so the likelihood of finding better conditions in the private sectors are much higher, where individuals have greater job security, higher salaries, included social benefits etc. This leads to a high rotation of workers meaning that sometimes the leader needs to start training people from scratch. Also, nepotism is another barrier since people are not hired due to their skills and competencies but more for whom they know. Consequently, the capacity of people affects the communications (outcomes) that is being done through the digital channels of the government. The DTF leader stressed the Capacity of people of converting these communications to their target audience, not just copying and pasting the same message that I create. Although if they just copy paste, that is still useful because we increase our reach.

Another rooted limitation is the lack of meaning and significance of citizen participation for some politicians, clearly obstructing the task and mission of “Urna de Cristal”. This of course has a negative effect on the process of citizen e-empowerment because this means that the input of citizens are treated with little interest or relevance and do not have a real impact on the decision-making process.

We must look at the positive sides of this initiative. We have earned international awards, globally we are positioned very well in regards to e-participation, but inside our politicians are not interested in that. They don’t see what is the necessity, what are the advantages. Normally the first thing they ask us is: how many people participated in this. We proudly answer 10,000 and they respond “10,000? That's nothing.

The quote above, leads me to think that politicians are also concerned about looking for “numbers” that can be used to back up their actions and policies, an even though a significant number of participation is needed to make it a representative sample, politicians and or/government
representatives must also start to value the quality of the input. More so, the reluctance of politicians on participating and communicating with citizens is explained by the leader of the DTF by the fear that some politicians have in interacting with the citizen because they are afraid of not being able to answer a question or being attacked or criticised. Consequently, one could emphasize the need for a change in mentality.

The quote below sheds light on the fact that citizens don’t tend to understand the structure of the state, nor the responsibilities or whom they should address in different cases, consequently this being another challenge that governments have to address.

> People have difficulties understanding the responsibilities of the government. For example if there is damage in street they blame the president when the responsible for that is the major of the city. But people don't care, they blame the congress; they blame a ministry (...). The important thing for the people is that someone responds.

The statement above refers back to the fact that the education inequality is extremely high in Colombia, since the cost of higher education is extremely expensive and unaffordable for many families. This of course falls under the responsibility of a democratic government that should ensure equal opportunities for all. While asking the “Urna de Cristal”, the leader of DTF and the civil society organizations about any e-participation courses in schools, all of them confirmed that this is something that is not addressed. The leader of the DTF stated that one of the main problems is the fact that the target audience in politics is always 18 years and above.

As mentioned earlier while analysing the levels of participation, the internal structures and processes determine the way the input of citizens are managed and hence the extents to which citizens are being empowered. After “Urna de Cristal” delivers the input to the government entities they have no control over how the citizen input is being used. For example, “Urna de Cristal” put the example of the Sports law: …the law has still not been approved, only the draft is ready. Our main task is to make sure to deliver the citizen input to the responsible entity, but we lose control over how these input are actually being used.

5.2.2 Citizen limitations

The extent to which citizens are empowered can also be analysed from a citizens’ perspective. First of all, from the survey, I verified that there is barely any knowledge of what “Urna de Cristal” is. Only 3 out of 30 randomly surveyed citizens knew about the existence of “Urna de Cristal”, two of
the three citizens coming from a small region of Colombia called Honda with a total of 27,000 inhabitants and one from Cartagena, verifying once again the statement made by the team “Urna de Cristal” that sustains that most of the participants come from less urban areas. The citizens explain this low awareness being a matter of the government not promoting it properly; some even state that it is probably not in their interest to promote it.

Another important finding was the strong link that citizens make between government and corruption, which in turn results in the lack of trust in the GoC, which in turn could explain the low participation. Some citizens formulate the question: Why should I participate if I know that nothing is going to change? The interviewed civil society organizations believes that: Normally the consultation processes are used to legitimate a decision that has already been taken, so people know beforehand that they are not going to influence the decisions made by the government.

What also becomes evident in most of the interviewees’ answer is that a certain interest does not lead into a participative action leaving them as passive informed citizens. The civil society organizations, FUNCICAR and Fundación Social Cartagena provide a possible explanation: Those citizens who have interest in participating don’t do it because they don’t believe the processes are transparent.

Another limitation related to the low level of participation is linked to the fact that people do not find a meaning in participating. So the team of “Urna de Cristal” emphasised that the main problem was not the fact that the awareness of the tool was low, but more the fact that participation is low due to more cultural reasons. One of the surveyed citizens in Honda was a woman that was 65 years old, informally working in a plaza selling obleas (a typical Colombian cookie). Her level of education and awareness of political issues was low but she did not seem to believe that participating in politics would help her change her conditions, so she saw no sense in it. Moreover, she belonged to the group of individuals that are digitally excluded since she had no smartphone and did not know how to use a computer.

