

Article

Diagnosis of municipal management in Chile: evidence from the perception of key actors

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This research analyzes the quality management model aimed at improving the performance of local governments in Chile, an instrument promoted by the central government through the Undersecretary of Regional and Administrative Development (SUBDERE). For this study, a survey of primary information was carried out through interviews and focus groups with key informants. These participants included academics, experts, SUBDERE officials, municipal officials, and representatives of associations of municipalities. The information obtained was analyzed through the QDA ATLAS.ti software, using categories identified in the documentary review process and the primary review of the interviews and focus groups. Based on the data analyzed, we reviewed the specialized literature for elements that help to explain why a policy remains in force even though there is evidence that it does not contribute to improving the management and services of Chilean municipalities. In addition, we discussed the negative impact of this type of policy and the contradictory perceptions of both the beneficiaries and the many actors involved in the adoption and use of the quality management mode under analysis. Finally, we suggest public policy measures associated with implementing a comprehensive management system through collaborative and intergovernmental processes complemented with quality controls that optimize and modernize municipal management.

Keywords: local management; quality management; implementation of public policies.

Diagnóstico da gestão municipal no Chile: evidências da percepção dos principais atores

Esta pesquisa analisa o modelo de gestão da qualidade, que visa melhorar a gestão dos governos locais no Chile, instrumento promovido pelo nível central através da Subsecretaria de Desenvolvimento Regional e Administrativo (SUBDERE). Para este estudo, a informação primária foi recolhida através de entrevistas e grupos focais com informantes-chave, incluindo acadêmicos, especialistas e funcionários da SUBDERE, bem como funcionários municipais e representantes de associações de municípios. As informações obtidas foram analisadas por meio do software QDA ATLAS.ti, utilizando categorias identificadas tanto no processo de revisão documental quanto na revisão primária das entrevistas e foco. Com base nesses resultados, exploram-se razões da literatura especializada que poderiam explicar a manutenção de uma política, para a qual não haveria evidências de sua contribuição para a melhoria da gestão e dos serviços prestados pelos municípios do Chile, bem como um impacto negativo e percepção contraditória dos beneficiários e dos diferentes atores envolvidos no programa. Por fim, são sugeridas medidas de políticas públicas associadas à implementação de um sistema de gestão abrangente, a partir de um processo colaborativo e intergovernamental, que poderia ser complementado com controles de qualidade que permitam otimizar e modernizar a gestão municipal.

Palavras-chave: gestão local; gestão de qualidade; implementação de políticas públicas.

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Diagnóstico de la gestión municipal en Chile: evidencia desde la percepción de los actores claves

Esta investigación analiza el modelo de gestión de calidad orientado a mejorar la gestión de los gobiernos locales en Chile, instrumento impulsado por el nivel central a través de la Subsecretaría de Desarrollo Regional y Administrativo (SUBDERE). Para este estudio, se realizó un levantamiento de información primaria, a través de entrevistas y grupos focales a informantes claves, considerando a académicos, expertos y funcionarios SUBDERE, así como a funcionarios municipales y representantes de asociaciones de municipalidades. La información obtenida fue analizada a través del software QDA ATLAS.ti, mediante categorías identificadas tanto en el proceso de revisión documental, como en la revisión primaria de las entrevistas y focus. A partir de estos resultados, se exploran razones desde la literatura especializada, que pudieran explicar el mantenimiento de una política, sobre la cual no existiría evidencia de su contribución a la mejora en la gestión y servicios que prestan las municipalidades en Chile, así como una percepción negativa y contradictoria de los beneficiarios y distintos actores involucrados en el programa. Finalmente, se sugieren medidas de políticas públicas asociadas a la implementación de un sistema de gestión integral, desde un proceso colaborativo e intergubernamental que pudiese ser complementado con controles de calidad que permitieran optimizar y modernizar la gestión municipal.

Palabras clave: gestión local; gestión de calidad; implementación de políticas públicas.

1. INTRODUCTION

There is ample debate in the specialised literature regarding the negative effects of decentralisation (i.e., Montecinos, 2005; Prud'Homme, 1995), as well as the factors which could explain the success of the “decentralising promise” (Finot, 2001) of greater economic efficiency, more effective services and policies which are also more appropriate for each territory, better accountability, among other elements where the assumption of “governmental proximity” would contribute to territorial development (Grindle, 2007). Lindert and Verkoren (2010), for instance, underline the big differences between urban centres which have been able to benefit from decentralisation for their territorial development (Bogotá, Monterrey, Montevideo, Buenos Aires, and Curitiba, among others), and peripheral and rural territories, emphasising the institutional and administrative capacities of municipalities as necessary conditions for seizing the benefits of decentralisation. This enables municipalities to better manage health services, education, urban services, social protection systems, investment projects, and an increasing number of services aimed at citizens, all this in a context of a higher demand for local democracy.

In this context, defining models and indicators which properly measure managerial performance and which foster organisational learning (i.e., Argyris & Schön, 1978, as cited in Cienfuegos, 2016; Dixon, 1994; Easterby-Smith et al., 2000; Senge, 1990) aimed at actors interested in results, should be a key piece of the model of municipal management. Although the provision of services is crucial, it represents only a part of municipal management. In order to attain minimum standards, they should be subject to a more thorough evaluation of municipal performance, incorporating elements such as governance, citizen participation, resource management, planning, among others (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2017a).

In the case of Chile, specialised literature has highlighted the fact that the current institutional capacities and structures of local governments in the country do not boost such modernisation (Horst, 2007; Weissbluth et al., 2007). This element becomes stronger in a context of municipal heterogeneity, leading to sizable gaps in management and service provision between the richer municipalities and the poorer ones. These differences are not only because of disparities in terms of funding, but they are also the result of the fragmentation of responsibilities within municipalities and the lack of an effective evaluation of municipal governmental management (OECD, 2017a). Thus, the evaluation of performance and management is weak in Chilean municipalities, unlike what occurs at the central

level, where a formal and progressive evaluation system was established (Marcel, 2006). In the municipal sector, the problem seems to emerge from the lack of managerial skills and of awareness of the importance of performance management within the group of higher management of municipalities.

In this frame, since 2006, a policy has been fostered and maintained in Chile to build a “Quality Management Model”, which, however, has been questioned due to its low impact, as we shall see. In such context, this article has three objectives:

Firstly, considering the possible deficiencies of the municipal quality management model, the study aims to analyse, from a descriptive perspective, the programme “National Diagnosis of Municipal Management Quality”, and to perform a qualitative analysis of the perception of expert municipal actors, technocrats, and policymakers. All this will be done from an intergovernmental and multilevel standpoint (Pressman, 1975), on the basis of the tensions across the actors who participate in the implementation of public policies (i.e., Cunill, 1991; Dente & Subirats, 2014).

Secondly, the study of the municipal quality management model, through the perceptions of key actors, complements previous evidence on the deficits of this policy designed to strengthen municipal management in Chile (i.e., Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe [CEPAL], 2018; Centro Latinoamericano para el Desarrollo Rural [RIMISP], 2016; OECD, 2018; Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile [UC], 2016). Additionally, based on a revision of good management practices reported in the literature, we propose possible key factors for redesigning and properly implementing a system of evaluation of municipal performance which would be effective and legitimised for the Chilean context.

Thirdly, considering the criticism of the quality management model evidenced by our empirical study, the article explores the possible theoretical reasons which could explain the persistence of a solution such as this public policy, advanced by the central level in Chile and aimed at improving the services and global management of municipalities, despite the fact that there is no clear evidence that it contributes to strengthening municipal management, and regarding which there is vast criticism and opposing positions over its design and implementation problems among public actors from the central and subnational level.

