The municipalist storming and its participatory challenges: Progress and restraints in institutionalising and embedding participation

Juan Mérida[*]

Abstract

This article analyses the participatory institutionality promoted by the rise of municipalist governments in Spain from 2015 to 2019. It focuses on the institutional advances made by this new wave of participation and the most important restraints. In terms of the most important advances, it highlights the generation of a new administrative participatory structure reflected both in the municipal organisation structure, resources, and the degree of transversality achieved through the integration of other municipal services into the participatory processes. In terms of restraints, the path dependence as a brake on change, the reduced transformative capacity of the new participatory institutionality, the difficulty of integrating traditional absences, and the problem of time as a factor that prevents greater institutionalisation, sustainability, and embedding of participatory processes. To reach these conclusions, an in-depth study of the participatory mechanisms introduced by the three municipalist governments (Zaragoza, Valladolid, and A Coruña) was carried out using a methodological triangulation that included documentary analysis, interviews with key actors, and participant observation.

Key words

Citizen participation; municipalism; participation embeddedness; path dependence

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Resumen

Este artículo analiza la institucionalidad participativa impulsada por el ascenso de los gobiernos municipalistas en España entre 2015 y 2019. Se centra en los avances institucionales de esta nueva ola de participación, así como en las limitaciones más importantes. En cuanto a los avances más importantes, destaca la generación de una nueva estructura participativa administrativa reflejada tanto en la estructura de organización municipal, los recursos, como el grado de transversalidad alcanzado a través de la integración de otros servicios municipales en los procesos participativos. En cuanto a los límites, la dependencia heredada como freno al cambio, la reducida capacidad transformadora de la nueva institucionalidad participativa, la dificultad para integrar las ausencias tradicionales y el problema del tiempo como factor que impide una mayor institucionalización, sostenibilidad e inserción de los procesos participativos. Para llegar a estas conclusiones se llevó a cabo un estudio en profundidad de los mecanismos participativos introducidos por los tres gobiernos municipales (Zaragoza, Valladolid y A Coruña) mediante una triangulación metodológica que incluyó análisis documental, entrevistas a actores clave y observación participante.

Palabras clave

Participación ciudadana; municipalismo; arraigo participativo; path dependence

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1. Introduction

It has been 40 years since participatory institutionalisation was incorporated into the local political-administrative system in Spain. The main reference was Brazil in the 80s and 90s of the last centuries when the "Workers' Party" promoted participatory budgeting in many of the cities where they governed. This was a model focused on the redistribution of resources and the democratisation of local political decisions (Santos 1998, Genro and Souza 1997/2003), two crucial elements if we want to talk about a transformative institutional participation model. In Europe, the first wave of participatory governance was promoted by the European Union in the early 2000s (OECD 2001) and, as several studies have attested, its main goals were legitimisation and effectiveness, principles that stemmed from the "New Public Management" (Ganuza and Baiocchi 2012).

During the cycle of austerity that began in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis, there was a retreat from participatory policies (Davies and Blanco 2017; Guarneros-Meza *et al.* 2018). In recent years, however, a new wave of "mini-publics" – i.e. deliberative assemblies composed of citizens chosen by lottery – has been identified (OECD 2020). Its main improvements include randomness, representation, and equality. Recent works, however, question whether these principles have been achieved (Gąsiorowska 2023), as well as their political relevance, becoming an instrument of legitimation rather than radical political transformation (Talpin 2017).

In parallel, Latin America has experienced a wave of progressive governments over the last two decades that does not seem to have given continuity to the first Brazilian participatory impulse: the reproduction of clientelistic, corporative logics and structural inequalities, the low quality of deliberation or the lack of a combination of participatory and representative mechanisms are some of the restraints pointed out (Goldfrank 2019). Concerning the above, the rise of far-right governments such as Bolsonaro in Brazil has shown the fragility of the participatory institutionality built over decades. The state-led management, the low level of formalisation, or the reduced binding nature of many of them, without clear impacts being visible, are some of the elements that would explain this participation institutional fragility (Pogrebinschi 2023, 82–84).

In the case of Spain, the trend has been similar to the rest of Europe. In this framework, the main aim of institutionalised participation was to legitimise the policies produced by representative bodies, if not to "contain and content" disruptive processes (Martínez-Palacios 2021). However, there were notable exceptions in community development, participatory budgeting, and other participatory public policies recorded in the literature (Villasante and Alberich 1993, Font 2001, Ganuza and Francés 2012).

