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Sustainability management in cities: a perspective regarding the role of civil society networks in the public policy analysis process

Mônica Beppler Kist ¹

Hans Michael Van Bellen ²

¹ Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Florianópolis / SC – Brazil

² Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina / Departamento de Engenharia do Conhecimento, Florianópolis, SC – Brazil

Alongside the consolidation of the multicentric model of public management, new forms of organization have been structured to act in the public policy process, seeking to contribute to the development of the policies' contexts and to direct this development toward a more sustainable trajectory. This research analyzes the relationship between civil society and the state, investigating how civil society networks aimed at sustainable development in cities act in the public policy analysis process. We studied four cases through an interpretative data analysis, researching how they act in the stages of problem identification, agenda setting, and formulation of alternatives. We concluded that the networks act in the three stages, and their contributions are represented by diagnoses about the city, events to debate themes, and explicit advocacy work with public managers. We assess that the systematized approach and the technical bias adopted by these networks contribute to them being considered an instance of support for local management by providing useful information to direct cities toward a more sustainable development trajectory.

Keywords: public management; public policies analysis; sustainable development; cities.

Gestão da sustentabilidade em cidades: uma perspectiva considerando a atuação de redes da sociedade civil no processo de análise de políticas públicas

Com a consolidação do modelo multicêntrico de gestão pública, novas formas de organização têm se estruturado para atuar no processo de políticas públicas buscando não apenas contribuir para o desenvolvimento de seus contextos, mas também direcionar esse desenvolvimento para uma trajetória mais sustentável. Este estudo busca analisar a relação entre sociedade civil e poder público, investigando como redes da sociedade civil voltadas ao desenvolvimento sustentável em cidades atuam no processo de análise de políticas públicas. Foram pesquisadas quatro redes a partir de uma análise interpretativa, investigando-se de que forma atuam nas etapas de identificação de problemas, formação da agenda e formulação de alternativas. Conclui-se que as redes atuam nas três etapas e suas contribuições são: produção de diagnósticos sobre a cidade, realização de eventos para debater temáticas e incidência direta junto à gestão pública. Avalia-se que a sistematização e o viés técnico adotado pelas redes contribuem para que sejam consideradas uma instância de apoio das gestões locais, aportando informação útil, com o objetivo de direcionar as cidades para uma trajetória mais sustentável de desenvolvimento.


Palavras-chave: gestão pública; análise de políticas públicas; desenvolvimento sustentável; cidades.

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Gestión de la sostenibilidad en las ciudades: una perspectiva considerando el papel de las redes de la sociedad civil en el proceso de análisis de políticas públicas

Con la consolidación del modelo multicéntrico de gestión pública, se han estructurado nuevas formas de organización para actuar en el proceso de políticas públicas, buscando no solo contribuir al desarrollo de sus contextos, sino también encaminar este desarrollo hacia una trayectoria más sostenible. Este estudio busca analizar la relación entre la sociedad civil y el poder público, investigando cómo redes de la sociedad civil enfocadas en el desarrollo sostenible en las ciudades actúan en el proceso de análisis de las políticas públicas. Se investigaron cuatro redes a partir de un análisis interpretativo, investigando cómo actúan en las etapas de identificación de problemas, formación de agenda y formulación de alternativas. Se concluye que las redes actúan en las tres etapas y sus aportes son: elaboración de diagnósticos sobre la ciudad, realización de eventos para debatir temas e incidencia directa en la gestión pública. Se estima que la sistematización y el sesgo técnico adoptado por las redes contribuyen a que sean consideradas una instancia de apoyo a las administraciones locales, proporcionando información útil, con el objetivo de orientar a las ciudades hacia un camino de desarrollo más sostenible.

Palabras clave: gestión pública; análisis de políticas públicas; desarrollo sostenible; ciudades.

1. INTRODUCTION

Cities are becoming increasingly relevant spaces as the discussion on sustainable development (SD) consolidates itself as a permanent topic on the global agenda. Globally, 54% of people live in cities (United Nations [UN], 2015a), placing them as the main locus of life in society. As a consequence, the demand for resources increases, and these centers are put under pressure. Although, historically, the size of cities reflected the wealth level of the countries to which they belonged, currently, some of the most populous cities are located in the poorest countries and this has been generating acute stress in several aspects (Vojnovic, 2014).

The awareness of such stress led the discussion to focus on the pace of development imposed on cities. Considering the worldwide discussion about sustainability, this focus in cities was strengthened because, given the current and projected percentages of occupation in cities, they represent the place where there is the greatest consumption of natural resources and, consequently, the greatest generation of waste (Nijkamp & Pepping, 1998). Furthermore, the rapid growth of large cities in poor nations and serious environmental disasters contributed to the insertion of these spaces on the frontline of sustainable development (Vojnovic, 2014).

However, this focus on the cities requires an articulated action between society and the State to make this transition to sustainability in a planned, manageable and lasting way: planned with objectives to guide actions; manageable by applying useful methodologies and tools; and lasting from the perspective of promoting cultural change. With good planning and governance, the increase of people concentrated in urban areas can facilitate economic and social development and, at the same time, enable the reduction of environmental impacts (UN, 2015).

In this regard, public management (PM) emerges as a central element in this process. Since its beginning and with the evolution of society, this field has undergone changes that have enabled it to evolve from a traditional to a multicentric approach, which enables the participation of different actors in the public policy process (Secchi, 2017b). This new approach, seen as a new form of

governance (Tantivess & Walt, 2008), promoted changes in the political environment, once society started structuring itself in different ways and articulating its participation in the public policy cycle (PPC).