Thus, the underlying hypothesis of our study is based on two theoretical arguments. On the one hand, from the study of public policies, the inertia of the municipal quality management model could be explained as the result of a deficit of rationality (Aguilar, 1992), given the null impacts and contributions of a programme which, nonetheless, is still operating under a “top-down” approach in its implementation (Boer & Bressers, 2011; Howlett, 2019).

Moreover, we assume that the existence of opposing positions and interests between bureaucrats at the central level who designed the programme and the officers of subnational governments who received the municipal quality management model can partly explain the deficiencies we detected in the programme and the inability to correct them (Pressman, 1975), leading to the underutilisation of cooperation opportunities for an adequate implementation and potential redesign of the municipal quality management model in Chile. Thus, from the perspective of the central level, municipal officials can only see the local reality, which would justify formulating programmes such as this without their participation. For local bureaucrats, however, officials at the central level are far away from the territorial reality, which leads to design flaws due to their ignoring the heterogeneity across municipalities and the actual capacities for local implementation (Grin & Abrucio, 2017).

The rest of the study has the following structure: we present a synthesis of the policy under study; we then review the academic literature on public policies, limited rationality, and intergovernmental cooperation for the promotion of municipal state capacities, as possible explanatory factors of the difficulties and continuation of a public policy without proven public value. Later, we describe the methodology on which the empirical analysis of this case is based, showing evidence about the limitations of the municipal quality management model according to the perception of key actors. The article ends by presenting the main conclusions and a discussion of possible explanations of the results and limitations reported in this case, using the theoretical review presented previously, in addition to the main implications of our findings for subnational public policies, as well as conditions and mechanisms for improving the evaluation system of municipal management studied.

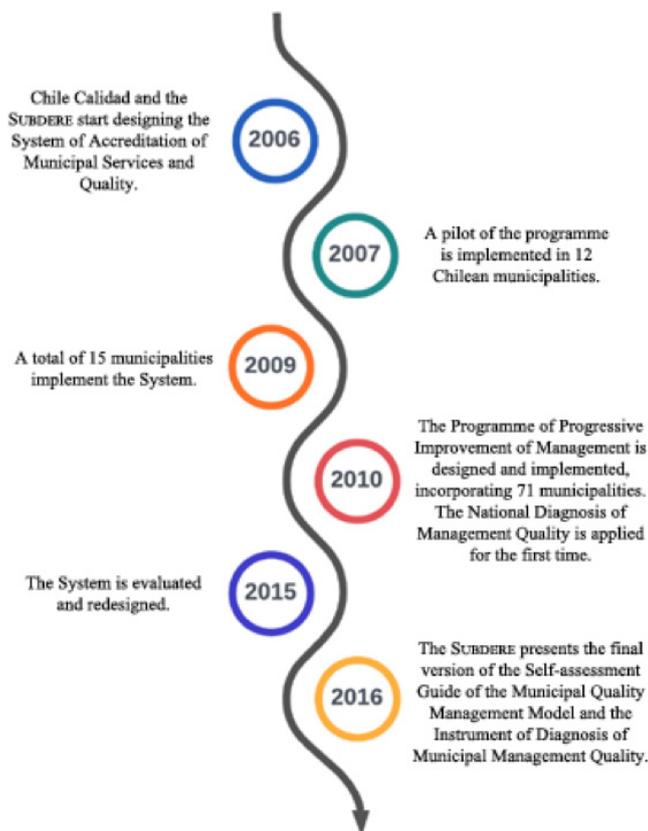
2. QUALITY MANAGEMENT MODEL IN CHILE: EVOLUTION OF A LIMITED POLICY

Since 2006, the Undersecretary of Regional and Administrative Development (SUBDERE) has attempted to install a Quality Management Model in order to improve the management of its services through a self-assessment methodology, basing its system on the Chilean Model of Excellence Management. In this context, starting that year, a pilot began to be implemented in 12 municipalities, aiming to generate a System of Accreditation of Municipal Services and Quality. In light of this programme, and under the System of Strengthening and Measuring the Quality of Municipal Management, in 2010 the instrument was denominated “National Diagnosis of Municipal Management Quality” and was applied to the 345 municipalities of Chile, with the initial objective of “measuring the management levels of municipalities and, on the basis of this, constructing a baseline which would constitute the input for orienting public policy in the realm of strengthening municipal management” (Subsecretaría de Desarrollo Regional y Administrativo [SUBDERE], 2012). This instrument was designed assuming that there was a lack of mechanisms for evaluating management at the municipal level, so it was developed in collaboration with the municipality associations and Chile Calidad¹, generating a reference model to improve management, by means of implementing cycles of continuous improvement, based on the results of self-assessments (RIMISP, 2016). Since then, the programme has weakened due to funding issues, although there have also been attempts to perfect it, as when, in 2015, it was determined that the instrument would be applied annually². Figure 1 shows the chronological evolution of the Quality Management Model championed by the SUBDERE.

¹ The National Centre of Productivity and Quality (Chile Calidad) was founded in 1996 to design and apply the “Chilean Model of Excellence Management”. This institution managed to universalise the model to such an extent that it enabled its adaptation and application to the Chilean context, becoming a guide for organisations in the country (RIMISP, 2016). This agency no longer exists, nor does it execute these projects.

² The annual application of the Diagnosis would then become one of the compliance indicators for allocating resources of the Incentive Fund for Municipal Management (FIGEM).

FIGURE 1 EVOLUTION OF THE MUNICIPAL MANAGEMENT QUALITY MODEL



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

In specific terms, the model is based on the concept of continuous improvement, conceived as a process with successive cycles of improvement of municipal management which encompasses the following central activities (SUBDERE, 2019):

- a. Periodical self-assessment: It makes it possible to measure the management level of municipalities against the Municipal Management Quality Model.
- b. Identification of opportunities for improvement or management gaps in regard to the Model, and prioritisation to address them.
- c. Design and implementation of the Improvement Plan: It helps in closing gaps and improves management levels.

The periodical application of this cycle in municipalities makes it possible to verify the impact of the execution of the Improvement Plan through time, and to identify new opportunities which take management to standards of excellence in the medium and long term (RIMISP, 2016).

The efforts made at a central level in the past decade in order to improve municipal management in the country have had an impact in those municipalities which have managed to install the logic of excellence models, as shown by the analysis of the results of the application of the National Diagnosis of Municipal Management Quality, which reveal a better performance of these municipalities compared with their peers, reaching very similar levels to more developed ones (RIMISP, 2016). In general, it is possible to highlight that there is a direct relation between typology and achievement rate, namely, Type-1 municipalities have a higher achievement rate than Type-5 municipalities³, showing a linear relation, so that the achievement rate goes down as the type number increases.

It should be noted, though, that the National Diagnosis of Municipal Management Quality is not mandatory for municipalities in the country, albeit participation has increased through the years. Moreover, the results of the diagnosis are not connected with the development of plans and programmes within the SUBDERE, which could help reduce the gaps detected by municipalities in the diagnosis (OECD, 2018).

Thus, the model presents several flaws in terms of the insufficient impact of this policy (RIMISP, 2016), as well as in the disconnection between design and management, coverage issues, the lack of evidence, difficulties in implementation, among others. This is consistent with the results of the survey regarding management achievement rates in seven comparable fields: Strategy, Leadership, Budget, Revenue, Material Resources, Processes of Service Support, and Processes of Service Provision, which average an achievement rate of only 46.7% between 2010 and 2019, with the lowest scores being those of the fields of Processes of Service Provision (31.9%), Strategy (35.5%), and Processes of Service Support (41.8%) (SUBDERE, 2019).

