

**DIRECT-DEMOCRATIC PRACTICES AND LOCAL
POLITICS IN CATALONIA:
HOW CAN TERRITORIAL VARIATION BE
EXPLAINED?**

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ECPR Joint Sessions Granada 2005

Workshop 19: Local Participation in Different Contexts

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Direct-democratic practices and local politics - how can variation be explained?

Introduction

Most literature on direct political participation has drawn its attention on two main issues. On the one hand, it has dealt with the question of how to normatively underpin direct participation in everyday politics. Some authors, point to direct participation as a means of overcoming the lack of legitimacy representative democracy would be undergoing (Norris, 1999; Phar & Putnam, 2000) or as a way of improving public policies in complex and uncertain environments (Stewart, 1995; Stoker, 2000; Goss, 2001; Kooiman, 2003). Others conceive of direct political participation as being an intrinsic part of Democracy, though without questioning representation as the basic feature of modern democracies (Barber, 1984; Pateman, 1970). On the other hand, a great number of studies have focused on how direct participation has been put in practice in different contexts, on the methodologies used and their consequences, as well as on the outcomes (Blanco & Gomà, 2002; Fishkin, 1995; Font, 2001; Subirats et.al., 2001).

In a joint research carried out by the *Institute of Government and Public Policies* (IGOP) and the *Jaume Bofill Foundation* (JBF)¹, we tried to give answer to a new type of question: we no longer were interested in the normative underpinning of direct democracy, nor in an accurate description of direct-democratic experiences. Instead, we tried to explain why local politicians would voluntarily agree to put in place processes involving citizens' direct participation and by doing so, supposedly circumscribe both, their scope of action and political power.

However, while we were close to identify the reasons underlying politicians' decisions to engage in participatory politics, the issue of why some do, while others do not, remained unanswered. In the last few years, principally between 1999 and 2004, some Catalan municipalities have acquired vast experience in involving citizens in local affairs through direct political participation. However, these experiences have had an unequal territorial distribution. Most direct-democratic experiences (and also the most innovative ones) have concentrated in Barcelona city and its province, while local authorities of the other three provinces (Girona, Lleida and Tarragona) seem to have been less willing to directly involve common citizens in some of their decision-making processes. Thus, in this paper we intend to give answer to the question of *what is accountable for the variation in number and distribution of direct-democratic practices in Catalonia?*

¹ The research was carried out in 2003/04. The results can be reviewed in Font, J. (Ed.)(forthcoming), *Una visió global de la participació ciutadana: raons, mecanismes, conseqüències*, Barcelona: Fundació Jaume Bofill.

The paper is structured in four sections. The first one addresses the theoretical question of why direct-democratic practices are put in practice by local politicians in the first place. In the second section, we try to tackle the question of why some do while others do not by referring to possible answers advanced by traditional approaches. In the same section we offer an additional hypothesis so as to be able to solve the puzzle. Section three will be devoted to the empirical analysis aimed at proving our hypothesis. The paper ends with some concluding remarks.

Direct democracy and its implementation: a conceptual approach

Little has been written on why politicians would voluntarily render themselves more accountable by putting in place direct-democratic practices aimed at narrowing their own scope of action while, at the same time, widening citizens' political power. We will have to rely on a larger divide in Political Science in order to be able to imagine possible answers to this question. The reasons could be subsumed under two main strands: sociological explanations vs. more economically or rational choice informed accounts. This is, the *structure vs. agency* debate.

Sociological approaches typically draw on values and ideas, on actors -conceived of as *homo sociologicus*- being embedded in cognitive frameworks and normative templates guiding their action, and on processes of learning and persuasion, through which their preferences would be formed and/or modified (endogenous preference formation). Thus, local politicians putting in place mechanisms involving common citizens in decision-making processes would heavily rely on ideas and values when deciding to do so. Ideas and values could be a consequence of a particular *Weltanschauung* or the result of a learning process through which politicians would come to acknowledge direct democracy as being intrinsically good and worth to be defended (Abers, 2000; Avritzer & Navarro, 2003).

On the other hand, rational choice accounts point to interests (self-interest), utility maximisation, cost-benefit calculations and exogenous preference formation as the main features of an overall economically informed approach (*homo oeconomicus*). Preferences and preference aggregation are supposed to be at the heart of any political outcome. Thus, the questions "[...] *Why would they [politicians, referred to as agents] make their actions more easily monitored when, by all accounts, the result is to induce them to take actions (...) that they would refrain from otherwise? (...) Why wouldn't they [the agents] work to perpetuate a situation in which they have great opportunities to take advantage of their official positions, without fear of competitors or*

retaliation? [...]" (Ferejohn, 1999: 140)² acquire striking importance. Ferejohn's answer is straightforward: "[...] *agents* [politicians] *have an interest in making themselves more accountable in order to get the principal* [electorate] *to trust them with more resources* [...]" (1999: 151), that is, in order to be able to enhance their political power. Very much in the same line, although specifically referring to local politics, Navarro (1999) also points to power resources as the main argument underlying local politicians' commitment to direct democracy.