Civil society initiatives began to collaborate for the availability and democratization of public information, fostering transparency, accountability, and participation (Cáceres, 2014). So, on the one hand, there are new forms of organizations that have sought to contribute to the development of their immediate contexts; and, on the other, the importance of cities making a transition to sustainability. This research proposes a confluence between these two issues, and its objective is **to investigate how civil society networks aimed at sustainable development in cities act in the public policies analysis process**.

The chosen context is Latin American. We searched for civil society initiatives that worked aligned with SD in cities and selected four cases. The Latin American context shows its relevance considering that the first urban transition in these countries has been completed, with almost 80% of the population living in cities (UN Habitat, 2012) and this territory is one of the best endowed with natural resources and the one with the highest social inequality rates in the world (Cáceres, 2014). The theoretical approach adopted to study these cases is the public policy analysis (PPA) process, which encompasses the first three stages of the public policy cycle, i.e., problem identification, agenda setting, and formulation of alternatives (Secchi, 2017a).

There is a growing need in understanding participation in the public policy process (Martinez & Kohler, 2016) as well as the role, initiatives, and ideas of civil society (Campbell, Lobao, & Betz 2017; Lundberg, 2020). Also, the 16th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of “promoting just, peaceful and inclusive societies” addresses the need for “responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels” (UN, 2015b). So, regarding contributions, we study civil society participation through organizations that do not have a formal relationship with the public administration but do advocacy work in the public policy process. Understanding how this dynamic has been occurring can give more robustness to the theme, providing elements of analysis for future studies.

Another contribution lies in the possibility of deepening the qualitative discussion on SD since this paper does not apply the result logic predominantly used in sustainability research, which analyzes whether a method or model was successful or not, but rather a process logic, which makes it possible to understand how these organizations act regarding SD. Furthermore, research on the public policy process usually addresses stages of formulation and implementation and, as this research focuses on the PPA, in stages prior to the formulation, we gather it can provide knowledge about the efforts made so that objectives that are born outside the formal management structure have some repercussion on the political process.

Considering that the concern with SD is present in our society and, with the evolution of the debate, different initiatives have been fostered, we understand that it is necessary to advance to the next stage, which is to analyze how these initiatives are acting in the public policies cycle, making available new knowledge that can better direct cities towards sustainable development.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Sustainable development and cities

Cities have become the main engines of economic growth (UN, 2015). However, because they enable diverse opportunities, they are also the main cause of environmental disturbances, since they are the greatest consumers of natural resources and also the major producers of solid waste (Newman & Jennings, 2008). These locations are set at the forefront of the debate on sustainable development, which, since the seventies, has tried to bring together different sectors of society around a common agenda: the need to redirect the global development trajectory towards an economically prosperous, socially just, and environmentally prudent path.

This pattern of development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (UN, 1987) has become one of the main guidelines of the United Nations. Since then, models, tools, and methodologies have been developed to assemble elements of planning, execution, and assessment, converging into sustainability management (Sales, 2017).

The search for SD refers to the harmonic intertwining of different areas and, to obtain a more practical approach, SD is usually addressed in terms of dimensions, being economic, social, environmental, and institutional the ones that gain more prominence (Cândido, 2010; Elkington, 1997; Harper, 2001; UN, 1992; Van Bellen, 2006). There is also a discussion regarding strong and weak sustainability. Strong sustainability focuses primarily on the environment since it is critical for our survival and any damage will repercuss negatively (Bell & Morse, 2008). Weak sustainability, on the other hand, values economic and social, as well as environmental benefits, and its efforts focus on whether macroeconomic indicators can be transformed into SD indicators (Hak, Moldan, & Dahl, 2007).

Another practical perspective on SD was consolidated by the UN over the years and its current version consists of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Two of them can be directly linked to the outcomes of this research: Goal 11: “make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” and Goal 16: “promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies” (UN, 2015b).

Under this perspective of sustainability management, cities can be seen as central, because, within the logic of located action, “the larger the space and the longer the time associated with a problem, the smaller the number of people who are really concerned with its solution” (D. H. Meadows, D. L. Meadows, Randers, & Behrens, 1972, p. 18). The pursuit for sustainability, when applied to the reality of cities, might return with new developments, which can mitigate the criticism about the gap between the concept of SD and its practice.

Moreover, Santos, Pereira, and Fonseca (2017) believe that endeavors aimed at promoting SD should be municipalized, and cities need to be noticed as the place where institutional, social, and economic changes emerge appropriately in a way that enables society to face the growing and urgent global challenges. Cities are also where most policies are defined and they became the locus of citizens who are politically informed and engaged in causes related to sustainability. In summary, in cities the spread of SD finds scalability and conditions to reach actors who can bring about changes.

The process of planning and building policies aimed at sustainability in cities differs from the construction of national policies, because it requires a high level of convincing of citizens to approve local regulations, demanding closer contact; and because objectives and priorities related to sustainability diverge from place to place (Zborel et al., 2012). In addition, the scale of efficiency of a city in planning and preparing for the future is decisive in determining its prospects concerning SD (Sachs, 2015). In this sense, we evaluate that a field that complements the discussion on SD in cities is that of public policies, especially public policy analysis.

2.2 The process of public policy analysis

Public policies can be defined as a set of interconnected decisions taken by an actor or group who select objectives and means of achieving them to moderate conflicts, extract resources, regulate behaviors, organize bureaucracies and distribute benefits, aiming to mitigate or eliminate public problems (Dye, 2013; Secchi, 2017b; Secchi & Zappellini, 2017). The field of public policies went through different stages, beginning with the traditional approach, which understood them as outputs of the political system and considered formulators and executors as different groups of actors. However, recently, society has undergone a dynamism in terms of political possibilities, so this traditional model has no longer managed to find reasonable answers to satisfy all emerging demands (Farah, 2011; Faria, 2003).