This way of measuring municipal performance championed by the central government is based on the Malcolm Baldrige Model (1987)⁴, associated with inputs, processes, products and outcomes, defined by a focus on quality, not acknowledging other models. On the other hand, although several specialised actors have recommended that the SUBDERE raise and formalise the model of public value connected with the Diagnosis (CEPAL, 2018; OECD, 2018; RIMISP, 2016), this has not occurred. This situation is related with a formalisation of actors and responsibilities, key activities, resources, technologies and costs —among other aspects— which make it possible to know, for instance, how data will be analysed, or what public policies or programmes are supposed to receive feedback from the diagnosis and how an impact or contribution (value) to management can be achieved through this instrument (OECD, 2018).

The implementation of innovative practices by municipalities is fundamental for the continuous improvement of their processes and services, dealing in the best possible way with the tensions regarding concerns over efficiency as an organisation, and, additionally, to create a basis of social

³ This typology of the SUBDERE (2005) aims to represent five types of communes in the country according to their size and socio-territorial variables. 1: Big communes, with high and/or medium development; 2: Bigger communes, with medium development; 3: Medium-size urban communes, with medium development; 4: Semi-urban and rural communes, with medium development; 5: Semi-urban and rural communes, with low development.

⁴ The Malcolm Baldrige Model, developed in the United States in 1987, aims to spread good practices and improvement procedures among organisations, both public and private.

legitimacy which gives them a “good governance” (Cienfuegos, 2016; Van Staveren, 2009). Thus, modern municipal management must balance the effective administration of its finances and procedures, without neglecting social sustainability and citizen support. A good local government, then, should not only fulfil its task of improving the functioning of its processes and services, but also build bonds with the community to facilitate transparency and accountability (Boorsma & Haisma, 2005; Mohanlal, 2012; Schouten, 2010).

As mentioned by Berstein and Inostroza (2009), effective municipal modernisation requires a balance between the quest for greater accountability and greater flexibility in management. With the objective of mitigating the risks of arbitrariness, the risk emerges of generating excessive traditional hierarchical/legalist control; nevertheless, greater flexibility without a transparent system which generates the appropriate incentives could lead to abuses which ultimately discredit decentralisation policies and, therefore, generate a “reversion or slowdown” of such policies, withdrawing attributions and funds, creating programmes limited to a deconcentration approach, or increasing costly bureaucratic controls. If real local governments are to be developed, which are both relevant and sustainable, more attributions and more resources are needed, which makes it mandatory to move forward to better accountability (Yilmaz et al., 2008).

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION PRACTICES AND PUBLIC POLICIES: DIVERGENT INTERESTS BETWEEN FORMULATORS AND IMPLEMENTERS

Conflict is a fundamental feature of policy formulation and implementation (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993). Different research approaches have explained why controversies between interested actors remain in regard to the design and implementation of public policies aiming to give public issues an answer. People and groups of people see problems from different perspectives: different frameworks, narratives and forms of knowledge (Roe, 1994; Schneider & Ingram, 2007; Schön & Rein, 1994; Shanahan et al., 2013), and, therefore, they often identify divergent problems. Thus, we would not be able to understand public policy analysis without considering the way in which differences in knowledge and understanding of public problems affect decision-making in the public sphere.

There are two main schools for the design of public policies, with radically contrasting analytical views: rationalism and incrementalism (Aguilar, 1992). The former, which is the dominant paradigm in the literature on decision-making, emerges from Lasswell’s postwar writings, while the later, Lindblom’s proposal, a reaction to rationalism, is, according to the author, the type of analysis most used by policymakers (Tapia, 2016).

As mentioned by Aguilar (1992), rational analysis is characterised by explicitly incorporating the model of rational choice or of rational solution of problems in search of solutions to public problems, whose steps are: determining the objective to be achieved and ordering the preferences, indicating the possible courses of action, the means they entail and their consequences, comparing the actions in terms of technical and economic efficiency, choosing and implementing the efficient or optimal alternative in a programmed manner, evaluating results and reiterative learning in light of the results.

In contrast to the rational analysis scheme there is Lindblom’s classic rebuttal (1959, 1963, 1979). He extends Simon’s limited rationality thesis and Popper’s piecemeal social engineering, asserting that the rational model does not describe the actual behaviour of decision-makers of flesh and blood.

Rather, according to this author, decisions follow the pragmatic rule of “getting out the quagmire”, and the procedure entails two important features: “the first one consists in reducing the universe of policy options to be considered, limiting the comparisons to the set of policies which are similar to the policies which will actually be implemented... and the second one lies in studying only the aspects in which the proposed option and its consequences differ from the status quo” (Aguilar, 1992).

On the other hand, implementation is a relatively new field in public policy analysis. The process after decision-making is a study area which remained unattended until the 1970s (Vaquero, 2007). Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) were the ones who first brought the attention of specialists to this field and strengthened the importance of this study area. Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) say that implementation studies had been an area of analysis scantily recognised because specialists had basically focused on the decision-making process. They believe that, once the decision was made, it would be implemented and reach an outcome similar to that initially purported. However, evidence from a large number of case studies increasingly shows the existence of a gap between the original objectives of policies and their final outcomes (Vaquero, 2007).

According to Olavarría (2017), the implementation of public policies can be seen as the execution of a set of activities aiming to achieve the goals of state interventions. To Dimitrakopoulos and Richardson (2001), this entails “the complex process of putting a policy into practice by a variety of mechanisms and procedures involving a wide and diverse range of actors”. They then add that this is “the stage of the policy process where the underlying theories of policy decisions, the choice of policy instruments and the resources allocated during the formulation process are tested against reality”.

Thus, public policies can be seen as hypotheses about how certain goals, assigned to a state intervention, can be reached if a certain group of activities, derived from a set of knowledge regarded as valid, is put into action. Since the implementation of public policies takes place in inter-organisational contexts where “a wide and diverse range of actors” intervenes, the analysis of implementation delves into the interaction between this “wide and diverse range of actors” and how the “variety of mechanisms and procedures” which determine what citizens or specific groups receive from state interventions is established within it. Then, the question that naturally emerges is: What forces or factors boost and/or lead this process (Olavarría, 2017).

Top-down and bottom-up approaches are the most common classifications regarding implementation found in the literature (Vaquero, 2007). Even though the analytical frameworks were developed in the 1970s and 80s, they remain relevant for current research and, therefore, can be regarded as classical sources. The debate between top-down and bottom-up approaches has had clear significance in the way in which implementation has to be analysed and, consequently, in identifying the forces or factors which foster the process. Elmore (1979-1980) argues that in the first approach – or forward mapping, as he calls it – implementation begins at the apex, with clear definitions of the policymakers’ purposes, and then continues through a series of increasingly specific steps which define what is expected at each level of the implementation. In the opposite approach – denominated backward mapping by Elmore – analysis begins at the lowest level and goes backward through the organisational structure in order to determine whether or not the agent in charge of implementation has the capacities and skills needed to reach the goals defined by the public policy (Olavarría, 2017).

On the other hand, and aiming to reach a better understanding of the process of implementation, the specialised literature has proposed a combination of the best of both traditions, thus establishing a hybrid approach (Dowding, 1995, 2001; Marsh & Smith, 2000, 2001; Richardson & Jordan, 1979; Sabatier & Jenkins, 1994). Within these hybrid perspectives, new theoretical approaches emerge, such as the “policy networks” approach, as an explanatory factor of public decisions and the dynamics of implementation (Dente & Subirats, 2014).

Beyond the controversies between the top-down and the bottom-up approaches, research on public policy implementation has largely remained committed to studying processes (Boer & Bressers, 2011; Howlett, 2019) and behaviours (for instance, Winter, 2012), rather than decisions.

More recently, new efforts are being made to try and turn research on implementation “from the description of events of policy formulation” into the “description of factors and mechanisms underlying such processes”, through an analysis of the actors involved and their interests within implementation processes (Howlett, 2019). This, however, would entail a dichotomy between researching implementation as a set of activities to reach a first decision, which is always important, and, alternatively, as a series of interactions between rather independent actors with no clear expected outcomes (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973).