**Participation Areas**

In the interviews and focus groups carried out there was consensus and coherence on the fact that citizens only like to participate regarding topics that truly affect them, something they see and things they understand, such as housing, education, labour, sports etc. The interviewed civil society
organisations states: *When a mother sees their children playing in an environment that is full of garbage, it makes them react and do something about it immediately.* Or like the team of “Urna de Cristal” states: *We try to reach the citizens with topics that affect their pocket*. “It is also true that there are some topics that Colombians like more than others. For example the topic of housing here in Colombia is something amazing (...) also the theme of labour also awakens a lot of interest in Colombians. Since we also witness a lot of health coverage issues, people are also very critical about this. A parallel argument was exposed by the Centre of Innovation that stated: *It is very hard to get people to participate in macro related topics because people don’t understand how or in what way that can affect their lives directly.*

Nevertheless, when people participate there are other barriers that arise. For example, the length of time the consultation exercise is open to the public, is a determinate variable to determine whether the e-participation initiative was a one-off pilot, part of a series of experimental studies, a regular participation exercise or an on-going well-established initiative. Most consultation guidelines acknowledge that the length of a consultation period is very important so that sufficient time can be allowed for responses (Macintosh; 2004; 2)

In the case of “Urna de Cristal” the participation exercises are sometimes especially short and even though the government in some cases devotes strong promotion efforts this time limitation ends up influencing the number of people participating and thus one could question the representativeness of the sample.

*The anti-procedure campaign was firstly raised in a specific section on the webpage where there were two forms to fill in: one in which the citizen had to prioritise which procedures had to be simplified and the second one was a open question where the citizens could say which were the procedures that had to be eliminated. This phase lasted 15 days, after this period, a strong media campaign was carried out in which the citizens were able to prioritize again the anti-procedures based on a shortlist created with the answers from the first phase.*

**Participatory Techniques**

Although there are many participatory techniques, as analysed previously, “Urna de Cristal” mainly uses e-information and e-consultation.

**Categories of Tools**
It is understood that the knowledge we have is dependent on the information we access and receive. Much of the information comes to us via some kind of media form (be that TV, Internet, books, newspapers). These media forms also reflect a set of political interests and therefore the source of the information starts to play a determinant role. From most of the citizen interviews a clear trend appeared regarding the fact that most individuals do not like to watch “Señal Institucional” (the state owned institutional channel on TV) because they don’t want to hear what the government has to say due to the lack of credibility and trust in it. Not surprisingly, the interviewed users of “Urna de Cristal” on twitter and Facebook had a more positive opinion about the institutional channel. Below are some of the answers:

*It is really good to be informed about what is happening in the government also giving the people without to Internet the opportunity also of being equally informed.* – twitter user

*It is a very informative and very good channel because it deals, for example with different projects that are being implemented in the country.* – user

*It is a channel that deserves many applauses for its cultural content, but it does not have a lot of new content.* – user

Another characteristic that affects the participation of citizen is the fact that “Colombians don’t like to read”, said both by the “Centre of Innovation in E-Government”, “Urna de Cristal” and one of the surveyed citizens that was a teacher. This is also confirmed with a recent statistic that state that Colombian read an average of 1.3 books per year. The laziness is also evidenced when people address questions to “Urna de Cristal” and the team responds with a link: They are unwilling to open the link and prefer to ask again in order to get a direct answer. More so, the leader of the digital force task stated: *We are living in a society where people cannot read more than 140 characters.*

**Technologies**

The technologies that are being used in the e-participation exercises bring inherent a digital divide that is both generational and geographic in Colombia.

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Even though it is well known that middle-aged adults and seniors are less comfortable using technology, one of the participants from the “Urna de Cristal” focus group argued:

One cultural aspect that the Facebook and twitter administrators have realised is that the retired Colombian user looks for a space to be heard. These middle-aged adults are users that have a lot of time and even though the technological tool implies certain limitations, it is a user that likes to write. In the moment in which the user feels comfortable writing, they end up providing comments up to 1 or 2 pages long. The contributions made by older adults are very interesting because they are users that the moment that they realize that there is someone behind this platform they continue participating and become very active in that sense.

As said by Livingstone, (2007) when referring to digital media one must understand that Internet especially appeals the young people- it is “their” medium, they are the early adopters, the most media-savvy, the pioneers in the cyber age, leading rather than being led for once, reversing the generation gap and gaining confidence and expertise as a result. However, evidence from this study shows that even if there is a technological barrier, some will find the means to overcome them:

Sometimes they use Facebook accounts from their children or grandsons or whatever but they look for a form of communicating.

The Ministry of ICT has identified the existing digital divide between the different generations and this is something that is being worked on. For example in the “Puntos vive digital” (physical place where citizens have access to Internet and computers for free), relevant training is being provided.

Older adults are not so afraid of using digital technologies, they are more afraid of not being heard, of not do anything about it, not reaching out etc.” When someone need to solve a problem they use any type of tool and if they need to ask a favour or help they will do so.

With regards to the geographical divide, it has been seen that citizen participation through “Urna de Cristal” tends to be higher in the smaller cities:

Users from big cities, like Bogotá, Medellin, Cali, are apathetic to participation. However in smaller cities, they conserve some type of naivety and they are more susceptible to participate. They have greater trust then those living in big cities. In Bogota, although they have more knowledge and technological capabilities, they have a lot of reluctance to the topic of participation in politics, for many factors: (1) they are more informed, (2) they have less trust in the government because they are more aware of the cases of corruption, so the contrary occurs.
The Colombians living in regions tend to be less educated that barrier of knowledge encourages them to ask, contribute, construct. In fact, they send us a lot of printed letters, so the person is looking for a contact. (“Urna de Cristal” focus group).