As a result of this dynamism, governments realized the need to change the way they act (Ohmae, 2005). This context contributed to the adaptation of institutional and regulatory frameworks, which favored the emergence of new organizations that transformed the relationship between society and public management. Thus, the traditional model gave room to a multicentric approach, which admits the participation of other actors in the public policy process (Secchi, 2017b; Tantivess & Walt, 2008).

This approach has given rise to new mechanisms of transparency and social control (Schommer, Dahmer, & Spaniol, 2014) and new forms of organizations, that are different from traditional forms of political representation such as parties, since they are not linked to mandates, and are diffuse, because their actors may represent the interests of specific groups or society in general. They also have in common the emphasis on transparency and accountability, contributing to fostering democratic participation in cities (Barber, 2013; Hernandez & Cuadros, 2014). Investigating them has become relevant, as they can provide insights into how the public policy process has been changing (Tantivess & Walt, 2008).

Contributing to this scenario, the field of public policy analysis (PPA) emerged to subsidize the decision-making process, as it seeks to provide additional information so that public policy can solve or mitigate public problems (Secchi, 2017a). PPA aims to remove the recommendation of public policy from superficiality and bring it as close as possible to a professional analysis (Secchi, 2017a) and its methodological achievement involves the analysis of problems and solutions.

According to Secchi (2017a), the PPA acts on the initial stages of the public policy cycle (PPC): problem identification, agenda setting, and formulation of alternatives. It can be implemented using a rationalist analysis, denoted by technical methods and objective data; or argumentative, with a more narrative, interpretive and constructivist nature. It is up to the PP analyst to make the decision on which approach is most appropriate (Secchi, 2017a).

One of the models that outline the method by which the PPA can be performed is the Eightfold Path of Bardach (2012), which uses a rationalist-empiricist approach. This model is structured in the following steps: define the problem; assemble some evidence; construct the alternatives; select the criteria; project the outcomes; confront the trade-offs; decide and tell your story (Bardach, 2012). Bardach (2012) comments that it is not necessary to follow this exact order, however, he recalls that the initial stage presupposes defining the problem.

Evidence assembling requires reading documents, researching, analyzing, interviewing, and so on. The construction of alternatives involves the proposition of policy options or alternative courses of action to solve or mitigate the problem. Criteria selection implies choosing criteria that make it possible to analyze whether the PP will follow a desirable path. Then, outcomes are projected for each of the alternatives listed. The confrontation of trade-offs implies the analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of each PP alternative. Finally, there is the decision, in which the analyst needs to choose which course of action to recommend (Bardach, 2012).

R. B. Denhardt, J. V. Denhardt, and Blanc (2014) also discuss the public policy analysis process, dividing it into five stages: problem formulation, evaluation criteria definition, development of alternatives, analysis of the expected impacts for each alternative, and hierarchy of the alternatives according to the established criteria. These are two examples of PPA methodologies. For this research, the three initial phases of the PPC are used as anchors, as we understand that they can be seen as macro-groups of the stages proposed by those authors.

3. METHOD

This research is situated in the interpretative paradigm (Morgan, 1980), as it is guided by the effort to understand the world from the perspective of the participants (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). In addition, it can be characterized as qualitative (Denzin & Lincoln, 2006), and descriptive (Triviños, 1987), which uses both a deductive approach in preparing for data collection and an inductive approach as it establishes new interpretations from the collected data. It is an instrumental case study since the selected cases play a supportive role and facilitate the understanding of the main theme (Stake, 2005), which is how civil society networks act in the public policy analysis process.

The objective of this research was established considering that Florianópolis (Brazil) was chosen, in 2012, to participate in a program of the Inter-American Development Bank (Banco Interamericano de Desenvolvimento [BID], 2014) called the Emerging and Sustainable Cities Initiative (ESCI). Its purpose consisted in developing better cities in Latin America and its methodology involved a citizen monitoring network, constituted in 2017, in which we took part. By following this network, we perceived some challenges in institutionalizing this type of initiative, which aroused our interest in understanding how this process occurred in consolidated networks. So we began searching for similar initiatives in Latin America.

Regarding case selection, considering the deadline of the research, our acquired knowledge by studying this subject, and the depth we would like to obtain from data, we settled that four cases would be selected: two more established cases and other two that had a methodology influenced by the first ones, to be able to make a comparison of their consistency. Thus, the four cases selected were: ALFA (Bogotá/Colombia), BETA (São Paulo/Brazil), GAMA (Manizales/Colombia) and DELTA (Ilhéus/Brazil).

The justification for selecting those specific cases was due to the period of existence and accessibility for ALFA and BETA, and, for GAMA and DELTA, due to being replicas of the first two and also accessibility. Regarding the countries, Colombia was selected based on our awareness of the case ALFA, and Brazil was selected for enabling analysis of this type of initiative in the Brazilian context. After conducting the research, we found that the collected data were sufficient to achieve the objective.

Furthermore, we evaluate that the selected cases exemplify what Hernandez and Cuadros (2014) say when they point out that what characterizes the transformation of civil society in recent decades is the emergence of models that develop a new language that emphasizes transparency, access to information, and accountability. These new forms of organization are different from traditional forms of political representation, such as parties, because their actors can represent the interest of groups or society in general (Hernandez & Cuadros, 2014).