In particular, bureaucratic adaptation and discretion alludes to the amount of discretion exercised by the “bureaucratic actors” who are in contact with the users who receive the outcomes of public policy (Hasenfeld & Brock, 1991). This propelling force focuses on the capacity of officials at the lower organisational level to adopt the mandate of the public policy received by the organisation in charge of implementation and to fulfil it.

Thus, the behaviour of public officers appears as a relevant element in the implementation process. According to Oszlak (2006), the behaviour of public officers is not completely unexpected or random; it is highly influenced by their personal characteristics (age, experience, education level), by their individual goals and their degree of compatibility with the institutional objectives, by the material resources available, by the nature of the norms and the type of external demands to which they must respond, by the opportunities of interaction and the type of relations they develop with their peers, superiors and subordinates, or by the evaluation and control procedures facing them.

In the subnational context, specifically, Pressman (1975) notes how, from the perspective of officials at the central level, municipal managers are only interested in the local reality, which justifies their exclusion from the formulation of programmes. Thus, municipal bureaucrats would like more resources from the central level, but not programmes which are imposed from above, nor the restrictions or conditions established to achieve them. From the perspective of municipalities, since officers at the central level are far from the local reality, there are flaws in the design of policies and programmes, as decision-makers at the central level ignore the territorial heterogeneities (Derthick, 1972). Likewise, officers at the central level are naïve, impractical and unrealistic, as well as too optimistic about the reach of the actions and programmes they champion, inasmuch as they ignore the local capacities needed for an adequate implementation. Following their interests, public actors at the central level would then try and allocate resources and information and seize control so that public programmes and solutions are carried out in accordance with their own premises and preestablished rules. On the other hand, local bureaucrats try to attract funds, to procure their uninterrupted inflow, and to look after their will of autonomy, over the objectives promoted at the central level (Pressman, 1975, as cited

in Grin & Abrucio, 2017). This conflictive relation between public servants at the central level and municipal officials leads them to a divergence regarding public policies of subnational reach, their design, objectives and implementation mechanisms.

In a study which analyses the National Programme to Support the Administrative and Fiscal Management of Brazilian Municipalities (PNAFM), whose aim is to modernise municipal management of subnational governments in Brazil, Grin and Abrucio (2017) discuss the problems which could emerge during the implementation of public programmes promoted from the central level, showing contrasting views between federal actors (in this case) and municipal officials regarding a programme which, on top of that, has implementation flaws and scant results.

Grin and Abrucio (2017) consider that the flaws during the implementation of the Brazilian programme to modernise municipal management could be characterised on the basis of two syndromes which tend to occur due to the behaviour and interests of the actors involved. On the one hand, the “wilting violet” syndrome (Downs, 1967, as cited in Grin & Abrucio, 2017), which takes place when local agents have little incentive to approach the central government and try to influence the redesign of programmes executed by them or to reduce their reach or objectives, avoiding a critical outlook of their functioning and contribution, all this on the basis of a cost-benefit analysis, considering the levels of dependence to the central level they would have. Thus, the advantages of virtuous interdependence are left in the background and are replaced by a more defensive behaviour.

On the other hand, there is what the authors call the “superman” syndrome, characterised by a centralised conception of programmes, ignoring local specificities by defining uniform, broad and “glamorous” goals based on justifications which are only theoretically projected, which takes them to an “inflation of high objectives” in an ambitious policy design with severe implementation flaws (Grin & Abrucio, 2017).

Both syndromes have a clear effect: the difficulty to create more collaborative intergovernmental relationships, considering that, in this dynamic, the risks are calculated by governmental actors in their interaction during the implementation of the programme. In the case of the “wilting violet”, local officials act more conservatively, since they “have an interest in preserving the status quo, as they wish to sustain the elements that put them in office when they make decisions” (Downs, 1967, p. 219, as cited in Grin & Abrucio, 2017). In the case of the “superman”, it is an issue of uniform rules, ambitious goals and inappropriate designs leading to the inefficiency of programmes and hindering their implementation (Downs, 1957). Thus, “structural constraints” (Downs, 1967) emerge which limit the capacity of both levels of government to achieve their objectives in a collaborative manner.

Within the argumentative analysis of public policy there has been little research on the role of collaborative decision-making. With all, when examining the relevance of multilevel governance analysis, the specialised literature highlights that “the outcome of any large-scale reform, be it good or bad, depends on the decisions made at various levels of administration and the context in which these decisions are carried out” (Frederickson et al., 2012). Hence the importance of understanding the creating, adoption and implementation of public policies at the institutional level, as well as understanding the incentives and administrative discretion in preserving certain solutions. As Torenvlied and Akkerman (2004, p. 39) point out, within multilevel governance systems, “collective decisions at one level may entail different substantive issue dimensions, may contain different alternatives, and may have different outcomes than collective decisions at another level”.

4. METHOD

For this study, we gathered primary information between December 2020 and February 2021, with the participation of 40 people through semi-structured interviews (template in the annex) taking place both individually and collectively. Due to the health context of COVID-19, the interviews were carried out online, thus securing the participation of actors from different regions and municipalities in the country.

Ten people took part in the interviews and focus groups with academics, experts and SUBDERE officials, while 30 people, both from associations and municipalities, participated in the collection of information from municipalities.

BOX 1 KEY INFORMANTS

Key informants	No. of participants	Categories
SUBDERE experts	10	Academic, officials and experts
Municipal actors	30	Associations (8 participants) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Association of Municipalities from the Aysen Region • Interregional Association of Municipalities • Association of Municipalities of Chile • Association of Municipalities from the Itata Valleys, Ñuble Region • Chilean Association of Municipalities Municipalities (22 participants) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Type 1: Temuco, Concepción, and Villa Alemana • Type 2: Lota and Osorno • Type 3: Angol, Padre las Casas, Ovalle • Type 4: Fresia, Romeral, and Vichuquén • Type 5: Nueva Imperial, Rauco, Malloa, and Pumanque

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The collected information was analysed using the software QDA ATLAS.ti, with two major components at the centre. First, a deductive process based on categories identified in the process of reviewing the literature and a primary revision of the interviews and focus groups. Then, an inductive one, by generating emerging codes in the process of analysing the transcriptions. 35 codes resulted from this process, which were then grouped into four families synthesising relations of problems identified by the actors, both in the design and the implementation of the policy:

- Issues with the orientation of the policy (net 1 in the annex): it alludes to strategic discontinuity problems and design inconsistencies.
- Low impact of objectives: linked with the disconnection between the policy and its aims (net 2 in the annex).
- Issues with the premises of the model: regarding the respondents’ disagreement with some relevant aspects of the design and its implementation (net 3 in the annex).
- Technical design: linked with the understanding of the diagnosis, length and formulation of questions (net 4 in the annex).

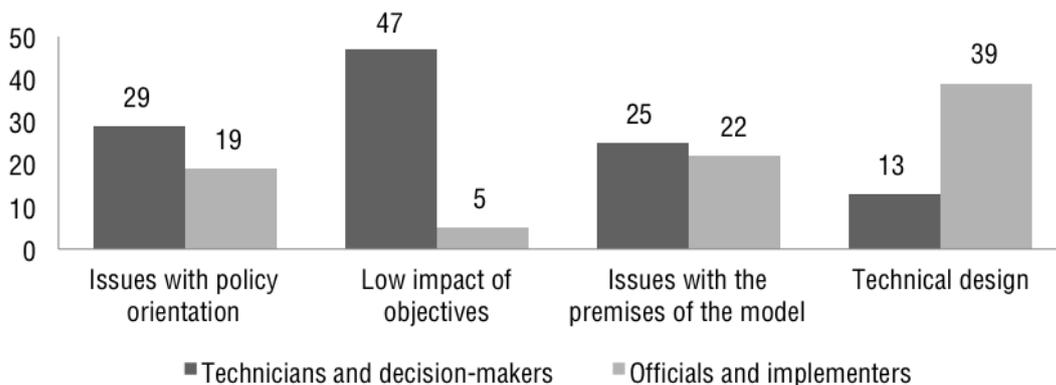
Additionally, ATLAS.ti enabled us to perform a quantitative analysis of discursive structures, which complements our qualitative examination, allowing us to observe the density and repetition of some concepts and findings. These results were divided by type of actor: on the one hand, technicians and decision-makers, including advisors, academics, consultants, directors and professionals of the SUBDERE; on the other, municipal officials in charge of implementing the diagnosis, and municipal associations. This distinction between groups of actors involved in different stages of public policy (design and implementation) makes it possible to more clearly observe the discursive emphases and specific concerns which, to a great extent, are linked with the policy phase in which they are involved.