In 2011, the social outbreak known as the Indignados Movement or 15M made visible the "crisis of the '78 Regime" and opened a new stage of political regeneration in Spain. Josep Marìa Vallès defines this Regime Crisis as:

> a set of norms, institutions and values that configure a certain type of relations between society and political power and are based on growing inequality, a degradation of the representative system, the profound disengagement of the territorial model and the

partisan colonisation of the High Administration and other State administrations, denying the supposed division of powers. (Vallès 2018)[1]

The mobilisations were represented by a new generation of the declining middle class (Walliser 2013, Rodríguez 2016) who, under the slogan "real democracy now", would make the leap from the squares to the institutions. Thus, between 2014 and 2015, there was a transition from an institutionalized cycle of protest to an institutionalized cycle of municipalist platforms (Calle 2016). Led by those cities where 15M had had a greater presence, from 2014 onwards the "Municipalist Bet" (Observatorio Metropolitano de Madrid 2014) began to take shape, which would end up becoming the "Municipalist Storming". In the municipal elections of May 2015, 15 provincial capitals such as Madrid, Barcelona, Zaragoza, Coruña, and Cádiz gained access to the municipalist government (Roth *et al.* 2019), which means that 20% of the Spanish population was administered by municipalist governments between 2015 and 2019 (Mérida and Telleria 2021).

In this way, the municipalist project is a clear example of "democracy-driven governance" (Bua and Bussu 2021), the theoretical framework of this monograph, as the cycle of new local institutionalism has been evident since 2015. Through this concept, the authors Bua and Bussu want to explain how institutions can be democratized through mobilisation and the rupture of the established system. This concept is opposed to that of "governance-driven-democratisation", in which the generation of new democratic practices is promoted through institutionalism. While the former is produced from the bottom up, the latter is produced from the top down. However, as the authors point out, this process is not unidirectional but can be marked by constant two-way dynamics. One of the dangers of governance-driven democracy is the instrumentalisation of participation to legitimize public policies, placate and co-opt dissent, and reduce participation to the actors legitimized by the system. This is linked to the neoliberal view of participation (Pateman 1970, Martínez-Palacios 2021) and governance as social control or, in Foucault's words, "governmentality" (Foucault 1994/1999).

The new municipalism is a production that contemplates both processes. A first phase between 2011 and 2015 of democracy-driven governance, in which social protest allows the opening of a new political-institutional cycle, and a second phase between 2015 and 2019 of governance-driven-democratisation in which the municipalist movement institutes itself as local government and carries out a participatory institutionalism marked by an attempt to democratize them. This article focuses on the analysis of the second phase.

Before doing so, it is necessary to make a brief presentation of the emergence of new municipalism. According to Thompson, new municipalism can be defined as a political project based on institutional, economic, and social democratisation at the local level (Thompson 2020). In this sense, the "local" – the proximity – is considered to be the best sphere from which to materialise democracy (Roth *et al.* 2023). But far from falling into essentialism, the local is not considered to be a space of democratisation in itself, a recurrent theme debated in contemporary political thought (Dahl 1967, Newton 1982), but rather a space in political dispute from which to think about new state spatialities

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[1] All translations from Spanish by author.

that subvert the hegemonic centralist model of the nation-state and put a brake on the prevailing neoliberal dynamics of recent decades (Russell 2019).

The new municipalism emerges as a reaction to the austerity policies promoted since the 2008 crisis (Peck 2012, Knight and Stewart 2016, Davies and Blanco 2017) and proposes a new social, ecological, and feminist agenda based on democratic principles (Roth, et al., 2023). In this democratisation process, two spheres of action are identified. An internal one that aims to challenge traditional party forms through the creation of a party movement based on horizontal and deliberative logic (Kitschelt 2006), and an external one based on the co-production of public policies through forms of public-community collaboration that allow for the design of new, more democratic forms of institutionalism (Subirats 2016, Martínez Moreno *et al.* 2019, Bianchi 2022). It is precisely on the latter aspect that the following paper is focused.

This article aims to analyze the new wave of participatory institutionalisation promoted by municipalist governments in Spain and to problematise its degree of institutionalisation and embedded participation. "Embedded participation is characterized by a productive interaction with the other actors and institutions within the governance context and a rootedness of participatory processes and culture in the political or policy system" (Bussu *et al.* 2022, 141). This means going beyond institutionality (the descriptive level set out in norms, laws, and other types of official documents) and considering that to understand embeddedness participation it is necessary to pay attention to specific practices, where and for how long they are developed. In this sense, institutionalisation does not ensure embeddedness and can sometimes even work against it. As stated in the call for the monographic series: "certain institutionalisations can enhance participatory embedding, while others, limited and cosmetic, can lead to the uprooting of the participatory logic". In addition to embedding, another central element that emerges from the above quote is that participatory institutionalism must promote real transformations that have plausible effects and go beyond mere instrumental intentions. Thus, embedding and radical transformation are two central elements to be investigated in municipalist participatory institutionalism.