Based on the theory and considering that this research adopts an interpretive approach, to prepare for the field, we chose not to list a priori categories, but rather guiding aspects, i.e., points considered relevant by the theory. The guiding aspects were defined considering the stages of public policy analysis and are presented in Box 1.

BOX 1 COLLECT AND ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

Stages of PPA	Support theory	Guiding aspects
Problem identification	Bardach (2012); Kingdon (2014); Secchi (2017a, 2017b)	How the network maps and identifies relevant issues and problems. How the network prioritizes the issues and problems identified.
Agenda setting	Bardach (2012); R. B. Denhardt et al. (2014); Heidemann, Secchi, Corrêa, and Ruschel (2010); Kingdon (2014); Secchi (2017a, 2017b)	How the network defines its agenda. How the network works to include its issues on the PM agenda.
Formulation of alternatives	Bardach (2012); R. B. Denhardt et al. (2014); Fleury (2005); Heidemann et al. (2010); Kingdon (2014); Secchi (2017a, 2017b)	How the network gathers information to formulate public policy alternatives. How the network develops and submits these proposals to PM.

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Concerning *data collection*, primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews. We conducted fourteen interviews with central actors of these networks, using video or audio-conference platforms. Six interviews were from the Colombian cases (three in each case) and eight interviews were from the Brazilian cases (four in each case). The interviews were conducted between March and August 2019. In the Results, the interviewees are referred to as “case-letter” (e.g., Alfa-G).

As secondary data, documents such as official reports, meeting records, statutes, and other relevant written sources indicated by the representatives of the networks were collected. We obtained 40 ALFA, 29 BETA, 24 GAMA, and 9 DELTA files. In the next section, these documents are referred to as “case-number” (e.g., Beta-05). The purpose of collecting this type of material was to gather as much information as possible about the networks so that the interviews could be more objective and concise.

For the *data analysis*, we carried out an analytical reading to filter information relevant to the guiding aspects. The information was classified using interpretative content analysis, which involves building or documenting a version of what the data means or represents (Mason, 2005). Although some guiding aspects for data collection were defined a priori, the analysis took an inductive approach, that is, we grouped information through an interpretive process, identifying patterns that allowed us to reach the objective of this research. Also, a documentary analysis was performed, and information was organized to characterize these networks and create a timeline of their operation.

4. RESULTS

Briefly presenting the cases, ALFA consists of an initiative implemented in 1998 in Bogotá. The founding entities were a non-profit private entity that supports entrepreneurship, a major media company, a civil society organization focused on social development and public policies, and an institute focused on leadership. In 2010, a university joined as a partner (Alfa-01). The constitution of the program implied the creation of an alliance, with the disposition to guarantee the financial resources from the private sector, to guarantee independence from the government (Gama-05).

BETA emerged in 2007, in São Paulo, with the support of community leaders, civil society organizations, and companies. It is a nonpartisan organization since it intends to interfere in public management with impartiality and transparency (Beta-19). Initially, it was conceived as a movement but later adjusted its identity as a network because it better reflected the idea of joint and non-hierarchical decisions (Beta-19). In terms of finances, BETA does not accept resources of public origin, also to ensure its independence (Beta-A). The network is financed by national and international companies, private foundations (Beta-19) and cooperation agencies (Beta-21). In addition, a part of the resources comes from voluntary and pro-bono work (Beta-19).

GAMA is a replica from ALFA. The program was created in Manizales in September 2011 (Gama-02). As a methodological requirement for its creation, at least four partners were needed representing the media segment, a union or company, academia, and a non-profit non-governmental organization (Gama-05). Regarding funding, entities that can provide financing follow the same precepts as in ALFA.

DELTA was founded in 2012 and has a methodological approach similar to BETA. It is a nonpartisan organization, and the initial partners were influential people from Ilhéus that wanted to “have this systemic vision” of the city (Delta-G). Regarding its funding, there is a single financier for the activities, a private non-profit foundation dedicated to strengthening initiatives aimed at promoting sustainability. However, this organization has been reducing the amount of funding, and DELTA “can still survive thanks to partnerships” (Delta-G). Box 2 summarizes the main characteristics of the four cases.

BOX 2 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CASES

Aspect	ALFA	BETA	GAMA	DELTA
Foundation	1998	2007	2012	2012
Justification	Lack of public accountability and spaces to debate the city.	Disorderly growth, lack of goals, dispersed social movements.	A new way for organizations to impact PP.	Cocoa crisis, SD as a way to restructure the island's economy.
How they name themselves	An initiative from citizens and the private sector.	An association of the democratic field of SP.	An alliance between different organizations.	A plurality of city representatives.
Main products	Quality of life report; Citizen perception survey; Alfa council.	Indicators and targets; Citizen monitoring; Citizen education; Citizen mobilization.	Quality of life report; Citizen perception survey.	Education for citizenship; Social monitoring; Impact on PP.
Budget	Program average annual cost in dollars: \$100.000,00 - \$150.000,00 (Gama-05).	Information regarding the range of the budget was not disclosed.	The initial budget, in dollars, was approx. \$26.000,00 and the budget for 2019 was approx. \$70.000,00.	In 2017, the funds received were approx., in dollars, \$75.000,00 and the spent was around \$70.000,00 (Delta-06).

