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The Rise of Policy Labs

Public Innovation Design in Chile: Laboratorio de Gobierno Experience

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Abstract

In her second presidential period, Michelle Bachelet (2014-2018) announced the creation of the Chilean Governmental Lab (Laboratorio de Gobierno), as a multidisciplinary institution to promote public innovation with a focus on citizenry. In the Latin American context, this initiative represents a newly model of public policy design and in the implementation of services, where the participation of various actors, such as civil society and private sector entrepreneurs, universities and research centres contributes in the process of co-creation in the public realm. Based on collaboration and coordination with those actors, public authorities seek to go beyond the purposes of efficiency and efficacy, stimulating innovation and new methodologies to approach and to solve public problems.

After a preliminary investigation of the case, some queries arise: What are the principles and goals of the Chilean Governmental Lab; and how are those translated in specific projects? To what extent Chilean actors are considering evidence-based policies to design innovative projects? What are the facilitators and constraints for innovation process? Which is the impact of the Governmental Lab so far?

Although the Governmental Lab has few results to show yet, there is some evidence from programs that could shed light about the principles behind the Lab. In this paper, we examine three initiatives carried out by the Laboratorio in collaboration with other public institutions and private sectors actors, and civil society organisations: AULAB, Experimenta and the redesign of the electricity bills.

In answering the questions mentioned, a review of emerging literature on innovation labs and interviews with key informants will be conduct as main data to examine the Chilean experience contributing to our theoretical and empirical understanding of policy labs.

Keywords

Public innovation – policy process design – Chile - Laboratory

1. INTRODUCTION¹

According to the literature in public policy, two main paradigms were traditionally intended to explain the design of public policy alternatives (John 2012). One the one hand, the rational model describes a sequence of processes, which beings with a policy design, its implementation and evaluation, with a set of results that provide feedback for new processes. This linear view was confronted by incrementalist scholars suggesting that public policies were not rational, and very often the implementation phase have a serious of unplanned factors that affects the results, making policies to take a path that does not follow the initial idea defined by policy makers (Cairney 2015). As such, policy change processes involve rather marginal and incremental modifications than radical transformations, and does not always stimulate a learning or feedback process to improve the policy making model. Thus, our understanding of public policies from social sciences disciplines leave us with these two poles or binary situation from one model based on the "idealistic" version of the process; to another based on a more "realistic" view, but they are limited when it comes to explain complex scenarios, beyond the theoretical and managerial focuses.

As an additional perspective based on innovation is currently seen as valuable principle to guide the search for solutions within the public sector, but it is still difficult to define it as a pillar in the public policy field. Although we can see that there is an increased interest by governmental institutions to integrate innovation as part of their political discourses to face various problems, such as inflexible managers, budget constraints, the lack of trustworthiness in political institutions, among others (OECD 2017b). There is little empirical evidence of how innovation is integrated in this picture. Rather than to elaborate a theoretical or conceptual discussion about the policy labs, this paper instead looks at the Chilean experience

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¹ This paper is part of the project "Explorando la Innovacion" conducted by professionals from the Laboratorio de Gobierno de Chile and academics from the Chilean Political Science Association (ACCP). The authors thanks to the Laboratorio de Gobierno team for their help and support, especially to Juan Felipe Lopez, Executive Director and to Roman Yosif, Sub director of project and ecosystems. We are also grateful to Valentina Arros, part of the team who shared with us invaluable information about civil servants, and Myriam Meyer, designer of the Laboratorio who is responsible for the graphical pieces of the project "Cuentas claras" used in this paper.

of innovation in the public sector. After a preliminary investigation using a documentary sources and interviews with key informants to explore the case, some queries arise: What are the principles and goals of the Chilean Governmental Lab, and how are those principles translated into specific projects? To what extent Chilean actors are considering evidence-based policies to design innovative projects? What are the facilitators and constraints for innovation process? Which is the impact of the Governmental Lab so far? Although this governmental institution has few results to show yet there is some evidence from programs that could shed light about the principles behind the Laboratorio, contributing to expand the unexplored literature on this topic.

Our paper is organised as follows: in the sections, we briefly discuss the concept of innovation in public policy, providing a definition of policy laboratories. The following two sections explain the context in which the Laboratorio de Gobierno the Chile was created and the pillars that guide its work. After that, we present a description of the methodology used and then, we described three initiatives carried out by the Laboratorio, in order to show how the the methodology were used in those cases. Finally, a summary of the main ideas is provided.