2. Methodological section

For this purpose, the results of research carried out between 2018 and 2022 in three of these municipal governments (Zaragoza, Valladolid, and A Coruña) during the 2015–2019 legislature are presented. Out of a total of 15 provincial capitals where municipalist candidates governed, three were selected based on the criteria that (1) they were intermediate cities, (2) the municipal area was governed by a municipal councilor, and (3) common new participatory mechanisms such as participatory budgeting were established.

The study analysed the participation mechanisms implemented by the government's participation area between 2015 and 2019 (see table below). However, it placed particular emphasis on participatory budgeting, for being the main participatory proposal in the three governments and being common to the three administrations, which facilitates its comparability. In order to classify the different mechanisms, the study was based on the typology established by Parés (2009). By advisory councils, refer to mechanisms that are stable over time, with more or less fixed representation and a

consultative nature. By participatory processes, refer to mechanisms that are developed over a period and tend to be more open and binding in nature. And for transparency and accountability, those mechanisms whose main objective is to inform the citizens by the city council on certain issues, rather than to consider the demands and needs of the people.

TABLE 1

	Zaragoza	Valladolid	A Coruña
Advisory Councils	Territorial Sectorial	Territorial Sectorial	Non-existent
Participatory processes	Plans and strategies Participatory urbanism Citizen surveys Participatory budgeting	General urban plan Participatory budgeting	Organisation of the city by districts Participatory budgeting Tecendo litoral AMAC Participadoiro O Noso Patio O camino do Vixia Ecohortas Parque de Bens Co-urbanismo nos talons
Co-managing spaces	Art and Technology Center Harinera Zaragoza Community Social Center Luis Buñuel	Citizen Initiatives Center	TEUS Old Provincial Prison Naves de Metrosidero
Transparency and accountability	Open government platform Coffee with the Mayor/From the neighborhoods	Complaints, claims, and suggestions Consul Platform Citizens' assemblies	A Porta Oberta Citizen's seat Dillo-Ti

Table 2. Participation mechanisms implemented by the participation area of Zaragoza, Valladolid, and A Coruña 2015–2019.
(Source: Author's compilation based on information from municipal websites.)

Through a documentary analysis of the participatory mechanisms promoted by the participatory area (municipal reports, municipal participatory regulations, municipal budget reports, electoral, programs, municipalist websites, and local press), 33 semi-structured interviews (politicians, technicians, and participants at individual and associative level) and direct observation of three of the deliberative spaces promoted in the participatory budgeting of Zaragoza and Valladolid (December 2018), the advances and restraints of the municipal participatory institutionalisation project during this cycle are presented.

TABLE 2

	Zaragoza	Valladolid	A Coruña	TOTAL
Politicians	5	1	2	8
Technicians	5	4	3	12
Participants	8	3	2	13

Table 3. Profiles of the interviewees.
(Source: Author elaboration.)

In this way, the aim is to cover two major research gaps: (1) to incorporate the study of "peripheral" governments of municipalism, which would make it possible to account for the breadth of the project beyond the paradigmatic and global cases; (2) to analyze the participatory institutionalisation implemented during the municipalist cycle, an area that has not been dealt with in depth. Despite the implementation of municipalist governments throughout the peninsular map, the studies published in recent years (Russell 2019, Blanco *et al.* 2020, Janoschka and Mota 2020, Thompson 2020, Russell *et al.* 2022, Bua and Davies 2022, Bianchi 2022) have focused only on Barcelona and Madrid, leaving out rich experiences that can shed new light on the cycle. Moreover, most of these studies have taken an overly generalist view of municipalism and have barely concentrated on analyzing this new participatory institutionalisation system, despite the fact that one of the hallmarks of the new municipalism was based precisely on this: "another way of doing politics". This study aims to provide continuity to the work already published (Mérida and Telleria 2021, Mérida 2022a, 2022b) on the subject and to delve deeper into the restraints of participatory institutionalisation and its embedding during the 2015–2019 cycle.

In order to address the aforementioned research objective, the text is divided into five main theses that dialogue with each other:

1. "Municipalism embedding in Spain and the new democratic commitment", a contextual section, which presents the basic characteristics of the previous participation model in Spain and the general characteristics of the new cycle.
2. "The inherited strategic selectivity as a brake on the change of cycle", which identifies the main institutional impediments that the new municipalist governments had to face during the 2015–2019 legislature.
3. "In search of lost legitimacy... and transformation?", which problematises the objectives of the new participatory institutionalisation that has been put in place.
4. "A participation from the middle class for the middle class", which questions the inclusive nature of the new participatory institutionalisation.
5. "The crossroads of state-time", which addresses the difficulty of accommodating the procedural and deliberative rhythms required by participatory democracy within a framework dominated by the bureaucratic and representative times of liberal democracy.

The conclusions sythesise the above theses and reflect on the main challenges for participatory institutionalisation cycles to take root transformative embedding, which is the central concern of this monograph.