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Addressing specific results of this research, from the data collected, it was possible to summarize some aspects considering the stages of public policy analysis:

As to **problem identification**, monitoring is the approach for these organizations to enter the PPC. They monitor indicators as well as entities, laws, public policies, and management plans. This front requires the gathering of information about the city, and during this period the networks build a relationship with PM. It takes some time until all data is produced, becomes available, and until the PM understands the role of the network. In this stage, they also carry out diagnoses of the city. They produce reports and studies, opinion polls, indicators, manifests, open letters, and other documents that highlight particular subjects. Box 3 presents some evidence regarding how these networks act in identifying problems:

BOX 3 EVIDENCE REGARDING PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

Source	Evidence regarding problem identification
Alfa-I	"[The methodology adopted by the network] is a kind of an evaluation system that identifies different challenges and problems in Colombian cities" and "this idea of measuring the quality of life through different themes [...] allows cities to easily identify which of these areas [...] are a problem or, indeed, a force."
Alfa-I	"[The prioritization of problems depends on] the interests and the situation of the city and where they want to focus their efforts". A topic that was identified by the program as an opportunity to prioritize is the environmental agenda.
Alfa-15	"In health, [...] in the last five years there has been a constant deterioration of data, as citizens are increasingly dissatisfied and feel that the service does not guarantee the right to health" (p. 2).
Beta-C	The network created a citizen observatory, with the purpose of "gathering a set of thematic indicators that we considered essential for analyzing public management". The indicator is fundamental because it "will point in that direction where one should prioritize investments and public policies."
Beta-D	One of the ways BETA makes the diagnosis by indicator available annually is through the Inequality Map, which shows "data by districts of the city to determine which districts have the worst indicators and where one should invest, whether with financial investment, infrastructure investment, or investment in improving public services."
Beta-20	The document "defends the conception of a contingency plan and proposes 25 emergency measures to face shortages and prevent a collapse of the system" (p. 15).
Gama-E	"[The program identifies the indicators that] are the lowest, in which we are doing worse and, from that, we have an identification of the city's problems."
Gama-M	For each theme, the program constitutes "workshops and we invite different actors who, let's say, are involved or who should be involved with these themes, to [...] consolidate a collective agenda [...]."
Gama-E	There are workshops based on the SDGs that study which indicators are related to them and should be prioritized.
Gama-22	"Education, despite being one of the emblems of the city, presents more challenges than advances. Comprehensive early childhood care was reduced by 4% and 72% of children advanced to the first grade" (p. 17).
Delta-L	"[...] these are our guidelines, sustainability, transparency, democratic participation, if there is any space [for dialogue] that is being closed and why it is being closed", DELTA will prioritize this in its performance, "if that has a macro impact and is within our vision of how the city can be better, so we are on it."
Delta-J	DELTA perceived a complementary way of acting, which implies not only looking at "the problems that exist but also looking at the potentials that exist". As an example, there is the attempt to strengthen chocolate and adopt it "as one of the local richness[...]."

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Regarding **agenda setting**, the networks carry out advocacy work intending to insert their issues into the public agenda, and this work takes place on different fronts. One of the ways these networks operate is to hold events or workshops, where they seek to bring together PM, interest groups, and specialists. Based on the diagnoses, they discuss the imminent problems and those that are considered relevant for the city to fit into an SD logic. Topics such as inequality, transparency, education, and health are discussed in depth. In addition, the networks approach the PM directly for specific meetings, attend hearings or participate in committees. Another lead in this process is the use of media. All four cases considered the relationship with the press to be strategic. Box 4 presents some evidence regarding how they act in setting the agenda:

BOX 4 EVIDENCE REGARDING AGENDA SETTING

Source	Evidence regarding agenda setting
Alfa-K	"[...] we carry out [the entire diagnosis hoping it] to be incorporated into the Development Plan, the targets, so that, from then on, we can have a much more direct impact on the city's decision-making."
Alfa-I	The program promotes thematic or technical workshops, in which "the local government and other actors sit down to talk, bring different researches [...] and, based on this discussion, create an agenda that can promote solutions to the theme X, Y or Z."
Alfa-K	"When I was in the ALFA Board, as a rule, the local administration had to monitor and control motorcycles with three or two engines, [...]. And nothing was happening, [...]. I wrote a column in the newspaper [...] the contamination level of these motorcycles was starting to contribute a significant percentage to air pollution. Immediately, we received a call from the Secretary of the Environment to invite us to a meeting to inform us about the measures they were going to take to mitigate the problem."
Beta-A	Beta-A says, about the subjects, that there are central axes: reduction of inequality, municipal budget, mobility, sustainable development, participatory democracy, which, in his perception, "are subjects that have a more fixed, more linear presence in our work".
Beta-C	The Law on the Target Program was the first major agenda of the network, which involved the approval of an Amendment to the Organic Law of the Municipality determining that, with each new administration, the elected or re-elected candidate must present, within 90 days from the start of the mandate and under penalty of ineligibility, the Target Program for the four years of management.
Gama-B	When the program provides "spaces for reflection, workshops, events, debates, forums, there is always a representation of the municipal administration", so they know in what subjects the city "goes badly and what doesn't go badly" and they need to "answer what they are going to do to improve what is bad, because [...] the final question is always returned to them."
Gama-M	The idea is to "put the themes on the table", along with the indices that are raised by the program, and, "together with these actors, start to develop some actions in common agreement[...]". The effort is made to develop a "joint agenda", to enable "decision-makers to know the information, be part of these discussions and, at a given moment, [...] incorporate the themes."

