Ethics and legitimacy of institutions solving wicked problems: the Catalan elections during the COVID-19 crisis

Ismael Peña-López

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Table of contents

- The problem: a wicked problem
- The approach to solutions:
  - Splitting the problem into smaller parts
  - Open Government
  - The Administration as a Platform
- Strategies and instruments:
  - Scoreboard, indicators and decision thresholds
  - Dedicated task forces & coordinating devices
  - Transmedia communication strategy
A wicked problem
Elections and the COVID crisis: Catalan Parliament 2021

Daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases, 7-day rolling average.
Source: OurWorld in Data / Johns Hopkins University CSSE COVID-19 Data
A wicked problem

- There is no definitive formulation of a wicked problem.
- Wicked problems have no stopping rule.
- Solutions to wicked problems are not true-or-false, but better or worse.
- There is no immediate and no ultimate test of a solution to a wicked problem.
- Every solution to a wicked problem is a "one-shot operation".
- Wicked problems do not have an enumerable (or an exhaustively describable) set of potential solutions.
- Every wicked problem is essentially unique.
- Every wicked problem can be considered to be a symptom of another problem.
- The existence of a discrepancy representing a wicked problem can be explained in numerous ways.
- The social planner are liable for the consequences they generate.

The solutions
Splitting the problem into smaller parts

The **health** scenario
- Minimize the risk to vote
- Minimize the risk of taking part in the organization (esp. polling stations)

The **right to vote** scenario
- Everyone has to be able to vote, no exceptions
- Prevent abstention for non-political reasons (e.g. fear)

The **legitimacy** scenario
- Maximize transparency and consensus about the electoral process
- Minimize boycott to the electoral institution, intended and unintended
Open Government

The transparency and open data component
- All data open: health, budget, protocols, procedures, minutes of meetings… and also: doubts, dissensus, issues
- Minimize the risk of taking part in the organization (esp. polling stations)

The participation component
- G2G, political parties, citizens
- Active listening

The collaboration component
- Co-design
- Co-management
The Administration as a Platform

Protocols
- Polling stations and voting procedures
- COVID Office (i.e. protection)
- Electoral campaigning
- Institutional communication and ways of voting
- Parties’ Table of Dialogue (political parties + government)

Tools for different profiles to foster autonomy and empowerment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voters</th>
<th>Polling stations</th>
<th>Infected and disabled people</th>
<th>Elderly people</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local administrations</td>
<td>COVID Officers</td>
<td>Representatives of the Administration</td>
<td>Candidates Media</td>
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The instruments
Scoreboard, indicators and decision thresholds

Health scenarios for elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Health</th>
<th>Voting rights</th>
<th>Legitimacy</th>
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<td>Deliberation</td>
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Tasks and risks scoreboard

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Progression according to:
- Value of RT significantly and persistently varies
- Number of hospitalizations significantly and persistently varies

Dedicated task forces & coordinating devices

Data and information Task Force

Electoral Office

Procurement

Communication Task Force

Expat voting Task Force

Parties’ Table of Dialogue Parliament

Polling stations

National COVID19 Task Force

Technical commission for the COVID19

COVID-19 Elections Task Force

Municipalities

Election boards Census office Mail office
Transmedia communication strategy

- Government bodies
  - Institutional campaign
    - Website
      - Twitter
    - Polling stations
      - Municipalities
  - Data
    - Information
    - Protocols
    - Updates
    - Analysis
  - Parties
    - Media
    - Experts
    - Citizens
Last thoughts

Three main phases
- Design: be open and collaborative, name, frame
- Implement: work consensus, empower actors
- Explain: be defensive (i.e. protect both team and project)

Keys for legitimacy
- Plan in (much) advance, master the issue
- Set the pace, tone and level
- Radical transparency, become authority
- Be quick to advance the issues, leave no room for doubts
- Own the higher ground, leave no room for mis-/dis-information
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To contact the author:
ismael.pena@gencat.cat
@ictlogist