5. RESULTS

As the following graph shows, code saturation among technicians-designers and officials-implementers is inversely proportional in those topics of most and least concern. In the case of the former, the most mentioned code was the low impact in achieving policy objectives, whereas issues with the technical design was the least frequent. Conversely, in the case of officials-implementers, the highest frequency lied precisely in technical design, while the low impact in achieving the objectives was of less concern.

In regard to the other two code families – issues with policy orientation and the premises of the model –, they had a similar amount of mentions among technicians-designers and officials-implementers.

GRAPH 1 CODE RESULTS FOR KEY INFORMANTS



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

On the other hand, after subjecting the set of interviews to a wordcount of concepts associated with the codes, it can be seen that 23 words were repeated 403 times. As seen in the following word cloud, the most repeated concept was SUBDERE with 23.5%, followed by resources with 15.3%, improvement plans with 8.9%, support with 6.7%, and self-assessment with 6.4%. As we shall see below, this is linked with the main problems detected by the respondents as a whole. This, in turn, reflects the relatively greater responsibility actors attribute to the central level in the implementation of the policy and the need to have resources which can be transferred at the subnational level, as a means to help reduce the management gaps detected in the diagnosis.

FIGURE 2 WORD CLOUD



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

As regards the qualitative elements, our main findings for each family are presented below.

5.1 Orientation of the policy

One of the problems identified is the lack of stability of the policy, probably due to government changes⁵. Although the model, as a tool for self-diagnosing municipal management based on quality, has not changed substantially, changing policy directives have affected the coherence of its design. In this context, the two codes with most saturation within this family were “discontinuity of the policy” and “lack of strategic vision”.

As a summary, after the experience of the “Programme for Municipal Institutional Strengthening” in the 1990s, which was funded through a loan of the World Bank, 2006 saw the creation of the Department for Strengthening Municipal Management within the SUBDERE. Afterwards, work

⁵ Between 2010 and 2022, Chile has had five governments from three different political coalitions: Nueva Mayoría (New Majority), Chile Vamos (Let’s Go Chile), and Frente Amplio (Broad Front).

began with the Chilean Association of Municipalities with support from Chile Calidad, aiming to create a quality management model, which proposed a three-level continuous improvement model with a pilot group including 35 municipalities, centred in a diagnosis process. However, in 2010, in a context of government change, an expansion was proposed toward a universal diagnosis which was denominated “census of municipal quality”, creating a self-assessed survey which was applied to all municipalities in Chile, although in a discontinuous manner. Later, in light of implementation issues due to differences across municipalities (size, resources, personnel), the model was divided into, on the one hand, “Progressive Improvement of Quality”, a limited version of global management, and, on the other, a more complex model of “Quality Management”. Between 2015 and 2018, however, the diagnosis was modified once more due to the governmental need to create a policy of Guaranteed Municipal Services, which meant adding the evaluation of 7 and then 14 services to the diagnosis.

This yielded a wide instrument which could be applied to all the municipalities, aimed at a diagnosis of global management, but also of municipal services. All this, nevertheless, without a clear approach to quality management and, as our findings reveal, with no connection to a comprehensive policy of quality improvement.

In the opinion of one of the respondents, this is one of the main problems of the policy:

The diagnosis must define its main purpose: either improving management processes and results, or improving municipal services; after choosing one of these two, the instrument should be modified with questions which are both pertinent and oriented toward the desired objective.

Another responder emphasises the fluctuation of the orientations, the short-term character of decisions, and the resulting inconsistency.

When the world of policy has a more strategic orientation, it makes it possible to improve the instrument with more capacity and political support. This is currently fluctuating, sometimes becoming only a short-term effort [...] The problem with the instrument emerged because of the policy of the previous government, which was due to the will to create guaranteed municipal services, and this will is the origin of this survey, which has nothing to do with the model [...] hence it was left with an instrument which they have had to constantly adapt.

5.2 Low impact of the objectives

As seen in the frequency table, this is the family with most codes in the subgroups of experts and technicians, and lower presence in the field of municipal officials and implementers. This is because in the subgroup of municipal actors the main issue was more concerned with the technical understanding of the instrument in its application, rather than with the attainment of the policy objectives (improving management), hence their being included in point four. As already mentioned, this could be characterised on the basis of the discussion over dissonance between the central level (the SUBDERE, in this case) and the institutions implementing centrally defined programmes, as Pressman (1975) says, an issue which would directly impact the correct implementation of initiatives such as the Chilean municipal quality management model.

As regard the objectives, the respondents, mainly technicians, highlight two important deficiencies of the model: the financial problems of the program and, as result of this, the lack of support from the SUBDERE to the municipalities in elaborating improvement plans. In turn, the weakness or absence of improvement plans raises, among the respondents, different questions over the true usefulness of the system and its measurements. Thus, as highlighted by some respondents, the instrument ends up becoming a bureaucratic mechanism, an end on itself with no connection with a strategic system of management improvement.

In the same line, the results of the diagnosis are, in the opinion of some respondents, linked with a deficit in financial resources and professional capacities. However, that very lack of human and material resources precludes many municipalities from progressing in management improvement, which in many cases widens the gaps. Thus, one of the respondents says that “there are very few municipalities which make quality improvement plans; very little is invested in this, they do it only when they get funds from the SUBDERE. So, how do we go from the diagnosis to the plan?”. The respondent then adds some additional difficulties:

Municipalities have become much more complex in terms of providing services. These have increased and been adapted to the territorial features of each municipality. These are the so-called emergent services. Therefore, the SUBDERE’s initial idea to standardise basic services became increasingly difficult to implement, and there were no resources to do so (information became increasingly detailed and complex, and therefore more difficult to analyse).

Why do we want the diagnosis if we are not generating the strategy which would enable this diagnosis to effectively turn into concrete actions for improving management? [...] How do we go from the diagnosis to the plan, that is the issue; diagnoses are not an end on themselves, they are a means to do stuff, but a diagnosis is useless if we do not make plans.

Lastly, another respondent adds:

It is difficult to improve an instrument when there is a systemic and structural problem behind it [...] because, even if we included a complementary paradigm, if the SUBDERE does not prioritise this politically, if it does not have the resources, the results would be the same.

[...] In this government, a self-assessment was made once in 74 municipalities [...] the self-assessments were handed out, we generated improvement plans to partly fund that ourselves, and do you know how much we managed to fund? [...] zero, because of a political decision, zero; we had 5,000 million in 250 projects, and the political decision was not to fund any of them.

5.3 Issues with the premises of the model

This code family had a similar distribution in both subgroups, which were clustered around three broad issues. Firstly, a group of actors had issues with the possibility of standardising, alluding to municipal diversity both in terms of financial resources and personnel, as well as territorial reality.

This was a particularly dense code in the case of municipal officials, which can be seen in the following extracts from several interviews:

Typologies are not sufficiently representative of the heterogeneity [...] This cannot be standardisable, you cannot talk about a guaranteed minimum service, unless it is very specifically so that you arrive at a very detailed typology.