Continue

Source	Evidence regarding agenda setting
Gama-14	GAMA “presented, in January (2016), the ‘12 Challenges in Manizales’, a calendar that brings together the aspects that the municipal administration should look at with a magnifying glass to maintain and improve the quality of life in the Caldense capital” (p. 7).
Delta-L	About the Legislative Power, “they listen to us, we have a lot of contact with the advisors, especially the Board of Directors, [...], they pay attention. It doesn’t mean they will do it, but they pay attention and that somehow counts.”
Delta-05	DELTA is part of the Solid Waste Working Group, which “seeks the implementation of the National Solid Waste Policy in Ilhéus” (p. 4).

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Regarding **formulation of alternatives**, these networks act mainly through the recommendation of public policies, but it is possible to identify different approaches. While Colombian cases make recommendations more formally, with events to deliver reports, Brazilian cases, besides making events, approach the PM to shape texts of bills or plans and, eventually, constitute a partnership with the PM to implement specific projects. We noticed more direct participation of BETA and DELTA in the development of some public policies, while in Colombian cases, the methodology emphasizes the importance of distance. We also could identify, except in DELTA, that these networks carry out analysis and balances on plans or public policies that are already being implemented, occasionally formulating alternatives for adjustments or redirections. Box 5 presents some evidence about this stage:

BOX 5 EVIDENCE REGARDING THE FORMULATION OF ALTERNATIVES

Source	Evidence regarding the formulation of alternatives
Alfa-11	“At the end of each sector evaluation, ALFA makes respectful recommendations to the Administration on matters in which policy adjustments are considered, some are new, others reiterate observations that [...] were delivered to the Administration” (p. 4).
Alfa-11	[Examples of recommendations] “Develop goals for years of education by average; [...] Define and implement strategies to obtain greater coverage in preschool and high school; Investigate the causes of dropout and implement corrective measures; [...]” (p. 11).
Alfa-23	“For several weeks, workshops were held to discuss and analyze the technical proposals of the draft Development Plan [...]. In particular, public policy recommendations were evaluated and presented for the sectors: education, public health, citizen security, mobility, environment, urban habitat, and economic development” (p. 1).
Beta-D	The working groups contribute a lot because “often, you have a question that needs to be elaborated, [...] and then you have these organizations that are part of the network [...]. Then you have all that support to be able to produce proposals as well.”

Continue

Source	Evidence regarding the formulation of alternatives
Beta-A	"We have a generic agenda for the city, which is the regionalization of the public budget, reduction of inequalities, a Target Plan that is ambitious, in short, a minimum agenda for the city[...]. In the dialogue with governments, some windows appear and we take advantage of these windows to help formulate [solutions]."
Beta-11	"Delivery of the 10 Proposals prepared by BETA to the candidates for mayor of São Paulo. The two candidates who went to the second round committed to such proposals" (p. 3).
Gama-E	In addition to having external experts, there is an internal body, the Technical Committee, which has specialists in different issues and helps them "to confront and verify different aspects that concern us, also identifying the way forward."
Gama-12	[Examples of recommendations] "An employment policy must be constituted in parallel coordination with a policy of economic and entrepreneurial promotion [...]; it is necessary to develop a policy focused on qualification and labor training of specific population groups [...]; third, a policy of assistance and employment must be developed that facilitates access to population groups that are vulnerable to the dynamics of the current labor market; [...]" (p. 58).
Delta-L	The Solid Waste Law, although proposed by the executive branch, was made by civil society and was approved unanimously on June 16, 2016.
Delta-04	Ten of the twenty-seven suggestions for amendments to the Municipal Organic Law proposed by DELTA were considered by the government.
Delta-06	DELTA participated in the public hearings for the preparation of the 2018-2020 Multiannual Plan. "It sent 54 proposals, of which 36 were considered" (p. 11).

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

In general, through the analysis of how these networks act in the process of PPA, it was possible to identify a convergence between the cases methodology and the stages of the public policy cycle and, consequently, it was possible to understand the nature of the contributions that these initiatives provide to the PPA process. In the next section, we present some points of discussion considering the theory about public policy and sustainable development.

5. DISCUSSION

Addressing each stage of PPA, beginning with **problem identification**, a public problem can be defined as a discrepancy between the status quo and a possible ideal situation (Secchi, 2017b). To be considered as such, the public problem needs to be recognized by a large part of society, be determinable, and admit a possible solution. This task of identifying public problems is a striking feature of the cases, which act mainly through processes such as monitoring and diagnosing the city. We understand that the monitoring of indicators is relevant because, as a result of the consistent request for data, there is an incentive for the PM to produce and systematize information, contributing to strengthening accountability.

Additionally, we perceive that the monitoring of PM favors transparency and reinforces social control; and the monitoring of public policies, budgets, plans, and projects contributes to the analysis of public policies because such networks have incorporated the verification of possibilities for improvement, deviations from the path or abandonment of issues. On this aspect, the convergence with Bardach

(2012) stands out, when he comments that evidence is necessary to the PP process, as those networks enable the production of realistic projections. However, it is worth considering that the performance of these organizations is based on their methodology, that is, the process of monitoring the city's indicators translates into the monitoring of the indicators that these initiatives consider relevant.

In this stage, as they also carry out diagnoses of the city, these diagnoses contribute to the analysis of public policies because, supporting the speech of Bardach (2012), they provide new information about the reality of the city, both in objective terms, from the analysis of the indicators, and in subjective terms, by exposing the perception of citizens. Furthermore, these diagnoses result in technical work that involves specialists and professionals.

On the other hand, it is worth noting that this diagnostic process takes into account the internal objectives of the networks. So, although there is a discourse oriented to the problems of the city as a whole, we cannot lose sight of the fact that these networks depend on resources to maintain themselves, and that the execution of projects for specific financiers can bring bias to the problems identified. This aspect confirms the view of Bardach (2012) when he argues that the identification of a problem is not usually unanimous, since it involves subjective elements, conflicts, and specific negotiations between groups.