3. Municipalist embedding in Spain and the new bet for a democracy of proximity

Although the new municipalism emerged as a reaction to the cycle of austerity policies, it differs from other previous progressive projects in the country in that it was a clear commitment to citizen participation as "another way of doing politics" (Mérida and Telleria 2021). This "new way" was reflected both in the construction of platforms and in the conception of the local state, understood as an entity that should be open to citizens. As for the construction of the new platforms, an intense process of democratic experimentation was carried out with open primaries in which people were prioritised over parties, and collaborative programs were designed through an intense activity of working groups and assemblies based on innovative participatory methodologies that prioritised consensus and care. Furthermore, in its organisational structure, the assembly was considered the highest political decision-making body.

This way of conceiving politics was opposed to Podemos' project, also framed in what was called the "new politics", which, following the Latin American populist theses theorised by Laclau and Mouffe (1987), was based on the construction of a political project around the leader, the nation-state as a framework for action and a political strategy based on the dual us/them discourse where participation was reduced to a plebiscitary character (Cancela and Rey-Araujo 2022).

This participatory soul with which the confluences were conceived was also transferred to the institutional project. Proof of this is that in the 15 provincial capitals where the municipalism confluences governed (alone or in coalition), the area of participation was managed by municipalist platforms. "Transparency", "Innovation" or "Open Government" was the nomenclature that the new areas acquired and gained special prominence in the new municipal organisational charts. This is especially noticeable in comparison with the marginal role they had historically played (Villasante and Alberich 1993, Font 2001).

TABLE 3

	2011–2015	2015–2019
Zaragoza	Citizen participation and internal regime	Participation, transparency, and open government
Valladolid	Citizen attention and participation	Participation, youth, and sports
A Coruña	Employment and companies	Democratic participation and innovation

Table 4. Position of participation in the municipal organisation charts 2011–2015; 2015–2019. (Source: Author's elaboration based on municipal websites.)

The new participatory institutionalisation was not only reflected in the modification of the municipalist organisation chart but also affected the distribution of resources. In all municipal governments, it is possible to identify an increase in the budget for the new areas of participation to the previous legislature. In addition, it is necessary to include the budgetary provision for new programs that, in cases such as participatory budgeting, reach a considerable percentage of investments. In terms of the staff assigned to this new

institusionalisation, on the other hand, no major changes have been identified, mainly due to the regulatory restrictions approved during the austerity cycle, which forced the use of external staff contracts, fostering a certain participatory commodification, a phenomenon that has been referred to by Martínez-Palacios and Parte Hartuz's team in previous works (Martínez-Palacios *et al.* 2023).

Finally, in this new participatory institutionalisation, the normative dimension of participation stands out, in which progress was minor. Particularly noteworthy here are the cases of Barcelona and Pamplona, where new frameworks were achieved that included innovative elements such as the definition of participatory processes, their inclusive nature, evaluation, the development of free software platforms, and the generation of frameworks for public-social collaboration. Nevertheless, Participation Regulation of Barcelona was suspended by the High Court of Justice in Barcelona on the grounds that it did not consider the need for the Consultations to be approved by higher representative bodies, which reflects the lack of municipal autonomy in the administrative structure of the Spanish state.

4. Path dependence as a brake on change

> Society, the state, and its institutions are like the peaceful geography of a countryside. They seem static, fixed, and immovable. But that is only the surface; underneath this geography there are intense and hot lava flows that circulate from one place to another, that are superimposed one on top of the other, and that modify the topography itself from below. And when we look at the geological history, with phases lasting millions of years, we see that this surface was worked, was the result of igneous lava flows that rose to the surface, sweeping away all the previous physiognomy in their path, creating mountains, valleys, and precipices in their flow, which over time, solidified and gave rise to the current geography. (García-Linera 2015, p. 145)

As García-Linera argues, the state and its institutions do not have a single form or identity but are the historical result of a dynamic and dialectical relationship between the social and state spheres. One of the main constraints of the municipalist cycle in transforming the existing institutional system was path dependence (Janoschka and Mota, 2020). In other words, the weight of an accumulated administrative legacy that was very difficult to modify.

Returning to García-Linera's quote, there was no lava flow intense enough to modify the historically formed geography. In the case of the new municipal institutionalisation, even though the preceding section shows certain changes in the administrative crust, the truth is that they did not have sufficient depth and intensity to generate major telluric changes. This is largely due to inherited state practices. As Bourdieu (1997) reminds us, bureaucracy is governed by a habitus (*ibid*.). That is to say, a certain historically constructed way of proceeding. This way of proceeding is not neutral but is based on parameters of inclusion and exclusion promoted by particular languages, codes, and practices. In Spain, the institutional participation model developed was based on consultative bodies limited to a small number of stakeholders recognised by the State (Font 2001, Parés 2009). After 30 years of a two-party regime and a certain model of state-citizen relations, to what extent has the new municipal participatory institutionalisation been able to modify the inherited path dependence?