This digital divide, both generational and geographical, has a profound impact on the actual ‘free’ use of these technologies for e-participation and consequently triggering once again asymmetrical power relations.
5.3 Sustainable e-participation

By operationalizing the 7Ps model proposed by Islam (2008) I was able to analyse the seven phases that are suggested. First of all, as it is explained in the background (see page 10) “Urna de Cristal” stands under a solid basis since there is a concrete national planning and policy agenda that contemplates “Urna de Cristal” as the national government driven e-participation initiative. The fact the government driven e-participation is legally regulated in a Decree Law and it is contemplated in the National Development Plan 2014-2018, which makes specific reference to “Urna de Cristal” and the DTF as the official national governmental initiative that leads the strategy of citizen e-participation and open government. On the other hand, regarding capacity building there has been a considerable investment regarding the telecommunications infrastructure that is connecting remote rural areas and allowing a greater proportion of the population to have access to Internet.

The second step of planning and goal setting is also achieved since there is a concrete planning and goal setting takes place. The ideal goal of “Urna de Cristal” is to e-empower citizens in the decision-making process. These are in turn linked to broader governmental goals of becoming a transparent, accountable and efficient government. But as stressed by the “Centre of Innovation in E-Government”: *There are costs associated with participation, which is mainly time so the fastest decision-making process is the one that is not participatory.* So planning to obtain this goal is not sufficient.

From the finding one can state that the third phase regarding program and content development is being addressed since there are pertinent efforts that are being executed especially regarding the development of content that is more citizen friendly. For example the fact that the DTF is encouraging all entities including “Urna de Cristal” to create content that adapts better to their target audience so citizens can relate more easily to how a certain government issue can affect them. Consequently, this could result in a greater impact that could lead to e-participation.

Fourthly, with regards to the process and tools, it could be said that “Urna de Cristal” is making use of all the existing channels in order to reach the largest amount of citizens. Throughout the focus groups it became clear the importance of using different tools depending on the goal of the campaign and the target group. For example, as stated by one of the members of “Urna de Cristal”: [citation]
(...) For many campaigns its useful to use Facebook since in Colombia the Facebook penetration rate is around 50% meaning that there are around 21 million Facebook users.

Additionally it was stated that by the responsible of the Facebook account of “Urna de Cristal” that there are a lot of interactions and comments.

By observing the Facebook page of “Urna de Cristal” it is evident that through the content published by “Urna de Cristal” the dialogue is mainly held among citizens and in some occasions does the administrator of the Facebook page adds comments such as:

“Thank you for your input”
“What solutions would you propose?”
“What arguments do you have to state this”
“I invite you to visit the page of the Ministry of X, and participate there”

The decision of what tools to use and what topics to discuss is determinant since as realized by the “Urna de Cristal” team, some tools have been proven to be more effective than others, as well as some topics have greater impacts through different tools.

For example when we did the campaign for the sports law, the best medium was Facebook in terms of participation and it helped us a lot. But for the law anti-procedures, we had to pay TV advertising on prime time on, to encourage the people to participate, so in this case we needed more resources to promote this campaign. The traditional advertising on TV helped us a lot to receive more interactions and comments from the people.

The fiths stage concerning promotion is especially important in the case of “Urna de Cristal” given the low awareness. In order for it to be sustainable awareness must exist and hence more exposure. The findings suggest that traditional media still impacts many citizens, especially in the case of Colombia where almost half of the population does not have access to Internet, meaning that it is still largely dependent on traditional means that have a broader reach. Raising awareness is especially important since the inappropriate awareness of the demand and supply sides can lead to a failure of the participation initiative and steps should be taken to make the demand side more aware of the mission of the initiative as well as clear information on how the initiative will provide benefits to the
stakeholders (Islam; 2008). Like stated earlier “Urna de Cristal” does not only have to promote or sell e-participation to citizens but also to politicians. Making actors understand the meaning of participating is one of the biggest challenges. Therefore, the promotion has to be complemented with pedagogical efforts.

Participation as described above (see 5.1) is limited and involves more e-information then actual active participation. As emphasised by Islam (2008), association of rewards in the participation process on both sides is needed in order to keep the motivational level of the participants sustained (ibid; 9:10). The “Urna de Cristal” team stated that they have tried to implement a system of recognition by designing an award system where citizens accumulate point depending on their e-participation and their level of contribution. A pilot of medals reward system was implemented and stills appears on the website, however due to the lack of time and resources it is not operationalized.

Finally the last stage of Post-Implementation analysis proposed by Islam (2008), could be described as one of the fundamental keys towards a sustainable e-participation. The findings from my case study reveal that “Urna de Cristal” gets little or no feedback on how the other government entities are using the input of citizen that were collected through “Urna de Cristal”. Consequently, there is no possibility of actually carrying out an impact analysis, which could be used in order to correct or improve the system. Ehrenfeld (2008) also stressed the importance of monitoring and feedback in all institutional change processes especially watching carefully what happens after some design has been put into play.

One of the aspects that seem to be missing in the sustainability analysis model proposed by Islam (2008) is the origin of the e-participation initiative. Since from my case study the sustainability limitation that is detected is the fact that it is an entity originated and attached to a political campaign proposed by the current president of Colombia, Juan Manuel Santos. Hence, it is understood that the existence of “Urna de Cristal” could be at risk in the next elections (2018) when there will be a change of President. This proofs why citizen-driven e-participation strategies are more likely to survive in the long run than those that are government-driven and even more if it forms part of a political campaign. The directors of the interviewed civil society organization hold that: *There is a very long learning curve and very short periods of government* meaning that political changes create changes that disoriented
citizens in the sense that the ways things used to function normally change and this leaves the citizen with a feeling of being lost.