Regarding **agenda setting**, the public agenda consists of a list of issues or problems to which the government and people outside the government are paying attention (Kingdon, 2014). The networks hold events or workshops, where they seek to bring together PM, interest groups, and specialists. They also use the media. We ponder that this is a channel that might contribute to the recognition of these networks by society because the consistency of the publications can increase society's expectations in periods when the reports are about to be released. This also converges with the logic of Multiple Flows (R. B. Denhardt et al., 2014), since media can direct themes consistent with the political atmosphere, contributing to opening windows of opportunity.

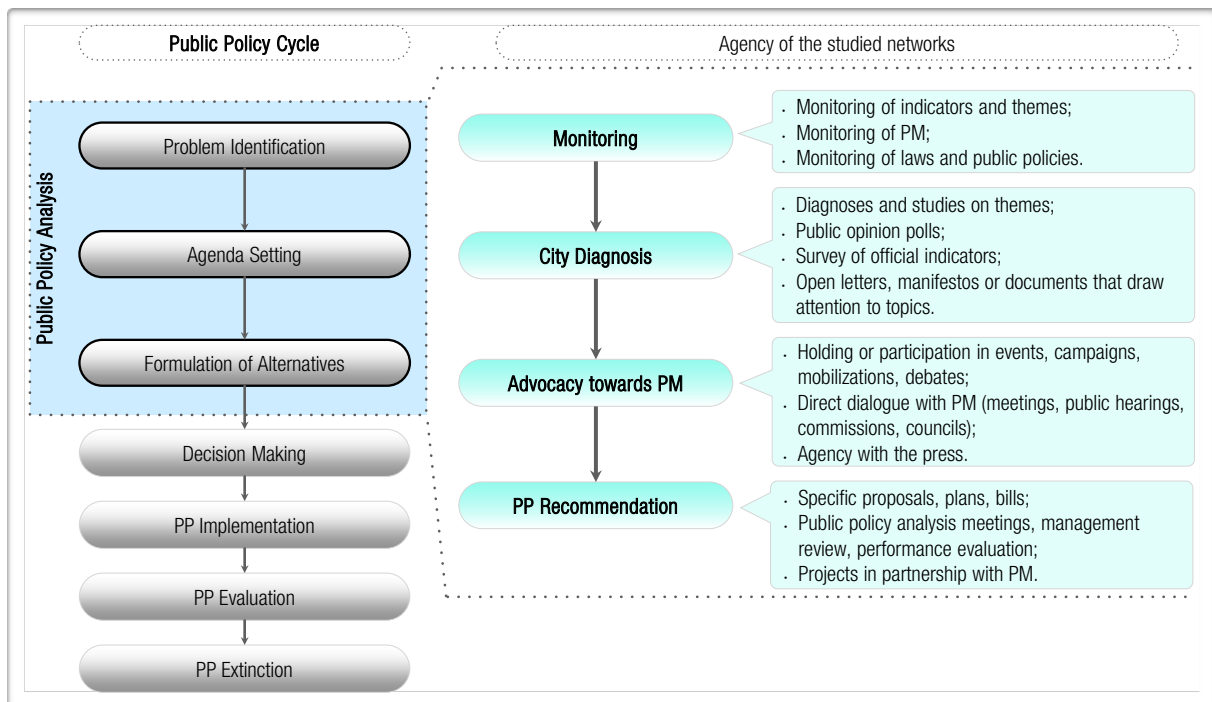
A positive aspect of this insertion of guidelines into the public agenda is the fact that these networks anchor their methodologies in the SD. Thus, there is a greater possibility of making PM approach issues belonging to sustainability dimensions. Themes such as air quality, mobility, and preservation, which usually are not priorities, even if not inserted into the public agenda, enter the radar. However, as well as in the diagnostic process, here we can also notice the bias of the choice and we must reiterate that policies emerge in a pluralistic dynamic within which distinct groups attempt to impose their interests (Vicente, 2014).

As to the **formulation of alternatives**, when a problem enters the agenda, initiatives that aim to build and combine solutions related to it become crucial (Secchi, 2017b). These networks act mainly through the recommendation of public policies, some in a more formal way and others with closer contact with the PM. The recommendation of PP contributes to the PPA because it allocates informational resources produced by society to provide more effective answers to problems thus strengthening the relationship between public and private actors (Fleury, 2005). Castells and Cardoso (2005) endorse this perspective, commenting that it is important to give space to new governance tools that encourage society's interaction and participation in the political process.

However, a point of criticism in this process, more specifically about Brazilian cases, is that although impartiality is an aspect emphasized, examples of partnership with the PM were reported. This

proximity may raise doubts regarding impartiality, since, considering that these initiatives participated in the construction of some solutions, we question whether they would be able to ensure neutrality to assess their results. We summarize the way the networks act in the PPA process in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1 ELEMENTS THAT CHARACTERIZE HOW THE NETWORKS ACT IN THE PPA PROCESS



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Regarding **sustainable development** in cities, the networks incorporate this approach in their activities. Specifically about the dimensions of SD - economic, social, environmental, and institutional (Van Bellen, 2006) -, we find that a weak sustainability logic prevails (Bell & Morse, 2008; Hak et al., 2007), since the environmental dimension does not have a higher level of importance. The main concern runs through the social dimension due to the focus on the quality of life and the institutional dimension due to the emphasis on democratic and participatory processes, but themes from economic and environmental dimensions can also emerge depending on a favorable political scenario or a critical situation.