Finally, institutional theories could be equally well-suited to account for local politicians' decisions on this matter -not least because they tend to reproduce the same debate on a slightly different basis. Its value added is the incorporation of institutions as independent variables accounting for the agents' political behaviour. New Institutionalism -in its various strands: rational choice, historical and sociological (Hall & Taylor, 1996)- emphasizes the role played by institutions as guides for human action. Thus, the institutional framework could be -at least partially- responsible for local politicians' commitment to direct-democratic practices. The kind of influence exerted by institutions will depend on which theoretical strand is used to explain behaviour. *Rational choice Institutionalism* will emphasize their incentive structure-modifying role, while leaving actors preferences untouched (Shepsle, 1989). Thus, politicians would involve citizens in local decision-making processes as a result of incentives offered by the institutional structure in which action takes place. Note that it does not necessarily imply ideological commitment. To the contrary, *sociological Institutionalism* points to institutions as preference or even identity-forming/modifying features establishing a guide for action by influencing the actors' ideas, values and preferences (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991). From this point of view, politicians would commit themselves to direct-democratic practices out of normative or ideological conviction. Finally, *historical Institutionalism* does not differ much from the other schools as it can be subdivided in two subcategories: a *calculus approach* and a *cultural approach* (Hall & Taylor, 1996). They both reproduce, again, the *agency vs. structure* debate, but complement it with a new -temporal-dimension. Here, *path dependence* is the important feature. The actors' behaviour would be constrained by past decisions. Costs of exit from a given path are incremental: the more decisions are taken in a given direction, the more difficult (costly) they are to be reversed (Pierson, 2000). From this perspective, decisions to put in place direct-democratic practices would be path dependent, no matter which approach is used. On the one hand, rational actors could engage in participatory politics out of strategy, which in turn would have been conceived of

² Although the questions are referred to accountability in general, a parallelism can be drawn to the specific question of this paper.

as a response to (institutional) incentives and past decisions. On the other, direct-democratic practices could be traceable to those values and normative guidelines embedded in the institutional structure, which would conform preferences and ideas of local politicians over time.

Direct democracy and its implementation: hypothesis

In the aforementioned project, we tried to solve the puzzle of why local politicians would voluntarily commit themselves to directly involve citizenry in everyday politics. We focused on both approaches, sociological and rational choice, in order to identify which of them was better suited to account for local politicians' decisions on this matter. Our conclusions were not straightforward: we found that both arguments had to be taken into account in order to fully understand why direct-democratic practices are being implemented in some municipalities. Ideology and associative experience, on the one hand, and strategic purposes, on the other, were the main reasons underlying most local politicians' decisions to involve common citizens in decision-making processes³. Left-wing party politicians with vast associative experience tended to be much more favourable to direct-democratic experiences in their home towns than right-wing party politicians without associative experience. However, despite ideology being an important predictor of direct-democratic practices, strategic purposes turned out to be equally important, especially as a means of overcoming electoral abstention; as a means of party differentiation; as a means of ex-ante legitimisation of certain decisions (already taken, even before citizens' involvement); and as a means of "neutralising" the political power organised citizens or party opposition could have acquired over time⁴.

However, our findings did not provide any information on how to explain the territorial distribution of direct-democratic practices. Ideological commitment (left-wing local governments) and strategic purposes are widespread features so as to make direct democracy flourish in many places. Notwithstanding this fact, direct-democratic practices tend to concentrate in Barcelona city and its surroundings. Thus, what has to be taken into account in order to fully be able to understand their unequal territorial distribution?

Following the conceptual approach outlined in the past section, one could think of institutions as being the missing variable in our analysis. Local politicians do not act in an institutional vacuum,

³ We carried out more than fifty in-depth interviews in fifteen cities from all over Catalonia, where direct-democratic mechanisms had been put in place between 1999 and 2004.

⁴ As mentioned, the results can be reviewed in Font (forthcoming).

but are affected by the institutional structure in which their action takes place. If the institutional structure Catalan local politicians act should be uniform, this is: if local politicians were subject to the same incentives and constraints (no matter which institutional school of thought you choose to define institutions) institutions should not matter, since they would not be able to explain variation. However, if variation in actors' behaviour goes alongside institutional variation, institutions could be made responsible for the unequal distribution of direct-democratic practices.

State-level and community-level laws concerning local politics and political participation apply to all municipalities in Catalonia: at the state level, local politics is being regulated by the *Ley Reguladora de las Bases del Régimen Local* (LRBRL) from 1985; community-level regulation is to be found in the *Llei Municipal i de Règim Local de Catalunya* (LMRLC) from 1987⁵. These laws state that local governments *may* consult the citizenry in all those issues they decide and with the methodologies they opt for. This is: the possibility of allowing the citizenry to participate through direct-democratic devices is optional, not compulsory. The only limitation is the final decision always being taken by official institutions (Pindado, 1999). From this point of view, the institutional framework is uniform.

This fact notwithstanding municipalities do not entirely share the same institutional environment. Local governments usually work with other non-local institutions⁶ in order to develop their competencies. Local governance frameworks in Catalonia often include a great variety of public and private actors providing local public policies with resources of different kinds. For example, Provincial Councils⁷ contribute to co-ordinate local governments and offer legal, economic and technical assistance in the provision of specific services. Universities, think tanks and private consultants are very often involved in local policy networks, too (Blanco & Gomà, 2002). This also occurs in the field of citizen participation policies. In this sense, local politicians should be subject to non-homogeneously distributed incentives and constraints coming from other non-local institutions.

⁵ For further details, see Paricio (1999).

⁶ Although Spanish legal literature refers to local governments, regional councils and provincial councils as Local Administrations, we nevertheless opt for *non-local institutional actors* when referring to provincial councils so as to distinguish them from strictly local actors like local governments.

⁷ Provincial Councils are made up of mayors and city councillors and have an own administrative structure. They are devoted to tasks of coordination between and support to local governments. Note that Provincial Councils do not have specific competencies but instead rely on political leadership and/or specific needs coming from municipalities, when it comes to define their strategy or to provide services.