5.4 Overcoming Existing Barriers and Limitations

Throughout this thesis I have dedicated a lot of attention to the existing barriers and limitations of citizen empowerment coming from both the supply and demand side. Throughout the focus groups and interview with the government representatives, I posed the following question: What is the Government of Colombia doing to overcome these barriers and limitations?

The leader of the DTF stressed the importance of training and coaching internally. The task of capacity building starts from the very basic task of explaining to the Ministers or directors the importance of using digital media to interact with citizens:

> We started to train the managers of the different entities because they thought the networks were useless, then the president in a cabinet meeting said that everyone had to use them because it was a very important element in becoming the most innovative government in Latin America. Despite this many are still reluctant to participation and we had to sit with each Minister to teach them why these tools and these interaction are important.

The next step has been to train the “Community Managers” that are the individuals in charge of the social networks of the different government entities which work in parallel to “Urna de Cristal” in e-informing and interacting with citizens. As stated earlier there is a high rotation, which in turn results in having to train some people from scratch making this a time-consuming task. The leader of the DTF emphasized that the trainings were first oriented towards networks but since then they have realized that “Community managers” do know how to publish on Facebook and twitter but they have more problems on knowing how to communicate with citizens and how content can be adapted to suit the target audiences.

Also, working on the citizen side to encourage their participation is also indispensable. In order to increase citizen participation the “Urna de Cristal” team is starting to segment the communications depending on the citizens’ interest.

> The importance of knowing who you are sending the email to is much more important than the quantity of people because if you’re sending an email to 1000 persons that you know that they are interested in culture, they are much more likely to participate then those who are not interested at all. Of course some ethical issues
The creation of this database is allowing “Urna de Cristal” to target their communications regarding interests shown by citizens. As it is pointed out, ethically there is an issue since this is also a way of enclosing the citizen in a specific “filter bubble”. So if a person is interested in education, sports and security, he or she will only receive information regarding these topics. But it could also be true that this person is also interested in health but has not yet had the chance to show his/her interest in it or maybe he/she does not want to manifest that interest digitally.

Another good strategy is trying to unlink “Urna de Cristal” from the Government. “Urna de Cristal” confirms: (...) It is very difficult to separate ourselves from what the President says, most of the participation topics are government related and this makes it even harder for us to break that bond, at least in terms of perception. Nevertheless, efforts from the “Urna de Cristal” team are being implemented in order to communicate things in a way that makes people think that they are an organization separate from the government: In fact some people think we are an NGO, a page or a different service. This is one of the success factors that “Urna de Cristal” has had, leaving that institutionalism.

Leaving that institutionalism has been related to the efforts being done to use words and sentences that are easy to understand, by removing government logos or any government related icon in order to make people think that “Urna de Cristal” is something independent from the Government. Another pertinent factor is the importance of locating participation in the specific social dynamic of Colombia. Like stated by the “Urna de Cristal team”:

> For us the simple fact of activating a person with a government topic is already an achievement because here in Colombia the indifference is terrible. We come from a history where just the topic of violence and everything that we have had to go through has made us completely indifferent and it has made us care more about our family and our inner circle and the fact of surviving and prospering. So having someone do something small like sending a text message or calling is already an achievement.

This quote again reinforces the importance of the Colombian context in which “Urna de Cristal” is framed. Historical event unavoidably affect and shape the degree of involvement of citizens and changing this requires a lot of time.
While conducting focus groups with the “Centre of Innovation in E-Government”, it became apparent that citizen driven e-participation initiatives such as “Ciudadanos activos” or “Congreso Visible” are much more widely known and used than the government driven tool of “Urna de Cristal”. Consequently, the government is seeking other solutions such as adapting the citizen-driven initiatives, which are more demanded and valued by the citizens, therefore insuring higher participation.

The “Centre of Innovation in E-Government” holds that participation should be understood as collaboration and sustains that efforts should be devoted to try to break with the top-down and bottom-up approaches and create a transition scheme where there is open innovation that enable the citizens to create alternatives. They provided the example of “Ciudadanos Activos” in Cali, which started as a bottom-up approach, and when they started to look for resources, they got the City Hall of Cali to join the initiative as part of their strategy and it is now part of the local planning.

As a trend they believe that adding to social innovation is another valid system of citizen e-empowerment. So we should move towards this model where the citizen is permanently demanding the service. The simple fact that it is an initiative that is born from below adds that sustainability aspect since it is harder to erase these initiatives from one government to another because it is politically inconvenient to draw away from a project that is demanded by the citizens.

The Centre of Innovation sustains that overcoming the digital divide is a question of time since the digital natives used to be between 3-18 years old, now they are already between 3-25 and this will gradually shift until the majority of the population will include digital natives. The biggest challenge is to change the participative culture. We keep doing this ammunition in culture and find ways to encourage citizens to participate in the political because now people don’t perceive it as a pleasant exercise. I share the view which states that civic education is necessary to actually achieve a change and this is something that has not been considered by any of the interviewed entities. The leader of the DTF sustains that sometimes there is a mistake being done while defining the target group at 18


and above, since it is then when they actually become eligible to vote. This brings us to the question of who participation is targeted to, voter or citizens?
6. IMPLICATIONS & CONCLUSION

In this thesis, political participation is framed as a specific factor of participatory democracy. From the analysis it is seen that the aim of e-participation presents a double side justification. First of all as stated by the GoC, the aim is to provide a government that is more transparent, accountable, effective and participatory, which could be conceived as an accountability system that is created to address the legitimization crisis that the GoC constantly has to tackle. From another perspective, e-participation can be implemented creating a formal political democratic system where citizens can actually influence the decision making process while jointly finding solutions to current social problems that affect the daily lives of citizens. In other words creating opportunities for collaboration, participation and influence.