It is striking that the instrument is the same for the 345 communes of the country, considering they are completely different from one another, and the point of reference is Santiago.

The survey is very general and tries to include all the municipalities in a single category. This instrument does not make it possible to see the big differences between municipalities. The instrument does not seem to be very applicable to communes with less resources; it is sad to keep checking “we do not have”, “we do not have”, “there are no resources”, “it is not done”, etc., and as questions tend to be repeated, the result is always the same; due to the low capacity in terms of economic and human resources, they do not have the capacity to develop improvement plans.

A second group of respondents emphasised structural factors of territorial diversity, mentioning economic and financial inequalities. Thus, given the territorial inequalities in the per capita budget of each municipality, it would not be possible to create standardisation and measuring systems due to the structural gaps. Some respondents point out that, in order to homologue the quality of municipal services or management, one has to begin by homologising the budgets; otherwise, the improvement policy does not address the problem that really structures the gaps between municipalities.

There are municipalities whose tax base is virtually nil [...] On the other hand, 85% of the revenues of the municipal system are generated by 11 municipalities. Given this, it is useless to demand management from municipalities lacking the financial capacity to achieve it [...] if a municipality is small, poor, isolated, rural, and has worse management than an urban municipality from a big city, then what do we do? Let us make the survey the following year... if on the face of this you do not undertake concrete actions, which really are structural, you need a different redistribution of resources and wealth, a different management model.

Lastly, it is possible to identify criticisms to self-assessment as the exclusive criterion for evaluating the quality management model, a code which also showed differences between actors. In the case of technicians and experts, there is a questioning of self-assessment as a principle, as reflected in the following extracts:

The diagnosis tool is based on ‘public faith’. No evidence is required and there is no validation process either, and in most cases it is not consistent with reality. There is roughly a 20% difference between reality and what municipalities assert.

It is not possible to sustain a whole improvement mechanism of municipal management on the basis of a self-assessment. The self-assessment needs to include, firstly, a meaning for the one

performing it, because it gives her relevant information for improvement, and secondly, that there be an external validator that enables municipalities to adjust their measuring standards, that the self-assessment include a minimum level of dialogue, of municipal participation, of collaboration, that enable the result to really reflect a global view regarding how municipal management is working.

In the case of municipal officials, emphasis lied in the need to externalise and to have support and permanent monitoring from the central government. In this line, as one respondent says, “the work to support the application of the instrument and the diagnosis should be externalised, as well as the monitoring and the elaboration of improvement plans”.

5.4 Technical design

Lastly, a set of codes stands out in this family which allude to elements of the implementation of the policy such as communication, training and understanding of the instrument. This area also shows big differences between types of actors, as it is a less critical area for technicians and experts, whose argument rather points to visibility and promotion flaws which preclude the opportunity to better connect and couple the relevance of the diagnosis and its potential utility for municipal management. In many cases the respondents are under the impression that the instrument ends up being foreign to municipal reality, becoming yet another checklist within the to-do list of municipalities.

It is not that the instrument has no utility (as is thought), it is just that it has not been visualised as it should, there has been no campaign or communication strategy that makes it possible to position the diagnosis tool as a useful tool, despite the fact that most municipalities apply it.

On the other hand, problems associated with training were also highlighted. As one of the technicians interviewed points out, “there is a deficit in training (the criterion with the worst evaluation) since 2010 and there is nothing and no one who can change it for the time being”. In the case of municipal officials and implementers – and to a lesser extent for technicians – it is the most saturated code, and where the main problems they identify are located, which is in turn linked to the understanding of questions, concepts, length and technical design of the instrument.

First, respondents pointed out that the multiple choices of the instrument are too dichotomous and do not reflect the complexity of municipal work.

The scale of the instrument (to not find yourself anywhere in the scale, or to find yourself in the middle, where small progress cannot be reflected in the instrument) [...] It is easier for assessing the financial area, but when you are evaluating processes, administrative areas, documental management, sometimes the final document that is needed is not clear, that is, there is a lack of conceptual support to guide you. In the evidence stage it becomes more difficult.

Secondly, some respondents highlighted the “ambiguous” and “confusing” character of the questions, and that the current glossaries tend to generate even more confusion. This, together with the inclusion of such aspects as gender and legal approaches, widens the problem, as it has not been

accompanied by adequate training. As one respondent points out, “there are many concepts that are not clear, such as the gender and legal approach; a one-hour training session via Zoom does not make it possible to know the real dimension of the concepts”.

More support is needed from the SUBDERE in teaching the application of the instrument (ultimately, it is up to interpretation), how to apply the survey, and how to interpret the concepts included in the diagnosis, for instance, the legal and gender approach, etc. [...] the most complex thing was to add topics without the preparation or knowledge.

Lastly, some municipal actors pointed out that the lack of understanding, together with the absence of improvement strategies, in a context of self-assessing processes, could be incubating resistance among the implementers of the programme, therefore undermining its implementation.

In order to answer the diagnosis, some municipalities need to accommodate their responses with no certainty as to whether they are applying the instrument in the proper manner [...] On the other hand, it may be the case that, since the instrument is answered by the municipal officials themselves, they develop certain resistance as they feel that this could reveal that they are doing a bad job.

The perceptions of key informants reported here could be consistent with what Agranoff and McGuire (2004 as cited in Grin & Abrucio, 2017) propose in regard to the lack of vision over the required capacities and the lack of technical support as factors influencing the lack of adherence among municipal officials who must implement the programme. On the other hand, and in line with what Pressman (1975) says, designers of this policy seem to have been “naïve” in regard to the conditions and possibilities of local governments, as well as unpragmatic and, therefore, unrealistic over the reach of this policy, ignoring the necessary local capacities for its implementation.

Thus, the difficulties evidenced throughout implementation could reflect the so-called “superman syndrome” discussed in the literature (Derthick, 1972, as cited in Grin & Abrucio, 2017), characterised by a centralised conception of local programmes, defining uniform, broad and “glamorous” objectives to be achieved through “daring” mechanisms, but which only contain theoretical projections, far from municipal reality. All this comes from a “top-down” approach to implementation (Dente & Subirats, 2014), which only considers the perspective of “national leaders” when defining priorities.

Likewise, the position of local implementers observed here could be in line with the “wilting violet syndrome” (Downs, 1967), as there is little incentive for these officials to seek technical support from the central level or to propose reforms to the model. After performing a cost-benefit analysis, the advantages of greater cooperation appear as secondary to them, leading to a rather defensive behaviour among these local actors, considering the levels of financial dependence of Chilean municipalities on the central level (Grin & Abrucio, 2017).

Our empirical evidence thus suggests that the existence of opposing positions and interests between those designing policies and those implementing them (Grin & Abrucio, 2017) is an obstacle to the creation of more cooperative intergovernmental relations and, therefore, to the possibility of adjusting the policy design in a participatory manner.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

As Berstein & Inostroza (2009) mention, proposing a higher degree of modernisation of Chilean municipalities is a commonplace. The biggest challenge is not only to identify approaches and methods which are “technically adequate”, but to achieve an effective implementation in local governments.

Since 2006, the SUBDERE has been promoting a system to identify gaps and to develop Municipal Strengthening Plans, so as to foster a culture of continuous improvement among work teams in municipalities. The objective of this model was to know the state of municipal management and to establish objective elements to direct the improvement process through plans, projects, programmes and investment, in order to provide better services to the communes.

One of the strengths of the National Diagnosis of Municipal Management Quality is its annual frequency, as well the fact that it is a panel and longitudinal measurement (Hox & Jong-Gievel, 1990). This type of instruments allows for evaluations based on time series, both at the individual level for each municipality, so as to identify outliers (“alerts”), and at the aggregate level, to identify behavioural patterns (RIMISP, 2016). Whatever the case, in order to achieve this, it is necessary to define splicing methods so that the measurements of each diagnosis are comparable to the others (Yilmaz et al., 2008).