A relevant contribution is an effort that the national networks - to which these initiatives are linked - are making to adapt the 2030 Agenda to cities. They are adjusting their indicators to the logic of the SDGs and adapting targets to correspond to the reality of the contexts they relate. As the 2030 Agenda emerged in a global context, we consider that this effort to municipalize objectives and adapt goals is relevant because translating them into the reality of each city contributes to raising awareness of citizens and public managers about the relevance of the SD.

A point of criticism refers to the low emphasis on the surroundings. The territory is a relevant element in the discussion about SD because it represents a unit where ecological bases and cultural identities of a group of people are built (Tybusch, 2011). Regarding the networks, only ALFA reported a concern to acknowledge the surroundings and neighboring cities as variables yet to be studied. The methodology of these initiatives, in general, focuses on the cities where they operate, which can limit the understanding of themes such as mobility, employment, and income, among others since cities are not isolated and both feed and are fed by their surroundings. Although this criticism does not nullify the potential of these networks in the city where they operate, it denotes that the next stage of evolution of the methodology of these initiatives could encompass the surroundings and establish a more comprehensive action in terms of region or territory. Box 6 summarizes the way the cases approach sustainable development.

BOX 6 CASES APPROACH REGARDING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

ALFA	BETA	GAMA	DELTA
Quality of life	Quality of life	Quality of life	Social monitoring
Accountability and citizen control	Social participation	Accountability and citizen control	Participatory democracy
Territorialization* of the SDGs	Municipalization of the SDGs	Territorialization* of the SDGs	Municipalization of the SDGs

* Although they apply the word 'territorialization', we could not perceive this emphasis in the collected data.

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

In an overview, the networks incorporate the SD approach in their activities, emphasizing quality of life, encouraging democratic and participatory processes, and incorporating the SDGs. As a result of the image of credibility and methodological consistency that they sought to build in the cities where they operate, it appears that PM considers their diagnoses and recommendations, and it is possible to perceive the incorporation of some themes and problems in the public agenda. The Target Plan in São Paulo and Ilhéus and the Development Plan in Bogotá and Manizales represent the most relevant examples.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The objective of this study was to investigate how civil society networks aimed at sustainable development in cities act in the public policy analysis process. Four cases were chosen, and, to understand how they approach SD in the cities where they operate, we studied the way they act towards public policies, more specifically on the PPA process (Secchi, 2017a). These initiatives act in the three stages, namely, problem identification, agenda setting, and formulation of alternatives. The issues presented by these networks do not always advance and, depending on the agenda and immediate political interests, are not even considered. However, the consistency of action and the technical methodology contribute to their being considered an instance of support for PM, which, by providing knowledge, aims at public policies aligned to sustainable development.

Regarding sustainability management in cities, the contributions are aligned with SD because of the set of principles of these organizations. The Brazilian cases declare the pursuit of fair, democratic, and sustainable cities and the Colombian cases, although only recently have been emphasizing the 2030 Agenda, base their methodology on quality of life, consistent with the social dimension of the SD. In addition, a process of adapting the SDGs to the city level is in progress in the four cases, and we believe this is a relevant aspect to direct the management of cities to a path more aligned with sustainability. The possibility of adapting indicators and targets to these contexts removes the SD from the conceptual spectrum or the global arena of discussion, positioning it closer to municipal management, and confirming the importance that cities have in the current context.

In general, although these networks have the potential to raise awareness about themes that contribute to SD, this more direct form of participation in the PP process poses challenges to public management, as indicated by R. B. Denhardt et al. (2014), because it requires new skills and competencies, including knowing how to listen to the demands and how to act responsively. The multicentric model of public management allows the participation of different actors in the public policy process, but the contributions generated from this new dynamic need to be channeled by the managers in some way to strengthen the processes of transparency and social participation.

In summary, we believe this research brought contributions because, in addition to increasing the literature with the description of civil society organizations that work with SD, it provided a deepening by analyzing them in light of their actions with the municipal government, mapping the strategies they use to achieve their goals. This research showed that when civil society organizations develop a consistent methodology, they can contribute to fostering SD, transparency, and accountability practices by public management. Finally, the results could inspire more initiatives of this nature, by encouraging social participation and the consolidation of mandates based on indicators and targets.

Regarding limitations, this is a case study, and although such characterization itself is not considered a limitation, this choice leads to a result that reflects the reality of the researched networks. About the analysis model, we decided to study how these networks act in the stages of problem identification, agenda setting, and formulation of alternatives. The results reflect this relationship, however, this does not imply that these networks neither have other channels of interaction with PM in other spaces nor does it mean that they are not part of larger public policy networks. Also, considering the data, this study is limited to portraying documents produced by these networks and the perspective of specific actors.

Furthermore, we consider that this aspect would be an interesting approach for future studies, that is, to complement this research based on the perception of public managers and citizens. Other recommendations would be the following: to study how these networks act in states and countries; and to develop an evaluation methodology to assess the degree of 'result' or 'impact' that these initiatives have been able to achieve in the cities where they operate.

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Mônica Beppler Kist



<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9487-3272>

Ph.D. in Administration from the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC); Administrator at the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC); Researcher at the Observatory of Sustainability and Governance Research Group. E-mail: monica.beppler@ufsc.br

Hans Michael Van Bellen



<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9224-7232>

Ph.D. in Production Engineering from the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC); Full Professor at the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC); Coordinator of the Observatory of Sustainability and Governance Research Group. E-mail: hans.michael@ufsc.br