Our hypothesis is thus, that causes of variation should be found in the institutional framework. Specifically, we intend to demonstrate that variation should be understood as being caused by the existence of *non-local institutional actors* willing to invest know-how and/or resources promoting but also legitimising direct-democratic practices. We understand *non-local institutional actors* as institutions behaving in a way as to alter local politicians cost/benefit perceptions of engaging in participatory politics or as to modify actors values/ideas regarding direct-democratic experiences in the wider context of representative democracy.

Finally, note that our hypothesis does not address the question of which reasons underlie non-local institutional actors when promoting direct-democratic practices. The paper merely states that they do indeed. Note too, that we intend to prove that *institutions matter*, without addressing the question of which particular new institutionalist strand is better suited to solve the puzzle.

Direct-democratic practices and their territorial distribution

Before turning to the distribution of direct-democratic practices in Catalonia, some preliminary questions and definitions should be addressed. First, when referring to direct-democratic practices we bear in mind those practices involving common citizens in decision-making processes drawing on collectively binding decisions⁸. However, direct-democratic practices are far from being homogeneous. They may differ in matters such as the subject concerned, the methodology used and the actors involved. Participatory devices used in Catalan municipalities can be divided into two big groups (Font, 2001; Colino et.al., 2003; Font & Blanco, 2003; Collet, González & Mas-Codina, 2005):

The "traditional" ones

Those participatory devices created in the mid 80s and regulated by local rules of citizen participation (Pindado, 1998; Navarro, 1998; Font i Gomà, 2001). Among them, we must highlight the *consells consultius* (consultative councils), a participatory mechanism with four basic features: first, they are permanent and formalised participatory structures regulated by general rules of direct-democratic participation (*Reglaments de Participació Ciutadana*); second, they are usually linked to a specific department of the local government – i.e. urban planning, education, environment, social welfare, etc. -; third, they are composed of elected politicians, civil servants and representatives of civic associations – they usually exclude citizens not involved in any

⁸ It has to be added that decisions taken by common citizens are never collectively binding in themselves, but become so when ratified by representative institutions.

organised or formalised group; finally, they are conceived of as spaces for exchanging information about local public policies, having little impact on final decision-making (Font i Gomà, 2001).

The "innovative" ones

Those participatory devices initiated in the last ten years following recent international trends of democratic innovation (Kahn, 1998; Seward, 2000). Being much less homogenous than the first ones, they include Citizen Juries, Community Plans, Educating Projects, Local Agendas 21, Participatory Budgets and others. In spite of their heterogeneity, they share some basic characteristics. First, they are more flexible than consultative councils in terms of methodologies and temporality. For example, they usually combine councils, workshops, assemblies, forums, polls and other methodologies linked to New Technologies of Information and Communication – specially, Internet. Second, they usually deal with crosscutting subjects and consequently, they are not linked to specific departments. For example, even though most Local Agendas 21 are promoted by environmental departments, the fact that they deal with the issue of environmental sustainability forces other departments –i.e. urban planning, economy, education– to get involved (Font & Subirats, 2000). Third, they usually promote participation of non-organised citizens. Some of them, like Citizen Juries, recruit participants at random from the local census. Thus, citizens do not get involved as representatives of any association. In others, such as Participatory Budgets or Community Plans, citizens might get involved both on an individual basis and on an organised basis. Finally, although we cannot affirm –or deny– that they have a greater impact on decision-making than consultative councils, they are usually more visible and more present in the local media.

In this paper, we will focus on innovative practices of direct participation and more specifically, on those which have become relatively common in Catalonia: Citizen Juries (CJ), Participatory Budgets (PB), Local Agendas 21 (LA21), Educating Projects (EP) and Community Development Plans (CDP)⁹. These are their main features (Font & Blanco, 2003):

⁹ In 2000 the authors of this paper took part in a research conducted by the *Institute of Government and Public Policy* and funded by the *Catalan School of Public Administration*. Its purpose was to identify which innovative participatory mechanisms –apart from consultative councils– were being used in Catalan municipalities. This research took as a sample those municipalities with more than 50.000 inhabitants. The abovementioned mechanisms were identified as the most widespread ones. The results of this research can be consulted in Subirats et.al. (2001).

Citizen Juries

Between 50 and 100 randomly recruited citizens meet in –usually- two or more juries in order to discuss a public issue and to take a stand on it. Participants – the jurors – meet during two or three days and carry out several tasks: they get informed on the issue by attending to speeches given by civil servants, experts, elected politicians and representatives of civic associations; they exchange opinions both in groups of different sizes; and finally, they answer to a questionnaire through which they take a stand on the issue they have been dealing with. At the end of the process the organising staff elaborates a report that sums up the answers of the participants and the ideas they have expressed during the participatory process. In Catalonia, 11 municipalities have used this participatory methodology since 1997 (Blanco, 2003).

Participatory Budgets

A direct-democratic device that enables citizens to get involved in public budgeting. Even though it does not presume any standardised methodology, most of these practices in Catalonia –and Spain– have followed, in general terms, the same organisational structure than the "original one" used in Brazilian municipalities. Thus, they combine open assemblies in which any citizen can voluntarily participate to make proposals and to express his or her priorities, with commissions or workshops composed of representatives of the assemblies –and, sometimes, civil servants, politicians, and representatives of civic associations– that supervise the process and lead discussions at a deeper level (Álvarez & Ganuza, 2003). Catalonia is, together with Andalusia, the Spanish region in which more PBs have been implemented (7 experiences).

