

Collaborative Governance for the Construction of Public Policies on Social Sustainability

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Abstract. Government actors promoting collaborative initiatives for a more inclusive and democratic society must understand that effective strategies for lasting social impact demand significant effort. Collaborative governance relies on the interaction between the government, private sector, and civil society. However, success is not guaranteed by collaboration alone, due to various factors can affect decision-making effectiveness. This article explores the key factors in collaborative governance, with a specific focus on social sustainability, to optimize governance practices. The field research was conducted using a qualitative approach through a case study in Porto Alegre city, Brazil. We conducted semi-structured interviews with 16 stakeholders, analysed documents, and performed direct observations. The study provides valuable insights for public managers and governments on effective strategies for addressing social issues and improving governance, aiming to enhance social sustainability and project efficiency. Additionally, it identifies factors for collaborative governance in the Latin America context.

Keywords. collaborative governance; social sustainability; decision-making; public policy; governance strategies; collaboration

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1. Introduction

Collaborative forms of governance are strongly encouraged but require management that enables the proper involvement and representation of different interests from the initial agenda and activities planning (Broccardo, Culasso & Mauro, 2019). The collaborative process becomes an alternative to strengthen decision-making (Naffaa, 2017), whereas the dynamics of collaboration result in collaborative actions involving multiple stakeholders in the definition of policies, regulations, projects, or agendas (Broccardo, Culasso & Mauro, 2019). Although the government actors are interested in promoting collaborative projects to build a more open and democratic society, they should be aware that creating results with transformative and sustainable social impact requires efforts (Temmerman, Veeckman & Ballon, 2021).

The engagement of players from the private sector, society, or the general public in decision-making processes and structures (Bianchi & Rivenbark, 2021), with diverse communication, collaboration, and power delegation (Newig et al., 2017) is one of the principles of Collaborative governance, which is defined by processes and structures of decision-making and management of public policies that involve people constructively to achieve a public purpose that would not be accomplished otherwise (Emerson, Nabatchi & Balogh, 2012). In collaborative governance, specific motivations drive participants to become involved, so it is essential to comprehend their impact on decision-making. This involves determining whether participants primarily aim to pursue their own interests or if they are seeking a better collective outcome. Their behavior influences the process throughout (Choi & Robertson, 2014b).

Although studies on Collaborative Governance extensively explore various dimensions such as models, antecedents, processes, outcomes, challenges, institutional structure, leadership, and the diversity of the groups involved (Bianchi, Nasi & Riverbark, 2021; Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson, Nabatchi & Balogh, 2012; Thomson & Perry, 2006), there is a significant gap in the literature regarding a deeper understanding of the aspects that influence decision-making in this context. Mosley & Wong (2021) address the legitimacy of the decision-making process, but there is still a lack of detailed analysis on how this process is constructed. Given these studies, it is

evident that the literature lacks a more detailed exploration of the specific factors that shape these decisions. This need is further highlighted by the research of Wang & Ran (2021), who emphasize the increasing complexity of the decision-making process in collaborative governance and the importance of understanding the elements that influence it.

This research has Collaborative governance as its subject, and its objective is to identify the related factors of a decision-making process in a social sustainability multi-stakeholder case, executed by the city of Porto Alegre (Brazil). The research question is: which factors can influence the decision-making process of a Collaborative governance focused on social sustainability? To achieve that objective, we applied a case study approach to understand the complex dynamics and interactions in the decision-making process in Porto Alegre City Hall (Brazil). This initiative aimed to create a public policy to qualify both formal and informal recyclable materials collection, as well as to improve solid waste sorting units.

This study contributes to practitioners and academics by providing them with a better understanding of how those involved in the collaborative process make decisions and communicate them, unraveling the Collaborative governance theme regarding the factors related to multi-stakeholder decision-making, and contributing to the development of broader theory in this field. Contributions to theory and knowledge are the factors that influence decision-making regarding collaborative governance in social sustainability with a focus on the Latin American context. It is a subject that heavily relies on context, and most of the main literature comes from the global north. Contributions to practitioners and managers depend on insights into public policies, particularly the steps of problem understanding and agenda definition. Contribution to society relies on a clear explanation of this complex social problem and its proper understanding.

In the next section, we will develop the conceptual foundation for our research by drawing from the literature to formulate propositions. These propositions will be validated or refuted in a case study conducted in Brazil (Cepeda & Martin, 2005). We emphasize the importance of conducting additional research on various forms of collaboration to evaluate the relevance of our theoretical argument and empirical findings. We conclude the article with suggestions for future research.