First of all, it should be stressed that the new participatory institutionalisation did not start from scratch, but had to coexist with the old existing institutionalisation. According to the empirical evidence, this was especially significant in the case of Zaragoza, where there was a more institutionalised model than in the rest. Zaragoza's participatory institutionalisation was based on the classic model of Councils, considerably embedded since the 1990s in the administrative structure of the city and composed of the usual stakeholders (political representatives, businesses, and neighborhood and sectorial associations). With the new municipal participatory institutionalisation, new mechanisms were established, such as participatory budgeting or the creation of new public-community spaces that opened up new actors detached from traditional institutionalisation, which generated opposition from the actors privileged by the previous model. This is how one of the political leaders of Zaragoza's municipalism reflected it:

> Participation, properly understood, means losing power in order to distribute it in a larger space (...) This means a distribution of power that has been the most conflictive and has caused us the most fights because the agents who had power were not willing to lose it.[2]

Thus, despite the fact that one of the principles presented by the new model of participation was "the complementarity between representative and participatory democracy" (Decree Consejería de Participación, Transparencia y Gobierno Abierto, 13 December 2017), in practice it was difficult to articulate these two models, precisely because institutional openness came to question the legitimisation of the previously represented actors. On the incompatibility of these models of democracy, one of the administrative directors (a politically elected technical position) of the new municipalist administration of Zaragoza refers to:

> If you put the fox to look after the chickens it will fail (...). They don't have to be there. They have their place and their apparatus (...). Otherwise, we go back to politics again. It would be important for someone to come to a legislature and (…) to remove the parties from there [from the spaces of participatory governance].[3]

However, in the case of A Coruña and Valladolid, where the level of inherited participatory institutionalisation was lower (not participating bodies consolidated), there was more possibility of implementing a participatory governance model outside the previous system of representation, which facilitated the process.

But if the lack of past institutionalism may have been an advantage when it came to implementing a new institutional participatory framework, at the same time the lack of structure hindered the implementation of ambitious municipalist programs. Thus, the fact that Zaragoza already had a participatory structure in place since the previous legislature allowed it to face the new processes with greater capacity. On the other hand, Valladolid and A Coruña, where there was hardly any civil servant body dedicated to participatory policies, had much less capacity for action.

In all cases, the inherited austerity legislation made it difficult to acquire the resources required to implement the new institutional framework. According to data from the

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[2] Interview conducted during fieldwork on 10 January 2020.
[3] Interview conducted during fieldwork on 14 February 2020.

Ministry of Finance, between 2011 and 2019, local administrations reduced their staff by 12% (Report on the Classification of the Functions of Public Administrations 2017-2021). Austerity laws such as the Law of Administrative Rationalisation [Law 27/2013] and the past way of proceeding of the city council prevented an increase in the number of staff, as one of the relevant political officials in A Coruña points out:

> The Law of Administrative Rationalisation has been strangling the administrations (…). Moreover, in A Coruña it had been a long time since a public tender had been held. Well, a lot of legacies that you have to deal with. What happens is that it's true that at no point do we get to have an in-depth debate on the consequences of this or on how to deal with personnel issues from a political point of view.

In the above quote, the political leader of the municipal government of A Coruña highlights the lack of a political strategy to confront the inherited strategic selectivity. From what we have been able to analyse, in the three cases studied, different ways were sought to reverse the lack of personnel. Collaboration with other municipal services or neighborhood associations (historically subsidized by the local council) were some of the formulas used. However, these collaborations were not enough and they had to hire companies specialized in participation processes. Although this made it possible to resolve specific situations, in the long run, it generated a high dependence on external contracting, which hindered the sustainability and embedding of the processes.

Another of the strategic selectivity inherited had to do with the current administrative culture, the bureaucratic *habitus* we referred to earlier. This was expressed by one of the coordinators of the technical area in Zaragoza:

> What happens is that it is frankly difficult because if you add participation to the work and responsibilities that each of the areas has, it is understood as an overload on their work. (...) Because my responsibility in urban planning, culture, and public services, is what it is, and I don't have to attend to the citizens' affairs.

It follows from the above that participation was assumed as one more burden to be incorporated into the bureaucratic agenda and not as an intrinsic element of the day-to-day work of the administration. This made it difficult for participants to have a more cross-cutting character in the administration as a whole. In addition to the compartmentalized nature inherited, the reduction in staffing levels made it even more difficult to promote a new, comprehensive participatory institutionalisation. As one of the technical coordinators in A Coruña said: "It is very difficult to collaborate if you are drowning and starving".