Local Agenda 21

Substantively, they are conceived of as strategic plans through which a sustainable model of development should be reached at the local level. Methodologically, they require the active involvement of several local agents, such as political institutions, local administrations, civic associations and the citizenry. Thus, they usually promote citizen participation both in the elaboration of the action plan and its implementation. In Catalonia LA21s are the most widespread innovative mechanism of direct participation, with more than 100 cases¹⁰. In spite of municipalities being able to choose the methodologies they want to use, LA21s often combine consultative councils, workshops, assemblies, forums and opinion polls and virtual spaces for participation (Font & Subirats, 2000).

¹⁰ LA2s have also been implemented at the sub-local level, as in some districts of Barcelona. For further details see www.gencat.es/mediamb/sosten/local_catalunya.htm

Educating Projects

Similarly to LA21, EPs are strategic plans aimed at promoting education. Very much like LA21s, they include participatory methodologies as workshops, forums, opinions polls and other techniques such as discussion groups and personal interviews. EPs are not only relevant because of their role in promoting innovative ways of direct participation, but also, and most importantly, because they are the channel through which local governments are beginning to intervene in the field of educating policies, traditionally controlled by Autonomous Communities and the central government (Subirats et.al. forthcoming).

Community Development Plans

This instrument of local development is usually applied in socially –and often territorially–segregated neighbourhoods. CDPs draw on the elaboration of a “Community Diagnosis”, an action plan as well as its implementation, by directly involving the residents of these neighbourhoods. They can tackle several dimensions of the community’s quality of life: urban transformation, economic development, cultural activities, health issues and specific needs of certain social groups such as the youth, the elderly, ethnic minorities or women. In Catalonia nearly 60 CDPs have been developed in different neighbourhoods of several municipalities.

Table 1: General territorial distribution

	CJ	PB	LA21	EP	CDP	Total
Barcelona	9	6	122	13	46	196
Girona	1	1	53	0	4	59
Lleida	0	0	20	0	2	22
Tarragona	1	0	39	1	7	48
total	11	7	234	14	59	325

Source: see annexes

As we have pointed out above, innovative direct-democratic practices have tended to concentrate in Barcelona city and its province¹¹. Their general territorial distribution is shown in table 1. Nine out of eleven experiences involving CJ are located in Barcelona Province. Girona and Tarragona

¹¹ For further details, see Annexes, tables 1 to 4.

have one each, while Lleida has none. The same tendency can be observed regarding PBs and LA21s. The case of CDPs is even more acute: forty-six of them concentrate in Barcelona Province, while Girona (four), Lleida (two) and Tarragona (nine) have put into practice notably less experiences¹².

Explaining the role of non-local institutions

What is accountable for such an unequal distribution of innovative practices of direct democracy in Catalan municipalities? In order to answer this question, we will try to identify the conditions needed to initiate innovative participatory practices. But before doing so, we should remind the two variables explaining the implementation of direct-democratic practices¹³. First, it may depend on the *political will* of local authorities. As pointed out in the theoretical framework of this paper, political will may be fostered both by ideological convictions and/or by strategic calculus of local authorities. Second, it may depend on the *availability of resources* since the implementation of participatory devices is rather demanding in terms of know-how and expertise, funding and organisational capacity.

This last point deserves further consideration. Let us consider, for instance, the implementation of Citizen Juries by a local government in order to discuss the planning of an urban space. Firstly, the local government should know how to put them into practice. Secondly, it will need a staff to put them into practice. This, in turn, will carry some financial costs: the cost of Citizen Juries in Catalonia, for instance, has been about 14.000 Euro (Blanco, 2003). Finally, the management of the process will also demand a certain organisational structure. However, Citizen Juries are probably not so resource demanding as other more complex participatory devices. Practices such as Local Agendas 21, Participatory Budgets, Educating Plans or Community Development Plans – that combine different kinds of participatory methodologies and tend to last much more than Citizen Juries – put even more pressure on scarce resources of local governments.

Consequently, participatory practices not only depend on the political will of local authorities, but also on the availability of certain -scarce- resources. Most innovative direct-democratic practices are surrounded and supported by a network of non-local institutions, that have provided local

¹² It would be interesting to contrast these data with the distribution of traditional devices of direct-democratic participation (consultative councils). Regrettably they are not available, but we have a strong intuition that whilst innovative participatory devices are clearly unequally distributed throughout Catalan territory, consultative councils have a more widespread distribution.

¹³ We are only re-formulating the hypothesis we have developed before.

governments not only with certain resources to make these participatory devices work but they seem to have created certain incentives for the use of these practices. We will start by identifying the institutions involved in the promotion of those participatory devices we are dealing with. Thereafter, we will try to explain both their nature and their main activities. Finally, we will map the territorial distribution of these institutions.

The case of Citizen Juries

CJs were first used in Catalonia in 1997 by the local government of Sant Quirze del Vallès, and almost simultaneously, by that of Rubí. As we have said before, from then on, 12 experiences of CJs have been put into practice in Catalonia, all of them at the local level. Their emergence is due, fundamentally, to the work of three institutions. First, the *Jaume Bofill Foundation*, which in the late 90s initiated a programme aimed at promoting democratic innovation in Catalonia. From its beginnings, the *Jaume Bofill Foundation* opted for the promotion (by funding both, research and putting in practice) of one specific participatory mechanism: the Citizen Juries (Font, 1998). The second non-local institution involved in the promotion of CJs was a group of researchers of the Autonomous University of Barcelona –funding members of the *Institute of Government and Public Policy* (IGOP)-, which not only carried out research but also got involved in the organization of some of them. Finally, the third non-local institution is an autonomous organism of the Province Council of Barcelona: the *Patronat Flor de Maig*. Both the *Jaume Bofill Foundation* and the *Patronat Flor de Maig* have co-funded nine out of the eleven experiences with CJs in Catalonia, in most cases assuming together more than 50% of the total cost its implementation (Blanco, 2003). In parallel, the IGOP was involved in the organization of five CJs –Rubí, Cardedeu, the two cases of Montornès del Vallès and the one at the Autonomous University of Barcelona (see annexes, figure 1). In fact, the organization of CJs has always been externalised to other institutions: the organising role has not only been played by the IGOP, but also by some private consultancies, which have become recently specialised in these matters.