Studying e-participation with the aim of e-empowering has to be located in the specific context of Colombia at a certain time since historical, political and socio-economic factors are essential to understand the situation in which it operates. Nevertheless, the government addresses the issues of equality by providing a platform that is inclusive, meaning that in the Colombian context where the Internet penetration rate is 50,71% the GoC cannot conceive digital media independently from traditional channels of communication since the value of digital media lies in the extent to which they enmesh with old media to provide multimedia platforms that allow a participatory model of democracy where participation, inclusion, and expression are continuously present (Banda et al.; 2009).

Throughout the study it becomes clear that the GoC has address the aim of openness, transparency, efficiency, accountability and participatory decision-making. The use of ICT have enabled the GoC to invest in projects that open diverse channels of communications that are created with the intention to allow citizens to interact with the state, and this in turn is a way of e-empowering. However, this can be argued since in my study I sustain that ICTs and digital media do not e-empower but e-enable citizens towards e-empowerment which is the process by which individuals and communities are enabled to take such power and act effectively in changing their lives and their environment (Minkler 1992, Robertson and Minkler 1994). Power itself being the ability to act or take decisions in ways that affect self and/or others (Staples, 1990). By operationalizing Macintosh’s model of e-participation (2004), the findings show that “Urna de Cristal” provides ample
opportunities for information, which is e-enabling. While there are less opportunities to e-engaging since the e-consultation exercises are limited to specific areas and they tend to be directed to topics that yield little social change. Hence it could be stated that “Urna de Cristal” potentially offers a space to inform citizens as well as a place where citizens can pose questions and proposals. Since there is no real evidence of e-empowerment it can be conclude that citizens are only being e-enabled. Nevertheless, the work being done regarding e-enabling, jointly by “Urna de Cristal” and the DTF, deserves many applauses since they are devoting considerable efforts to overcome contextual and internal limitations. And the efforts being concentrated in e-enabling have helped the GoC to achieve the goals of becoming a more open, transparent and accountable government.

This leads me to the following question. If e-empowerment is to be achieved at some point, what are the actual limitations that are blocking this to be achieved? While studying e-participation with the aim of e-empowering citizens, it is seen that the process of e-participation brings many limitations and challenges that cannot be fought overnight. Even though ICTs have enabled a more direct way of communication, the internal layers existing in the GoC still block the citizen and the entity of “Urna de Cristal” from having real power over the decision making process. Through the lens of e-participation as a process proposed by Tambouris et al. (2007), a special focus and importance was given to the categories of tools through which the participation techniques and areas are supported. Creating “Urna de Cristal” as a multi-channel platform has supported the inclusiveness, which in turn is also being enhanced by the efforts implemented that try to create an e-participation environment that is more citizen friendly. For example the simple fact of trying to overcome legal restrictions that limits the way in which things are communicated. Also, taking risks when it comes to communicating, leaving the institutionalism that generates no proximity towards the citizen has been proved effective.

From the demand side, there are several factors that effect degree of participation. For example low awareness of the tool; geographical and generational digital divides; degree of exposure to media; lack of trust and credibility in the government; passivity, indifference and low interests in politics; that characterises the majority of the citizens. Also when it comes to e-participation exercises it is seen that the citizen participation is only present in the operative, so if there is a public service that is not operating, if people can get a tangible benefit form the state that improves their lives, then people look for channels of communication to participate in order to interact and see what can be
done to fix their problem or how they can obtain tangible benefits. This is reflected in participatory techniques implemented such as the consultation exercises carried out by “Urna de Cristal” where the only two exercises that achieved a high level of participation was the anti-procedures and sport law consultations. So, it is clear that some topics draw citizens into the public life while others induce passivity since they deal with aspects that citizens have a harder time relating to and seeing how it affects their daily life. Additionally, e-democracy projects run by the governments are known to direct participation towards areas where the least significant change is likely to occur.

There are historical and political factors that have feed citizen apathy towards the government, hence there is a wide spread rejection that is nurtured by many different variables, for example the continuous corruption scandals, the increasing unemployment, the high inequality, the needs for greater security in their environment etc. Hence it is unrealistic to expect technology to disrupt the causes of political disempowerment that have deep roots in culture and society (Scullion et al., 2013).

This apathy results in low active participation of citizens in “Urna de Cristal” platforms and this becomes one of the main barriers towards e-empowerment. The value of the tool is inherit was giving in the information that was being disseminated, leaving citizens informed of what the government was doing. Hence it can be concluded that the pro-activeness and participation of citizens is crucial to increase the value and usability of these platforms. Additionally, taking into account that interaction involves a two-way communication, the government-driven initiative of “Urna de Cristal” also has to deal with the government representatives that are fearful of establishing any form of direct, informal communication with citizens since it might undermine their political authority, or because they are fearful of getting criticized or getting a question that they are unable to answer. These types of constraining factor block the process of e-participation to be fully democratic. The reasons why citizens don’t participate in politics are not new to us but the issue that the government should address more actively is what should be done in order to create active informed citizens capable of influencing the decision-making process?