Without mechanisms to verify the informed responses, it is impossible to attain certainty over the information reported by municipalities, thus preventing the use of the diagnoses to announce management and public policy decisions (Staes & Thijs, 2006). Thus, in the medium-term, a fundamental challenge is to design and implement information systems that enable validation processes (at least documental validation) over the responses provided by municipalities (OECD, 2017b). As we have pointed out, the current diagnosis process does not include actions to collect verification means that make it possible to validate, for instance, whether certain management instrument which has been informed actually exists, and whether it meets the conditions.

The perceptions of selected key informants also evidence the need to design an aggregation model of/to public value (Moore, 2017). Considering the programme objective, a series of aspects need to be formalised, such as actors and responsibilities, key activities, resources and technologies, and costs, which would make it possible to know, for instance, how the data will be analysed, or which public policies or programmes are to be informed from the diagnosis and how can they be targeted and/or reoriented (Martins et al., 2019). This could include, for example, training programmes in management areas where low maturity is observed, conducting strengthening programmes to formalise municipal service provision processes by promoting broad management models among municipalities that are also specific to each context.

In this sense, the different perceptions identified in our study of the contributions and problems of the municipal management model, especially from the positions adopted by the SUBDERE public officials (who champion the policy) and by the municipal actors (who implement it), show how the tensions between contrasting points of view over a public initiative can generate collaboration problems (Grin & Abrucio, 2017), in the face of a potential redesign of that policy, which would more decidedly contribute to strengthening municipal management in Chile.

As our empirical evidence shows, differences between policy designers and implementers are inversely proportional in terms of the topics of most and least concern. In the case of the former, the most mentioned code was the low impact in achieving the policy objectives, whereas issues with

the technical design were the least frequent one. Conversely, in the case of implementers, technical design was the most frequent code, while the low impact in the policy objectives was less concerning.

Likewise, the perceptions of municipal actors collected in this work reflect the difficulties of implementing a standardised tool which considers neither the structural factors of territorial diversity nor the economic and financial inequalities across municipalities in Chile. Thus, municipal actors believe that the instrument ends up being foreign to the municipal reality, becoming just another rutinary process within the to-do list.

Based on our literature review, it is reasonable to consider the “superman” syndrome defined by Derthick (1972), and observed by Grin and Abrucio (2017) during the implementation of the Brazilian programme for modernising municipal management, as a variable which could explain the difficulties in the implementation of the Chilean municipal management model. In the case of the Quality Management Model studied here, there seems to be a centralised conception of municipal management, ignoring the local specificities when defining broad and “glamorous” goals, but which contain only theoretically projected justifications, leading to an “inflation of high objectives” in an ambitious policy design, without enough recourses for its implementation and severe implementation flaws (Grin & Abrucio, 2017).

The contradictory coexistence of the “superman” and “wilting violet” syndromes reduces cooperation opportunities between the central level and the municipalities which could lead to replacing this policy with a tool which adds value to municipal management. As in the case reported by Grin and Abrucio (2017), it is probable that in the Chilean case most municipalities opt for a rather defensive behaviour, with local agents facing little incentive to try and influence the redesign of the programmes they implement, avoiding a critical outlook of their functioning and contribution, all this based on a cost-benefit analysis, considering the dependence levels they would have on the central level.

On the other hand, the self-complacent and optimistic view of central-level designers generates an unvirtuous combination of “inflation of high objectives” (Derthick, 1972), which could largely explain the implementation flaws we noted, and the shy results of the public policy for improving municipal management we analysed.

Despite the fact that the weaknesses of the policy reported by the key informants have also been noted previously by international organizations and experts (i.e., CEPAL, 2018; OECD, 2018; RIMISP, 2016; UC, 2016), the programme keeps being implemented by the central level with no significant changes in its design. Based on our review of public policy theory, we observed, in this case, a decision-making process characterised by limited rationality (Lindblom, 1959, 1963, 1979), as it considers neither the evidence and recommendations of the specialised literature nor the perception of the beneficiaries themselves, preserving an incremental dynamic which does not consider the limitations detected, as well as the null impacts and contributions it yielded.

One reason that could explain the behavioural inertia of the policy under study lies in the structural conditions of the Chilean case and its institutional framework for evaluating public programmes and policies. In Chile, the practice of evaluating public interventions has been propelled by an organ of the central government and associated with the budget cycle of the public sector (Olavarría, 2012). The evidence, however, shows that sectorial executive authorities and programme administrators resort to their own information for making decisions regarding the programmes and their management, and that fulfilling the process is seen as a mere formality by them. Thus, the “usability” of information

remains circumscribed to the actions that the Budget Directorate of the Chilean Ministry of Finance can undertake, which not always influence the continuity, redesign or decisions regarding the outcome of the programmes (Olavarría & Figueroa, 2010). In this sense, and in light of the international experience, creating an autonomous agency that evaluates the interventions throughout the public policy cycle (Aguilar, 1992) appears to be an initiative which would promote a model of rational choice or of rational solution of public problems such as developing good practices in the realm of municipal management, based on evaluating results and reiterative learning depending on the results, thus breaking with the incrementalist inertia, which enables the preservation of a programme that seemingly does not add public value (Aguilar & Bustelo, 2010).

The qualitative research design chosen in this study, besides of multiple cases (Yin, 2014), has made it possible to attain an initial understanding of an organisational phenomenon which is complex and scarce for the Chilean context, such as the implementation of public policies, from a variety of perspectives and sources, taking advantage of our unusual access to a phenomenon which is not easily observable from the outside (Ozcan et al., 2017). It would seem appropriate for future research, however, to consider new mechanisms for collecting data, complementing the information obtained from interviews with key actors and the analysis of secondary information, which we carried out here, with a quantitative analysis entailing a comprehensive assessment of municipal management. This could be address through parametric stochastic frontier models (Battese & Coelli, 1993, 1995) with longitudinal or panel municipal data, identifying, for instance, the effects and correlations of the Incentive to Municipal Management Fund with the results of the municipal diagnosis, which would provide us with additional evidence of the public policy under study. On the other hand, expanding our sample of multiple cases could be useful in the future, leading to a more robust and generalisable theory (Miles et al., 2013).

Lastly, we have achieved our objectives for this research. First, we have analysed the Chilean municipal quality management model and its programme “National Diagnosis of Municipal Management Quality” on the basis of a qualitative analysis of the perception of municipal actors, experts, technocrats, and implementers of public policies. Secondly, we have presented new evidence which complements previous studies on the flaws of this public policy (i.e., CEPAL, 2018; OECD, 2018; RIMISP, 2016; UC, 2016), proposing possible key factors for its redesign and proper implementation. Thirdly, this article explored possible theoretical reasons for the contradictory positions of public actors at the central and subnational levels over the design and implementation issues of the programme detected in our empirical analysis, as well as regarding the preservation of a solution over whose contribution there is wide criticism and scarce evidence.

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Ignacio Cienfuegos: Conceptualization (Lead); Data curation (Equal); Investigation (Lead); Methodology (Lead); Project administration (Lead); Supervision (Lead); Validation (Lead); Writing - original draft (Lead); Writing - review & editing (Lead).

Francesco Penaglia: Conceptualization (Lead); Data curation (Equal); Investigation (Equal); Methodology (Equal); Project administration (Supporting); Supervision (Equal); Validation (Lead); Writing - original draft (Lead); Writing - review & editing (Lead).

Janel León: Project administration (Supporting); Supervision (Supporting); Validation (Supporting); Visualization (Lead); Writing - original draft (Supporting); Writing - review & editing (Equal).