The case of Participatory Budgets

PBs were first used in a Catalan municipality in 2000 by the City Council of Rubí. Due to a change in the local government of this city in 2003, PBs are no longer applied in this city. Nevertheless, other municipalities have followed the example of Rubí. Sabadell, Callús, El Figaró-Montmany and Mataró among others (see annexes, figure 2), are developing PBs and the local governments of many other municipalities have committed to apply them during this office (2003–2007). Again, several non-local institutions are supporting local governments in this task.

Information on what PBs are and how to put them into practice has increased enormously in the last few years. In this case, however, the diffusion of information is much more difficult to be traced back to any specific institution¹⁴. Nonetheless, some PBs have been supported by the following institutions: first, a group of students and researchers of a Postgraduate Course on Citizen Participation funded by the *Patronat Flor de Maig* and co-ordinated by professors of Sociology of the Autonomous University of Barcelona (involved in the Participatory Budgets of Rubí, El Figaró and Sabadell). Second, the *Patronat Flor de Maig* significantly contributes directly to the funding of PBs in its territory, this is, in the province of Barcelona. Finally, some private consultancies act also as consultants and very often are hired to organise PBs –i.e. *Idees, Desenvolupament Comunitari* or *Indic*.¹⁵

The case of Local Agendas 21

As we mentioned before, LA21s are the most widespread mechanism of direct participation in Catalan municipalities, although they are not at all specifically Catalan and they have not been promoted by Catalan institutions alone. The promotion of LA21s was agreed by more than 178 governments at the *United Nations Conference on Environment and Development* held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Since then, they have been supported by some international institutions like the ICLEI –*International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives*– or the European Union, some states and other sub-national institutions. In Catalonia, the first institution to promote the elaboration of LA21s was the Province Council of Barcelona. Very soon, in 1993, a programme aimed at supporting the elaboration of "Local Environmental Diagnosis" (*Auditories Ambientals Municipals*) was put in place. This was conceived of as the first step towards the elaboration of a LA21. Since then on, this institution has offered cognitive and financial support to all those municipalities willing to engage in LA21s. Funding is conditioned to the observance of the methodology patented by its Environmental Department. The methodology is based, among others, on the promotion of particular participatory devices. Furthermore, in 1997 it promoted a *Network of Sustainable Cities and Villages* bringing together all municipalities of the Province having put into practice a LA21.

¹⁴ However, several institutions have significantly contributed to this flow of information: for instance, a Catalan political group, linked to the Socialist Party of Catalonia, called *Ciutadans pel Canvi*, which has recently initiated an intense campaign for promoting the use of Participatory Budgets in the localities governed by the Socialist Party (see www.elscalersoncalen.org). Or the *Jaume Bofill Foundation* itself, which has recently funded a research and a publication on Participatory Budgets freely distributed by mail and through internet (www.fbofill.org). Finally, other organisms such as the International Observatory of Participatory Democracy, located in Barcelona, or the international network URBAL have to be taken into account.

This model was adopted some years later by other institutions. On the one hand, the Catalan government adopted a *Programme for the Promotion of Local Sustainability* in 1998, aimed at playing a similar role for the whole Catalan territory. On the other hand, the Province Council of Girona promoted the *Council for Environmental Local Initiatives* in 1997 and some years later this model was also adopted by the Province Council of Tarragona.

Together with these institutions, some research groups of several universities as well as several private firms have also helped the local governments to organise LA21s and to elaborate their specific contents.

Educating Projects

In 1990 the First International Congress of Educating Cities was promoted by and held in the city of Barcelona. The congress represented the first step towards the constitution of the International Association of Educating Cities (IAEC), which nowadays is composed of more than one hundred municipalities committing themselves to the Charter of Educating Cities¹⁶. Whilst this Charter sets the basic principles IAEC members commit to, Educating Projects usually are the operative programmes through which local authorities intend to promote and implement them.

Barcelona was the first Catalan municipality that initiated an EP (1998) and was followed very soon by other cities such as Sabadell, Reus and Sant Cugat. From then on, 11 Catalan municipalities have adopted their own EP. Even though all these municipalities belong the IAEC, only those which have initiated an EP in the Province of Barcelona have received an additional support from several institutions: first, from the Province Council of Barcelona, which in the last 90's initiated a support programme for EPs through funding and consulting; second, from several groups of research –most of them belonging to the Autonomous University of Barcelona– that have helped local authorities in the organisation of EPs¹⁷; finally, from private consultancies that have recently specialised in the organisation and the management of EP¹⁸.

¹⁵ Many of their employees have been trained in the aforementioned Postgraduate Course.

¹⁶ This Charter was set forth in Barcelona for the first time and revised at the 3rd Congress in Bologna (1994) and the 4th one in Genoa (2004). See www.bcn.es/edcities/aice

¹⁷ For instance, the Institute of Government and Public Policy has collaborated with Mollet, Santa Coloma de Gramanet, Barcelona and Rubi's EP. And so has a group of sociologists with the neighbourhood-level Eps in Barcelona.

¹⁸ For further details, see Institut d'Educació (2003).