2. PUBLIC INNOVATION AND THE ROLE OF POLICY LABORATORIES

Since the last ten years, academic literature suggest that public innovation is an iterative process in which governmental institutions seeks to extend their linkage with individuals through dynamics that makes possible "to do more for less" (Lewis, Ricard, Klijn y Figueras 2017). At the same time, public innovation is seen as an strategy to break up the status quo, creating a field of permanent update and training for civil servants, which is a group that traditionally resist changes. Furthermore, a number of countries have defined public innovation as a strategic principles, prompting the creation of "new ways to do things"

in the political arena, establishing multidisciplinary centres or laboratories to support entrepreneurs or projects to solve public problems funded by the State (Acevedo y Dassen 2016; OECD, 2017).

As an example, most of the OECD countries have introduced strategic plans of innovation, and some others have developed specialised programmes such as Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, México y Uruguay in Latin America, among others, which shows that there is an increasing trend about innovation (Acevedo y Dassen 2016; OECD 2017). In a number of cases, the strategic plans of innovation take the form of institutions, as it is the case of the policy laboratories.

In an attempt to define the concept of a policy laboratory, we can say that these are institutions that creates public policies following methodological approaches and procedures inspired by disciplines that are not traditionally involved in the public realm, and are closer to the reasoning use in the design (OECD 2017). For policy laboratories, the most important characteristic of those methods, applying them to public policies, is the possibility of experimentation in controlled spaces. As such, hypothesis or prototypes can be tested and piloted in safe environments, avoiding the risks of its implementation, becoming an iterative process of trial and error that allows policy makers to include improvements or changes that otherwise might be ended up being inefficient in social and economical terms. In this way, the process of public policy formulation based on a logic of design may provide a picture that indicates the pros and cons of the policy before its implementation, being a space of permanent feedback in what it is know as a methodology of "learn by doing" (OECD 2017b). An additional challenge faced by the policy laboratories is that they have to respond very often to the imperative of "to do it better, with the same or less resources."

In this line, two considerations about the principles that guide laboratories have been developed in the literature: open government and evidence-based criteria. Both elements have

reinforced the necessity of the states to be more transparent, participative and collaborative on each every steps of the public policy formulation. The evidence-based approach put an additional challenge for governments: to demonstrate empirically that a public policy may work. Governmental innovation, therefore, can be understood as a "new way to make public policies taking advantage of the laboratories as learning spaces, where the meaning of efficacy and efficiency are related to new methodologies that help to reduce the gap between the public sector, representatives of the private sector and the citizenry (OECD, 2017).

Despite of the diversity of laboratories around it is possible to identify different types of institutions according to the subject of intervention: on the one hand, States could promote public innovation from within; generating processes to define channels of improvement for public management from the inside of the government. Secondly, there are those laboratories that fall in the category of "institutionalised" that seeks to generate innovative process. In those cases, innovation implies that public institutions and civil servants are part of the cocreation process to find potential solutions, leaving behind their limited role as implementers of what policy makers decided. A key factor of innovation projects' sustainability is the institutional learning, but also public servants compromise to strength their capacity to develop their own innovation processes without permanent supervision from a Lab.

Thus, we may find a variety of cases with different aims: on the one hand, those cases to improve or to re-design a public service; or those projects that seeks to collaborate and to transfer skills and capacities to civil servants to lead innovation in their institutions.

On the other hand, states may change their approach about the way they establish relationships with the community, which means that innovation are focus on actors and organisations in the outside of the public sector. While both criteria might coexist, they make an important difference when it comes to explain the nature of their work. In the first place,

there are "outside-oriented" laboratories that seek to connect public policies to citizens, assigning them a role in the design and co-creation of solutions, beyond the "citizen participation." This type of laboratories may be called "citizens" labs that place the community as beneficiary group, as well as a co-responsible on the design. It is important to note, that the classification of citizens includes different actors, such as individuals, civil society organisations, epistemic communities, as others that are commonly excluded from the public policy creation. Through the inclusion of citizens participation makes a difference with a public policy design restricted to technocrats or policy makers, as it consider the users as beneficiary of policies, but also as a responsible for the solutions, given their first-hand knowledge of the necessities of population. Additionally, there are other factors to take into account: the territory in which the laboratories are working (local, regional or national), the areas (health, education, technology for instance), and the sources of funding (private, public or both).