2. Theoretical basis

2.1 Collaborative Governance

Collaborative governance is a form of shared governance in which authority and responsibility for decision-making depend on an agency that must inform or consult other rights holders and stakeholders when planning or implementing initiatives (Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2013). This governance model does not refer only to formal decisions and official laws, but also to formal processes and customary laws (Kossmann, 2015), indicating that the initiation and management of Collaborative Governance is not a one-time act, but a continuous process (Ulibarri et al., 2020).

In a collaborative process, public agencies work with other public and private organizations to develop or implement policies and programs (Ulibarri & Scott, 2017). In this way, collaboration increases opportunities for social learning among stakeholders, suggesting that they would be more capable of identifying and correcting incompatibilities with greater collaboration (Ulibarri, 2015). However, collaboration is linked to the process of dealing with varied perspectives, adopting new roles, and assuming multiple responsibilities in complex situations (Bradley & Arlati, 2022).

Governance practices are shaped by the interactions of different social actors, who often have diverse, conflicting, and antagonistic interests, viewpoints, and values, which governance must resolve or reconcile (Gutherlet, Besen & Morais, 2020). Political actors collaborate during decision-making processes in exchange for the exchange of their objectives into policies (Fischer & Sciarini, 2016). These processes can be simple or complex - they can vary according to the outcomes to be achieved and the reflections to be generated throughout the choices. A key question for those interested in developing effective Collaborative governance systems is: "how to facilitate the decision-making dynamics among diverse and interdependent stakeholders facing complex problems?" (Choi & Robertson, 2014a), as they participate in the governance process, often defined interests and histories of conflicts and alliances (Follador et al., 2021).

Proposition 1: The complexity of the context changes the dynamics of the processes and makes the results unpredictable and difficult to control.

In contexts of multiple stakeholders, such as in collaborative governance, the goal is to bring together key stakeholders in an integrated dynamic of communication and decision-making. This approach is based on the recognition of the importance of equity and accountability in interactions among stakeholders, as pointed out by Almeida, Getschko, & Afonso (2015). Furthermore, Trimble et al. (2022) emphasize the need for well-defined and formalized roles, even if of a consultative nature, to ensure effectiveness and clarity in the decision-making process. This perspective highlights the importance of clear and accountable structures to facilitate productive dialogues

and equitable decisions in environments with multiple stakeholders.

Proposition 2: Social problem's systematic understanding demands listening to all actors.

Interaction among stakeholders can create a trusting relationship among them, even if their goals are not fully achieved (Hovardas, 2021). Trust can be used as social capital to establish governance so that decisions can be made consensually (Panday, 2018; Ansell et al., 2020), although it requires the involvement of stakeholders (Kossmann, Behagel & Bailey, 2016). Furthermore, there must be a pre-established and consolidated degree of trust to allow participants to share knowledge among themselves and improve the performance of the collaborative process (Tonelli et al., 2018). It is imperative to dedicate efforts to enhance collaborative efforts and partnerships among all community stakeholders, focusing especially on integrating those who have been traditionally excluded from decision-making processes (Wang & Ran, 2023).

Proposition 3: Previous trust among stakeholders is fundamental to reducing conflicts during decision-making.

An important characteristic that helps to distinguish Collaborative governance from traditional decision-making mechanisms is the relative balance of formal power among the various participants involved in the decision-making process (Choi & Robertson, 2014a). For Purdy (2012), Collaborative Governance is related to processes that seek to share power in decision-making with stakeholders to develop shared recommendations for effective and lasting solutions to public problems.

In the division of responsibilities and power, the act of governing becomes more complex, especially in the relationship between the democratically elected governmental authority and the social and private actors who grant power in decision-making related to public policies (Ferrarezi & Oliveira, 2012). Collaborative Governance processes must be planned to promote a substantial balance of power among stakeholders during deliberation and decision-making (Choi & Robertson, 2014b).

Proposition 4: Actors who have centralized power in other spheres or decisions (such as in government) may not behave collaboratively in collective decision-making.

Governance practices are influenced by the interactions of various social actors, who may have conflicting interests. The importance of balance and trust in decision-making is emphasized, which should be facilitated by the development of mechanisms to manage the complexity and diversity of interests in collaborative decision-making. These aspects are essential for the creation of more effective governance systems, especially in the context of increasing social and environmental complexities.