Community Development Plans

Finally, CDPs were promoted in 1996 by the *Social Welfare Department* of the Catalan government. As we said before, they were conceived of as mechanisms aimed at promoting the development of communities in urban depressed areas. The Catalan government initiated this programme together with a Catalan federation –FAVIC– that brings together residents associations from neighbourhoods in industrialized areas built during the 60s under the Franco regime. Local governments, together with residents associations, decide whether or not to develop a CDP. Nonetheless, they always apply for governmental support, which in turn is subject to conditionality: the promotion of public-private partnerships and direct-democratic involvement of the citizenry.

All CDPs developed in Catalan municipalities have been partially funded by the Catalan Government, though not fully. The Province Council of Barcelona too, has co-funded several CDPs through its aforementioned democratic innovation programme. Local governments themselves are also forced to bear part of the costs.

Finally, other institutions have also played a significant role in their development. For example, students and professors of the abovementioned Postgraduate Course on Citizen Participation and some private consultancies such as *Desenvolupament Comunitari* have been involved in many CDPs.

Summing up, several non-local institutions have tended to support most direct-democratic practices developed in Catalonia. They can be divided into four categories: non-local public administrations; foundations; universities; and private consultancies. They all are of a great importance for the development of direct-democratic practices, as they provide local governments with *funding, know-how* and *legitimacy*.

Explaining the role of non-local institutions

Providing local governments with funding

As seen before, several institutions have provided local governments with funding aimed at putting participatory devices into practice. For example, the Province Council of Barcelona, through its *Patronat Flor de Maig*, funds innovative direct-democratic practices at the local level every year. In 2005, up to 600.000€ have been budgeted for funding activities aimed at: a) Training activities for local elected politicians and civil servants of local administrations as well as

civic associations; b) Supporting innovative direct-democratic practices; c) Promoting research on participatory experiences and methodologies and their diffusion. A similar role is played by other public institutions. The Catalan government offers funding for LA21s¹⁹ as well as CDPs²⁰. Finally, not only public institutions but also private ones offer funding. This is the case of the *Jaume Bofill Foundation*, which has a large budget aimed at promoting and financing democratic innovation²¹.

Summing up, local governments lack sufficient resources as to put in practice direct-democratic practices on their own: they lack specialised staff and financial costs of implementing these practices are often unbearable (Subirats et.al. 2001: 25). Thus, co-funding has opened up opportunity structures for local governments seeking to commit themselves to participatory politics.

Providing local governments with know-how

Non-local public institutions also provide local governments with expertise on how to organise innovative direct-democratic practices and thus, often act as consultants. So do private firms and academic institutions in most experiences we are analysing. Consequently, the organisation of most direct-democratic practices has been externalised, fully or partially, to private consultancies and/or to groups of research from several universities, as the IGOP.

However, the external, consultant role is not only played directly. These institutions also contribute to the diffusion of information via training programmes on democratic innovation. A great amount of courses and conferences for local authorities are organised yearly by the *Patronat Flor de Maig*. Besides, it also co-funds the Postgraduate Course on Citizen Participation at the Autonomous University of Barcelona oriented towards future experts on participatory methodologies and civil servants. A similar role is played by the *Jaume Bofill Foundation*, which organises a yearly seminar on participatory methodologies. Moreover, the *Jaume Bofill Foundation* promotes and finances conferences and debates on participatory democracy organised by civic associations and often held by university professors and consultants. Finally, the *Patronat Flor de Maig* and the *Jaume Bofill foundation* have funded both, research on

¹⁹ www.gencat.es/mediamb/sosten/local_catalunya.htm

²⁰ www.xarxa-omnia.org/pdc

²¹ Between 2000 and 2004 this foundation has set aside around 200.000 Euro each year aimed at promoting democratic innovation via research, training and funding practices.

democratic innovation and publications (journals, collections and books) on this issue²². Most of them are free accessible in the internet and some of them are even freely distributed among local authorities and civil servants.²³

Last but not least, information is also diffused by networks. Non-local public institutions promote networks as part of their role as promoters of democratic innovation, granting co-ordination and exchange of information between local authorities and civil servants engaged in participatory politics. Thus, some of the aforementioned methodologies have its own network bringing together all those towns engaged, for example, in LA21 (*Xarxa de Ciutats Sostenibles*-Sustainable Cities Network) and Educating Projects (*Xarxa de Ciutats Educadores*-Educating Cities Network). Thus, diffusion of information, know-how and best practices is a crucial feature of network promotion.

Legitimising participatory politics

Finally non-local institutional actors also play a legitimating role of democratic innovation. On the one hand, they often directly legitimise specific participatory practices *vis-à-vis* political opposition and civic associations. As most interviews we carried out confirm²⁴, political and procedural "neutrality" would be supposedly guaranteed by precisely these institutions being involved. Their involvement would also grant a certain "quality" from a point of view of the outcomes. Growing acceptance also comes from members of academic institutions being involved in many experiences (as promoters, organisers or researchers) and thus, participatory politics being supported, this is, legitimised by the academia. On the other hand, they also produce indirect legitimisation by acting as think tanks – producing ideas, defending values and generating research and publications.

To conclude, is it plausible that these institutions account for the territorial variation of local practices of direct citizens' participation in Catalonia? We think that the fundamental prove of their significance is that these institutions themselves have also been unequally distributed. As it has been noted above, the Province Council of Barcelona, specially – but not exclusively – through

²² The *Patronat Flor de Maig* edits one journal: *Papers de Participació Ciutadana*. In turn, the *Jaume Bofill Foundation* has several collections: *Debats*, *Quaderns*, *Finestra Oberta* as well as several publications on democratic innovation in some of their book series on Social Sciences.