It is highly likely to believe that public policy design must integrate both dimensions: citizens and institutions in order to create a coherent discourse between those who are in charge of design and implementation, and the beneficiaries. Precisely, the Chilean Laboratory illustrates a novel initiative in Latin America that seeks to cover all the three dimensions: a new strategy to connect the State with the citizenry developing innovative projects with different public services. Also, the Laboratorio de Gobierno aims to transfer and to strengthen skills and capacities within civil servants that may lead innovation projects independently and successfully in the long term.

3. CASE OF STUDY: LABORATORIO DE GOBIERNO OF CHILE

At the beginning of her second presidential mandate (2014-2018), Michelle Bachelet announced the creation of the Chilean Governmental Laboratory, the Laboratorio de

Gobierno, as an interministerial institution with a multidisciplinary team with a mission to promote citizen-focused public innovation through a human-centred design process. This initiative represents a whole new model of public policy design and public service delivery in the Latin American context, in which various actors such as civil society and private sector entrepreneurs, universities and research centres contribute to the co-creation of public realm (Arros 2016). By relying on a tight collaboration and coordination through new innovative methodologies with those actors, Chilean public authorities seek to go beyond the mere purposes of efficiency and efficacy in addressing and solving public issues.

As explained by Morales (2014) the first attempts to promote the modernisation of the State began with the Eduardo Frei administration (1994-1998) guided by an strategic plan called "Plan Estratégico de Modernización de la Gestión Pública", in which efficiency and results where declared as main principles. The following government of President Ricardo Lagos (1999-2005), expanded the initiative to a project known "Proyecto de Reforma y Modernización del Estado" emphasising the necessity to create flexible and efficient institutions. In her first period, President Michelle Bachelet (2006-2010) defined a route map named as "Agenda de Modernización del Estado" in which the main purpose was to create a state based on excellence. In 2010, the first right wing government after the return of democracy in 1990, led by President Sebastián Piñera followed the agenda, focusing in the use of new technologies to improve transparency (Observatorio Digital, 2011).

It is in the second administration of President Bachelet, in 2014, when she annual on her annual presidential speech, the creation of the Laboratorio de Gobierno, saying

"We should go one step further in the modernisation, we should go for an innovative State...this year, we are going to create the first Laboratory of Government. It will be a meeting point for talents from public administration and private entrepreneurs, to develop innovation' projects to improve the services we offer to citizens; and to find creative solutions for public policy challenges" (Bachelet, 2014).

It was in the second semester of 2014 that the Laboratorio, constituted as an interministerial project started, with the main purpose of to develop, facilitate and to promote innovation processes with a focus on public services users. The Laboratory belongs to the Production Development Corporation (CORFO), it has a directory composed of representatives of seven ministries, and an executive director that leads a team of around 20 professionals from various disciplines such as designers, digital developers, lawyers, anthropologists, political scientists, historians, economists, public administrators, among others.

4. PILARS, PRINCIPLES AND STRATEGY OF THE LABORATORIO DE GOBIERNO

Although the Laboratorio was conceived as a governmental response for a modernisation agenda, where the presidential mandate is to be innovative, there are other imperatives involved that may worth to look at, around the concepts of the role of the states and public management. The first pillar in which the presidential mandates is an ethical one. There is an obligation from the state that requires to do more things with less resources; but also, to reconfigure the way in which public institutions interacts with citizens. All of this imperatives respond to the increasingly complexity of public policies as well as societies, taking into account that it would be inadequate to use same strategies when it comes new problems because are not going to have the same results in this new context². We must agree that these components are features shared by other laboratories; but what makes the Chilean case an interesting example, is that those pillars became a frame in which the combination of a

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² Interview with Juan Felipe Lopez, Executive Director of the Laboratorio de Gobierno de Chile. Conducted in May 10th 2017.

methodological orientation from disciplines such as social science and design, are the source of inspiration to the incubation of projects.

Specifically, the fourth methodological principles that guides the work of the Laboratorio de Gobierno are:

- 1. Focus on individuals, civil servants as well as citizens.
- 2. A systematic view of problems.
- 3. Permanent co-creation, based on cooperation and participation.
- 4. Experimentation as trial and error processes of learning.