2.2 Social Sustainability and Governance

Social sustainability can be defined as the resolution of basic needs, such as adequate housing and income; individual capacity or opportunity for learning and self-development; social or community capacity for the organizations and networks development, that promotes social interaction (Davidson, 2010). Although it is a well-established concept, the social dimension is the least developed among all concepts of sustainability, as academic research frequently focuses more on the environmental and economic dimensions (Beck & Ferasso, 2023). This can be explained by considering that identifying social impact can have positive and negative social consequences. The scope of social impact is daunting, which may explain why social sustainability the least well-established pillar of sustainability is compared to the more easily quantifiable economic and environmental impacts (Buchan et al., 2024).

Social sustainability should be recognized in a reliable and affordable manner along with general stakeholder support for the data collection and analysis, thus a good governance will promote sustainability in general and address social sustainability in particular (Pashaei Kamali et al., 2018). Collaborative governance projects should be able to build a wider and democratic society, although it requires action taking efforts at all levels, the government level included, to trigger outcomes with transformative and sustainable social impact (Temmerman, Veckman & Ballon, 2021).

Pashaei Kamali et al. (2018) identified collaboration and participation as a sustainability necessary practice, with the stakeholder's involvement in decision-making process, which is obtained through discussions aimed at resolving conflicts. It is expected that social sustainability issues faced by society will expand the challenges of balancing local, national, and global goals and objectives, requiring a more collaborative approach to public policy development for long-term planning structures and tools (Picavet et al., 2023).

3. Methodological Procedures

The research used a single case study approach (Yin, 2015) to analyze the Todos Somos Porto Alegre program, a Porto Alegre City Hall initiative in Brazil. The program aimed to shift from social assistance to economic and social development by promoting the productive inclusion of self-employed recyclers through labor market training. This case was chosen for its elements of collaborative governance and stakeholder participation in public policy creation.

The study employed an interpretative qualitative approach, capturing participants' perspectives and integrating multiple data sources (Yin, 2016; Cepeda & Martin, 2005). Data collection involved document analysis, direct interviews, and observations, ensuring reliability through triangulation (Martins, 2008). Primary data were obtained from interviews with project participants conducted between October and December 2019 (see Table 1), while secondary data included program reports, meeting minutes, and media articles (see Table 2). Interviews followed a structured script validated by two researchers (Baxter & Jack, 2008) and were conducted in person or remotely via Skype and WhatsApp. Participants were selected based on their roles in the program's creation, formalization, and implementation (2012–2016), ensuring stakeholder representativeness. Sixteen stakeholders were interviewed until reaching saturation (Fontanella, Ricas & Turato, 2008). Interviews were recorded, transcribed in Portuguese, and selectively translated into English, preserving the original meaning.

Tab. 1 - List of interviewed stakeholders.

Institution	Role	Quantity	Approximate time length
City Council: responsible for the Law	Alderman author of the Law 10.531/2008 that institutes, in the city of Porto Alegre, the Gradual Number's Reduction of Animal Traction Vehicles ¹ and Human Traction Vehicles Program	01	25 min
Porto Alegre City Hall: executioner of Public Policy	City Department of International Relations Office Chief	01	51 min
	City Department of International Relations Projects Coordinator	01	56 min
	Mayor of Porto Alegre during the Program	01	43 min
Private Company: Program Supporter	Head of Institutional Relations	01	28 min
University: Program follow up	Production and Transport Engineering Professor at UFRGS	01	15 min
Cooperative: Program coordinator	General Coordinator	01	47 min
	Consultation Letter drafting and coordination support in Project 2	01	01h 08 min
	Planning and Execution Program's Structurer	01	40 min
	Project 1 Coordinator	01	01h 25 min
	Project 2 Coordinator	01	01h 17min
	Author of Program's book	01	25 min
Rio Grande do Sul Public Ministry of Labor: actions follow up and support	Social Assistant	01	01 h 04 min
	Chief Prosecutor	01	31 min
Triage Unit: Program beneficiary entity	Triage Unit Leaders and "Fórum dos Catadores" from "Vila Pinto" and "Campo da Tuca" participants.	02	49 min
Total		16	704 min

The documents, listed in Tab. 2, allowed us to corroborate and increase the data evidence collected from other queried sources, so it provided us the necessary content for this case study contextualization, expanding and

¹ A type of Vehicle that is pulled by animals, such as wagon, carriage, or chariot.

highlighting the interviewee's speeches and the information gathered where the interviews and the non-participant observation, being frequently used along with other methods of data collection that offered us a more differentiated and dynamic conjuncture assessment that cannot be easily captured by traditional methods (Liu; Maitlis, 2010).