DATA AVAILABILITY

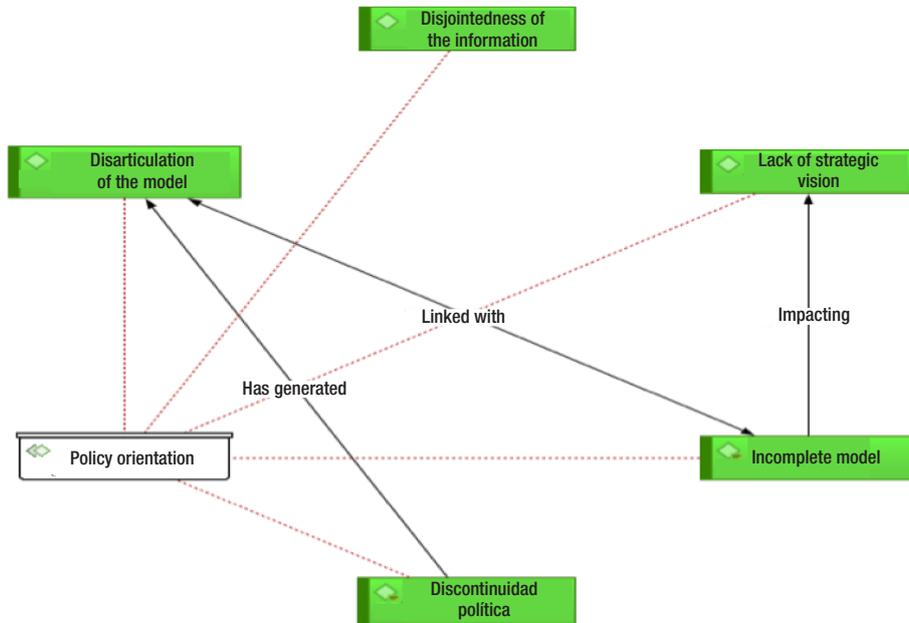
The entire data set supporting the results of this study is available upon request to the contact author Ignacio Cienfuegos (icienfuego@uahurtado.cl). The data set is not publicly available due to containing information that compromises the privacy of research participants.

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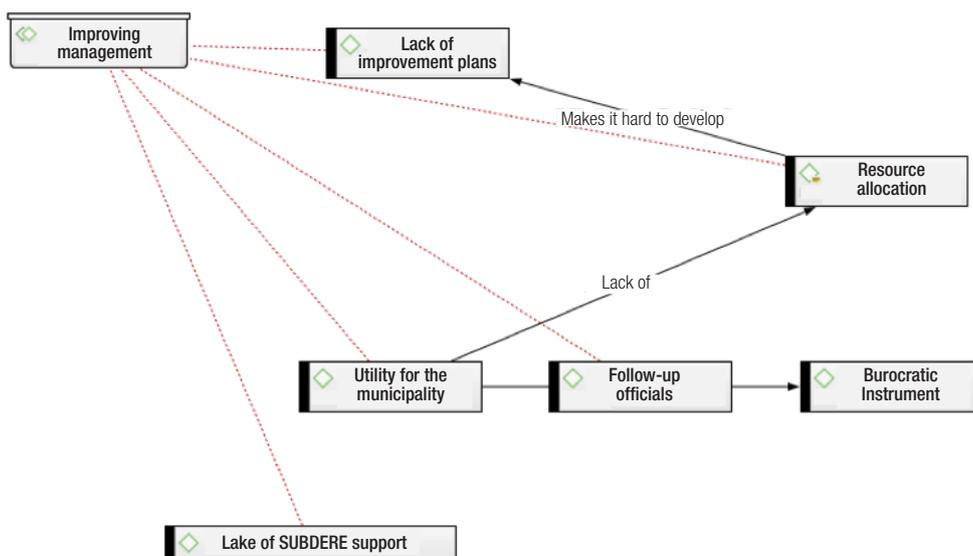
ANNEX

NET 1 ISSUES WITH THE ORIENTATION OF THE POLICY



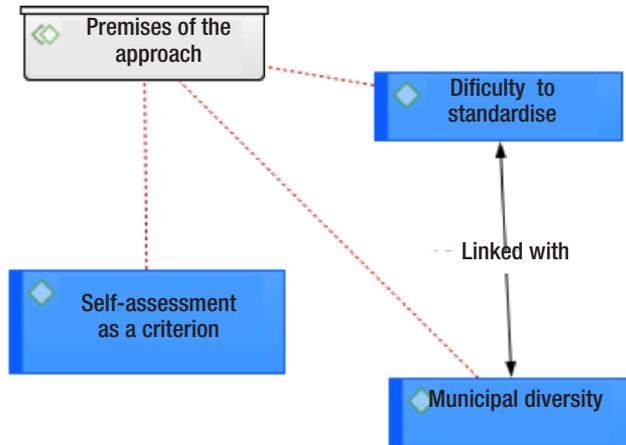
Source: Elaborated by the authors.

NET 2 LOW IMPACT OF OBJECTIVES



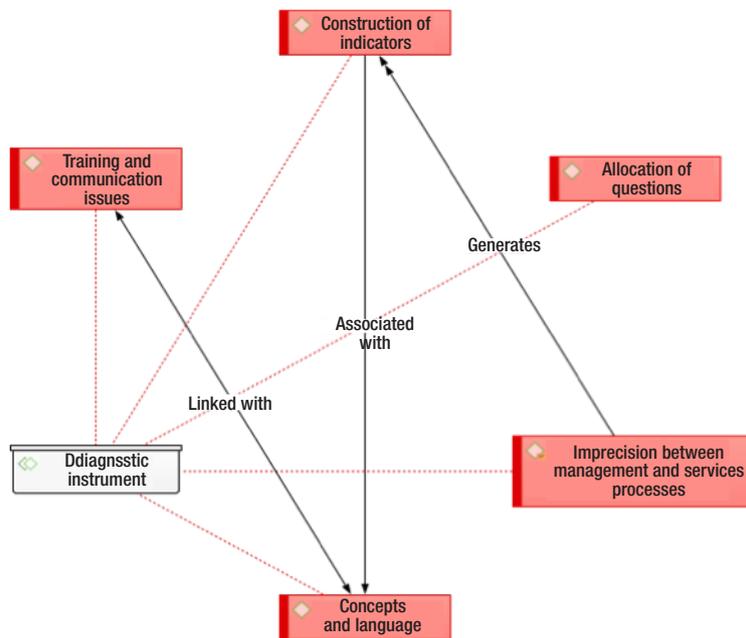
Source: Elaborated by the authors.

NET 3 ISSUES WITH THE PREMISES OF THE MODEL



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

NET 4 TECHNICAL DESIGN



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

SEMI-STRUCTURED TEMPLATE

Focus group and interviews with experts and SUBDERE officials

- What have been the premises of the municipal quality and management model?
- What is the history of its creation and changes?
- What is the reason behind certain features of the model such as self-assessment, the certification model, among others?
- Why was the evaluation of municipal services included in the comprehensive management model?
- How has the implementation process of the policy taken place?
- How have government changes and political criteria affected the model?
- What are the main weaknesses of the model?
- How are the results of the instrument connected with other initiatives and policies stemming from the SUBDERE?
- How is the relationship between the SUBDERE and the municipalities and actors involved?

Focus group and interviews with municipal actors

- How has the history of the implementation of the model in your municipality been?
- What is the annual cycle of answering the survey (who fills it; is there someone in charge; how is it promoted; how are the results obtained)?
- What is your assessment of the instrument? What utility does it have for the municipality?
- What do you do with the results? Are there improvement plans?
- Is the approach comprehensible? What is your assessment of its areas, length and criteria? How would you improve it?
- Are there training and working processes with the SUBDERE?
- What is your opinion of self-assessment as a criterion?