Furthermore, as the public management has an ethic imperative (to innovate from the state) became something concrete through principles across all public policy steps. Those principles, in turn, they became materialised with an strategic plan that prioritise projects following two approaches:

- 1. To explore and to solve: that means to deal public problems trough different programs, looking to find a solution through a process of co-creation and permanent experimentation.
- 2. To train and to mobilise: which seeks to transfer skills and capabilities in actors within and outside to the state; transforming them in agents of innovation.

Thus, these four dimensions: the mandate, imperatives, principles and strategies brings together a frame that limits and organise the process of public innovation in the Laboratorio de Gobierno. The viability to carry out innovative project prompted by the authorities, also relies in factors such as the type of leadership, management and how previous public polices were designed. It is worth noting that issues regarding public budget, timing, and deadlines, and legislation poses important constraints to innovate. For instance, according to the Chilean laws, governmental institutions can do just what the law says you are authorised to do. Different is the case of private entrepreneurs that are allowed to do everything that the law

does not forbid; that means decision making a process surrounded by inflexible structures and teams that prefer the status quo rather than makes things differently.

5. LABORATORIO DE GOBIERNO'S METHODOLOGY

While the traditional models of public policy are useful instruments to simplify the complexity of the process and to be more or less predictable, that helps to reduce the risk levels of public resources; the Laboratorio seeks to implement a model based on "learn by doing". Taking advantage of other disciplines knowledge, for instance, service design, the Chilean institution has followed the innovation-based model of the Design Council developed in the UK, adapted to the national context, known as the "Double Diamond," comprise of four stages, as it is shown in the following figure:

Problem definition | DEFINE | IDEATION | DELIVER |

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Diagram 1. Double Diamond Model

Source: Elaborated by Laboratorio de Gobierno team.

1. Discover: the first stage consists in a collaborative process between a number of actors such as civil servants, users, students, academics, entrepreneurs and experts to identify public problems in specific areas. It starts from the idea that the diagnose of the issue could be different from one person to another involved in the same sector, and not

imposed from above by policy makers, given a various audiences the possibility to have a voice in the policy formulation. In doing so, the process is comprised of institutional exploration activities, to understand what are the obstacles in the public management.

- 2. Definition, as the second stage involves a process of convergence, in which problems are conceive in a more general way as "public challenges." Furthermore, problems that are posed as questions, under this methodology are stated as widely queries with a focus on solutions rather than barriers. For example, we may –from a traditional perspective- says "that the quality of life in rural cities has decrease drastically"; instead, from innovation, we may raise the question "how we can improve the quality of life in rural cities"? Thus, the aim is to open spaces to listen ideas rather than to emphasise the initial diagnose, requiring a new stage of co-creation.
- 3. Ideation is the third stage based on divergence, in which there is a new instance to look at potential solutions or ideas; that might include a conceptual response or a tangible services or product, varying in their nature and feasibility. At this stage, elements such as budget, deadlines, and scope are taking into account in their priority.
- 4. The last stage is the delivery, where the Laboratorio team presents to a various actors a set of possible solutions that are discussed in a participative ways, prototypes or models that are piloted in a risk-controlled scenario, that provides rapid results that are feasible to be improved before being implemented as a final solution. This "learn by doing" approach installs a participative process as a requirement and it provides evidence that permits corrections during the experimentation.

7. THE DOUBLE DIAMOND MODEL APPLIED: THREE EXAMPLES

• AULAB

The acronym AULAB, which is a contraction of the word "aula" that means classroom with Lab, linking the Laboratorio work with academia, launched in August 2015, with the aim to strength collaboration between the state and higher educational institutions to respond to public problems. The initiative was organise by the Laboratorio, the Ministry of the Interior and Public Security, and the National Emergencies Office (ONEMI). In an open call in August of that year, teams comprised of one academic and at least three students (under and/or post graduate level) from any institutions in Chile were invited to take part on the last two stages of the double diamond model. In response to challenges (at the point of convergence of the two diamonds) that are already defined for an institutional actor within the public administration, teams were requested to develop ideas and to elaborate initial proposals. The first called was frame in the problem of natural disasters, as Chile is a well-known country to be affected by earthquakes, tsunamis, flooding, forest fires and volcanoes eruptions given its geographical configuration. Therefore, it is necessary for the Chilean government to have better mechanisms to react adequately, when it is possible, to those events.