Tab. 2 - List of analysed documents.

Analyzed Documents Report		
Document	Document's Purpose	Date
Law 10.531/2008 establishes, in the city of Porto Alegre, the Gradual Number's Reduction of Animal Traction Vehicles and Human Traction Vehicles Program	Establishes, in the City of Porto Alegre, the Gradual Number's Reduction of Animal Traction Vehicles and Human Traction Vehicles Program and provides other measures.	September/2008
Project Opening Term	Beginning formalization of Productive Inclusion Program implementing and Waste Pickers Productive Inclusion and Porto Alegre's Popular Recycling System Restructuring.	August/2012
Kick off Meeting Report	Report on a meeting held at Local Governance City Department of Porto Alegre City Hall.	August/2012
Braskem Social Investment Presentation	Project Presentation Containing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Information • Work Balance sheet • Stakeholders List • Developed Strategy • CVCA - <i>Costumer Value Chain Analysis</i> • Impact Matrix X Complexity 	August/2012
The Implementing of Productive Waste Pickers Inclusion Program and The Restructuring of Porto Alegre's Popular Recycling System Work Proposal	Work proposal presented by "Cooperativa Mãos Verdes" containing the expected objectives and results for the program implementation phase.	August/2012
Scope Management Plan	Establishes as the project scope will be managed and sets how will be treated and controlled its changes.	September/2012
Action Plan Schedule	Lists the actions and those responsible for the program implementation with the planned dates.	February/2013
"Todos Somos Porto Alegre" Program's Implementing	Presentation containing an evaluation of the conducted work, the results of the program implementation phase and the next steps.	February/2013
Executive Committee Establishment Report	Executive Committee establishment and its initial referrals.	February/2013
Committee Tasks and Quality Management System (QMS)	Defines the meeting's systematic between the members of the stakeholder's network and the executive and operational teams, during the Program implementation.	March/2013
Productive Inclusion Program Presentation	Porto Alegre City Hall presentation on the "Todos Somos" Program.	June/2013
Meeting report	Reports of the meetings that occurred throughout the program.	2012 to 2016

The interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed using NVIVO v12 for Apple. Data from interviews and documents formed a corpus analyzed categorically according to Bardin (2009), enabling objective and systematic data collection. We started with an initial reading of the data to understand the information, followed by a detailed analysis for coding and categorization. The process included highlighting important sections and making brief

notes, connecting insights to the codes identified in the interviews and documents.

Afterward, we identified the factors that emerged from the interviews and influenced decision-making, making it possible to verify which factors had already been identified by the theory and which emerged from the analysis of the information (Flick, 2009).

4. Results

4.1 The Program Structure in Porto Alegre

Porto Alegre is the capital and largest city of Rio Grande do Sul, the southernmost state of Brazil. It has a population of approximately 1.5 million inhabitants and about 4.5 million in its metropolitan area, making it the twelfth most populous city in the country. Porto Alegre was founded in 1769 by a group of immigrants from the Azores Islands, Portugal. In 1989, the city became internationally known for being the first to implement participatory budgeting.

Aiming to modernize the city and improve traffic circulation in Porto Alegre, the capital of Rio Grande do Sul, as well as to advance strategies for preparing the city to host international events such as the 2014 FIFA World Cup, the City Hall decided to ban the circulation of wagons and waste pickers' carts in urban areas, in compliance with Law No. 10,531/2008. Additionally, the municipality sought to professionalize the informal waste sorting system by investing in and strengthening waste sorting units, introducing production goals and processing volume targets, and encouraging the formation of consortia and networks for materials processing and commercialization.

Following the approval of Law No. 10,531/2008 and the establishment of the Executive Committee for the Gradual Reduction of Animal Traction Vehicles (ATVs) and Human Traction Vehicles (HTVs) (Decree No. 16,638/10), it became necessary to implement a public policy for the productive inclusion of waste pickers and the restructuring of sorting units in Porto Alegre. To this end, the public policy known as *Todos Somos Porto Alegre* (a name chosen by the Waste Pickers Forum) was carried out through a 26-month-long program. This initiative involved multiple stakeholders, including City Hall departments, the Brazilian Development Bank (BNDES) as the funding agency, NGOs engaged in outreach to the waste picker population and sorting centers, social and community leaders, private entities, and, crucially, the waste pickers themselves—the primary beneficiaries of the policy.