In short, the access to the government of the new municipalism confluences in 2015 did not imply direct control of the administrative apparatus. Similarly, the fact that the opposition forces lost the government did not mean that they lost their capacity to influence. This relationship between access to government and power management has been picked up in recent work (Bua and Davies 2022). After 30 years of two-party rule, the arrival of municipalism confluences in government represented an anomaly in the system. The new governments not only had to face a reduced bureaucratic structure with a culture alien to participation but also an attack by the liberal governance model articulated by political parties, associations, media, and senior civil servants. This resulted in a lack of political support in governance spaces, constant criticism in the

press, and administrative and legal obstacles, which made the institutionalisation of the new participatory regime very difficult.

5. In search of lost legitimacy… and transformation?

As has already been mentioned, the municipalist approach emerged as an attempt to democratise institutions in a process of delegitimisation that had been undermined throughout the cycle of protests that began in 2011. One of the proclamations was citizen control of the institutions. To this end, they argued, it was essential to generate new channels of the relationship between the administration and the citizens, generating a new co-productive and co-managing institutionalism that did not reduce the public to the state but extended it to society as a whole (Subirats 2016, Martínez Moreno *et al*. 2019, Bianchi 2022). But to what extent did this democratisation go beyond mere institutional legitimation or did it instead entail a transformation in redistributive terms? In this sense, it is necessary to problematise the two main purposes attributed to institutional participation: participation as a form of "legitimization" or participation as a form of "transformation" (Fung 2015).

In the introduction to the article, it is stated that, during his trip to Europe, the transformative character of the participatory institutionalisation promoted in Brazil was replaced by a more legitimising character, a drift that was also reproduced in Spain (Ganuza and Baiocchi 2012). In this sense, municipalism, taking up the citizen disenchantment expressed during the cycle of protests that began in 2011, wanted to promote a new institutionalism open to citizen participation. In this way, a whole discourse associated with "transparency", "innovation" or "open government" (nomenclature associated with the new areas of participation) was articulated.

Nevertheless, although this openness is mentioned very directly, no discursive repertoire of participation as a path to social justice or redistribution, elements that were key to the Brazilian transformative element, was identified. In fact, with the exception of participatory budgeting, which had a certain redistributive weight, the new mechanisms were rather experimental and consultative in nature, leaving aside deep-rooted material problems such as housing or finance. In this sense, the thesis defended in this section is that the participatory institutionalisation promoted by municipalist governments focused more on opening up social representation than on combating distributive inequality. The way the participatory budgets are presented by the councils in the three cities is an example of this (See table below). As mentioned in the previous section, the limitations of competencies and resources indeed hindered the municipalities' capacity for action, but even so, it is necessary to stress that there is no evidence of a strategy oriented towards this objective.

TABLE 4

Zaragoza	"A tool for participatory, direct and deliberative democracy, combining face-to-face and self-organising spaces with digital spaces for information, proposals, and prioritisation through support and debate" (Town Hall website, 25th of October 2016).
Valladolid	"The main channel for taking citizens' needs into account" (Electoral Programme Municipalist Platform 2015).
A Coruña	"The next decision we took was to bet clearly on individual participation (...). That is, participation as a right" (interview, head of citizen participation).

**Table 5. Municipalist government discourses on participatory budgeting.
(Source: Author's elaboration.)**

Nevertheless, the position defended in this article considers that legitimacy and transformation need not to be seen as opposing models. In fact, binding participatory processes can achieve greater legitimacy than those that seek to endorse decisions already taken through consultative processes and that, in reality, end up generating an even greater distancing of citizens from institutions. An example of this was the high implementation rates of the proposals approved in the participatory budgeting of the three cities during the first edition, which reached 94% in Zaragoza, 90% in Valladolid, and 85.7% in A Coruña. Undoubtedly, this redistributive material effect, as it guaranteed investments in the public space of all the city's neighborhoods, was an instrument that legitimised the process both towards the opposition and towards the citizenry as a whole. However, as the percentage of implemented proposals decreased in the following editions, the delegitimisation became greater. It was the main argument used by the new government team in 2019 to not implement it again. In this way, it can be seen how legitimisation and transformation of participation should not only be seen as opposing ends, but also as complementary.

6. Participation from the middle class for the middle class

Several studies have pointed out that the composition of both 15M and the municipalist platforms was made up especially of a precarious middle-class profile (Calle 2015, Rodríguez 2016), but: which profile was represented in the new participatory institutionalisation of municipalist governments? As mentioned above, one of the aims of this new wave of participation was to open up the institutions to citizens. But what do we mean by citizenship? The literature on participation has pointed out that the supposed universality of the right to participation conceals inequalities in both access and process. In this regard, it shows how there is a relationship between social inequality and inequality in institutional participation (Alarcón and Font 2014, Alarcón *et al.* 2015, Font *et al.* 2019). Therefore, people with lower levels of education, low incomes, women, young people, and foreigners tend to participate less, while those with higher levels of education, average incomes (those with higher incomes do not participate either), men, and people born in Spain tend to be more represented. To the above biases should be added associative and ideological (Navarro 2000) biases, whereby people linked to

associations and those who support the ideology of the government promoting the participatory processes participate more. Other authors (Young 2000, Della Porta and Rucht 2013, Collins 2017) have argued that participatory inequality does not only occur in "access", but also during the "process". There are cultural codes that act as forms of power, silencing, devaluing, and frustrating a large number of subaltern individuals and groups. Was the new institutionalism able to reverse these initial inequalities? In the words of the theoretical framework presented; was it able to generate a more inclusive participatory embedding?