The AULAB then, presented a fruitful environment to produce innovative plans taking advantage of the expert knowledge from the academic sector, which are not always included in the public policies design. In the first version, there were 145 applications from various disciplines, focused on a diversity issues such as data management, coordination and early reaction plans, and the improvements emergency housing in terms of quality and use of resources. 60 teams were selected and they passed to a second phase called "The Camp of Ideas", in which they spent a weekend working to elaborate specific proposals, and then, they had to present to a jury composed of the institutions involved. After the camp, 15 teams passed to the next phase called "a Residence" where these groups "incubated" their projects through different methodologies to advance in prototypes, business models, risks mapping

social research and piloting models. Lastly, thee projects were selected by a jury (during an exhibition that was visited by President Michelle Bachelet) that won funds to implement their models during six months, that might be replicated in the future.

• "CUENTAS CLARAS" (RE-DESIGN OF ELECTRCITY BILLS)

From a data survey applied by the Laboratorio de Gobierno and the National Office of Consumers Protection (SERNAC) in 2014, it was detected a problem based in the level of understanding from citizens about what was the content of their energy bills. Before that, another study conducted by SERNAC in 2012³ showed that more than a half of the familiar budget was destined to pay basic services, including energy. In lower-income households, almost 30% of 50% was intended to pay energy bills, becoming a very important issue in family budget for more needed families. In planning a solution, the SERNAC, the Service of Electricity and Fuels (SEC) and the Laboratorio de Gobierno began to re-design the energy bills. Although 34 companies, along the country, are responsible to deliver the provision of energy in Chile, the SEC regulates the format of the bill. So, the process included an unusual effort to dialogue with representatives of all companies plus members of the citizenry in participative activities.

In a 10 months period, the re-design of the bills was carried out for these institutions following the four stages: discover, definition, ideation and delivery. In each stage, there were conducted workshops to raise issues, to map actors from the ecosystem, workshop to create prototypes, among others; in which they were invited SEC and SERNAC delegates, electricity agents and civil society representatives from 15 regions of the country. At the end the meetings, there were six examples of bills that were tested in three counties in the north, centre and south of Chile: Arica, Puente Alto, y Aysen, respectively. Before the piloting, in

³ http://www.sernac.cl/estudio-radiografia-al-presupuesto-familiar-2012-en-chile/

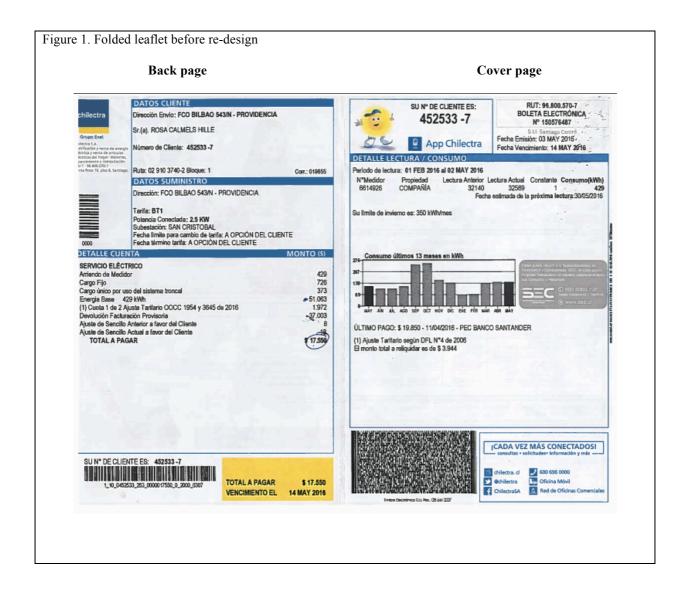
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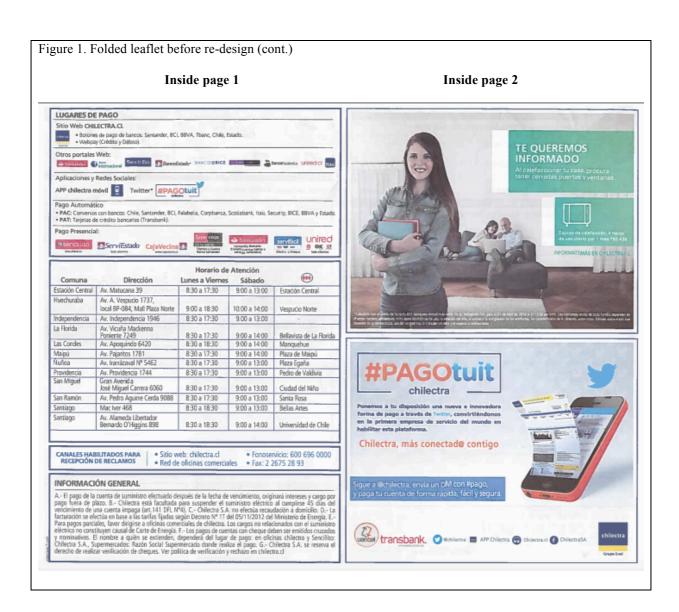
each region there were applied an online survey to know the level of understanding and trust in the contents of the bills. Another bill was applied at the end of the pilots, to get feedback and it showed an improvement on trust from 47,2% to a 70,4%; and from 49,2% to a 71,7% in the level of comprehension of the bill. Transparency and simplicity were also measured and grew up from 47,3% to a 76,7% and from 50,6% to a 75%, respectively⁴.