The program's main premise was to create work alternatives considering the gradual phasing out of ATVs and HTVs. Other key objectives included street-level outreach to waste pickers, offering individualized support and referrals, strengthening the sorting unit network, and providing legal and institutional backing to enhance their operational capacity and production scale. The focus of the program shifted from a social assistance approach to one based on economic and social development, emphasizing income generation and popular education as a productive force.

In terms of governance, the program's strategic and political coordination was led by the Executive Committee, which defined roles and responsibilities for governance functions and oversaw actions to consolidate an integrated support network. This included organizing continuous improvement seminars, and committee meetings, structuring the external evaluation process, and managing the communication plan aligned with governance activities. The support network comprised the Technical-Operational Coordination unit and individual Project Working Groups. These groups worked closely with service providers and operational teams that directly interacted with the target population. In turn, the target population also maintained dialogue with the Integrated Support Network and the Waste Pickers Forum.

A collaborative network was established so that Porto Alegre City Hall, together with other public and private organizations, could develop and implement the public policy, in line with recommendations by Ulibarri and Scott (2017). Based on the formulation of strategies, activities, and goals, Morse and Stephens (2008) emphasized that such processes should begin with a core group of committed stakeholders. Once the outcomes and strategies are defined, the collaboration moves to the implementation phase, in which agreements and action plans are developed through a set of mutually supportive initiatives. To ensure the continuous improvement of the program, executive committee seminars and meetings were held, alongside the development of the external evaluation framework and the management of the integrated communication plan.

4.2 Decisions influencing factors

4.2.1 Complexity

Complexity can be defined as the presence of numerous interconnected and interactive elements that impact the behaviour of a system (Casti, 1986). The definition of Casti is particularly relevant in the public context, as it demonstrates the challenge of predicting the outcomes of an action or decision.

In the analysis of the program documents, complexity was evaluated by constructing a complexity matrix. This approach considers the need for a holistic understanding of the different actor profiles, as well as the diverse demands and needs of the population that necessitate a range of actions, projects, and competencies. The importance of developing a personalized service policy to assess and handle each waste picker case, particularly

considering significant complexities, is also emphasized.

Complexity was a factor highlighted by the interviewees, considering the context of the Todos Somos Program and the situations experienced, particularly in relation to the withdrawal of the ATVs and HTVs from circulation. The program's increased complexity was associated with the waste picker's carts and wagons, as shown in Figures 1 and 2. This was due to the diverse audience, many of whom relied on carts or wagons to support their families. However, in some cases, these vehicles were also used to sustain drug addiction.

We had two problems with Todos Somos, one, the complexity of the waste picker's itself, their profile, people who mostly do not have an organization, many are homeless, there's always an exploitative group behind them, only a few are independent, the majority live in a vicious cycle of drug involvement, not all of them, but most of them, that's a problem. (E01).

Fig. 1 - A man pulling a Human Traction Vehicle in the city of Porto Alegre.



Fig. 2 - A man riding an Animal Traction Vehicle (ATV) in the city of Porto Alegre.



Interviewee no. 10 reports that Todos Somos was a complex program, and there was the need to understand the context of waste pickers and screening units to establish the necessary strategies, "*align things with people, could have time to reason and bring ideas, it is not in the heat of fire that a complex decision is made*" (E10).

The living conditions of waste pickers were a complex problem that needed to be addressed in the Todos Somos

Porto Alegre Program. The families depended on garbage collection work to live, which was also degrading work. The activity involved sorting the collected garbage in informal sorting units or in their homes, which led families to literally live among the garbage, not to mention the use of heavy human traction strollers, pulled up and down the city, often with children inside.

4.2.2 Systemic comprehension

For Maani (2016), systemic understanding is the key that frees mental models and paves the way for accepting exchanges in a multi-stakeholder decision-making process, being the first step towards a systematic understanding of the problem. However, in a decision-making process, in some cases, information is gradually presented, and problems are unstructured (Gontijo & Maia, 2004).