Concerning the data obtained from the cases analyzed (participatory budgeting), the first thing to highlight is the difficulty in accessing information on the type of participants. The difficulty in identifying which sectors participate in the participatory processes promoted by the State is a pattern that tends to be present (Smith 2009). However, this indicates a certain lack of prioritisation of inclusion strategy, as it is difficult to redress existing inequalities if they are not known.

The first thing that can be highlighted from the data obtained is that in the three cities, a high level of participation was achieved in absolute terms. The important promotion of the processes, especially the participatory budgeting and, especially, the inclusion of telematic forms of participation, allowed much wider access to citizenship. Nevertheless, if we look at the level of face-to-face participation in Zaragoza and Valladolid (in A Coruña the participatory budgeting was only carried out telematically), the number of participants drops considerably.

Thus, the first conclusion is that the new participatory institutionalism achieved more participation. But what kind of participation did it achieve? In the forms of telematic participation, we can only refer to the data from Zaragoza, which is the only case where this information is collected. In the three editions, there is a participation bias according to age (with young and older people being the least represented), income (with middle-income earners participating the most), level of studies (with those with university studies participating the most), and country of origin (with hardly any participation by foreigners). With regard to gender, women participate more in voting (aggregate participation), while men participate more in proposals (propositional participation). Therefore, it can be affirmed that the telematic route ensures an increase in participation, but does not avoid the reproduction of several of the previous biases. About face-to-face participation, the data from Valladolid point to a reproduction of the traditional profile of participants: men of adult age, linked to associations, and born in Spain.

In sum, it is noted that the quantitative increase did not lead to a qualitative increase. While it is true that there are certain structural conditions (precariousness, care sharing, cultural system) that make political participation extremely difficult and that cannot be solved by a new participatory institutionalism, it is also true that there are actions of the State, that can encourage the participation of the most excluded groups. To do so, the first thing is to identify these absences, aspects that were barely considered by the governments studied. The second is to develop a strategy and mobilize resources to integrate these absences. Otherwise, the following paradox may be generated: participatory processes that were aimed at reducing the social gap may end up reproducing it or even increasing it since the people who participate respond to a middle class that has more covered needs than those who do not participate.

7. The crossroads of state-time

This last thesis of the article is focused on the dimension of "time" as one of the main factors that restrained the implementation of this new municipalist participatory embedding.

The first thing to emphasize in this regard is that time and its rhythms are not something natural but are defined and organized by the State (Bourdieu 1997, 2014). The calendar, the hours, or the working and school days are defined by the State, which holds its monopoly (Elias 1989). In the liquid societies we live in (Bauman and Leoncini 2018), time has accelerated, generating a sense of permanent lack of it. However, as Han (2009) poses, the problem is not the acceleration of time itself, but the "desynchrony" that this entails. This leads us to the following paradox: the acceleration of time ends up slowing down processes. The lack of capacity to process increasingly intense flows generates a bottleneck that can lead to an overflow of the flows themselves.

The new participatory institutional framework was affected by this desynchrony, making its sustainability difficult. In the first place, there is a perceived desynchrony between electoral times and participatory times. An example of this occurred in May 2019, when the Electoral Board decided to suspend the assemblies of the participatory budgeting of Valladolid as it considered that they affected the electoral process of the municipal elections (Redacción 2019).

Another desynchrony identified in several of the interviews conducted with technical staff and people participating in the research has to do with the relationship between bureaucratic times and social times. This was expressed through different forms such as the inability to process a large number of demands by a technical body under restraints, the consequent lack of quality returns by the technicians to the citizenry, or the slowdown in the execution of works that had been approved during the participatory process. This lack of articulation between the bureaucratic and citizen times was also perceived in the desynchrony between the bureaucratic working days (mornings) with the social free times (mostly in the afternoon), which hindered the ability to meet between the different agents.

And, finally, a desynchrony is also identified between aggregate digital times and deliberative digital times. Although aggregate digital times are shorter and more accessible, they make it more difficult to process information, especially its discussion.