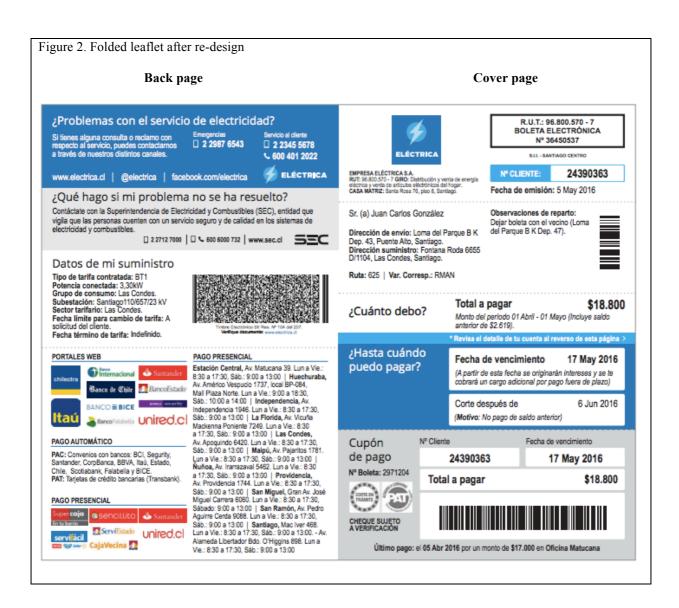
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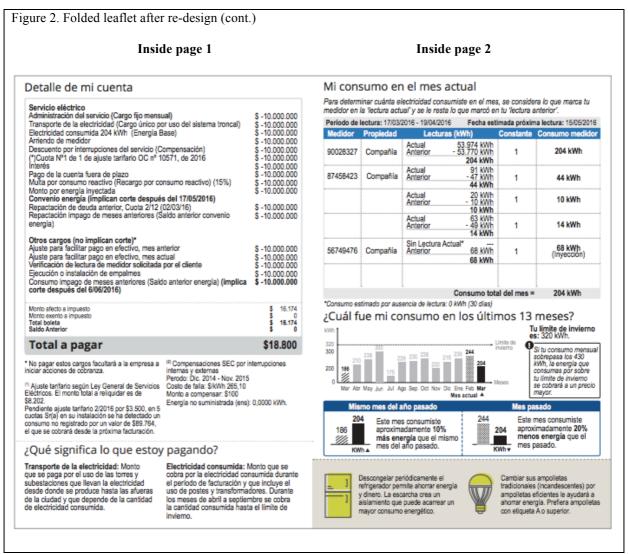
⁴ According to the data from surveys in Puente Alto, one of the largest county of the country. In the cases of Arica and Aysen, results are not currently available.

The following figures show the format of bills received by households before and after the redesign:









Sources: All figures from https://www.lab.gob.cl/cuentas-claras/

Beside the success shown by the numbers of the surveys, the added value of the redesign is the participative collaboration between civil servants, private sector representatives and the civil society that tested various prototypes chosen the most understandable for users based on evidence, increasing trust and transparency. Since January 2017, all companies are required to:

- Use a clear language, facilitating users understanding of charges, and due dates for payments
- Prioritise relevant information for comprehension
- Glossary of concepts
- Charts of yearly consume
- Tips for saving costs
- Contact details for information and complaints of energy companies, SEC and SERNAC

Source: Own elaboration with information from https://www.lab.gob.cl/cuentas-claras/

The new bill reaches approximately 6 millions of households in Chile, bringing closer the State to the citizenry, as an unique story of co-creation because its democratic methodology, its widely impact, and its empowering feature through mechanisms of accountability and shared responsibility for both the public and the private sector. Furthermore, the application of the double diamond illustrates how to create services and products taking into consideration deadlines, budgets and formal procedures that rule the public policy making.