Municipal governments should collect suggestions and opinions from all stakeholders in projects on behalf of cities, however, citizen participation should be simplified (Bolívar, 2018), for example, through forums. Nevertheless, Ulibarri and Scott (2017) pointed out that high-capacity collaborative decision-making forums may not be the most inclusive in terms of incorporating all network players into decision-making, but they are institutions where a subset of key network players is heavily involved (stakeholders offering particularly relevant information, maintaining key resources, and being critical to achieving successful results).

In the analysis of the Todos Somos Program documents, we observed that there were practices, methods, and project management tools, that provided the necessary formalism which allowed the development and management of a program of this nature. The Program adopted a management model, so they could manage all phases of ongoing projects, identify risks, reduce difficulties and resistance at each program stage, and apply production engineering tools aiming the production of social benefits, as reported by one of the interviewees, “this project, in my opinion, was the first time that a method was used to solve a social problem, so the chances of getting it right were good, and if we continued, much better” (E4).

In the Todos Somos Program, the topics discussed in the meetings were recorded in reports and the agenda was previously established, the information was obtained from the working groups and provided support so the decisions could be made, and errors minimized. The structuring and analysis of the information were aspects highlighted by all interviewees regarding the systemic understanding of this issue, being mentioned even by the members of the Waste Pickers Forum. Interviewee 3 highlighted that the Executive Committee, in some situations, participated in the Waste Pickers Forum and held open meetings with waste pickers, due to the lack of self-employed waste pickers' representatives. These mechanisms allowed the collection of information for decision-making and for the program to move forward with the planned actions.

4.2.3 Relationship among stakeholders

In decision-making, all stakeholders need to be involved for the process to be effective (Edmunds and Wollenberg, 2001), though in some moments might have conflict situations, which may be a resource or a liability during collaboration (Ansell & Gash, 2008). There are many conflicting interests among stakeholders, but they must adjust their preferences through deliberation and dialogue (Choi & Robertson, 2014a).

During the interviews, respondents were asked if conflicting situations occurred and how the relationship between those involved in the program and 12 (twelve) of the 16 (sixteen) interviewees reported that conflict situations, such as complaints to the Public Prosecutor's Office, informal recyclers' resistance to joining the Program, conflicts of ideological concepts among stakeholders that generated critical moments during the execution of the Program. Interviewee no. 9 recalls that conflicts and problems occurred daily and were mitigated due to the trust relationship established between those involved in the Program, especially within the Executive Committee and Working Groups. This relationship was possible due to the Executive Committee member's previous history of participation in other social projects, which, as Ansell & Gash (2008) said, contributes to raising the levels of trust among those involved and thus increasing the commitment, as substantiated by Interviewee no. 3 speech.

We had a very good team within the government, had a very engaged team within the government, I for example had a team within the government that I had to deal with, that maybe you will talk to. Sometimes there were many difficulties, but they were really aligned people who wanted to make it happen like us, so there was a lot of trust between us, we knew that even if we disagreed on something we were doing it over things we wanted to go the best way possible for the program's sake (E03).

Interviewee no. 3 reports the trusting relationship established between stakeholders and the belief that they had over the Program's results. These aspects were fundamental to strengthening the relationship between those involved, even with the existence of conflicts that consequently influenced the decision's direction. Interviewee no. 14 notes that there was mistrust over a Public Power conducted the Program, being the role of the government leader responsible for the Todos Somos Program fundamental to promote the collaborative conduction of the program, through conversation and consensus. This aspect corroborates the research of Emerson, Nabatchi & Balogh (2012) that considers the trust positive influence in collaboration, seen as a mechanism for better understanding the problem and being an essential element to achieving consensus and meeting the needs of

stakeholders, especially in projects aimed at social sustainability (Beck & Ferasso, 2023).

4.2.4 Power

In collaborative governance, decision-making should be focused on collectively and on sharing with decentralized power, so that the involvement of multiple stakeholders allows legitimizing the decisions made (Emerson, Nabatchi & Balogh, 2012). Power should be shared among stakeholders during deliberation and decision-making, to develop shared recommendations for effective and lasting solutions to public problems (Purdy, 2012; Choi & Robertson, 2014b).