One of the conclusions drawn from the previous desynchronisations is that participatory processes need time to improve and become embedded. But what if there is no time? Or rather, what if the distribution of time is unevenly distributed? It is evident that if the possibility of participation requires time and this is an unequally distributed resource, biases will arise in the representation, especially that which has to do with a greater dedication of time. For example, in the case of Zaragoza, the data show that there is greater participation of women in the aggregate processes while they are underrepresented in the propositional and face-to-face processes. In other words, those that require more time.

In order to resolve these inequalities, perhaps the solutions are not only the generation of new technological tools, which continue to reproduce previous biases but also the creation of conditions for greater equality in access to time. Proposals such as reducing

the working day to four days a week or universal basic income seem to be moving in that direction. However, increasing the availability of time does not seem to be enough, and it is just as important to guide its use. Neoliberal hegemonic reason has tended to establish a conception of time based on productivism, consumption, and the dissociation of the individual from the environment and the community. This is why not only more time should be promoted, but also a change in its use. As a popular saying goes: "We cannot waste time, but neither should time waste us".

In his posthumous book, Graeber and Wengrow (2021) tell us that during the Spanish Conquest in Mexico, Txalaca, one of the peoples not assimilated into the Aztec Empire, spent months deliberating whether to support the Spanish Crown or decide to resist. There were no kings there and everything was decided through a popular urban council. Chroniclers say that the Spanish troops could not believe that the decisions took so long, with lengthy interventions made by different members of the community. 500 years later, it seems that the short-term and productivist rationality projected by the State has not changed, and the accelerated and vertical times are imposed in front of the procedural and deliberative times. These, we believe, should be basic elements for generating embedding participation.

8. Conclusions

In 2015 municipalist platforms stormed local institutions as a reaction to a short cycle of political austerity and a long cycle of systemic de-legitimisation represented in the Regime of '78. In this storming, one of the main challenges was to build a new participatory institutionalism that would allow the democratisation of the local administrations under management. This article is a testimony to this process of participatory institutionalisation, highlighting some of the progress made and the obstacles encountered in its implementation. It provides lessons for future participatory institutionalisation waves.

The first thing to note is that this new process of participatory institutionalisation emerged from a critique of the previous participatory model developed in Spain. In this sense, it can be said that municipalism arose as a critique of the established model of institutional democracy and as an attempt to create new effective channels of participation between citizens and the institution. This criticism of the previous model of participation was based on the need to politicise the term "participation", which had been emptied of meaning. The model of participation established by the European Union and applied mainly in Spain was designed to legitimise *the status quo*, without questioning the forms of decision-making and the redistribution of resources, which are essential for a sense of radical participation.

To this end, the Municipalist Platforms considered it necessary to create a new participatory structure that would make it possible to establish new relationships between the administration and the citizens. The development of new areas, the provision of resources, the generation of programs, and the implementation of a new participatory agenda were evidence of this. Thus, it can be affirmed that the municipalist platforms represented one of the most important advances in citizen participation since the reinstatement of the Parliamentary Monarchy in Spain.

Nevertheless, they had to face past institutional inertia (path dependency), which reduced the possibilities of transformation during the municipalist cycle studied (2015–2019): institutional atrophy reinforced by the austerity framework, compartmentalised and technocratic bureaucratic habitus, lack of complementarity between the models of representative democracy and direct democracy and opposition from the political, social and media powers of the city hindered the implementation of this new institutionalism. Some evidence gathered in recent works on municipalism in Spain (Blanco *et al.* 2020, Janoschka and Mota 2020, Bua and Davies 2022).

This article also shows how the participation model implemented by the analysed municipalist governments prioritised the development of new channels of participation that were more open to citizens, without taking into account the more redistributive effects of the model, and that despite the limits of municipal competencies, it continues to be oriented towards solving minor problems, without giving a greater role to some of the city's transcendental decisions, such as housing or finance. At an inclusive level, the implementation of new digital tools allowed for an increase in the number of participants. However, it did not prevent previous participatory biases (age, level of studies, income, country of origin), which continues to demonstrate the difficulty in including the most disadvantaged social sectors.

Furthermore, the new participatory institutionalism neglected face-to-face deliberative processes, an essential element for the recognition of diversity and the search for common solutions. This leads to the last of the theses put forward in this article: What happens when the timing is not right to combine a large-scale participatory mechanism with a high quality of deliberation? This section argues that there is an acceleration of participatory models that is an obstacle to the processes and their embedding capacity. In turn, there is a desynchrony between social and bureaucratic rhythms. This is where one of the big problems with embedding lies. In order for the process of participatory institutionalisation to be accompanied by a process of participatory embedding, sustainability is required; financial, human, political, community direction sustainability, etc. However, the rhythms of participatory rooting are still subject to the rhythms of electoral cycles and even more, the rhythms of the media agenda, which are even faster. How to face this contradiction? This is one of the most important challenges for the embedding of participation and institutional democratisation in the future.

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