• EXPERIMENTA: AN INNOVATIVE STATE FOR PEOPLE

"Experimenta" (To experiment in English) is a programme design by the Laboratorio de Gobierno with the aim to transfer capacities and to promote mechanisms within public institutions workers, to developed their own innovative projects. At the beginning of the programme, the Laboratorio team provides methodological support and training, accompanying them through the creation of examples or cases that strengthen civil servants' skills and capabilities. The Laboratorio de Gobierno is a facilitator agent to other governmental institutions to produce original products, as the case of the energy bill and bring together various actors, but also plays a role as an agent that facilitates the "learn by doing approach" in public policies. To be part of the Experimenta initiative, the Laboratorio makes an open calls for applications from divisions or teams within public institutions: ministries, centralised and decentralised services, municipalities, public institutions of higher education, among others, that seeks to face a challenge a find a solution from an innovative perspective. Applicants should be prone to work under a "learning by doing" approach and they should complete the programme developing a prototype of a product or service in collaboration with the users of their services.

The first call of Experimenta was launched in May 2016 and took place in two cities: the capital, Santiago, and Concepcion, one of the three large cities of the country, located in the south of Chile. There were 14 applications in Santiago and 36 in Concepcion; and after interviews with each team from public institutions, 7 of them were selected in the capital, and 5 in the southern city. The team of the Laboratorio worked permanently in both cities with these groups in every stage developing their own projects, for instance, helping them to carry out different techniques to collect information about the needs of the users, such as in-depth interviews, participant observation method, service testing, service safari and costumer journey, according the requirements posed from the challenge identified.

One of the difficulties that Experimenta faced at the end of the year was the election of new local authorities (at municipal level), changing individuals or teams that were already participating in projects with the Laboratorio. Another factor that is worth noting -that could be related with the political and administrative centralization of Chile- was that authorities and teams from Concepcion were keen to participate, as there are few initiatives of this type in cities outside the capital. To date -and despite of the traditional difficulties on public management and the electoral cycles- the winner teams in both cities are in the final stage of the process, becoming a milestone in the purpose of the Laboratorio de Gobierno as an agent promoter of change within the public institutions.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we reviewed three empirical initiatives carried out by the Laboratorio de Gobierno de Chile, to show evidence of how innovation is translated in public policies, in order to contributes to the theoretical and empirical understanding of policy labs.

Public innovation implies necessarily to re-think in how we conceive the role of the state, the public management, and the linkages with the citizenry to improve participation, to increase accountability and to reduce the lack of trust in political elites and policy makers.

In Chile, the space of innovation it is constrained by the legislative frame, that allows the state to do only what it is written in the laws; that differs significantly from the private sector, that are permitted to do everything that is not forbidden by the laws. Despite of the institutional restrictions, the Bachelet government through the Laboratorio de Gobierno has been effective into integrate the concept of innovation as a value for their public policies.

The Laboratorio has adopted a methodology known as a double diamond, which is comprised of four stages, similarly to a model used in the service design area. The methodology has been proved useful and rigorous, providing a secure space for trial and error processes to test solutions for public problems. Specifically, we examined three initiatives carried out by the Laboratorio de Gobierno. One of them is the "AULAB" that seeks to connect ideas from students and professors, in order to solve and prevent public problems, such as the consequences of natural disasters. The second initiative called 'Cuentas claras' was lead by the Laboratorio authorities in collaboration with the Superintendence of Electricity and Fuels (Superintendencia de Electricidad y Combustibles-SEC), the National Office of Consumers Protection (Servicio Nacional del Consumidor-SERNAC), and private energy providers. Finally, a third experience called "Experimenta" was reviewed that brought

together public servants that were trained about management and methodologies to help them to create innovative projects in their day-by-day work.

Programmes and initiatives as the ones described above, still needs to demonstrate and to convince sceptic actors to these multidisciplinary approaches to deal with public problems, because there are new methodologies that applied different techniques to the traditionally used in social sciences or public administration. And it is precisely, that these new approaches stimulates co-creation, instead isolated processes of public policy formulation that brings about a greater involvement of various actors, making them co-responsible for public policy and legitimating the process before the citizenry.

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