As it has been stated, one of the biggest challenges is the fact that entity of “Urna de Cristal” has no decision-making power but only has the power to influence the ways in which government entities interact and communicate with the citizens. Still, the findings show that the skills and capacities of the people that are in charge of the entities’ digital communication and interaction also influences
the impact of these. Hence, the importance of having continuous capacity building that contributes to the human capital involved in the participatory process which will in turn aid the sustainability of the project. In that sense “Urna de Cristal” is currently regarded in the National Development Plan and in the Live Digital Plan as the main governmental initiative with regards to e-participation. The capacity building is mainly addressed by the DTF, who has devoted considerable resources in providing relevant training to various groups of individuals involved in the e-participation process such as ministers and managers, which aims to overcome the insufficient willingness of politicians to participate.

By analysing the seven-phase model suggested by Islam (2010) it is seen that “Urna de Cristal” has to continue to work mainly on the last three phases which involve promotion, participation and post-implementation analysis. Capacity building must also be implemented on a continuous basis since both government representatives and citizens need to build on their skills and capabilities as well as understanding the meaning of e-participation and the benefits that it can provide to both stakeholders. More importantly, the fact that “Urna de Cristal” gets little or no feedback on how other government entities are using the input of citizens that were made through “Urna de Cristal” limits the its’ capacity to actually undertake an impact analysis which could be used in order to improve or correct the process or system of e-participation. The sustainability of government driven e-participation projects is especially important since in the short history of e-democracy there is evidence of numerous failed projects, dead web sites and earnest intentions that were never taken up and thoughtful dialogues that led nowhere (Coleman and Blumler; 2009; 195).

**Recommendations**

Like stated by Alperovitz & Dubb (2013) when traditional systems either falter and fail, or appear in decline, ideas concerning the development of coherent new systemic designs may gain far greater importance offering specific answers to specific questions concerning whether a new system may offer hope of genuine democracy, equality, community and ecological sustainability (page 20). Taking on institutions directly and attempting to change them is an exceedingly difficult challenge since institutions are fundamentally conservative; the structuration process tends to reinforce the past in the present (Ehrenfeld, 2008; 173). In much the same way that individuals make sense of the world through acting out their daily routines, institutions make sense to those actors living inside of
them and constituting them by following habitual beliefs, norms and patterns that become strongly entrenched over time (ibid, 2008).

Like proposed by the “Centre of Innovation in E-Government”, e-participation should be understood as collaboration and efforts should be devoted to try to break with the top-down and bottom-up approaches and create a transition scheme where there is open innovation that enable the citizens to create alternatives. Hence social innovation could be the path to take for citizen e-empowerment since the citizen is creating a service based on their needs and this will ensure the usability and sustainability since it is harder to erase these initiatives from one government to another because it is politically inconvenient to draw away from a project that is demanded and created by the citizens.

In parallel, in order to implement such initiative, I suggest that the “Centre of Innovation in E-Government” and “Urna de Cristal” should work in partnership combining their expertise and knowledge to re-design the e-participation of the GoC. Both empirically and theoretically there are grounds for expecting e-democracy to operate most successfully in a collaborative alternative like “Ciudadanos Activos” (Active Citizens), which is a bottom-up approach that was then adopted by the local government of Cali since it was an effective initiative that was being demanded by the citizens. This new way of conceiving e-participation has been mirrored by a more recent initiative called Apps.co where the GoC encourages and supports citizens to create their own apps according to their own needs and problems. This design could be translated into e-participation, with active citizens actually designing and implementing an e-participation tool that fits their needs and is financed and supported by the GoC. Not many resources would be needed to implement this. As it has been evidences with the “Urna de Cristal” team, limited resources creates the possibility of a more creative and innovative environment to emerge since individuals are challenged to undertake a specific task with a restricted amount of resources, meaning that nowadays not many resources are actually needed to create something which could result to be very valuable and useful.

**Final reflections**

Critically evaluating it can be stated that while the GoC is opening different communication channels that reach different citizens with different interests, it is gaining media power allowing
them to gauge citizen concerns, opinions and preferences which in turn could be used to adapt the communication accordingly by segmenting citizen into topics of interest and target information more precisely. Hence, It’s about media’s power to create and sustain meaning; to persuade, endorse and reinforce (Silverstone, 1999; 143). More so, the opening of numerous channels have allowed citizens to be more informed on what the government is actually doing, hence adding to the aim of openness and transparency.

Although Macintosh provides a good model of e-participation, it results to be incomplete since, from this empirical study, it is seen that rather then a continuum e-participation should be conceived as a complex system. It is true that with higher trust and maturity e-participation can maybe achieve the ultimate level of e-participation, which is e-empowerment, but this is rarely the case. If e-empowerment is not meet, what happens then? Are citizens being disempowered? It could be argued that there is some sense of disempowerment since gaining communication power can control, shift or displace the attention of citizens. On a more positive note, the ones participating in these platforms are to a certain extent learning to dialogue, discuss, criticize, seek for alternatives, propose, and argument developing skills that are essential in the e-participation process.