Not all interviewees could identify whether there were power relations between stakeholders involved in decision-making. Of the 16 (sixteen) interviewees, only 6 (six) mentioned a Centralized Power occurrence. In the opinion of four (4) interviewees, the power was decentralized, and shared among all those involved, both in the Executive Committee and in the Active Search team, as reported by Interviewee no. 3. In Interviewee 5's statement, when asked if there was anyone who had the final say in decisions, it is possible to observe that authoritarianism did not prevail in the decisions "We have to avoid that, that is authoritarianism, we didn't have that, we avoid it, not out of fear of making decisions, democracy should be the main foundation" (E05).

Interviewees no.10 and no. 4 reported that power was centered on the Government, in this case, the City Hall. However, they highlighted that the government seemed to be always willing to listen to all those involved opinions, with dialogue still prevailing. In the opinion of Interviewee no. 3, the power was centered in the Cooperative that supported the City Hall in the coordination of the Todos Somos Program, due to this stakeholder technical knowledge in relation to the Program and the influence it had in the Executive Committee.

It is important to emphasize that collaborative governance processes should be planned to promote a power balance between stakeholders during debate and decision-making (Choi & Robertson, 2014b).

4.2.5 Administrative Burden

The concept of administrative burden can be understood as the individual perception of policy implementation as a burdensome task. Often, this burden manifests as a repetitive, inevitable, and prolonged experience, imposing substantial challenges within the context of collaborative governance (Burden et al, 2012). Collaborative governance aims at decision-making based on deliberative consensus, however, there were some situations in which administrative burden was present just as required by any traditional model of centralized governance. During the interviews, the respondents were asked about critical situations they experienced during the program execution and what could have occurred otherwise, i.e., what could have been improved. Interviewees no. 2 and no. 11 mentioned the administrative burden situations handled with BNDES, the main financing source of the program, influencing the continuity of the program when Porto Alegre City Hall had a change of management due to the city's election, this aspect is supported by Purdy (2012), who concludes that in Collaborative governance processes that are convened by government agencies, the authority of the government is linked to its rights to establish and apply rules, while the authority of other actors stems from their right to participate in governance or to bring legal actions.

Interviewee no. 3 emphasizes the slowness of government movements, but this slowness is not related to decision-making, but rather to the realization of decisions, i.e., in the interviewee's words the slowness lies in 'putting the decision on the street, the internal processes needed, and the various assessments. This got in our way a lot, mostly when resources should be liberated so we could effectively execute what we had decided, so that was something we needed to improve. *"The situations encountered required the restructuring and reanalysis of information, making necessary some actions, goals, and schedule adjustments in the Program. Interviewee no. 3"*

5. Results discussion

The complexity of the program is manifested by the multiplicity of actors involved and the variety of their interests and living conditions. For example, waste pickers are not a homogeneous group; they have different stories and challenges, and this complexity increases when considering the logistics of their carts and wagons, which are essential for their work, but also involved in broader public and social policy issues.

The Todos Somos program faced the challenging task of reconciling these diverse factors, seeking to balance the needs and expectations of each stakeholder. This task is complicated by the unpredictable nature of these interrelated elements. As a result, strategies and policies that prove effective in one aspect of the program may not be suitable or effective in another, leading to unexpected and difficult to manage outcomes, corroborating Proposition 1 of this study "The complexity of the context changes the dynamics of the processes and makes the results unpredictable and difficult to control".

The emphasis on using practices, methods, and project management tools reflected a conscious effort to address social problems systematically and structured. The interviewees' reports reinforced the idea that the adoption of structured methods in solving social problems significantly increased the chances of success. By involving waste pickers and other relevant stakeholders in the decision-making process, the program not only gained a deeper understanding of the challenges faced but also promoted a sense of ownership and commitment among the

participants.

The Todos Somos Program exemplifies how the systematic understanding of social problems is intrinsically linked to the inclusion and listening to all actors involved, validating Proposition 2 of this research: "Social problem's systematic understanding demands listening to all actors". By integrating project management methodologies with the active participation of a variety of stakeholders, the program was able to effectively address complex social challenges, reinforcing the idea that listening to all actors is essential for the effective resolution of social problems. Effective and well-defined governance strategies likely improve not only social sustainability but also the interconnections of its dimensions (i.e., environmental, economic, and social). However, the stakeholders involved in the decision-making process must have a clear understanding of social issues (Pashaei Kamali et al., 2018).