²³ Other organisations such as *Nous Horitzons Foundation* – linked to the left-wing party IC-V – and *Catalunya Segle XXI Foundation* and *Ciutadans pel Canvi* – both linked to the Socialist Party – have edited several books and special issues on this topic, too.

the *Patronat Flor de Maig*, has played a much more proactive role in the field of democratic innovation than its counterparts in Girona, Lleida or Tarragona. The Universities of this province, specially – but not exclusively – the Autonomous University of Barcelona, have also been much more proactive in this field than in the other three. The same happens, again, with the *Jaume Bofill Foundation*, which in spite of intending to work all over Catalonia is located in the City of Barcelona and has been much more proximate to local governments of Barcelona Province. Eventually, most of the private consultancies have their offices in Barcelona or its surroundings, too. In conclusion, the network of non-local institutions working in the field of democratic innovation is clearly much denser in the province of Barcelona than in the other provinces.

However, two facts force us to slightly qualify our hypothesis. First, CDPs are promoted by the Catalan government, that obviously works in the whole territory of Catalonia. Something similar happens with LA21s, which have been promoted not only by the Province Council of Barcelona but also by the Province Councils of Girona, Lleida and Tarragona and even by the Environmental Department of the Catalan government. Notwithstanding this fact, distribution of CDPs and LA21s are as unequal as other participatory practices –if not more. Which could be the reasons underlying this phenomenon? Lacking conclusive data to give a definitive answer, we could point to the following explanations:

First, the mere existence of such programmes –from the Catalan government or the Province Councils of Girona, Lleida and Tarragona– does not guarantee an impact of these institutions if they are not complemented by other institutions such as universities, foundations and private consultancies. Thus, since institutional density in Barcelona is higher than in the other three provinces, local governments in Barcelona province have much more resources, know-how and legitimisation at hand.

Second, even though non-local institutions seem to be important, it should not be taken as the only explaining variable. We should recover ideology as one of the reasons that foster political will of local authorities. Data on electoral results of local elections in Catalonia show that the proportion of governing left-wing parties is proportionally higher in Barcelona than in the other three provinces (see annexes, table 7). In the joint research carried out by the IGOP and the *Jaume Bofill Foundation*, mentioned in the introduction of this paper, we concluded that although

²⁴ As we said before (see note 3), we carried out more than fifty in-depth interviews. Our interviewees were local politicians, civil servants and representatives of civic associations.

ideology was an important predictor of participatory policies, left-wing governments of Barcelona province tended to have a higher commitment to democratic innovation than their counterparts in the rest of Catalonia. This conclusion should be complemented by adding that differences between left-wing party governments regarding direct-democratic should be traced to the density of non-local institutions operating in a given territory.

Conclusions

Conclusions will be devoted to three main issues. First, we will sum up the empirical findings of our research. Second, we will deal with their theoretical implications. Finally, we will make some concluding remarks drawing on the current political situation.

In this paper we intended to demonstrate that non-local institutional actors should be considered as relevant to the extent that they would account for the unequal distribution of direct-democratic practices in Catalonia. Empirical evidence confirms our hypothesis, although the cases of CDPs and LA21s force us to qualify them –and to bring ideological factors back in. Nonetheless, the concentration of innovative democratic practices in Barcelona is strongly correlated with the density of non-local institutional actors supporting local governments.

As to theoretical implications, strategic purposes and ideology surely play an important role when it comes to explain why some local authorities tend to put into practice participatory devices and others do not. However, as said in the conceptual approach, local politicians do not act in an institutional vacuum but are affected by the institutional structure in which they are embedded. Incentives and constraints exerted by the institutional framework certainly helps us to understand variations in political behaviour.

Finally, some few concluding words referring to the new political situation in Catalonia. The new Catalan government –controlled by left-wing parties since 2003 for the first time since the first regional democratic elections in 1981– has assumed the promotion of local practices of citizens' participation as one of its priorities in order to play a similar role to that of the Province Council of Barcelona. If our conclusions were correct, we might expect governmental action to play an important role in the diffusion of direct-democratic practices in Catalonia. This would certainly be welcomed by many local authorities, who have publicly complained about the lack of institutional support concerning democratic innovation in Girona, Lleida and Tarragona.

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Annexes

Table 1: Citizen Juries

Province	Town	Number of Experiences
Barcelona	Cardedeu	1
	Corbera de Llobregat	1
	Esparreguera	1
	Granollers	1
	Montornès del Vallès	2
	Rubí	1
	Sant Quirze del Vallès	1
	Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona	1
	Girona	L'Escala
Lleida	-	-
Tarragona	Calafell	1

Source: Blanco (2003)

Table 2: Participatory Budgets

Province	Town	Number of Experiences
Barcelona	Callús	1
	Figaró-Montmany	1
	Mataró	1
	Rubí	1
	Sabadell	1
	Terrassa	1
	Girona	Santa Cristina d'Aro
Lleida	-	-
Tarragona	-	-

Source: <http://www.escalersoncalen.org>

Table 3: Local Agenda 21

Province	Number of experiences
Barcelona	122
Girona	53
Lleida	20
Tarragona	39

Source: <http://www.gencat.net/mediamb/sosten/local_catalunya.htm>
(data from 2002)

Table 4: Educating Plans

Province	Town	Number of Experiences
Barcelona	Barcelona	1 + 3 de barri
	Granollers	1
	Mataró	1
	Mollet del Vallès	1
	Pallejà	1
	Rubí	1
	Sabadell	1
	Santa Coloma de Gramanet	1
	Sant Cugat del Vallès	1
	Terrassa	1
Girona	-	-
Lleida	-	-
Tarragona	Reus	1