The findings from this study show while there are a wide variety of open channels that allow the opportunity interact directly with policy makers and debate among peer citizens, rarely are citizen inputs being reflected in the outcome of policies, which is especially risky since instead of reducing the mistrust between citizens and the government it could instead widen it. As stated by Coleman and Blumler (2009), while e-democracy exercises are managed by institutions, which have a direct interest in the outcome of the public discussion, politicians ignore them and citizens mistrust them since they do not believe to be a credible link between their input and the policy outcome, hence their democratic potential is bound to be unrealised. Therefore, it could be argued that the government is unconsciously disempowering active citizens that involve and devote time and energy in the e-participation process through various interactions since there is no e-empowerment emerging from these interactions, hence displacing their attention, time and efforts that could be invested elsewhere, such as bottom-up e-participation channels or even better by creating their own channels and tools.
One can also conclude that the UN E-Government rankings can be misleading and provide a very narrow view of reality. Also, the fact that comparing and ranking countries with different contexts in e-participation can be highly ineffective and unrealistic since, as this study has shown, the context does play a determinant role. Like discussed in the theoretical framework, e-participation cannot be studied without taking into account the way citizens are using the available tools. Also the citizens’ perception must be understood under a specific historical, economic, political and cultural reality. This is also being emphasised by Islam (2008) who holds that one must look at both the supply and demand side of e-participation.

**Future Study**

Throughout my analysis, I discovered the existence of the Digital Task Force which as we saw in the analysis it is an internal entity that complements the work of “Urna de Cristal” in the phase of communication and e-information by supporting and advising all the entities with regards to their digital communication with citizens. Given that the DTF works closely with the Presidency, “Urna de Cristal” and the numerous government entities, a more detailed study of how a government entity, for example, the Ministry of Education is interacting with its’ citizens directly through the use of digital media (Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Google +) as well as through “Urna de Cristal”. Another interesting line of research could be the study of how the e-participation initiatives can integrate the youth below 18 years old that is not being integrated or considered as strategic in the e-participation exercises.
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8. APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Consent Form Focus Group/Interview

UPPSALA
UNIVERSITET

Focus Group Consent Form
Urna de Cristal – Ministry of ICT – Government of Colombia

Dear Participant,

This is an academic study that is part of the Master Program of Social Science, Digital Media and Society from the University of Uppsala. Through this focus group I intend to discuss the concepts of empowerment and sustainable e-participation. While discussing these concepts in the context of Urna de Cristal the group is expected to answer a series of questions that will be related to the concepts.

Purpose of the Study

It is well known that governments are no longer the main generators of data and information. Today citizens and non-state actor add to the pool of information and knowledge more easily through the use of ICT and Internet. Hence, non-state actors demand for a more transparent, accountable and productive government agencies. The contribution of the team “Urna de Cristal” is very valuable especially trying to answer the main research questions of this study, which are,: (1) How does the government driven tool of “Urna de Cristal” relate to the concepts of participatory democracy, e-empowerment and sustainable e-participation? (2) How the online government is designing and implementing a strategy that will make government driven e-participation sustainable.

Ethical Considerations:

• The information given is completely confidential, and will not be associate to your name with anything you say in the focus group.

• You may refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at anytime.

• It is understood how important it is that this information is kept private and confidential. We will ask participants to respect each other’s confidentiality.
• If you have any questions before or after the focus group, you can always contact me (Sofía Parra) in person or via email to parrabels@gmail.com

• The session will be recorded so that I can make sure to capture the thoughts, opinions, and ideas I hear from the group. No names will be attached to the focus groups and the recording will be destroyed as soon as they are transcribed.

• After the study has been completed, the thesis will be published in DIVA. I will send the link of the completed study to all participants.

• Please check the box at the bottom of page 2 and sign to show you agree to participate in this focus group.

Explanation of the process

About focus groups

• Not trying to achieve consensus but gathering different views and information
• Get more in-depth information from a smaller group of people in focus groups. This allows me to understand the context behind the answers given

Logistics

• Focus group will last approximately one hour (11-12) and it will take place at the Ministry of ICT

Ground Rules

• Everyone is required to participate.
• Information provided in the focus group must be kept confidential
• Stay with the group and please don’t have side conversations

Function: ________________________________

Years working at Urna de Cristal: __________

☐ I have read the consent form and I have agree to participate in the focus group

Name: _____________________________________________________________________

Signature: ___________________________________________________________________
Appendix 2: Translated Interview Guide
Focus Group Guide “Urna de Cristal”

Introduction (8 minutes):
- Presentation of participants and task in “Urna de Cristal”
- Introduction of the researcher and aim of the study
- Importance and relevance of the study
- Ethical considerations

Theories and Context (8 minutes):
Presentation of the models of Macintosh (2004) and Tambouris et al. (2007) that view e-participation as: a) continuum of levels and b) as a process.

Questions and Input:

Use and awareness of “Urna de Cristal”
- What is the perception that the citizens have about “Urna de Cristal”? Is there wide awareness of the tool?
- Do you see emerging trends on the profile of the user?
- What is “Urna de Cristal” doing to increase awareness?
- Is there a tool that has proven to be more effective than others?

Design and structures of the Colombian Government:
- Could you explain more about the functioning of “Urna de Cristal” and how it is designed?
- How is the input of citizens managed? Do you have an Information Management System?
- The topics proposed for participation vary widely and involve many entities and Ministries of the Government. How are these entities coordinated with “Urna de Cristal”?

Topics of Participation:
- Is there a possibility for the citizen to participate regarding a topic other than the ones predefined by the GoC?
- What criteria does “Urna de Cristal” use to define the topics of participation?
- What topics attract more participation? Why?