In the Todos Somos Program context, the importance of trust among stakeholders was highlighted by how conflicts were managed and mitigated. The trust relationship within the Executive Committee and among the Working Groups played a key role in mitigating daily conflicts. This trust did not arise spontaneously; instead, it was built on shared experience and a history of participation in other social projects. As Ansell and Gash (2008) observed, trust contributes to elevating levels of commitment and collaboration among parties, facilitating the resolution of conflicts and more cohesive decision-making.

The initial distrust regarding the public power's program management was overcome by the program leader's ability to foster constructive dialogues and seek consensus. This aspect aligns with the conclusions of Emerson, Nabatchi & Balogh (2012), who consider trust as an essential mechanism for better understanding problems and achieving consensus, especially in projects focused on social sustainability.

As highlighted in the literature, pre-existing trust among stakeholders is a factor in effective conflict management and the facilitation of collaborative decision-making (Panday, 2018; Ansell et al., 2020; Tonelli et al., 2018). However, in the studied case, trust did not occur previously among stakeholders, but during the execution of the program's actions. Instead, it was established during the implementation process, partially supporting Proposition 3: "Previous trust among stakeholders is fundamental to reduce conflicts during decision-making."

Collaborative governance prioritizes decentralized power, while power influences decision-making and the relationship among stakeholders involved in this process, sometimes can have a dynamic behavior, that is, fluctuating between centralized and decentralized power, and efforts must be focused so that power remains balanced among participants. In some cases, the Government initiates and coordinates policy networks and maintains great power over the nature and functioning of Collaborative governance, prevailing its opinion in decision-making (Eckerberg, Bjärstig & Zachrisson, 2015; Criado and Guevara-Gómez, 2021). However, the Todos Somos Program demonstrates that, even in a scenario where some actors may have more power (like the Government), the structure and planning of Collaborative governance, along with the willingness to maintain open dialogue and listen to all parties, can lead to effective collaboration.

Although power was centralized in the government, there was a continuous disposition to listen to all parties and maintain dialogue. This suggests that, even in a situation of centralized power, there can be a collaborative approach if there is a willingness to listen and engage all stakeholders, not confirming Proposition 4 of this study: "Actors who have centralized power in other spheres or decisions (such as in government) may not behave collaboratively in collective decision-making".

In the initial literature analysis on collaborative governance, no elements of administrative burden were detected. However, in the context of the Todos Somos Program, interviewees reported facing barriers and redundancies in obtaining information, which necessitated a revision of the project structures. This situation illustrates how the government, or its public bodies, plays a critical role in structuring collaborations in the public sector. Administrative burden tends to emerge in contexts with multiple problems and can be more effective when the objectives are well-defined, supported by political backing, have adequate resources, and possess the autonomy to develop solutions based on specialized expertise, as suggested by Meier et al. (2019).

6. Conclusions

The analyzed case study emphasized the significance of trust among stakeholders in conflict management and collaborative decision-making. It highlighted the need for inclusive decision-making processes involving listening to all actors, including traditionally excluded ones, such as informal and organized recyclers. This contribution to society underscores the importance of trust in facilitating effective conflict resolution and decision-making. However, administrative burdens in governance can pose challenges that impact the effectiveness of social projects.

The study provides evidence supporting existing theories about the role of trust in collaborative governance (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson, Nabatchi & Balogh, 2012), contributing to the understanding of how power dynamics affect collaborative governance (Eckerberg, Bjärstig & Zachrisson, 2015; Criado & Guevara-Gómez, 2021). Thus, it contributes to the existing literature on administrative burden and its impact on governance processes (Wanna, 2008; Meier et al., 2019). However, future research could examine projects in which pre-

existing trust among stakeholders has been identified, to determine whether this factor can mitigate conflicts that may arise during the decision-making process.

It is important to note a limitation in our study, as we were unable to contact some self-employed informal recyclers (beneficiaries of the program) during the interviews. These recyclers were not involved in the Waste Pickers Forum. This group represents an unorganized working class, many of whom do not have access even to a telephone or a permanent address. However, despite this obstacle, it was possible to identify the factors that influenced decision-making through interviews with the Program's contributors, including the recycling practices of the cooperatives (leaders of the Screening Unit and members of the Waste Pickers Forum) and other stakeholders.

This study provides practical insights for public managers on promoting effective strategies to address complex problems. It shows the importance of clear and well-defined governance strategies that enhance social sustainability and its interconnected dimensions. Additionally, the findings can be useful for the government and public sector organizations in organizing collaborative efforts, with the goal of reducing administrative obstacles and improving the efficiency of public projects.

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