Source: Subirats et.al. (Forthcoming)

Table 5: Community Development Plans

Province	Town	Number of Experiences
Barcelona	Barcelona	11
	Badalona	7
	Badia del Vallès	1
	Cornellà de Llobregat	1
	El Prat de Llobregat	1
	Gavà	1
	L'Hospitalet de Llobregat	4
	Igualada	1
	Manresa	4+1 de ciutat
	Mataró	1
	Rubí	2
	Sabadell	2
	Sant Boi de Llobregat	2
	Santa Coloma de Gramanet	1
	Terrassa	5
	Vilassar de Mar	1
	Girona	Banyoles
Girona		1
Figueres		1
Olot		1 de ciutat
Lleida	Lleida	2
Tarragona	Flix	1 de ciutat
	Reus	3
	Tarragona	3

Source: <<http://www.xarxa-omnia.org/pdc>>

Table 6: electoral results from 2003 local elections in %

Province	Participation	Abstention	PSC (socialist party)	CiU (nationalist conservative party)	ERC (nationalist left-wing party)	PP (conservative party)	IC-V (radical left- wing party)	Others
Barcelona	59,5	40,5	36,4	20,7	11,9	12,4	12,3	4,8
Girona	66,9	33,1	26,7	34,9	16,8	5,2	6,8	7,6
Lleida	69,5	30,5	26,5	37,7	16,5	8,0	3,5	6,0
Tarragona	66,9	33,1	29,2	32,4	12,8	9,6	4,6	9,6

Source: Institut d'Estadística de Catalunya (Idescat). See <http://www.idescat.es>

The leader of the Spanish opposition party Ciudadanos on Sunday demanded Madrid impose direct rule in Catalonia after days of separatist protests, as he led a pro-Spain counter-demonstration in Barcelona. Albert Rivera, the head of the centre-Right party, called on Spain's Socialist Party government to end the "chaos", suspend Catalonia's autonomy and remove its president, Quim Torra, from office. "Torra must be sacked. What are they waiting for when there is an article in the Constitution that allows for this?" Mr Rivera said to a crowd of some 2,000 people. He was referring to Article 155 of the Constitution which allows for this. This would be focused on "how Catalonia remains in Spain, and not how it leaves", he added.

media captionCatalan leader seeks talks to secure independence. Addressing the Catalan parliament in Barcelona on Tuesday evening, Mr Puigdemont said the autonomous region had won the right to be independent as a result of the vote. Catalonia is one of Spain's wealthiest regions but a stream of companies has announced plans to move head offices out of the province in response to the crisis. The European Union has made clear that should Catalonia split from Spain, the region would cease to be part of the EU. Are you in Catalonia? What do you think of the latest developments? E-mail us at haveyoursay@bbc.co.uk. You can also contact us in the following ways

The crisis in Catalonia began on 1 October after the Catalan parliament held a referendum on independence which the Madrid government had already declared illegal. The Civil Guard, Spain's semi-militarised central police force, were sent in to stop people voting and were condemned for their heavy-handed tactics which saw them firing rubber bullets into the crowd and beating people as they arrived at polling stations. Read more.

Dismissed President Carles Puigdemont declared Catalonia to be an independent republic, only for Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy to impose Article 155 of the Spanish constitution which allows the central government to take direct control of a province and order fresh regional elections for 21 December.

PDF | Is there a political space for a possible federal accommodation of the demands of self-government in Catalonia and how is it configured? In order | Find, read and cite all the research you need on ResearchGate.Â , in other words, a political system endowed with an extraordinary capacity for experimentation and variation in time and space, as required by diverse specific contexts. All federations change historically and. â€¢ Nationalism in Catalonia was linked to both the peasantry and part of the modernising bourgeoisie. The region simultaneously experienced industrialisation (it borders France, with a weak Spanish state but a large internal market) and a so-called â€˜cultural renaissanceâ€™. â€¢ After its transition to democracy in the late 1970s, Spain can be considered a federation in all but name, with 17 autonomous communities having extensive devolved powers, guaranteed by the Constitutional Court. â€¢ Although the 1978 Spanish Constitution states that sovereignty resides with the Spanish people as a whole, it al The independence referendum in Catalonia has caused a violent crisis in Spain, with potential wider consequences for the EU.Â I fully understand that the Spanish government wants to defend the territorial integrity of the country. On the other side, there are justified requests by the people of Catalonia that cannot be answered just by police force. That calls for dialogue and I hope Europe will be able to moderate such a dialogue between the Spanish central government and the government of Catalonia.Â And this is not a one-way street. The governments, regional and local ones, have to offer opportunities for integration. But people also have to be ready for integration. We support the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Spain, which is our strategic partner".[59].Â Croatia â€˜ Croatian Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs stated that "Croatia regards the events in Catalonia as a matter of Spain's internal affairs, and supports democratic and peaceful solutions in accordance with European values".[63].Â "In view of the new events in Catalonia, Kingdom of Spain, the Government of the Republic of Paraguay, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, urges respect and unrestricted adherence to the rule of law, as it is enshrined in the Spanish Constitution, guarantor of the unity and the democratic rights."[84].Â Sardinia: Over 100 mayors and local administrators from Sardinia "recognized" The Catalan government mounted a massive propaganda effort to drum up support for independence. It sought to instil in public consciousness the idea that Catalonia is being exploited by the â€œineffective Spanish stateâ€ and that Catalonia is subsidising the entire country. â€œMadrid is robbing usâ€ is a widely used phrase. But experts believe that, while the region produces more than it consumes, Spain does not sponge off of Catalonia, as the regionâ€™s government argues.