Categories of tools:
- Which would you say is the most effective tool?
- Is there high interaction taking place on the website of “Urna de Cristal”? Why is the number of interested people regarding a question always zero?
- Can you explain more about the functioning of the medals system that appears on the webpage?
Participation areas and techniques

- Have you seen a change in participation since “Urna de Cristal” began functioning in 2011?
- Is the participation mainly based on the basis of the citizens asking questions and the government responding?
- How is the interaction between citizens?
- How do you use the input from citizens?

**Consultation**

- Could you tell me more about the consultation exercises that have taken place in the last years?
  - What is the duration of these consultations?
  - How has the input of citizens been used?
  - Have the citizens received feedback on how their participation has been used?
  - What has been the result?
  - Which of all these have been the most valuable? Why?

**Empowerment**

- Do you think the citizens are being empowered through the use of “Urna de Cristal”? In what way?
- In what experiences of e-participation have citizens been empowered through Urna de Cristal?
- Is it significant to “e-empower when the level of e-participation is so low?”

**Sustainable Participation**

- How is “Urna de Cristal” working towards a sustainable e-participation?
- What factors do you think challenge the sustainability of “Urna de Cristal? Why?
- If citizen participation increased substantially, does “Urna de Cristal” have the means to respond to this? Would more resources be assigned to the team?
- Should the structures and or process be changed to obtain a sustainable e-participation?

**General Challenges and Achievements**

- With more then four years of existence, what have been the main challenges?
- What is the Government of Colombia doing to overcome these barriers and limitations?
- What would you say are the main achievements of “Urna de Cristal” in the past 4 years?
Appendix 3: Translated Interview Guide - Focus Group
“Centre of Innovation in E-Government” of the Government of Colombia

Introduction (8 minutes):
- Presentation of participants and of the Centre of Innovation:
- Introduction of the researcher and aim of the study
- Importance and relevance of the study
- Ethical considerations

Theories and Context (8 minutes):
Presentation of the models of Macintosh (2004) and Tambouris et al. (2007) that view e-participation as: a) continuum of levels and b) as a process.

Questions and Input:
- As a Centre of Innovation it is understood that you work can detect trends in e-participation, develop alternative ways of participation and work towards a more sustainable form of participation. Can you comment on these aspects?
- How would you describe the citizen participation in Colombia?
- What are the trends that you have detected with regards to e-participation in Colombia?
- What are the main limitations and barriers in e-participation in Colombia?
- What is necessary in order to obtain a sustainable e-participation?

Appendix 4: Translated Interview Guide – Civil Society Organizations
Fundación Social Cartagena – Cómo vamos & FUNCICAR

Introduction (8 minutes):
- Presentation of participants
- Introduction of the researcher and aim of the study
- Importance and relevance of the study
- Ethical considerations

Questions:
- How would you describe citizen participation from your perspective?
- How would you describe e-participation? What is necessary to encourage it?
- How is the digital literacy of citizens?
- Have the “Live Digital Points” helped the community in gaining digital literacy?
- What are the main barriers and limitations of e-participation?
- Do you have any evidence of citizens being e-empowered?
Estimado Señor/Señora,

Me dirijo a usted para invitarle a una entrevista dentro de la investigación de Maestría de Ciencias Sociales, Medios digitales y Sociedad, de la Universidad de Uppsala (Suecia), que tiene como propósito estudiar “Urna de Cristal” Colombia como herramienta de participación sostenible y empoderamiento más allá del proceso de paz. Esta pregunta resulta relevante dado que la participación ciudadana en los procesos de decisión y en el desarrollo de políticas complementa y fortalece la democracia representativa, dónde los ciudadanos no sólo eligen a sus representantes pero también interactúan de manera sistemática formulando preguntas, proponiendo propuestas y en algunos casos influyendo en la toma de decisiones.

Principios Éticos:

Todos los principios éticos deben ser cumplido durante la entrevista. Para ello, se informa abiertamente de la intención y el objetivo de este estudio. Antes de proceder a la entrevista, el entrevistado deberá firmar un documento donde se especifica de manera detallada la utilización de la información y se asegura la total confidencialidad y anonimidad (si deseada). El análisis de los datos de las entrevistas se expondrán en el paper que será de acceso público una vez aprobado y publicado en el sistema central DiVa de la Universidad de Uppsala. No dude en contactarme si hay algún aspecto que no quede claro.

Gracias de antemano por su colaboración y tiempo.

Un cordial saludo,

Sofía Parra Beltrán
Appendix 6: Citizen Survey Questions

1. Do you know “Urna de Cristal”? If yes, how did you get to know this participation tool?

2. What Urna de Cristal channels do you use to interact with the Government of Colombia? Which do you use the most?

3. Since when approximately have you been using “Urna de Cristal”?

4. What do you think about the tool?

5. Are you aware of the television program “Urna de Cristal” broadcasted in the institutional channel?
   5.1 What is your opinion about the program?
   5.2 What is your opinion about the institutional channel?

6. Do you participate actively in any of the channels of “Urna de Cristal”? In what form?

7. Do you feel empowered in any way?

8. Do you think that with your participation you can influence the decision making process of the government?

9. Have you participated in any of the consultations carried out by Urna de Cristal? Where you aware of them?

10. Do you think that the topic discussed in “Urna de Cristal” adapt to the themes that you would like to discuss or have information on?

11. What topics are you most interested in? Do you participate in them?

12. What limitations have you come across while participating?

13. Do you think “Urna de Cristal” should improve in any way?

14. Would you like to add anything regarding the platform “Urna de Cristal”?

15. Would you like to provide me with your age, city of residence and profession? (Optional question)

Thank you for your time and collaboration